

Vice President of Competitive Operations

2022 Report to Board of Governors/Board of Directors

Submitted by Chris Leahy

2022 Competitive Season

While not completely back to normal, the 2022 competitive season has been a great success so far. Congratulations to all of the participants and thank you to all of the coaches, officials, parents, volunteers, and supporters who make it possible.

This year continued the development of the Athletes with Disabilities (AWD) category. There was an increase in the number of clubs at the AWD Invitational co-located with the Junior Olympic Championship, and more clubs have started AWD programs. In August USAAS hosted the first ever AWD invitational co-located with a FINA World Championship. We hope this step encourages FINA to look into supporting AWD athletes and provide opportunities for other AWD competitions.

Male Solo remained as an experimental event for this season, but there is now a proposal to add it as an official event to all of our Championships. In addition, FINA is finally catching up to USAAS and is looking to add male athletes to the acrobatic, combination, and team events.

Legislative proposals

A massive number of proposals have been submitted to the Governance and Rules committees (with even more to come for the Rules committee). I would like to extend my thanks to all of the members of those committees for their diligent work, it is greatly appreciated.

Governance has several proposals to help clarify the responsibilities that are the operational duties overseen by the national office staff, and the strategic guidance that is handled by the board of directors, and the committees that report to the board of directors. A number of proposals also deal with streamlining the size and makeup of the committees under the board of directors.

The proposals currently in front of the Rules committee are focused on rules that are specific to USAAS competitions. Proposals to make technical and free routines different events (rather than combining their scores) at the Junior National and Junior Olympic Championships matches what is being done at the FINA level and it provides more flexibility to athletes. Eliminating the requirement to have an association championship as a qualification step in the Junior Olympic track would provide a number of benefits; helping to ensure the organizational needs of the administrative structure remain separate from the needs of the competitive structure, allowing more time in the competition schedule for qualifying meets and reducing meet costs for athletes.

Upcoming FINA changes

Unlike other legislative years, FINA is holding its technical congress (October 3rd) after USAAS's annual meeting. USAAS will hold a virtual meeting in October to discuss any changes to the technical rules that are impacted by FINA changes. Proposals should be submitted to the rules committee by October 10th.

FINA is proposing major changes to the scoring of routines to try to make the placement/score of routines more objective. The difficulty score will be pre-calculated based on the composition of the hybrids in the routine, inspired by how difficulty is calculated for figure skating or gymnastics. The synchronization score will be calculated based on the number of observed "small", "obvious", and "major" synchronization/matching mistakes ("unequal actions"). A panel of judges will give an execution score to each hybrid or acrobatic movement. The execution score of each hybrid will be multiplied by the declared difficulty and the synchronization penalties subtracted to determine the "Elements Score"

There are a number of other minor and major changes being proposed by FINA. A "Tech Talk" summarizing the changes will come out after the Board of Directors votes on changes to the USAAS rulebook in October.

Goals for 2023

Implementation of new FINA rules; locally, at the zone level, and nationally is one of the main priorities for the 2023 season. Educational material for athletes, coaches, and judges will be coming from both FINA and USAAS. Updated technical rules from FINA will be published much later than in other quads. Resources for technical chairs and meet organizers will be provided as soon as possible. For competitions early in the season, associations and meet hosts are encouraged to adopt rules that make sense for them and their athletes.

The organization should continue to lead in encouraging the development of the AWD program both nationally and internationally. If possible, USAAS should try to adopt a set of rules that are consistent across multiple federations to make it easier for athletes from different federations to compete together.

The Junior Olympic Championship schedule is in dire need of an overhaul. While routine times are decreasing, a number of judging/scoring changes are likely to increase the amount of time needed per routine. That coupled with potential changes to acrobatic/combo events, and the 13-15 figure event will require major updates to the schedule. Anyone interested in working to create a new schedule is encouraged to contact the Vice President of Competitive Operations.

On an organizational note, the USAAS technical rules should be evaluated to determine if there are places that could directly reference the FINA technical rules rather than restating the rules in a different format. The rules committee should evaluate the organization of the technical rules to see what can be done to ensure that the technical rules are clear to athletes, coaches, and judges, especially in regard to differences from FINA rules and qualification procedures.

Lastly, a new Competition and Innovation committee is being proposed. Assuming the addition of this committee is approved, work will need to be done to generate starting point of areas for the committee to explore. Thought will be required to ensure the committee works smoothly with other committees as it develops new ideas and proposals.

Thanks

The Competitive Operations work could not be done without the help of many people. I would like to extend my thanks to the Competitive Operations committee chairs: Anna Farmer and Christine McMaster-Shah, Championship Management; Liz Gerdin, Collegiate Committee; Linda Loehndorf, Judges' Board; Sue Nesbitt, Masters Committee; Patricia Jones, Rules; Betsy Caza, Figures Subcommittee for their work before, during, and after the annual meeting. In addition, I would like to thank Katie Wieckowski for her advice, judgment, and work as the AEC Vice President of Competitive Operations. Finally, thank you to Baylee Robinson for all her efforts in keeping the events running smoothly.