

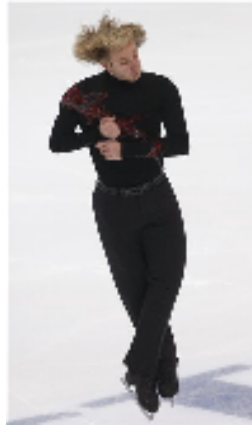
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Judging skaters: from 6.0 tops to 159.53, or ...

By [barry wilner](#), AP Sports Writer

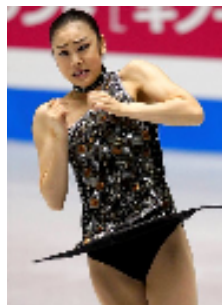
A scandal demanded change. Eight years later, heading into another Winter Olympics, the question remains: Did figure skating get the judging system right?

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FILE – In an Oct. 23, 2009, file photo Russia’s Evgeni Plushenko performs his short program at the Cup of Russia ISU Grand Prix figure skating event in Moscow, Russia. (AP Photo/Ivan Sekretarev/file)

2.



File – In a Dec. 4, 2009 file photo Kim Yu-na, of South Korea, performs in the ladies short program at the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in Tokyo, Japan, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009. (AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye/file)

3.



FILE – Former World Anti-Doping Agency chief and current board member of the Vancouver Organizing Committee, Dick Pound gestures during a news briefing in Guatemala City, in this July 6, 2007 file photo. The loudest of the figure skating scoring system is Canadian IOC member Dick Pound. “I don’t see much improvement,” Pound recently said. “You don’t know what’s going through (the judges’) minds. It’s so corrupt that the judging is anonymous.” Pound seized on one area that rankles many. In the 6.0 system, each judge’s marks were posted under his or her name. Now, there is no such identification. The ISU believes the anonymity prevents influencing the judges. (AP Photo/Andres Leighton)

For more than a century, the 6.0 system was accepted by skaters, coaches and fans. They may not have loved it, but they understood how it worked, including the politics that sometimes came along with the marks.

Those politics went overboard in the pairs judging scandal that hit the Salt Lake City Games, and the sport's veracity was so challenged that the International Skating Union felt it had no choice but to scrap the 6.0.

"I don't blame the old system. It was something that was in place for a hundred years," says Peter Krick, the ISU's event coordinator. "But you got one mark, say a 5.3, which at a world championship is a good mark, but not so good at somewhere else. You had no idea what it was that got you to a 5.3, and a 5.3 was always different in each competition. The skaters and the coaches did not get feedback.

"And then the judges had to place the skaters in an order, so maybe they did not give full credit because they had to squeeze people in with the marks."

Discarding such a tradition-laden method in a sport so subjective was going to be problematic no matter what the ISU came up with. But one thing the ISU recognized immediately: Any new system must have checks and balances.

Under the international judging system adopted in 2004 and fully implemented for the 2005–06 season, a judging panel and a technical panel evaluate the performances. Each move, from Evgeni Plushenko's quads to Kim Yu-na's spins to Belbin and Agosto's twizzles has a fixed value. Handle those elements well and earn a certain number of points. Mess them up and lose points from the total score.

"The old system was a deducting system, where the mistakes the skaters would do resulted in a decreasing mark," Krick says. "It was not clear where to deduct or what was the ideal point from which you are deducting. We needed to teach that a perfect point in a performance must have a special value.

"This system is building up the marks as a positive one. You add up what has been performed and credit the skaters for even an attempt of an element.

"This system feeds back. It's an open book to see where you were rewarded and where perhaps there was a minus-2 points in the grade of execution because you did something wrong."

Simple, right?

No way.

Sure, there are two principles that have not changed from the 6.0 to the current formula:

—The technical marks are given for the difficulty of the program and the elements performed.

—The quality and components are judged separately, measuring skating skills; technical transitions from one element to another; performance and execution; choreography and composition; and interpretation and timing.

But no longer are judges required to identify or grade the difficulty of the technical elements; that's left to the technical specialist, who does not sit on the judging panel. The nine judges on the Olympic panels in Vancouver are charged solely with evaluating quality.

There also are referees and technical controllers to oversee the judging. And video replay now can be used — and often is — to determine if a skater did, say, the required three full revolutions on a triple jump or came up short on a spin.

The idea, Krick says, is to get a full picture of a performance by using all the technological and personal evaluation possible.

"I skated in the old system, and the judges didn't specifically credit you for what you worked very hard to achieve day to day for years," he says. "We can do that now."

Are they doing it? Some critics say no, the loudest of them Canadian IOC member Dick Pound.

"I don't see much improvement," Pound recently said. "You don't know what's going through (the judges') minds. It's so corrupt that the judging is anonymous."

Pound seized on one area that rankles many. In the 6.0 system, each judge's marks were posted under his or her name. Now, there is no such identification.

The ISU believes the anonymity prevents influencing the judges.

"I guess people like to see who is the 'bad guy,' " Krick says. "It is sort of like you go to a Formula One race to expect to see a crash because this is where the interest is."

Krick admits influencing results is possible in any subjective sport. But he points out there have been very few complaints about results — and certainly nothing approaching the Salt Lake City fiasco — under the current system.

"We have a technical committee that works in a team which discusses what has occurred and they make a decision," Krick says. "That is more fair, because one person can't decide everything."

"The panel presents the result and it is transparent. If something appears biased, we see it, the team sees it. If they see something in error, they immediately step in. At the moment, the calls and results we have been seeing are within the range of interpretation. We have not seen severe mistakes made."

Of course, the focus on lutzes and lifts and layback will be at its sharpest over the next two weeks. Unquestionably, skaters, coaches, choreographers, broadcasters and fans will wonder about some of the marks.

But the figure skating community has pretty much grasped and accepted the new judging system.

"It's a good new judging system, because it really sets it out exactly," says Elizabeth Manley, the 1988 silver medalist in Calgary, the last time the Olympics were staged in Canada. "The skaters know what they need to do now, where it was always up in the air. You look at my performance, for instance, in Calgary. Everybody kind of went, 'We don't understand, how did that not win, right?'"

"But with this system, it's very straightforward, it's very laid out. At the beginning I was unsure of it, but now I do like it because the skaters are well aware of what they need to do to get the certain amount of points."

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AP National Writer Nancy Armour and Sports Writer John Wawrow contributed to this story.