

University of Peloponnese

Thesis

**AESTHETIC GROUP GYMNASTICS- THE HISTORY OF THE SPORT AND  
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION**

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Gymnastics is one of the most natural activities for people of all age groups. Rhythmic gymnastics has been practiced in Northern and Eastern Europe for almost half a century. In the past 10 years its younger sister aesthetic group gymnastics has become increasingly popular.

The governing body of aesthetic group gymnastics the International Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics was founded in 2003. The author has been involved in gymnastics since the age of 7. First as a gymnast, now as a coach, judge and organizer of different gymnastics competitions. In Estonia, author's native country, gymnastics is the number one sports practiced by girls.

The history of the sport and the development of the federation have not been researched and documented before. But the availability of the materials and close relationship with one of the founders of the federation, Ms. Mall Kalve, made this thesis possible.

The aim of the thesis is to provide insight to the development of aesthetic group gymnastics and the history of the Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics from its beginning until summer 2013.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Administrative Committee
AGG	Aesthetic Group Gymnastics
EC	Executive Committee
FEG	<i>Federation Europeenne de Gymnastique</i>
FIG	<i>Federation Internationale de Gymnastique</i>
GC	Gymnastics Club
IFAGG	International Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics
OVO	<i>Olarin Voimistelijat</i> (Gymnastics Club in Finland)
PC	Promotional Committee
RG	Rhythmic gymnastics
SC	Sports Club
SVoLi	Finnish Gymnastics Federation
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency
WW	World Wide (refers to World Championships held in 2004-2005)

## **1. GYMNASTICS IN GENERAL**

### **1.1. The origins of gymnastics**

Gymnastics was introduced in early Greek civilization to facilitate bodily development through a series of exercises that included running, jumping, swimming, throwing, wrestling, and weight lifting. Many basic gymnastic events were practiced in some form before the introduction by the Greeks of *gymnazein*, literally, "to exercise naked." Physical fitness was a highly valued attribute in Ancient Greece, and both men and women participated in vigorous gymnastic exercises. The Romans, after conquering Greece, developed the activities into a more formal sport, and they used the gymnasiums to physically prepare their legions for warfare. With the decline of Rome, however, interest in gymnastics dwindled, with tumbling remaining as a form of entertainment (Bott, 1995 p. 23).

As with many other sports after the decline of ancient Greece and Rome, the sports of gymnastics degraded as well.

In 1774, a Prussian, Johann Bernhard Basedow, included physical exercises with other forms of instruction at his school in Dessau, Saxony. With this action began the modernization of gymnastics, and also thrust of the Germanic countries into the forefront in the sport. In the late 1700s, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn of Germany developed the side bar, the horizontal bar, the parallel bars, the balance beam, and jumping events. He, more than anyone else, is considered the "father of modern gymnastics." Gymnastics flourished in Germany in the 1800s, while in Sweden a more graceful form of the sport, stressing rhythmic movement, was developed by Guts Muth. The opening of Jahn's school in Berlin 1811, to promote his version of the sport, was followed by the formation of many clubs in Europe and later in England (Bott, 1995 p. 25). The sport was introduced to the United States by Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent, who taught gymnastics in several U.S. universities about the time of the Civil War, and who is credited with inventing more than 30 pieces of apparatus (Cooper *et al.*, 1993 p.45). Clubs were formed as Turnverein and Sokol groups, and gymnasts were often referred to as "turners." Modern gymnastics excluded some traditional events, such as weight lifting and wrestling, and emphasized form rather than personal rivalry.

## 1.2. International Gymnastics Federation

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1881 the office of FEG (*Federation Europeenne de Gymnastique*) was founded in Liege. Nicolas J. Cuperus was the president for 43 years. The founding countries present at the first *International Convention* were Belgium, France and the Netherlands (FIG, 2013).

Men's gymnastics was on the schedule of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896. Twenty eight athletes are known to have participated in gymnastics from eight nations in 8 events such as parallel bars, horizontal bar, horse vaulting both team and individual (Mallon & Widland, 1998 p. 23). The FEG, recognized by the IOC, did not officially participate in these Games as an international Federation (FIG, 2013). Several competitions are held; the International Tournament in Antwerp in 1903 can be considered the start of World Championships. In 1908 for the first time, FEG participates in the Olympic Games as an official international federation, responsible for gymnastics worldwide. On 7<sup>th</sup> April 1921 with the vote of sixteen members the FEG becomes FIG (*Federation Interenationale de Gymnastique*).



**Figure 1.** Logo of FIG. (Source: The Olympic Sports).

In Amsterdam, 1928 the first women participated in gymnastics in the Olympic Games. In 1952 more events were added to the women's program (FIG, 2013). In the early Olympic competitions the dominant male gymnasts were from Germany, Sweden, Italy, and Switzerland, the countries where the sport first developed. But by the 1950s, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the Eastern European countries began to produce the leading male and female gymnasts (Bott, 1995 p. 27).

In 1984 rhythmic gymnastics was added to the Olympic program. Lori Fung from Canada was the first Gold Medalist in Rhythmic Gymnastics since nobody from the Soviet Union was present due to the boycott.

### 1.3. Differences between RG and AGG

Since rhythmic gymnastics (RG) and aesthetic group gymnastics (AGG) are often confused, further explanation is needed. Rhythmic gymnastics is a women-only event in which gymnasts perform on a floor with a rope, hoop, ball, clubs or ribbon accompanied by music, in individual or group events (Olympic.org, 2013). RG can be done individually or in a group of five in that case the sport is called rhythmic group gymnastics, but it's always practiced with apparatus. The technical level of the performance is the most important thing in RG.



**Figure 2.** Rhythmic group gymnasts of Greece competing at London 2012 Olympic Games. (Source: [hooping.org](http://hooping.org)).

In the 1800s rhythmic gymnastics operated under the guise of group gymnastics, and included a trace of elementary choreography. It grew slowly until the first experimental competitions appeared in Eastern Europe in the 1930s, when its newfound complexity

began to draw a wider audience. It incorporates elements from classical ballet, such as pliés and arabesques, as well as the German system of emphasizing apparatus work for muscle development and the Swedish method of using free exercise to develop rhythm. The FIG recognized rhythmic gymnastics as an official discipline in 1963, and a year later organized an international tournament in Budapest. Until 1992 in Barcelona, only one individual event was on the program. A second, team event was added to the program in 1996 in Atlanta (Olympic.org, 2013).

In contrast, AGG is a team sport where a group of 6-12 women perform emotional routine that consists of different body movement series without apparatus. Until this day, FIG doesn't recognize AGG as an official discipline, mostly because it's not widespread enough- it's practiced mostly in Northern Europe and Russia.



**Figure 3.** Bulgarian National Team competing at 2012 AGG World Championships. (Source: IFAGG).

## **2. AGG UNTIL 1998**

### **2.1. Women group gymnastics through the years**

After the decline of the ancient culture the physical education of girls and women was forgotten for centuries. Its existence for the countries was depending on men. During the Industrialization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the governments realized positive sides of well-fit women. First countries to establish physical education for women were Denmark and Switzerland. In 1892 swizz educator Phokion Heinrich Clias wrote the first book about women's physical education. The book was recognized all over the world, emphasizing running, jumping, hopping and skipping in different movement patterns. First school to educate teachers of physical education for women was founded in Copenhagen in 1839 and aesthetic gymnastic became a part of the curricula at Copenhagen University in 1909. The main principle of Danish gymnastic was good posture, but the means to achieve it were strict and not easy to follow. Finnish aesthetic gymnastics enthusiasts Elin Kallio and Elli Björkstén brought dynamics and emotion into the exercises. In the United States gynecologist Bess Mensendieck proposed healthy posture and rational gymnastics through controlled movements. French physiologist George Demney wrote several scientific papers about the disadvantages of the overly strict Swedish and Danish gymnastics and proposed smooth dynamical movements. He brought relaxation and stretching exercises in aesthetic gymnastics. Czech Miroslav Tyrš followed the principles of antique sports. The aim of his gymnastics was to develop healthy, strong and beautiful women. He used apparatuses like sticks, clubs, flags and hoops. Clubs and hoops are nowadays used in RG.

As one can see there were many different schools, all of them focused on looking beautiful, being emotional and connecting it with the dance. Music played important part in most of the aesthetic gymnastics schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Musical professor Emile Jaques Dalcroze thought his students to express the music through movements. His student and biggest critic Rudolf Bode proposed that following rhythm of the music makes people too tense and suggested using intuition. He also brought new movements in aesthetic gymnastics- swings and waves.

French educator and actor Francois Delsarte came up with a system of gestures and mimics that spread in Europe and America. The principle was that the poses and movements of a person change according to the mood.

American dancer Isidora Duncan denied ballet as the foundation of dance and considered gymnastics the basis of body control. She was the first to use classical musical pieces that weren't composed for ballet, like Beethoven, Gluck and Wagner for her improvisations. Isadora Duncan is considered to be one of the founders of modern dance and body movements with expression.

Gymnastics as a team sport for women have always been popular in Northern European countries like Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Estonia. The women in those countries are rather tall and strong, movements with good flow, like swings and waves are really suitable.

Outside the towns of Denmark, gymnastics was part of the cooperative movement and the special Danish folk high school movement. The folk high schools trained young men to become gymnastics instructors, and they brought the exercises back to local training halls where gymnastics became increasingly popular. The aim was first and foremost to create meaningful activities for young people. Competitions became popular with the arrival of German-inspired exercises on apparatus such as the horizontal bar, parallel bars and rings. The Danish Gymnastics Federation was founded in 1899. Today, even the smallest hamlet has its own gymnastics club. More than 300 000 Danes are organized in clubs under the umbrella organizations of the Danish Gymnastics Federation and The Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations (Brandt,2006).

In Finland there was thin line between folk dance and gymnastics. Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation was founded as early as 1896; a year later gymnastics festival tradition was started.

In Estonia, first aesthetic gymnastics groups were founded in 1915. They aimed for physical preparation and in addition to plastically controlling ones body, ballet was taught. Estonians were the first to focus at training as groups and performing in the same groups. In 1937 first aesthetic gymnastics competitions were held in Estonia, with the participation of 187 gymnasts, including men. The program consisted of marching- and running exercises, compulsory free program, free program of choice, compulsory and free jumps. During sixties aesthetic gymnastics became a part of university program, it came increasingly popular among women and has been like that ever since.

According to Martis *et al.* (1982) the principles of aesthetic gymnastics are the following:

- In the body movements there should be integrity between muscle groups and joints. Some muscles perform the exercise, others pre- or post exercise movement. Most exercises are consistent with nature: wave, swing, relaxations, jumps and so on, the movements involve the whole body.
- Most of the movements are dynamic, because from both historical and physiological point of view it makes the body linger and muscles more lean. Dynamical movements are achieved with spatial movements (marching, running, dance steps, skips, hops, jumps) and using different planes (sagittal, frontal, axial).
- There is deep connection with dance because of consistent and dynamic exercises, emotional performance all done with music in the background.
- The focus in the practice is on determination and awareness of the movement. The more aware one is of their body, the bigger effect the exercises are going to have.

## **2.2. The rise of AGG competitions**

Aesthetic Group Gymnastics (former Women's Group Gymnastics) has been a competitive gymnastics sport in Finland since 1950. Both regional and national championships have been held for girls and women. In 1996, the first international aesthetic group gymnastics competition was held in Helsinki with participants from 6 countries. From the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June The Midnight Sun Gymnastics Festival was held to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Finland's Women's Physical Exercise, it was also the most important gymnastics happening of the year 1996 in the whole Europe. 30000 participants from all over the world came together from all over the world. The many-sided programme consisted of opening and closing ceremonies, competitions and shows by many different performing groups in parks, theatres, swimming stadiums and on Festival Square (SVoLi, 1996). Rhythmic and Aesthetic Gymnastics competition "Blue Ribbon Games" was held from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> June. During that time the competition consisted of two programs: on the first day, aesthetic group gymnastics routine was performed and on the second day, free program- a dance, a routine with apparatus etc. The teams were very equal in the compulsory program first, GC Piruett got 19.2;

second, Vantaan Naisvoimistelijat 19.067 and third, Kotkan Kisailijat 18.930. In the free program: GC Piruett 9.725; second, Vantaan Naisvoimistelijat 9.625; shared third place Mäntsälän Voimistelijat 9.275 and Kotkan Kisailijat.

The development of the rules and the competitive agreements continued in the next international competition in 1997, which was named PINK. The same competitions were also organized in 1998 and 1999 with teams from eight countries.

Already in connection with PINK- competitions 1997 and 1998, an international conference was held discussing the evaluation of the sport. It was agreed that Aesthetic Group Gymnastics (AGG) is a gymnastics sport in which at least 6 gymnasts combine a group. In competitions the groups compete without apparatus. The rules define how the different required elements, such as body movements, difficulties and music, form a competitive and artistic program. AGG is stylized, expressive natural total movement, in which the body movement must include fast and slow movements and variations in the use of power. A movement performed with one part of the body reflects in the whole body. The gymnastics program must contain body movements, jumps and leaps, balances, skips and hops, which form varied series of movements and different combinations. Different movement series flow naturally from one to the next supported by the tempo of music and changes of strength. The main goal of the program composition is aesthetically pleasing gymnastics.

In 1997, six teams took part in the PINK competition- there were two winners with equal scores, both from Finland- Kotkan Kisailijat and Campuksen Koonto, the third was Piruett Elite from Estonia.

In 1998, most of the teams competing came from the different universities of Finland, Estonia and Latvia. The winner of was Kotkan Kisailijat from Finland; second Campuksen Koonto from Finland and third Vantaan Voimistluseura from Finland.

As the minister of foreign affairs, later the president of Finland, Tarja Halonen stated in her 1999 PINK opening speech: "Sports and fitness are dear to us all. We know that life is so much easier when we are in good physical shape. Women's gymnastics has traditionally been one of the most popular forms of sport and fitness. Although it was not a competitive sports to begin with, programmes and performances have always been compared with each other. It is therefore only natural that team gymnastics have developed into a competitive sport". (Halonen, 1999).

### **3. HUMBLE BEGINNINGS**

#### **3.1. 1999, The internationalization of AGG**

During the years, the wish to expand the AGG to even more countries and to form some kind of international organization and to arrange a competition on an international championship level, grew. Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Canada and Japan were actively taking part in AGG international competitions such as PINK.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May, General Secretary of SVoLi (Finnish Gymnastics Federation) sent invitations to representatives of the teams that participated in PINK- International Women's Group Gymnastics Competition in Finland. The meeting was to be held in the Finnish Sports Federation in Helsinki on 12<sup>th</sup> of June. The aim of the meeting, expressed in the invitation, was to discuss about the international future of the women's group gymnastics and to form an International Executive Committee (Puro, 1999). It was decided that the competitors must be over 16 years old- this secures the enjoyable aesthetic show performed by grown-ups. It also offers the retired rhythmic gymnasts to be involved in the sport, but in less serious way (Jantunen, 1999).

On 12<sup>th</sup> June, Finnish Gymnastics and Fitness Association SVoLi organized meeting for the International Organization of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics. 14 members from Estonia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Sweden and Finland were present. During the meeting it was decided that an International Executive Committee (EC) should be formed, its task was to prepare the foundation of an international federation within three years. EC agreed to meet once a year and during that time approve the organizers and competitors of the World Championships. EC became the promoter of the sport (Koski, 1999).

During that meeting two working groups were formed: a technical committee (TC) and administrative committee (AC). TC tasks were to discuss and handle matters like technical regulations of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics (AGG), the form of the World Championships, judges' work and training. AC and the official secretary became the contact persons for AGG and its responsibilities were to handle the matters of the international organization structure, finance, competition calendar, and regulations for organizations of the World Championships. One member from each country present at the meeting was chosen to be AC members.

During that meeting Bodil Mickels, President of the Organizing Committee of the upcoming first Aesthetic Group Gymnastics World Championships introduced the organization and hoped that all the participants would spread the world of this sport and bring new countries to the World Championship. Estonia and Czech Republic expressed their interest in organizing World Championships in 2001. In autumn of the same year, both countries proposed their capitals to be the hosts (Jantunen, 1999).

First AC meeting was held in Tallinn in 10<sup>th</sup> October with 5 members present, Sweden decided not to take part in AC-work. Since there was no official organization, it was decided that the meeting and overall communications should be referred to as cooperation in AGG. It was decided that chairman of the AC of AGG would contact the chairman of the General Gymnastics in FIG in order to explore the possibilities of AGG becoming a part of FIG. It was agreed that finance and membership fees are not important because there is no organization to look over it. The AC decided that there is no limit to teams from one country, in the finals however, there is maximum of two teams from each country. Invitations to the World Championships were sent to 20 countries. During the meeting, Estonia was chosen to host the second World Championship in 2001 on the basis of longer history in AGG and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonian Sports Association Kalev (Koski, 1999).

The competition rules were published in November with the changes in evaluation system: artistic and technical values are judged in groups of 3 judges. This made the evaluation more defined.

### **3.2. 2000, 1<sup>st</sup> World Championships**

In 27<sup>th</sup> January Bodil Mickels expressed in her letter to AC members the high standard of the upcoming World Championship- 8 countries and 19 teams had registered. After communication with FIG's Committee for General Gymnastics, Margaret Sikkens-Ahlquist and FIG's general secretary Norbert Bueche FIG's statement was that at the moment FIG is not interested in new, competitive gymnastics forms, because AGG doesn't have the necessary broad international interest. FIG suggested that the title of the WCs should be "Aesthetic Group and Fitness World Championships", but as AGG is a form of gymnastics, not fitness, the AC turned the suggestion down (Mickels, 2000). FIG stated that they do not agree about the use of the World Championship title, but also concluded that FIG does not have any exclusive right to the title. FIG approved

that FIG-countries can take part in the WC without any restrictions (Mickels, 2000). For the first and last time the coaches and choreographers were allowed to be judges as well. 10 countries took part, the level of gymnastics was uneven. The Finns went beyond limits to get 10 countries in the event, for this reason even a dance company from France took part in the 1<sup>st</sup> World Championships in AGG.

The first World Championships were held in Helsinki, Finland. The winner was Campuksen Koonto from Finland, the coach and choreographer was Anu Mattila. Since gymnastics has always been very popular, the World Championships drew wide audience. The level of judging was low due to the uncertainty of rules and lack of education.



**Figure 4.** Campuksen Koonto. (Source: Sunlahti).

During the first World Championship May 25-28, Judges Course was held. On 28<sup>th</sup> May during EC meeting elections for the members of AC and TC were held. Prague, Czech Republic was chosen to host World Championship in 2002 (Aho, 2000).

### **3.3. 2001, Setting the rules for AGG**

On 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> January International Judges' Course was held in Prague that proved evaluating body movements the most difficult. It was decided that more training should be done. Next seminar was held from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> February in Tallinn that introduced Finnish and Estonian gymnastics cultures, accompanied by demonstrations of the body techniques and how to use an apparatus with AGG body movements.

Technical Committee meeting was held 7<sup>th</sup> February in Prague with 10 members present. Administrative Committee decided that the number of teams/countries participation in the World Championships 2001 is 3 teams/country and one extra team for organizing country. The length of the competition program was limited from 2 min to 2 min and 45 sec. Also, corrections were made in the body movements- 2 different total body waves and 2 different total body swings were made compulsory. It was decided that the whole group must perform the required element with good quality or it cannot be considered as a difficulty of the Technical Value (TV). It was decided that the judge has to pass an AGG international judges' course in order to be qualified for the WC. The choreographer or the coach who participated in the preparation of a competing group cannot be in a judges' panel. It was decided that at the World Championships 2001 there will be the preliminaries and finals and the participants have the opportunity to perform in a show after the competition (Jantunen, 2001).

39 countries received an invitation to the World Championships 2001 held in Tallinn.

On 30<sup>th</sup> March to 1<sup>st</sup> April International Judges' Course was held in Tallinn. During the same weekend Kalev's Championship in AGG was held and judges had the possibility to pass the examination in order to judge in the World Championships. The special judging committee that makes proposals to TC concerning the judging work of AGG was founded. The judging committee proposes head judges and superior jury to prominent competitions, prepares exercises and judge exams to international judges courses, takes care of the ranking and register of judges together with TC or the secretary of the sport, recommend to TC the instructors to international judges courses, prepares with TC and instructors the contents of judges courses and nominates a responsible judge to the international competitions of AGG that are under supervision of TC. The members of judging committee of TC were: Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu, Jindra Kostalova, Mall Kalve and Anna Kirjavainen.

In 27<sup>th</sup> April AC chairman was invited to a meeting in Copenhagen with the FIG president Bruno Grandi, FIG General Secretary Norbert Buesch and chairman for FIG

Committee for General Gymnastics Margaret Sikkens-Ahlqvist. Closer co-operation was discussed for 2002-2004. FIG promised not to restrict participation and change the economical conditions (Mickels, 2001).

During 1<sup>st</sup> July EC meeting it was decided that until 2002 the title of the biggest and most important competition is World Championships. Other possibilities for the name of the competition were Continent Championships, AGG Worldwide and Worldwide for teams.

The second World Championships were held 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June in Tallinn, Estonia. There were 20 teams from 8 countries present. The winner was GC Piruett from Estonia with 38.10 points, coach and choreographer Mall Kalve. Second was Lahjan Tytöt from Finland, 37.80 points. There was even break between Olarin Voimistelijat from Finland and SC Velar from Estonia, both scored 37.50 in total. Since there was no rule about it, for the first and last time in the history of AGG, both teams got bronze medals. Later on it was changed in the rules that only one team can get gold, silver or bronze medal.



**Figure 5.** GC Piruett, winners of 2001 World Championships in Tallinn. (Source: Eesti Võimlemisliit).

On 1<sup>st</sup> July EC meeting was held, AC and TC reports were presented. Graz, Austria was chosen to be the organizer of the World Championships in May 2003, partly because Graz had the honor of being the European Cultural City in 2003 (Koski, 2001).

### **3.4. 2002, Establishment of the judging system**

On 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January International Judges' Course was held in Graz, Austria with the agenda of the new artistic value evaluation. First coaches and judges from Russia appeared in AGG.

After the TC meeting in January it was decided that the changes of the competition rules will be done via e-mail or fax. 10 members out of 9 sent their votes and answers to the chairperson. TC approved the levels of the judges and nominations of Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu, Mall Kalve, Anna Kirjavainen, Tarja Rasimus-Järvinen and Jindra Kostalova as expert-judges of AGG. The choice of expert-judges was based on their experience if AGG work as a judge and educator or developer of the sport. It was decided that the highest-ranking judge of the country will automatically be the first judge of a country on a draw. Also the number of the finalists in World Championships was decided to remain 8, because the other continents will have possibility to get place to the finals with wild card. For the first time, Galina Polakova, TC member from Latvia, suggested the teams to present Technical Value Judges their compositions elements schemes and indicate required elements and supplementary difficulties. The judges should therefore define A, B difficulties and B,C,D series, add their values and get the score for the team. This system would improve the point quality and the process would accelerate the speed of judging. No decision was made (Koski, 2002b).

In April SVoLi translated the rules of AGG for junior gymnasts.

At the TC meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June in Prague the principle of nominating expert judges was agreed- the country proposes to TC some person with deep knowledge of AGG technique, practice and judging. The person should have many years of international experience in AGG, has been active in the developing work of the sport and has been an international instructor of judges and has the highest judging level. The expert judges are the experts of the sport, who share their experience and knowledge of the AGG and develop the rules. The proposal of Galina Polkova about the composition schemes of the teams was not approved. Judges list was renewed according to the lists of the judges who have passed the exams and who have judged World Championships in the first

three years. The technical secretary introduced the proposal of the register system and the judging card and they were found practical and good and were approved to further developing. This meant that national federations had to send national judges list from that point on to IFAGG. It was added to the rules that AGG international co-operation and countries and teams that participate in the competitions follow ethical values and fair play in sports. They are engaged to follow the national anti-doping rules and sanctions regarding doping (Koski, 2002b). The principle of Fair play should be followed in all AGG-competitions from which the fourth point stands out: During the competition days the judging panelists are not allowed to discuss evaluation aspects between each others as well as with coaches and gymnasts (AGGICO, 2003).

The third World Championships were held in Prague, Czech Republic. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat Dynamot from Finland. The coach was Anneli Laine-Näätänen and choreographer her brother Antton Laine.

During the EC meeting in Prague, 23<sup>rd</sup> June there was lively conversation about the cooperation with FIG. It was mentioned that FIG is very interested in co-operating, but the sport of AGG is not enough widespread. It was concluded that there is a possibility to work together with FIG, but the federation is not interested in spending money on the newcomers like IFAGG. The second option for getting money for the developing the sport was to found AGG federation, that had a good chance of finding sponsors in order to get more money for the sport. The Executive Committee agreed to start the work to establish a new federation. It was decided that the new federation should be formed at the EC-meeting 2003. The AC was responsible for the preparations and was allowed to use outsider expertise. No decision about the organizer of 2004 World Championships was made due to no applications. It was pointed out that AC and TC need to get new participating countries in AGG, also the need for Bulletin was expressed (Mickels, 2002).

On 5<sup>th</sup> October, Judging Committee met for the first time in Helsinki and they decided on three levels for international judges. First level's judges must have attended three different judging courses and must have judged at least two World Championships. Second level's judges must have attended at least two international courses and judged at one World Championships. Third level's judges must have attended one course (Ahlroos- Tantt, 2002). The first level judges have the right to work as an international judges instructor, as a head judge and in the Superior Jury. Second level judges have the right to act as a national judges instructor, and an international judge, third level only as

an international judge (AGGICO, 2002). During the meeting regulations for judges dress code were agreed on and need for ethical regulations for judges was pointed out (Ahlroos- Tantt, 2002).

The first informational newsletter “AGG International” was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. The newsletter gave information about upcoming courses and competitions and also the results of previous competitions. It also provided the names of AC and TC members (Koski, 2002c).

### **3.5. 2003, Founding of the federation**

17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> January International Judges’ Course was held in Kisakallio, Finland. It was the first time when different levels judges were educated by different lecturers with different topic (Ahlroos-Tantt, 2003). On the last day of the course, 19<sup>th</sup> January, the TC held a meeting. Member Polina Notchevnova proposed that all the teams participating in World Championships should be divided into two groups and suggested to make the rules for B group easier. Other members agreed to use this system for national competitions.

Information paper was delivered to the members from WADA (The World Anti-Doping Agency). It was agreed that the World Championships age-limit is still 16 and over, but junior and children AGG work was strongly encouraged. The ethical code for judges was delivered, with the most important point about sanctions stating that two TC members can propose a sanction to the judge that has acted unethically and the guilty cannot continue evaluating until TC has decided the matter. It was decided that at the upcoming 2003 World Championships in Graz, Austria, there would be no extra places for the teams/countries that come from other continent, but if the team that comes from other continent does not qualify for finals, still has a possibility to perform their competition program in the beginning of the finals (Jantunen, 2003).

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January Bodil Mickels had a meeting in Rome with FIG president Bruno Grandi and representatives Norbert Bueche and Margret Sikkens-Ahlquist. FIG suggested once again that AGG should use another title for the International World Championships. If AGG disapproves the FIG might use sanctions (Koski, 2003a).

At the TC Meeting in Austria on 22<sup>nd</sup> May it was decided that the previous champion will have a wild card with the possibility to participate in the next World Championships with the same team with the exception of two gymnasts.

The TC also agreed on 10 finalists from that point on. During the spring before the World Championship in Austria, Russians were exploring the opportunities of coming to the competition with four teams. They stated that all the teams were incredibly equal. Despite the rules stating that only 3 teams from a country can participate at World Championships, Russian Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics still brought four teams to the event, TC decided to let all the teams take part in the preliminaries, with the sanction of the lowest ranking team not showing on the results list (Koski, 2003b).

The World Championships were held in Graz, Austria from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May. The competition was exciting and the gymnastics quality was clearly higher than ever. Music's of the compositions were different and versatile. The medalists had one thing in common- the execution. Top three teams were very secure and balanced in their executions. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Dynamot from Finland with 38.45. Finland also got the second place, Olarin Voimistelijat/Elektronit, 36.35. Estonia, GC Janika won the third place with 35.55. Dynamot winning second year in a row showed professional level and good quality performance. Their coach was Anneli Laine-Näätänen and choreographer was Antton Laine.

At the EC meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> May, FIG's Committee for General Gymnastics representative Flemming Knudsen introduced proposal for and agreement of cooperation between FIG and AGG. Bodil Michels noted that AGG international is very pleased that FIG has made this concrete proposal and opened a discussion. After the discussion it was decided that the negotiations with FIG would continue with the aim to be able to sign an agreement of cooperation in October 2003. It was also agreed that the use of the WC-title is a negotiable matter (Koski, 2003a).

During the same EC meeting candidate countries for upcoming World Championships were discussed, among them Canada's very strong desire to host the competition; it was agreed that for some years, due to the financial conditions, the competitions should be organized in Europe. Denmark expressed a wish to organize World Championships in 2004, but due to the law they needed FIG-agreement for the title. EC agreed on the membership fees for the first time- A- membership 1000€ and B-membership 400€ (Koski, 2003c). A-member is a national gymnastics federation that represents at least five gymnastics clubs, B-members are separate gymnastics clubs. There is no limit to B-members from one country, but there can only be one A-member from a country. It was noted that since the membership fees are quite minimal, more voluntary work is needed.

Every member pays registration fee only once: A-members 300€ and B-members 100€ (Koski, 2003c). At the General Assembly in 2004 Associate Membership C was added, for registered organizations that are in an early state of development and wish to benefit from close co-operation with the IFAGG and its members (IFAGG, 2006). Also at the meeting it was decided that new international AGG-federation should be formed that combines the participating federations and clubs. AC looked into the laws and the only possible home for the federation was Finland (Koski, 2003c). The other option was Estonia, but the law states that 50% of the members should be Estonian.

The founding meeting of IFAGG (International Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics) was held at the House of Sports in Finland on 12<sup>th</sup> October. The statutes had been pre-checked according to Finnish law by the Association Register of National Board of Patents and Registration of Finland. The seven founding and signing members were Marieta Dukova from The Bulgarian Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics, Anna Jurcickova from The Czech Sokol Organization, Kadri Liivak- Riisalo from Estonian Gymnastics Federation, Kirsti Partanen from Finnish Gymnastics and Fitness Association, Polina Notchevnova from Russian Federation of Aesthetic Gymnastics, Annely Riga from Ritmika Rhythmic Gymnastics Club and Maija Ceming from Sampo Rhythmic Gymnastics Club (PRH, 2003). The first five are the representatives of A-members and the latter 2 of B-members. Membership fees were agreed A- 1000€, B- 400€ and C 200€ (Koski, 2003d).

Johanna Jantunen from Finland was unanimously elected as president of IFAGG for the period 2003-2005. She was a member of the organizing group for the first ever AGG competition in Finland 1996. She has been both coach, judge and educator since then. President's responsibilities in addition to official signatory are to be IFAGG office's superior and official contact person for FIG and other federations and associations (Koski, 2003d).

Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu (Finland), Maija Ceming (Canada), Liliya Morozova (Russia), Annely Riga (Canada), Mall Kalve (Estonia) and Jindra Kostalova (The Czech Republic) were unanimously voted as the six members of IFAGG council. Johanna Ahlqvist and Jaana Asikainen from Finland were decided as auditors (Koski, 2003d). The Board was called Council only at the founding meeting; later on it's referred to as the Board. The Board leads the IFAGG between General Assemblies and meets twice a year. The main responsibility of the Board is to implement the resolutions of the General assembly and to develop AGG according to the plans of the IFAGG (Koski,

2003d). President, Vice President and Chairpersons of the TC and PC constitute the managing group for the IFAGG's Board (Koski, 2003e). The highest decision-making power in the IFAGG was vested in the General Assembly, in which all the members have the right to be represented (IFAGG, 2004).

During the meeting Bulgaria's candidacy for 2004 AGG World Wide Championships was discussed, the concern about the date (30<sup>th</sup> of June) and location- too far from the capital was evaluated (Koski, 2003d). In Finland and Estonia the gymnastics season runs from autumn to beginning of June.

The meeting concluded that the two working groups, AC and TC that have been working during the AGG experimental working period, should end their work (Koski, 2003d). In the third Bulletin, IFAGG asked enthusiastic and interested candidates to apply for the PC (Promotion Committee and the Technical Committee). TC of AGG is responsible for technical regulations, judges work, training, education, competition calendar and competitions itself, also making plans and visions for the future of the sport. The PC is responsible for spreading the sport, creating the IFAGG Bulletin, finding sponsors and making marketing and promotional plans (Koski, 2003e). In the same bulletin it was noted that only the members of IFAGG can participate in the international competitions that IFAGG arranges (Jantunen, 2003c).

23<sup>rd</sup> December IFAGG received an agreement from FIG. In its first paragraph it stated: "IFAGG is a newly founded, growing federation whose purpose is to spread the sport of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics and to promote its development, including the organization of international competitions. (...). This agreement of cooperation allows FIG to recognize the AGG competitions and acknowledge that members of IFAGG may participate in these. This means that the FIG members don't have to become members of the IFAGG to participate in the Group Aesthetic events organized by the IFAGG." (FIG, 2003). In its third paragraph it stated: "The IFAGG organizes yearly the competition AGG Worldwide. IFAGG agrees not to use the title World Championships in competitions arranged by IFAGG or its members during the period of agreement. FIG is the sole organization that has the right to organize World Championships in Gymnastics and Gymnaestradas (...). The name of this IFAGG event must be submitted and approved by writing by the FIG." (FIG, 2003).

Already in November during the process of composing the agreement document the President of IFAGG, Johanna Jantunen expressed her concern about FIG's aggressive co-operation proposal. IFAGG decided not to sign the document in 2003 (Jantunen, 2003b).

## 4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERATION AND SPORT

### 4.1. 2004, Agreement with FIG

On the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2004 the Board held its first meeting in Kisakallio, Finland. The meeting was mostly to discuss administrative matters, such as the salary of the secretary and opening bank account and making payments. During the meeting seven members of TC were elected with the first to update the AGG competition rules. Also the members for PC (Promotion Committee) were chosen. PC's first priority was to create brochure with a logo for IFAGG. The need for budget, plan of activity and marketing plans was expressed (Ahluroos-Tanttu, 2004a). The winner of the logo contest was Natalia Kulchenko. IFAGG's logo has three gymnasts doing the split jump with the globe on the background, which reminds a lot of the logo of FIG (Kirjavainen, 2004f).



**Figure 6.** Logo of IFAGG (Source: Soumen Voimisteluliitto, 2013).

PC had three meetings in 2004: in March in Estonia, in June in Bulgaria and in October in Finland. During the year, PC had three areas of activity: marketing, public relations and spreading of the sport (IFAGG, 2004b).

After negotiations, IFAGG's office was opened in Helsinki, Finland and Anna Kirjavainen was elected for secretary. In March, IFAGG-s webpage was launched: [www.ifagg.com](http://www.ifagg.com). Jaak Riga was responsible for composing and updating the pages (Kirjavainen, 2004b, 2004c). In the newsletter, previously called World Championships are now referred to as WW (World Wide). In the same newsletter it was pointed out that in every AGG competition invitation has to be mentioned that official rules of the competitions are approved by IFAGG. Also the official age of juniors 14-16 years was

mentioned and the fact that juniors have the same rules as women was mentioned (Kirjavainen, 2004a).

On 21<sup>st</sup> of February the Board decided that the agreement between FIG and IFAGG has to be approved (Kirjavainen, 2004b). On the 24<sup>th</sup> February the President of IFAGG, Johanna Tuomala-Jantunen, signed the agreement between FIG and IFAGG from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005. In the document IFAGG agrees to organize yearly competition AGG Worldwide. IFAGG also promised that all activities would be arranged by the FIG Anti-Doping Rules, the FIG Code of Discipline and the FIG Code of Ethics. FIG agreed to install IFAGG links on its website and vice versa (FIG, 2004).

TC added to the ethical rules that the choreography of the competition programme or the competition dress cannot hurt/insult any religion, nationality or take of an attitude politically (Kirjavainen, 2004f). The decision was made after GC Janika, Estonia, composed a routine that depicted 9/11- falling of the towers and terrorists, the gymnasts of the team were wearing a leotard depicting American flag to make the message and symbolism of the routine clearer.

In March Finnish Gymnastics and Fitness Association SVoLi gave IFAGG the permission to use their junior rulers of AGG. TC decided to accept these junior rules as IFAGG's official rules for children 10-14 years (Ahlroos-Tanttu, 2004b). During TC meeting, IFAGG's vice president Mall Kalve proposed to have short program with equipment is AGG competitions as a second program. TC decided to profile free program before anything new would be done (Ahlroos-Tanttu, 2004b).

During the Board meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March, the need for equality between IFAGG's members and non-members was expressed. It was decided that the non-members of IFAGG who participate at IFAGG's events should have higher participation fee than the members of IFAGG (Kirjavainen, 2004b). The participation fee includes administration, bulletin 4 times/year, judges' register and rules. IFAGG will take 40% from the participation fees of the World Wide starting from Sofia 2004. The administration fee (400€) of non-members in WW will come totally to IFAGG (Kirjavainen, 2004b).

The fifth World Championships, then referred to as World Wide competitions took place in Sofia, Bulgaria 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> June. The coaching and choreographing duo Anneli Laine-Näätänen and Antton Laine were successful once again, because the winner for the third time in a row was Olarin Voimistelijat Dynamot from Finland, second and third place went to Russia, to the teams Oscar and Roxett (Kirjavainen, 2004g). There were altogether 24 teams participating from 11 countries (IFAGG, 2004b).

In the General Assembly of 27<sup>th</sup> June in Sofia, Bulgaria, the statutes of IFAGG were approved. Its role and constitution states: “Amongst its members, the IFAGG is the supreme authority on all matters relating to international Aesthetic Group Gymnastics (AGG). The IFAGG approves and authorizes the official International AGG Rules, which define the sport and its features. Aesthetic Group Gymnastics are based on movements that are expressive, natural and performed with continuity. The IFAGG is made up of national AGG organizations that have been admitted as members.” (IFAGG, 2004a). Surprisingly the official language of IFAGG is Finnish, but the official language of rules is English (IFAGG, 2004a; IFAGG, 2005b). During the same General Assembly IFAGG agreed to start organizing official junior competitions- IFAGG Junior Championships (Kirjavainen, 2004d).

During the Board meeting Johanna Tuomala- Jantunen revealed that the Finnish Ministry of Education has given 15000€ in support of IFAGG’s work. Also at the same meeting the new logo and promotional brochures made by Piret Levald were presented (Kirjavainen, 2004e). At the Board’s next meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> October presented another grant 1500€ from Finnish Ministry of Education to be used for President’s and secretary’s costs and for administration. The rules of covering the travel expenses were agreed on: it was decided that travelling expenses will be paid when the person represents IFAGG. Also at the same meeting it was agreed that the next WW will take place in Greve, Denmark (Ahloos-Tanttu, 2004c). Once again the WW was to be held in connection with celebrations in the host country- Denmark was celebrating 200 years anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen’s birth. The theme of the event was “Ugly Duckling” (IFAGG, 2005a).

On 29<sup>th</sup> December Anna Kirjavainen resigned her secretary position and went to work for SVoLi (Finnish Gymnastics Federation) as the head of AGG Training project. Minna Koski was elected for secretary position with her main task being the connecting link between the IFAGG, its members, Board members, Board appointed groups and outside organizations and individuals.

#### **4.2. 2005 1<sup>st</sup> World Cup and Junior World Championships**

During the first Board meeting of the year 2005, the participation fees for the teams that come to the WW by FIG mandate were agreed on 400€ for administration fee and 100€ for the participation. The normal participation fee was kept the same as previously-between 50-80€ The children competitions were limited to 30-80€ The IFAGG decided to pay and deliver medals for World Wide/World Championships, World Cup and the IFAGG Junior Championship (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2005). In the beginning of the year, IFAGG got another grant of 15000€ from the Finnish Ministry of education, it was pointed to the administration (IFAGG, 2006a).

IFAGG and FIG had signed an agreement of co-operation on February 2004. That agreement was valid for 2004-2005. Negotiations of the further co-operation continued in February. On the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2005 Johanna Tuomala-Jantunen and Mall Kalve attended a meeting in Copenhagen with FIG representatives Margaret Sikkens-Ahlqvist and Flemming Knudsen. It was agreed that IFAGG members would decide at General Assembly whether they wish to be under the umbrella of FIG or if they want to be independent organization. The agreement proposal was received in the end of December 2005 (IFAGG, 2006a).

The second Board meeting took place in Tallinn, Estonia on 18<sup>th</sup> March. The competition system of IFAGG: 1<sup>st</sup> category competitions are -World Championships, World Wide, World Cup, TC-approved, 2<sup>nd</sup> category competitions are - all other international competitions, 3<sup>rd</sup> category competitions are - national competitions (Koski, 2005a). Finland, Russia, Czech Republic and Estonia expressed their wish to take part in the first IFAGG Junior Championships in 2006 (Koski, 2005a). During the meeting the pros and cons of going under FIG's umbrella were discussed. The biggest pro was the fact that under FIG AGG has the chance to become Olympic sport in the far future. The biggest disadvantage of the agreement was that probably AGG would become a part of General Gymnastics, which means that AGG won't have its own TC. FIG's opinion is that every evaluation and scoring system should be the same in all gymnastics (Koski, 2005a). This is the main reason why IFAGG failed to sign another agreement with FIG.

The first IFAGG Junior Championships took place 17<sup>th</sup> June in Plzen, Czech Republic. The participation was limited to three teams from a country and the official age category was 14-16 years. (IFAGG, 2005). The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Deltat from Finland, second place SC Roxett Russia and third GC Meetrum, Estonia (Koski,

2005b). Similarly to the success in seniors, the coach of the winners here was Anneli Laine-Näätänen with Laura Närhi and Hanna Allto, Antton Laine was the choreographer.

The sixth World Wide competition took place on 20<sup>th</sup>- 22<sup>nd</sup> May in Greve, Demark. The winner was Roxett from Russia, second place for Vantaan VS/Frida, Finland and third Piruett, Estonia. The winners were far ahead by one point, second, third and fourth were really close and got respectively 36.55, 36.50, 36.45 (Koski, 2005b). The coach of the winners was Olga Ponikarova and the choreographer was Svetlana Shishkina.

The General Assembly was held after the World Wide on 22<sup>nd</sup> May with 36 members present. There were two applicants for the World Championships 2007: Spain and Bulgaria. After Gisela Gorriz from Spain made her presentation, Bulgaria withdrew their application. It was agreed unanimously that Spain will host the World Championships 2007 (Koski, 2005c). The first IFAGG's honorary member was nominated: Elia Uitto from Finland (IFAGG, 2006). She was involved in all the first competitions as an organizer and coach of the teams.

The winner of the first ever IFAGG World Cup was SC Oscar from Russia, GC Piruett from Estonia was second and VVS Frida from Finland third (IFAGG, 2005). World Cup is a series of competitions that are held throughout the year in Europe. The World Cup consists of four seasonal competitions held in different countries. Ten best teams of every competition get the ranking points and World Cup results come from three best competitions (Kirjavainen, 2004h). Five countries: Latvia, Finland, Estonia, Belgium and Russia expressed their interest in taking part of World Cup I.



**Figure 7.** SC Oscar, winners of the first IFAGG World Cup. (Source: Võimlemisklubi Janika).

### **4.3. 2006, IFAGG office, conflict with FIG**

In the beginning of the year the decision about signing a new agreement with FIG still wasn't made and the President Johanna Toumala-Jantunen had private meetings with all the members of the board.

During the board meeting in Tallinn, 23<sup>rd</sup> March Canada expressed its desire to become the host for WW 2008. At the same meeting it was decided that from 2007 the judges have to get licensed and from the following year, 2008 the junior and senior gymnasts need to pay license fee as well. It was announced that during SVoLi games the team Oscar took the first doping test in the history of AGG. From that point on all the gymnasts that need medication had to fill out a paper with doctors' approval and the national federation sends it to IFAGG in order to prove the entitlement to the drug (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2006a).

The second IFAGG Junior Championships took place in Tallinn, Estonia. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Alfat from Finland, second place stayed in Estonia with GC Janika and third place went to Russia for Yunona (Koski, 2006d), The coaches and choreographers of the winners were Jaana and Hanna Asikainen.

In the beginning of the year FIG sent to IFAGG another for of agreement stating that IFAGG cannot use the title World Championships or World Cup. The President Bruno Grandi was ready to come to the World Championships held in Helsinki if IFAGG decides to sign the agreement (Grandi & Gueisbuhler, 2006a). On 19<sup>th</sup> of April, Johanna Tuomala-Jantunen sent an official letter to the chairperson of General Gymnastics Committee Sikkens Ahlquist stating that IFAGG could no accept the agreement between the two organizations and is hoping for further negotiations (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2006b). In replay to this letter FIG President Bruno Grandi stated his regrets about the matter and wrote : “As no contract has been presently signed, the President and members of the FIG General Gymnastics Committee, as well as all the other members of FIG authorities, have been instructed that they are not allowed to attend any of IFAGG’s events.” (Grandi & Gueisbuhler, 2006b).

The office and the official address of IFAGG was for three years the home address of the secretary. On the 7<sup>th</sup> June the Board decided to move the IFAGG office to the premises of Deviation Finland, which is the building, used for the Helsinki 1952 Olympic Games. During the Board meeting in Helsinki on the same day, TC decided that if two teams draw in the final score, the higher-ranking team will be the one scoring higher in the finals. If the score is the same, execution in the finals will be the deciding vote, if it’s still equal, then the execution in preliminaries, if it’s still equal the Superior Jury’s will decide. Because of 26 teams registered for WW 2006 it was decided that there will be two groups- group A and B. The national federations will make the decision which one of their teams is the first and second in their country- they will compete in group A. The third ranking team will compete in group B (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2006c). Group A, the so- called “warm group” consists of the best teams with higher technical quality and execution level. Group B is the “cold group” that starts the competition. The groups competing there are the third teams of countries that use all the three places meant for each country. Knowing the background, judges give them lower scores. The possibility of a B-team making to the final is almost impossible.

The World Championships were held in Tampere, Finland. The winner was Finnish Olarin Voimistelijat/Dynamot, second place for Bulgarian National Team and third for SC Roxett from Russia. 26 teams from 11 countries took part in the competition (Koski, 2006a). It was close competition Dynamot got 37.85 points, Bulgarian national team 37 points and SC Roxett 36.45 points (IFAGG, 2006).

The coach for the fourth time gold medalist Dynamot was Anneli Laine-Näätänen and choreographer her brother Antton Laine. Until this day it is one of the most memorable AGG routines due to the emotional background it has.



**Figure 8.** Olarin Voimistelijat/Dynamot. (Source: Olarin Voimistelijat).

The Board meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> October was already held at the new premises of IFAGG. During the meeting a problem with the new judges licensing system appeared: there are not enough level 1 judges. International judges license must have minimum one competition after the test in one year. Judges license must be updated every time the rules are changed. The board expressed that they are very understandable for new cases (Koski, 2006b).

From 2006 five competitions were considered as competitions for World Cup ranking and winner was Bulgarian National Team, SC Roxett finished second and GC Piruett third (Koski, 2006c).

The same year, IFAGG launched a Spreading plan where the board expressed its spreading intentions around the world- the goal is to get up to 23 countries to be involved in AGG. Among the first steps was sending bulletin, DVD-s from

competitions and a message to join the “gymnastics of the future”. IFAGG developed “Plan America” which involved sending a group to perform in South America to promote the sport. There was even a plan to find an university teacher who’d be interested in teaching AGG on highest educational level possible. Similarly to the previous program, there was also “Plan Europe” which involved sending performance groups to gymnastics festivals and rhythmic gymnastics competitions in Europe (Tuomala-Jantunen, Koski, 2006).

#### **4.4. 2007, European Universities Cup, World Challenge Cup for Juniors**

The year 2007 is the fourth year of activity for IFAGG that had no official employees yet. One of the aims was to increase the office services to 4-5 days a week or to hire a employee for IFAGG, while developing the structure of administration. During the General Assembly the following year, IFAGG was in the same situation- it had no employees due to the economical situation (IFAGG, 2007). For the first time in IFAGG’s history, the result of accounting period was in deficit, -3700€(IFAGG, 2007). It was noted that if there is an increase in the number of members to 25-30 more volunteers, sponsors and partnerships are needed (IFAGG, 2006b). Until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006 IFAGG had 10 A-Members and 4 B-members (IFAGG, 2006a). During the year 2007, the numbers of members grew by five: The number of IFAGG A-members remained ten, B-members 8 and C-members 1. Italy, Moldova, France, Turkey and Austria became the new members of the federation (IFAGG, 2008a).

The second and third honorary members of IFAGG Pulmo Puonti and Maija Ceming were decided at the Board meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2007). Both of them were the pathfinders of AGG competitions and of the sport in general.

The first European Universities Cup in AGG was held on 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> March in Moscow, Russia. More than 80 gymnasts from 7 countries took part. The winner was University of Tartu from Estonia, second place Moscow State Pedagogical University from Russia and third Kharkov State Academy of Physical Culture from Ukraine. Universities and AGG have always been connected for three reasons. First, most of the rhythmic gymnasts finish the sport but the time they are finishing secondary schools and going to universities. They are interested in continuing the beloved sport on less professional level and shifting to AGG from RG is very natural. Secondly, several coaches work as

educators in universities. Third, universities are sponsors for several teams, providing mostly facilities.

The IFAGG Junior Championships were held in Espoo, Finland from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March and the winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Ampeerit, the second place GC Janika, Estonia and third VVS/Tiklit, Finland (Koski, 2007a). The coaches and choreographers for the winners were Liisa Liokas, Heli Katajamäki and Anna Hassinen.

The World Championships were held from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> June in Salou, Spain. The winner was GC Janika from Estonia, second place Bulgarian National Team and third was SC Oscar from Russia. It was a very tight competition, considering the scores- GC Janika 37.8, Bulgarian National Team 37.55 and SC Oscar 37.05 (Koski, 2007b). The coaches of GC Janika were Janika Mölder and Jelena Karpova, the routine was composed by Russian Sanja Glyzina. The Bulgarians were leading after the preliminaries with 0.10 points, but GC Janika scored remarkable 19.15 in the finals, which was 0.50 higher than their preliminaries score. During the competition, judges Riina Voolpriet and Annelly Rig, received a warning for unethical actions. After preliminaries, judges were having dinner and there was a lively discussion about some teams, one of them Bulgarian Team that had memorable “Bird” routine. The music of the routine was crane sounds, the composition had lot of arm movements that resembled birds flapping wings, also the leotards had weathers on it. Judge Mall Kalve expressed some movements from the program and it was considered unethical by a judge to discuss a group’s performance or movements after the competition.

From the year 2007 IFAGG organizes World Challenge Cup, a competition for juniors that consist of three competitions throughout the year in different parts of Europe. Maximum three teams per country can enter the competition and earn points (IFAGG, 2009).

Bulgarian National Team won the World Cup with 40 points, just ahead of SC Oscar from Russia with 37 points and Olarin Voimistelijat Deltat from Finland 26 points (Koski, 2007c).

## **5. TIMES OF STRUGGLE AND CHANGE**

### **5.1. 2008, Unethical judges**

The rules regarding to IFAGG's Cup Finals and Championships were clarified: gold medals will be given only to the team that is best according to the rules. There can be two or more teams in silver medals and two or more in bronze medals. Contrary to World Championship medals, the organizers are responsible for buying and ordering enough medals to cover possible shared positions in silver and bronze medals. This means that minimum of 17 medals are required for each place (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2008). During the Board meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January in Helsinki, it was decided, that the points from the World Cup Finals are multiplied and the teams can get the same points from World Championships as well (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2008). So far the number of gymnasts in a team was 6-10, it was decided that the maximum amount of gymnasts is 12. During the registration for competitions the passports of the gymnasts are checked and the coaches need to fill in three different lists of names: the team, the preliminary team and the list of Finals. This means that for example from the team of 12, six can compete in the preliminaries and six in the finals (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2008a).

As per usual after the competitions scoreboards and judges evaluations are overlooked and based on the documents of World Cup IV, Sofia in Bulgaria, it was verified that second level judges Maria-Liisa Tuomisto and Leena Strack from Finland evaluated teams nonprofessionally and violated the rules. They favored the teams from their own country, gave the team's unjustified scores and intentionally violated the obligations. Maria-Liisa Tuomisto placed all three Finnish teams in the top three, which was very far from the actual situation. Leena Strack had already received warning in June 2005, but still favored strongly Finnish teams. IFAGG declared that both of them had been bias to the gymnasts and teams, damaged the reputation of the aesthetic group gymnastics and IFAGG and violated the rules of Fair Play. Both of them were banned from judging official competitions under IFAGG's authority (IFAGG, 2008b).

From 2008 Johanna Tuomala-Jantunen, Pulmu Puonti, Tatiana Myroshnichenko, Jindra Kostalova and Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu started preparing IFAGG Bases of Education in Training, Coaching and Judging. It includes the ethical principles, substance of education and methods of learning, teaching and approaching. The educational program is based on the 3 lower systems of European Union educational system (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2008a). Unfortunately there haven't been developments up until this date.

IFAGG Junior Championships were held 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May in Cartagena, Spain. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Fotonit from Finland; Victoria from Russia was second and another Russian team, Sonet, third.

The World Championships were held for the first time in another continent besides Europe, in Toronto, Canada 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Deltat from Finland 36.45; second place the winners of 2008, GC Janika, Estonia 35.25; followed by Bulgarian National Team with 35.00.



**Figure 9.** Deltat, World Champions of 2008. (Source: Olarin Voimistelijat).

At the Board meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> October, Tatiana Myroshnichenko was welcomed as the second Vice President and Elena Dukova from Bulgaria as the new member of the Board. During the same meeting it was agreed that the office of IFAGG wasn't serving as it should due to the lack of quality, availability and dysfunctioning. It was agreed that more work needs to be done with more effectively with grater expertise and responsibility. It was unanimously decided that Deviation Finland will provide the office services instead of secretary (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2008b).

## 5.2. 2009, Dominance of Finland

Until 31<sup>st</sup> December IFAGG had 13 A-members and 13 B-members (IFAGG, 2009).

The 10<sup>th</sup> World Championships were held on 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of June in Moscow, Russia. There were altogether 26 teams participating from 12 countries. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Deltat from Finland, coaches Anneli Laine-Näätänen and Inka Saini, choreographer Antton Laine. The team from OVO won the World Championships for the third time in a row. The second place was Oscar from Russia and third Madonna from Russia (IFAGG, 2009). Oscar was the winner of World Cup leaving Delta and Madonna behind.



**Figure 10.** Deltat, World Champions in 2009. (Source: Olarin Voimistelijat).

IFAGG Junior Championship was held in Rostov-On Don, Russia 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> March. The winner was Victoria, Russia; second place Sonet, Russia and third Ukrainian National Team (IFAGG, 2009). Victoria was also the winner of Challenge Cup leaving Ukrainian National Team and GC Janika from Estonia behind.

With the help of the grant of 18000€ the surplus of the year was 10760.34€ (IFAGG, 2009).

### **5.3. 2010, Alterations in committees**

The plan expressed at the General Assembly of 2010 was to found an Educational Committee that's responsible for developing education in AGG, producing materials for coaches and judges by organizing courses and camps and producing educational DVD-s. (IFAGG, 2010a).

During the Board meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> May in Sant Cugat, France, it was decided that Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu cannot be part of the judging in senior category, because her daughter is a member of a competing team from Finland. Alla Koscheleva from Canada and Lea Kriibi from Estonia can't judge seniors due to ethical reasons as well- both of them are assistant judges of teams that are competing (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2010).

The World Championships were held on 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> June in Varna, Bulgaria. There were altogether 27 teams participating from 13 countries. The winner was Olarin Voimistelijat/Fotonit from Finland, coach Anneli Laine-Näätänen and choreographer Antton Laine (IFAGG, 2010b). Madonna from Russia was the silver medalist and Bulgarian National team won bronze. It was a very close competition between the first two, Fotonit scored 37.15 and Madonna 37.10, this means the difference was only 0.05 which is even less than the smallest deduction possible- for example one person from the group is slightly out of the formation or someone not pointing their toe enough.

Together with the World Championships, General Assembly was held and it was decided to approve three extra trophies during the competition: choreography, expression and dress. Also country ranking was used for the first time: total points from the best score from maximum of three teams from the same country will be counted together. The country with highest score will be ranked 1<sup>st</sup> (Lauri, 2010a).



**Figure 11.** World Champions 2010, Olarin Voimistelijat/Fotonit. (Source: Olarin Voimistelijat).

In World Cup competitions were totally 33 teams from 12 countries. Olarin Voimistelijat/Ampeerit from Finland was also the winner of World Cup, leaving Russian teams Madonna and Nebesa behind (IFAGG, 2010b).

IFAGG Junior Championships were held in Brno, Czech Republic and the winner was Victoria from Russia, Olarin Voimistelijat Fosforit finished second and GC Janika from Estonia was third. Victoria was also the winner of Challenge Cup leaving Janika Junior from Estonia and compatriots Vdokhnovenie behind (IFAGG, 2010b).

Until 31<sup>st</sup> of December IFAGG had 13 A-Members and 16 B-Members (IFAGG, 2010b).

For the second time the accounting period was in deficit with -4267.66€ (IFAGG, 2010b).

#### **5.4. 2011, Economical situation of IFAGG**

During the Board meeting in Tartu, Estonia on 9<sup>th</sup> of June Vice-President Tatiana Miroshnychenko from Spain resigned her position and was named Executive Director of IFAGG from 9<sup>th</sup> June for two years (IFAGG, 2012).

In General Assembly, Aleksandra Tuomala-Jantunen from Finland was elected to continue as a president for the fifth time in a row. So were Board members Mall Kalve, Estonia, Lilia Morozova, Russia and Annely Riga, Canada (IFAGG, 2012).

The World Championships was held on 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June in Tartu, Estonia. There were altogether 26 teams participating from 12 countries. The winner was Madonna from Russia, coach Saniya Glyzina and choreographer Irina Zinovka. Bulgarian National Team got the silver medals and GC Piruett/GC Janika joint Elite team from Estonia got the third place. Madonna was dominating the competition- 18.70 in the preliminaries and nearly perfect 19.10 in the finals, totaling 37.80. Bulgarian National Team got 36.16 points. The battle between GC Piruett/GC Janika joint Elite team and Olarin Voimistelijat was close: both scored 17.70 in the preliminaries, but the technical value of Estonians was higher in the finals and their 17.90 won against 17.70 from Finns.

In World Cup competitions there were 27 teams from 12 countries. 20 teams got points in World Cup and the winner was Madonna from Russia ahead of their compatriots Oscar and Finnish Olarin Voimisteliat Team (IFAGG, 2012a).

IFAGG Junior Championships were held in Vigo, Spain from 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> May. 21 teams from 11 countries took part and the winner was Roxett from Russia. Silver medalist Sonet was also Russian and GC Janika Sunshine from Estonia finished third (IFAGG, 2012a).

World Challenge Cup competitions were held for the fifth time. It consisted of three competitions and the medalists were the same as IFAGG Junior World Championships: Roxett first, GC Janika Sunshine second and Sonet third (IFAGG, 2012a).

Because of the 20000€ grant from the Finnish Ministry of Education the accounting period surplus was 13096, 15€ (IFAGG, 2012). Economy of IFAGG relies mainly on membership fees. The additional incomes are the participation fees, licenses and profits of education. The grant from Finland's Ministry of Education has been the most important support to IFAGG since the beginning (IFAGG, 2012b).

During the season 23 senior teams took part in World Cup and 23 juniors in Challenge Cup. The number of teams shows strong enthusiasm and motivation of the teams. Until 31<sup>st</sup> of December IFAGG had 14 A-Members and 16 B-Members. The aim for the year 2013 was to increase the number of members up to 45 (IFAGG, 2012b).

## **6. NEW HORIZONS**

### **6.1. 2012, Spreading the sport**

In 2012 Educational Committee was founded that is responsible for developing AGG, producing materials for coaches and judges, educational DVD-s and educating AGG coaches, judges and gymnasts by organizing courses and camps (IFAGG, 2012b).

IFAGG also created a project for spreading the sport to new countries. There is a list of 47 countries that have been in contact with IFAGG or with whom IFAGG is seeking contact with. Each of these countries has a nominated person responsible for first contact and act as a mentor for the country (IFAGG, 2013a).

During the Board meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> March in Helsinki, Finland, the proposals from TC were discussed and agreed upon. The first discussion was about the benefits and disadvantages of dividing teams into A- and B-groups. There were equal votes, but it was decided that A- and B-groups will remain until General Assembly makes the decision. The second discussion was the proposal of changing the age limit of the gymnasts from 18 to 16. The reason for the proposal was, that 16, many rhythmic gymnasts stop their previous sport and it's important to give new countries the possibility to participate in the competition. Setting the age limit to 18 has some disadvantages: some gymnast's stop their gymnastics career at that age, the category needs to progress but with older gymnasts it's harder. It was decided that the age categories will stay the same (Lauri, 2012).

IFAGG Junior World Championships were held in Varna, Bulgaria 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April. The winner for the second time in a row was Roxett from Russia, leaving compatriots Vdokhnovenie and Bulgarian National team behind (IFAGG, 2013a). World Challenge Cup competitions were arranged for the sixth time, 28 teams from ten countries took part and the winner was the World Junior Champion Roxett, Russia; second place Vdokhnovenie, Russia; third GC Janika Elite, Estonia.

The 13<sup>th</sup> World Championships were held from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June in Cartagena, Spain. The winner for the second time in a row was Madonna from Russia with 37.40 points, second was Bulgarian National Team with 37.25 points and third Nebesa from Russia, 36.00 points. In the finals, both Madonna and Bulgarian National Team got 18.70 points, so did Madonna in the preliminaries. Since preliminaries score for Bulgarian National Team was 18.55, the Russians won their second consecutive gold medal.

In World Cup competitions 32 teams in total from 13 countries took part. The winner was the World Champions from Russia, Madonna with a huge lead with 42 points. Second was Olarin Voimistelijat Team with 26.5 leaving GC Janika Sunshine third with 26 points.

Starting from 1<sup>st</sup> August Tatiana Miroshnychenko resigned her executive director position and IFAGG hired her as technical director. There is no secretary any more; Deviation Finland is responsible for office services.

At the TC meeting in Barcelona, Spain on 28<sup>th</sup> August it was decided that a group consists of 6-12 nominated gymnasts during the year and reserve gymnast belongs to the group. For every specific competition a group can use 6-10 gymnasts on the competition carpet from 12 nominated gymnasts (Miroshnychenko, 2011).

During the Board meeting in Rimini, Italy on 15<sup>th</sup> November it was decided that Faroe Island will be the host of 2015 Junior and Senior World Championships that will be held together in the same event (Tuomala-Jantunen, 2012).

Until 31<sup>st</sup> December IFAGG had 14 A-members and 11 B-members (IFAGG, 2013a).

## **6.2. 2013, New continents at World Championships**

World Championships in Lahti, Finland 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June was season's main event and performances were magnificent. 27 teams from 14 countries took part in the competition. World Championships were held within a major Finnish gymnastics event Sun Lahti and many gymnasts contributed to the enthusiastic atmosphere during the preliminaries and finals. Russian team Madonna won its third consecutive World Championship with 38.05 points. Finnish Olarin Voimistelijat Team was second with 38.00 points. The competition was tight between gold and silver medalists; the difference between the two teams was only 0.05 points. The bronze medal went to Bulgarian National Team with 37.65 points (IFAGG, 2013b). New Countries in the World Championships were IWCPE team from Japan and Ocean-team from South Africa. Ocean is South Africa's only AGG team and before World Championships they had never competed before. Newcomer started practicing only five months before the competition; the backgrounds of the gymnasts are in rhythmic gymnastics. In addition to South Africa, there were ten teams in the finals plus one team from each continent. All in all there were 13 teams in the finals (IFAGG, 2013b).

During the General Assembly on 6<sup>th</sup> June Aleksandra Tuomala-Jantunen was reelected as the president of IFAGG. Anna Kirjavainen's mandate period ended and Salla Lintunen from Finland was elected a new member in the board. During the same meeting two honorary members were named. First of them, Evelyn Koop, who is one of the founding members of IFAGG and has promoted AGG in Canada since the early development days in the fifties. She is also the founder of Kalev's AGG team Rhythmic Expressions in Canada. The other honorary member of IFAGG is Bodil Mickels from Finland. She did a lot of preparatory work in the founding of IFAGG in the year 2003 (IFAGG, 2013b).

## **7. MOST IMPORTANT AND SUCCESSFUL**

### **7.1 People**

#### **Anna Kirjavainen**

She has a degree in coaching and sports administration, since 2003 she has been international expert judge in AGG. She has worked in several gymnastics clubs in Finland and was the head coach of SVoLi. She has published several national and international AGG materials, as well as strategy for top gymnastics in Finland 2007-2012 and developmental program for 2010-2020. She was the international secretary in IFAGG 2003-2004. From 2011 to June 2013 she was the member of the Board.



**Figure 12.** Anna Kirjavainen. (Source: Suomen Liikunta ja Urheilu).

#### **Jindra Kostalova**

Born in Prague, Czech Republic, she is the president of the Czech Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics. She represented Czechoslovak in sports gymnastics and holds a doctors degree in pedagogy. She was the member of the Board 2003-2008.

### **Annely Riga**

Was born in Estonia, graduated from the University of Tartu in physical education and later worked there as a coach. She was the member of Estonian rhythmic gymnastics team during Soviet Union. In 1977 immigrated to Canada and has been working there as a coach and educator of rhythmic gymnastics.

In 1980 she founded club Ritmika, which is one of the best and known clubs in Canada. In 1996 the Ritmika Club team was the first non-European team to take part in AGG competition. She has been a member of IFAGG Board since its founding in 2003 and chairperson of IFAGG Promotion Committee since 2004. She was also the founding member of IFAGG.



**Figure 13.** Annely Riga. (Source: Ritmika Rhythmic Gymnastics Club).

### **Johanna Jantunen/Johanna Tuomala-Jantunen/ Aleksandra Tuomala-Jantunen**

She has a master's degree in education from University of Helsinki and another degree in special education teaching. She has coached AGG groups since 1987 and 1990-1993 her teams won the Finnish Championships. She was also a member of the first international AGG competition held in Finland 1996. Finnish Gymnastics and Fitness Association SVoLi proposed her candidacy as IFAGG president. The voting was unanimous and she has been the president of IFAGG since 2003.

According to her words: “ Aesthetic group gymnastics is a sport, where different technical and athletic skills, expression, music and the idea of the composition will complete as an aesthetic whole. Part of the charm in aesthetic group gymnastics is it’s aesthetic appeal, the difficulty level of the technique and the combination of multiple skills. In group gymnastics doing together to reach the same aim and having challenges are also part of the charm.” (Tuomala, 1999).



**Figure 14.** Johanna Tuomala. (Source: Suomen Liikunta ja Urheilu).

### **Liliya Morozova**

From Moscow, Russia finished the Russian State University in physical culture and sport in 1991. Shortly after that she coached and consulted teams in Brazil and Indonesia. Before the millennium she moved back to Russia to work for Russian Olympic Complex for administrative work. She has been the member of the Board since 2003.



**Figure 15.** Liliya Morozova. (Source: Russian Federation of Aesthetic Gymnastics).

### **Mall Kalve**

Born in Tallinn, Estonia and holds a degree in drama and dance. Has worked as a coach since 1978 and the coach of Estonian national team in rhythmic gymnastics in 11 years. In 1990 she founded a gymnastics club Piruett that is the biggest gymnastics club in Estonia. She has been the member of Board and Vice President of IFAGG since the foundation. She was the coach and choreographer of 2001 gold and 2000 silver medalists as well as 2005 and 2011 bronze medalists.



**Figure 16.** Mall Kalve. (Source: Eesti Võimlemisliit).

### **Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu**

Born in Helsinki, Finland was the executive director of Sport Federation of Southern Finland. Holds a degree in management and leadership and in sports administration. She was the member of the IFAGG Board from October 2003 to June 2010, member of IFAGG Management Board since October 2004. She was the member of organizing committee of the very first AGG international competition, PINK 1996. She has been instructing AGG judges since 1991 and is the author of several AGG materials.



**Figure 17.** Päivi Ahlroos-Tanttu. (Source: Etelä-Suomen Liionta ja Urheilu).

### **Tatiana Miroshnychenko**

Was born in Kiev, Ukraine. In the eighties she was a part of Soviet Union's rhythmic gymnastics team. She holds a doctors degree in physical education specializing in rhythmic gymnastics. In the middle of nineties moved to Spain and started working there as a coach and educator. Since 2004 has been actively involved in AGG. In 2011 she was named Executive Director of IFAGG.

## **7.2. AGG clubs**

### **Olarin Voimistelijat (OVO)**

Olari Gymnastics Association (OVO) was founded in Espoo Finland in 1981. Today OVO offers Aesthetics Group Gymnastics, Rhythmic Gymnastics and a variety of gymnastic lessons as a hobby for its over 1750 members. Some 250 girls compete in Aesthetics Group Gymnastics and Rhythmic Gymnastics. With seven World Championship gold medals, one silver and one bronze medal OVO is the leading association in Aesthetics Group Gymnastics. Its group Dynamo was a forerunner in this field with four gold medals. Team Deltat was the winner in 2008 and 2009. Deltat also finished third in the 2007 World Cup and won the World Cup in 2008 while team Ampeerit finished third. Team Fotonit was the World Champion in 2010 and Team Ampeerit won the World Cup. OVO Team finished third in the World Cup on 2011 and second in 2012. OVO has won the IFAGG (International Federation for Aesthetics Group Gymnastics) Junior Championships four times in a row. Deltat were the Junior Champions in 2005, Alfat in 2006, Ampeerit in 2007 and Fotonit in 2008. Team Fosforit won silver medals in 2010. OVO has 24 teams that compete ranging from 6-7

year old girls to seniors (Olarinvoimistelijat, 2013).

The head coach Anneli Laine-Näätanen , born 15<sup>th</sup> October 1975 was a successful rhythmic gymnast for nearly 13 years, competing in European and World Championships. Since 1995 she has been coaching aesthetic group gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics in Olarin Voimistelijat. Her teams have won seven World Championships gold medals and two World Cups, which makes her the most successful coach of the sport.

### **GC Piruett**

Võimlemisklubi Piruett (GC Piruett) was founded in the summer of 1990 as a sports club mostly offering aerobics trainings to women. In 1998 the number of women groups and groups for children was equal and from that point on, teaching young gymnasts has been the aim of the club. Nowadays the club offers classes for girls and boys from 3 years old. The biggest number of groups is involved in a mix of dance and gymnastics, which is the foundation of AGG. GC Piruett has won numerous Estonian Championship titles in all age categories. Rhythmic gymnastics and acrobatics for men are practiced in the club as well.

The founder and head coach is Mall Kalve, who is member of IFAGG board, as well as 2001 World Championship organizer.

## **CONCLUSIONS. REASONS FOR AGG'S SLOW DEVELOPMENT**

AGG is not widespread enough- it's mostly practiced in Northern Europe and in some clubs in Canada. The reason for that is historical- in other countries (e.g. France, England) ballgames and individual sports are more popular for women. Second reason is that since it's not Olympic sport, it's difficult to find sponsors to spread the sport. All the Board members work on voluntary bases as well as the members of different committees. Third reason is the unequal levels of the teams- the groups that consist of rhythmic gymnasts are not good in body movements in the first year, but after the initial learning phase they exceed the girls who have been doing only AGG by far, because they are more flexible and have a better flexibility. Even the level of gymnastics in the World Championship finals is unequal- Madonna is scoring nearly perfect scores close to 19.00, Faroe Island at the same time gets slightly over 10.00. The audience wants to see their teams on the podium, that's why federations besides Russia, Finland, Estonia and Bulgaria are not very eager to organize competitions on international level.

The second bigger problem is the dominance of Russians and Finns. The Finns are the founders of the sport and have a very specific style that consists of smooth body movements and high, powerful jumps. The Russians on the other hand focus on flexibility and balances as well as the emotional part of the routine. The other countries have been trying to imitate the two different styles, but they haven't been successful. Choreographer Antton Laine has been composing routines all around the world, for example in the finals of the World Championships 2013 five routines of thirteen were composed by him. That makes the routines similar and overall the sport becomes a one-man show. The Russians are influential because gymnastics is very popular in Russia, they have lot of girls participating in rhythmic gymnastics, so the pool for gymnasts is large. The other reason for Russians success is the governmental support for the teams- they have the possibility to take part in the competitions as well as organize them.

The third problem is the subjectivity of the sport. Even though the rules for the teams and judges have been made very clear, there is still a problem with evaluation of the routine. for example, artistic value depends largely on the judges opinion- was the music suitable, was the leotard well fit etc. There has been proposal to use computers to do the evaluation. It's used in RG for making the judging faster and for overseeing the elements. The possibility of technical value schemes has been proposed several times, but this far it hasn't been adopted.

The fourth reason that the development of AGG has been so slow is that almost all the members of the Board and the committees have been the same since the beginning of the federation. This leads to small changes in the rules, less innovative ideas and permanent conflicts about the same things from year to year. Younger people don't find AGG appealing, because there is no fortune, fame and change for career in the area.

The fifth reason could be its discriminatory nature- the sport is practiced only by women and on the highest level from 14 years of age. So far men are not allowed to compete at international competitions among girls. There are some young boys practicing AGG in Spain, but due to the rules they are not able to compete. AGG has always been a women only sport because of its movements that are very fluent and smooth. AGG is practiced from very early age and also national competitions are held, because the goal of AGG in the first years of practicing is to grow love for sports and to develop body awareness. Later on the goal of AGG shifts to results on the highest level.

Aesthetic Group Gymnastics (AGG) is a very feminine and beautiful sport that is widespread in Northern Europe. First international competitions were held in 1996, first World Championships in 2000. Ever since the sport has been led by almost the same Board that was elected during the founding of International Aesthetic Group Gymnastics Federation (IFAGG) in 2003.

During the years there have been several groups and countries winning the most honorable title in AGG. Two of them stand out- Olarin Voimistelijat from Finland and Madonna from Russia. The Finns from OVO are characterized with smooth movements and high jumps, Russians on the other hand show extreme flexibility and high artistic value.

There have been problems within IFAGG- failed attempts to sign agreement with IFAGG, unethical judges, struggles with spreading the sport.

Hope of the sport of aesthetic group gymnastics relies on the youth- as long as there will be girls participating in classes all around the world, there will be international competitions. Also highest authority of IFAGG, the Board needs some changes and new blood of young members who are motivated to develop the sport.

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