AEROBIC GYMNASICS (SPORTAEROBICS) AS A SPORT BRANCH


Abstract

Aerobic gymnastics (sportaerobics) is a sports discipline which comprises the elements of dance aerobic and sports gymnastics. It evolved in the 80s of the last century in the USA and Japan and has become a sports branch with its fans all over the world. There are four federations nowadays (ANAC-Association of National Aerobic Championships; IAF-International Aerobics Federation; FISAF-Federation of International Sports Aerobics and Fitness; FIG-Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique) that cherish competitive aerobics. This sport branch has changed its name from its beginnings, from competitive aerobics, through sport aerobics, into aerobic gymnastics that has now been accepted by the International Gymnastics Federation. The competitions are held individually for men and women, mixed pairs, trios and groups of six competitors in pioneer, junior and senior category. Aerobic gymnastics (sportaerobics) was a promotional sport at the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000.

Key words: AEROBICS / SPORTAEROBICS / AEROBIC GYMNASTICS / AEROBICS ORGANIZATIONS / CODE OF POINTS

INTRODUCTION

The name “aerobics” is connected to the name of an American doctor Kenneth Cooper, PhD., who used to work in the military air force base in San Antonio (Texas, USA) during the 60s of the last century. Namely, Kenneth Cooper was the founder of the system of training based on the principles of physiology, of physical effort, intended to improve physical abilities of an individual, called AEROBICS.

Cooper’s AEROBICS, since it evolved at the time when the American society was flooded by the wave of physical inactivity and the “dullness” of the soul, gained the world glory, because it moved people to think and take over the responsibility of their own health and therefore moved them to systematical workout. Soon afterwards, Jacky Sorensen came to an idea to, by taking into account the principles set by Kenneth Cooper, promote aerobic workout with music, which had in its structure dance steps (dance aerobics). Since then, up to now, millions of aerobics fans spurred by their wish for good looks, preserving health, and fun, has been practicing “dance”, "soft", "step", "slide", "kick boxing", "cardio-funk", "aqua" aerobics, accompanied by different types of music (latino, disco, funky, hip-hop, afro, jazz, ethno, etc.).

During the 80s of the last century certain fitness instructors came to an idea that aerobics can, together with its workout form, have a competitive form as well, through which the numerous aerobics instructors could compete in order to check their physical abilities as well as to show the original combinations of various
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exercises and competitive structure at the same time. Led by this idea, they organized competitions, made rules and founded aerobics federations.

Today there are four federations in the world (ANAC-Association of National Aerobic Championships; IAF-International Aerobics Federation; FISAF-Federation of International Sports Aerobics and Fitness; FIG-Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique) which cherish competitive aerobics.

**Association of National Aerobic Championships.** Karen and Howard Schwartz founded the SFI-Sport Fitness International in the USA during the 80s, precisely in 1983, with the goal to develop a new sport, that they firstly called competitive aerobics. Soon after the foundation, the first rules were made for the competition organized in the USA in 1984 as the First National Aerobic Championship (National Aerobic Championship - NAC). During time the name competitive aerobics was changed into sportaerobics (in 1986), and the new demands and criteria were added to the Code of points. Several years later the Sport Fitness International has grown into the United States Competitive Aerobics Federation – USCAF, and nowadays the mentioned federation exists as the Association of National Aerobic Championships - ANAC. Sports aerobics became a sports branch, that had its fans outside of America, and so, in March 1990, in San Diego, the ANAC organized the First World Championship in Sport Aerobics, in which there were competitors from sixteen countries. The Association of National Aerobic Championships is the federation that organized the First World Aerobic Championship for pioneers (7-10 year olds), cadets (11 – 13 year olds) and juniors (14 - 17 year olds) in 1998.

**International Aerobics Federation.** The International Aerobics Federation – IAF was founded in 1983, too, and at first as the Fitaerobics International Association – FIA. In the beginning this federation had its two central offices, in the USA (FIA/USA) and in Japan (FIA/JAPAN).

The Fitaerobics International Association with its seat in the USA covered North and South America, as well as Western Europe, organized the First World Championship in San Francisco in 1984 in which the competitors from the USA, Canada and Japan took part. The Fitaerobics International Association, with its seat in Japan, covered Asia, Oceania, and Eastern Europe, and promoted sportaerobics as a sports branch by organizing competitions in Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore during 1987. That same year the first regional sports aerobics championship was organized - "ASIA CUP".

The change in Federation occurred in 1989 when it changed its name into the International Aerobic Federation – IAF with the only seat in Japan. A year later, in 1990, the First World Sport Aerobics Championship organized by this federation took place in Tokyo – "IAF SUZUKI WORLD CUP". Under this Federation numerous competitions, both world and regional (Asia – Oceania, Europe, America) are being organized nowadays. In the Suzuki World Cup, IAF organizes World Aerobics Congress aiming to improve this sport branch.

**Federation of International Sports Aerobics and Fitness.** The Federation of International Sports Aerobics and Fitness is a federation which, unlike the others, beside sportaerobics, promotes and organizes the competitions of fitness teams. It pays special attention to education of trainers in the field of fitness in the context of its work.

**Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique.** The International Gymnastics Federation introduces sport aerobics in the “family” of gymnastics sports in 1994, and since that moment, sport aerobics has become more important as a sports branch. The first world championship organized by the FIG rules was held in Paris in 1995, at which competitors from 34 countries participated (at the last championship 50 member countries were participants). The International gymnastics federation in the context of its activities pays special attention to education of skilled staff, so the Academy for aerobic gymnastics was founded in 2002. The students of the Academy are given chance to attend the lectures in the field of anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, physical preparation, psychology, as well as the lectures with practical display of exercises.

For the development of sports aerobics as a sports branch, the year of 1995 was very important,
when all three federations (ANAC-Association of National Aerobic Championships; IAF-International Aerobics Federation; FIG-Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique) agreed to contribute mutually in order to promote sportaerobics into the Olympics sports event. Sportaerobics was shown to the world public during the Olympic games in Sydney in 2000 as a promotional sport in the context of sport gymnastics competition, and, for the time being, these were the only Olympic games during which sportaerobics competitions were held.

Sports aerobics was changed once again in 2005. Namely, after almost two decades of existence of sportaerobics, this sports branch changed its name into aerobic gymnastics on the initiative of the International Gymnastics Federation in 2005. The change of the name of this sports branch resulted in numerous dilemmas, because ANAC, IAF and FISAF did not accept the change of name, although ANAC and IAF did accept the Code of points of competitions in aerobic gymnastics given by the International Gymnastic Federation. Therefore, there are two official names for this sport branch, aerobic gymnastics (FIG) and sportaerobics (ANAC, IAF, FISAF).

WHAT IS AEROBIC GYMNASTICS (SPORTAEROBICS)?

Aerobic gymnastics (sportaerobics) is a sport branch originating from “traditional” group lessons of aerobic workout with music (dance aerobics), characterized by choreographic performance of intensive, dynamic movements and motion and predetermined different difficulty level exercises. The performance of each exercise must be in accordance with chosen music background. The routine performed by the competitors comprises the exercises of strength, stamina, flexibility and coordination, joined together in a harmonious unit with the usage of the whole competitive space. Every routine in aerobic gymnastics/sportaerobics demands a high level of motor and functional competitor’s abilities, aiming to successful performance of sportaerobics elements, compulsories and difficulty (a defined performance of a certain difficulty level).

The given demands of a competitive routine are determined by the Code of points, that existed in each federation, and which differed from each other in certain demands (music background, exercised, compulsory elements, and the way of giving points). Since that difference did not contribute to development and promotion of aerobic gymnastics (sportaerobics in those days), in time, by joined initiative, ANAC and IAF have determined the Code of points, which has been applied in all competitions organized by these two federations.

A real improvement in compliance with demands for the contents of routines was made after the meetings of ANAC, IAF and FIG representatives held in Lahti (Finland) in 1997 and Toronto (Canada) 1998, as well as the consultation with the representatives of the six leading countries in aerobic gymnastics/ sportaerobics in the period from 1998-2002. Namely, the ANAC and IAF accepted the Code of points written by the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG), which have been implemented in all competitions organized by these federations since 2003.

However, despite the aforesaid harmonized standpoints, each of the four existing federations have organized their own competitions (Table 1.), which, in the beginning, were organized exclusively for the member countries of each individual federation, and, no sooner than 2003, after having accepted the common Code of points, were the competitors allowed to take part in competitions organized by another federations (the competitors of FISAF are not allowed to take part in other federations’ competitions).

The first world competitions were organized by the ANAC and IAF, and therefore it is no wonder that the largest number of competitions (19) was organized by these federations for seniors, and juniors as well, for whom there were eleven international aerobics championships (Table 2.). In the beginning the competitions were held according to the Code of points by the ANAC and IAF, while since 2003 and 14th Suzuki World Cup, as well as the World Sports Aerobics Championships held in Los Angeles in 2005 (16th for seniors and 8th for juniors) the competitions
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were held according to common Code of points for sport aerobics, as well as aerobic gymnastics. Under the supervision of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) the world championships (10), and the World Cup (qualifications and finals), continental competitions (Europe and Pan-American), international tournaments, open national championships have been organized, while within the World Gymnastics Games there were three competitions in aerobic gymnastics by now (Lahti in 1995, Akita in 2001, and Duisburg in 2005.).

Table 1. Aerobic gymnastics / sportaerobics competitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPETITIONS</th>
<th>ANAC</th>
<th>IAF</th>
<th>FIG</th>
<th>FISAF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Sportaerobics Championship (up to 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Aerobic Championship (since 2005)</td>
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<td>International Youth Aerobic Championship</td>
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<td>World Junior Aerobic Showcase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suzuki World Cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Sportaerobics Championships (up to 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aerobic Gymnastics World Championships (since 2006)</td>
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<td>World Games</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Cup Series/Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show/Gala</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Open Tournaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Competitions (Senior/Junior)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The number of more important aerobic gymnastics/sports aerobics competitions held.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPETITIONS</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Sportaerobics Championship / International Aerobic Championship (ANAC)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzuki World Cup (IAF)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Youth Aerobic Championship (ANAC)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Sports Aerobics Championships / Aerobic Gymnastics World Championships (FIG)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Sports Aerobic Championships/Aerobic Gymnastics European Championships (FIG)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Junior Aerobic Showcase (ANAC)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Cup Series/Final (FIG)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Games (FIG)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerobic Gymnastics Panamerican Championships (Senior/Junior) (FIG)</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Common attitudes about the rules of pointing contributed to the fact that all official competitions (regardless of the federation that organizes them) are accepted and announced in the competition calendars of each federation, which represents another great contribution to the promotion of this sport branch.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CODE OF POINTS IN AEROBIC GYMNASICS (SPORTAEROBICS)

Demands of Composition, Judging and Scoring (panel of judges, ways and criteria of evaluation), the Ways of forming of marks, Forbidden elements, Table of difficulty by groups (description and the way of recording).

**Space for competition.** Competition composition is performed on the stage height 80-140 cm, on the space of 14 x 14 meters. The stage must be closed on one side, i.e. must have a background of a certain color. On the stage, the competitive space of 7 x 7m must be clearly marked by black lines 5cm wide for individuals, mixed pairs and trios, and 10 x 10m for groups (Picture 1.).

**Picture 1.** The dimensions of competitive space on the stage

**Categories.** In aerobic gymnastics/sport aerobics the competition is held for individuals for men and women, mixed pairs, trios (men, women, mixed) and in groups of six competitors (men, women, mixed). The competitions are held in the following age categories: pioneers (12-14 years), juniors (15-17 years) and seniors (18 years and over). Competitions are also held for the age of 10-12, but only for individuals and in the groups of three, exclusively on the national level.

**Competitive clothing.** The competitive clothing for the performance is precisely described by the competition regulations, and comprises the description of sneakers, and clothing for men and women, wearing jewelry (it is allowed to wear earrings on the earlobe), and hairstyle for middle length and long hair. It is expected that competitors wear sneakers that have soles to reduce all landings, flexible middle part and solid heels. The girls must wear one-piece tricot which can have long or short sleeves, the tricot can be without sleeves with wider braces. Men must wear one-piece tricot which can have long or short sleeves, the tricot can be without sleeves with wider braces, or they can wear shorts and body T-shirts.

**Length of performance.** The routine performed in junior and senior category presented by competitors lasts for one minute and forty-five seconds (1:45), while in pioneer category it lasts.
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one minute and thirty seconds (1:30), and allowed
tolerance is plus/minus five seconds (± 5) for all
categories. Measuring of time starts with the first,
and ends with the last tone of music. Music
background may comprise only one piece (song),
i.e. a compilation in which more than one song or
composition appear is not allowed, but in the very
piece the original music effects are allowed.
However, music effects which can be identified as
taken from another composition and that last
longer than four seconds are regarded as other song
or composition and therefore are not allowed.

**Routine.** The competitors are demanded a
routine that comprises elements of dance aerobics
(combination of high and low intensity steps) and
difficulty, that are performed using the whole
competitive space. The mentioned elements must
be in accordance with the chosen music, and
difficulties must be “implemented” into the routine
without interruption. Among the elements of dance
aerobics the steps that are implied are
"march", "jog", "skip", knee lift", "kick", "Jack" and
"lunge", while the difficulty levels are divided
into four groups as the following:

- **b)** Static strength ("Supports Family"),
- **d)** Balance and flexibility ("Turn Family", "Balance Family", "High Leg Kicks Family", "Illusion Family").

All exercises, according to the difficulty of
performance rank from A, B, C, D, E, and F
category. The routine can comprise a maximum of
twelve difficulties for seniors, ten difficulties for
juniors, and eight difficulties for pioneers (the
performance of any difficulty more than above
mentioned number is punished by the difficulty
judges), as well as a minimum of one difficulty out
of the four mentioned groups.

In ANAC Class II and Master Divisions
competitions, along with the above mentioned, it is
demanded that the routine comprises the so-called
compulsories. Compulsory exercises mean the
performance of "Jumping Jack" phase (it always
begins with four "Jumping Jack" and it lasts for
32 bits), and four continuous high leg kicks (High
Leg Kick). According to this demand, on the
mentioned competitions, the routine need not
comprise twelve, but only the maximum of ten
elements.

**Forbidden movements.** In aerobic
gymnastics/sportaerobics all movements that
disturb competitor’s postural status, i.e. load the
spine (hyperextension of the spine) are forbidden.
According to this, all exercises with the rotation of
sagital and transversal axis (salto, rondat, acrobatic
jumps), protection with body, position on hands
over 30 degrees, knee pirouettes, rotation on the
back (the elements of break-dance), elevation on
the tiptoes, as well as leg kicks from martial arts
are forbidden.

**Panel of judges.** Panel of judges comprises
fourteen judges as following: judges for artistic
value of the routine (4), judges for performance
(4), judges for difficulty (2), line judges (2), time
controller (1), and the chairman of the Panel of
judges.

A judge for the artistic value estimates the
so-called artistic quality of the routine, which
stands upon the choreography, (changing of dance
steps and difficulty, intensity) musicality,
creativity, expression during movements and
motion and the usage of space. A judge for
performance assesses the technique of each
motion performance and synchronization of a
competitor. Representation and number of difficult
elements, as well as their value is controlled and
estimated by a judge for difficulty. The duty of a
line judge is to control whether the line of
competitive space has been crossed by any of the
competitors, while the length of composition’s
time is measured by a time controller.

**Formation of marks.** A competitor who
wins the largest number of points wins the
competition, and the way of forming the marks
represents a complex process described in detail in
the Code of points of aerobic gymnastics (Code of
points Aerobic Gymnastics 2005-2008).
CONCLUSION

Aerobic gymnastics (sportsaerobics) is relatively “young” sports branch that from the moment of forming the idea of aerobic instructors’ competition in the 80s of the last century up to now has overgrown into sports branch which has more and more fans every year. Since the period in which only aerobic instructors competed, over the period in which ex-gymnasts have taken part in competitions (sport and rhythmical gymnastics), now is the period in which, even in early age, there is the selection of competitors for this sports branch. The structure of a routine in which the elements of dance aerobics and sports gymnastics change in sequences, adds dynamic and attractiveness to this sports, both in individuals competition, and in mixed pairs, trios (picture 2.) and groups. By performing the mentioned elements, the competitors show stamina, dynamic and static strength (picture 3.), flexibility and balance, and especially the skill by performing attractive, difficult elements trained technically up to the perfection.

The attendance of a greater number of participating countries in major competitions (World and European championships, World cup) show the popularity of aerobic gymnastics (sportsaerobics) and the wish of individuals to go in for this attractive sport. The present popularity leads to the need to comply Code of points on all levels of competition inside the federations. Above all, it is thought about the code of points on ANAC Class II and Master Divisions and FISAF competitions, because of the fact that their specific demands (performing ”Jumping Jack” phrase and four continuous High Leg Kicks) look like ”traditional” aerobics lessons, than it is the case with the present Code of points for aerobic gymnastics, that shall have certain changes after this year. What direction the change of Code of points shall take is going to be seen, but there remains the question whether the changes will be accepted for all levels of competitions within the aerobics federations.

Besides the compliance with the Code of points, there comes the need for education of skilled staff, not only within the FISAF and FIG, but also within the other two aerobics federations by organizing congresses, skilled staff seminars, workshops, as well as other ways of education.

In order to develop this sports branch, world experts of aerobics have to answer the challenge and comply their attitudes concerning the name, because there is still an open question whether the change of the name, initiated by the International gymnastics federation, means the step forward or backward on the way of developing of this sports branch.

Picture 2. Competition of trios.

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