

The Dancesport Judging System and Its Evolution at National and International Level

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ABSTRACT

DanceSport is a mix between art and sport as it combines an elaborate way of communicating the artistic movement fully synchronized to the character of the melodic line and the competitive character. This special activity is in a continuous transformation through the evolution of the technical nature and complexity of dance elements/dance figures, with regulations that constantly adapt to the present time and society, constantly offering an amazing show.

The purpose of the research is to structure the DanceSport judging systems, the problems that have arisen over the years and the changes that took place regarding the evaluation of dancers.

The evolution of the judging systems and the criteria reflect the evolution of dancers over time, an evolution that became vital because of the technical/artistic nature of transformation and also, because of the complexity of the choreographies or dance routines.

Keywords: dancesport criteria, judging system.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dance, according to the scholarly writer of dance and aesthetics Sorrel (1994), “is the first language of mankind able to awaken the deepest, most nuanced and enduring resonances of our vitality. It is human language before its synthesis”.

“Dance (Grau, 2015) represents a multi-sensory pursuit that connects human beings in a particular kind of relationship, which gives dance its power.”

This special activity called DanceSport combines both art and sport in an elaborate way of communicating artistic movements in full synchronization with the character of the melodic line and the competitive character, influencing the development of both physical and mental skills and creating an environment conducive to developing the social interactions and according to the conclusions of the study conducted by Fink, Bläsing, Ravignani and Shackelford at the beginning of 2021, despite the cultural diversity in dance movements and contexts, the primary communicative functions of dance may be the same across societies.

Judging this type of show is not an easy task for judges who decide to rank dancers in competitions and the subjectivity sometimes becomes inevitable in the evaluation of the dance couples. This type of situation required the creation of the most objective way of judging sports performances, in competitions, in order to minimize the influence of subjectivism on the final scoring of dance couples.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Authors such as Picart (2007) and Thompson (2007) argued since the fact that, as the choreography, costuming of different genres of ballroom and Dance Sport continue to evolve, these theatrical productions are aestheticized and are created to encourage commercial appeal, using the narrative frame of the competitive melodrama to heighten audience interest.

Famous dance teachers and choreographers such as Pletnev (2012) and Bijster (2012), emphasize the importance of the experience and skills of judges as they are the ones who apply the judging criteria in order to evaluate the dancers.

According to studies conducted by specialists in the field of sports psychology, Van Bokhorst *et al.* (2016), adjudicators' emotion recognition skills might have an effect in detecting errors and so, making a more accurate assessment. Furthermore, the scoring given by judges could be also influenced by their level of expertise.

They also consider that the separation of coaching and judging activities would be extremely detrimental to DanceSport. The experience gained in the dance studio, including the experience as dancers, performing on the dance floor and being up to date with the latest information regarding the performance and evaluation of dancers is complementary.

Thus, a variety of perspectives have to be taken into account such as: motivation and happiness, touch and contact, movement and the kinesthetic sense, physical exercise, community and diversity, creativity and individuality, gender, music, and his own theoretical construct self-othering Sam (2014).

According to specialists in the field as Lamb (2012), we can say that the artistic side of dance requires the sports side or the athletic side, as a means to create and improve performance both in quality and aesthetic form and if we consider performance art, such as dance sport Özcimder *et al.* (2018) the definition of success might not be that clear, since the overall goal in art forms is not as explicit compared with those in general sports behavior.

Considering that Kobiela *et al.* (2019), argued that judged sports such as figure skating and dance sport are aesthetic performances rather than games, Thomas (2015) argues that they are simultaneously performances and games. In addition to the two aspects that are considered to be connected, Maheu *et al.* (2019) affirm that their main goal is to skate or dance beautifully and the requirement to perform elements or figures makes achieving that goal more difficult.

Such opinions highlight the need to maintain the aesthetic quality of DanceSport, as technical performance is achieved in stages and should have the role to support the aesthetics of movement and performance.

Thus, by knowing the complexity of DanceSport, as an artistic sport, Brownlow *et al.* (1997), we can explain to some extent, the issue of judging and evaluation through the objectivity of preferences, the dynamics of the relationship between art and sport, a successful dance performance requires that the dancers are well-connected to multiple variables (oneself, dance floor, music, partner, other couples, and the audience Bayraktar (2019), the importance of imagination, originality and ingenuity.

Dancing, according to Cristinados Santos (2021) has been suggested to increase the levels of physical activity, especially of the youth, researching the physiological characteristics of dance classes, mainly regarding the levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) during classes.

The World Dance Sport Federation (WDSF) has, over time, created various judging systems to streamline the process of evaluating dance couples, systems that aim to maximize impartiality and ethical behavior.

Each year, WDSF grants approximately 2,000 permits to organize international Dance Sport competitions – Standard Dances, Latin Dances and 10 Dances (Continental, Sub-Continental and Intercontinental Championships, Show Dance competitions, World and Continental Cups and Opens, International Grand Slam competitions).

In addition to this type of competition, there are thousands of other different competitions organized worldwide by each national federation and WDSF affiliated organization, sportdance competitions (local, regional, national) for all sections, value categories and age categories (www.worlddancesport.org).

III. ISSUES ADDRESSED

A. Performance Evaluation and Judging Criteria according to the WDSF Regulations

The performances of the dancers (the dance couple is evaluated as a unitary whole) are evaluated by the adjudicators commission, their number varies depending on the competition's type, as well as the judging system to be used.

The list of evaluation criteria for dancers includes elements of technical nature, types of hold, rhythmic interpretation, footwork but also difficult to define notions such as presentation on the dance floor and the appearance of dancers (clothing, makeup, attitude, the cohesion of the couple).

According to Ansoorge and Scheer (1988), judging criteria, by being well-defined and interconnected, become the tools that adjudicators use to assess the quality of artistic and sporting performance. Adjudicators are not required to apply all evaluation criteria at any time during the competition, varying according to its stage. For example, in the first stages (preliminary rounds) of the competition are followed elements related to the basic requirements (correct posture during the dance, basic technical skills, full synchronization with the musical support, accuracy in the execution of the dance figures) Montero (2012), and as the competition advances, the more complex criteria are applied (the accuracy of the execution from a technical and artistic point of view, the dynamics of the execution, the highlighting of the character of each dance style, partnering elements).

In the last stages of the competition (semifinals and finals), as mentioned by Năstase (2011), in addition to all the other refereeing criteria used previously, the adjudicators follow the elements that differentiate the dance couples, aspects that offer artistic value to sports performances, elements that offer an elaborate show.

B. The Evolution of the Judging Systems

DanceSport is a sport in a permanent change and evolution, which means that the judging system is constantly adapting to the requirements, changing, and improving in order for the adjudicators to become impartial and objective.

Since the beginning of this complex sport, dance couples have been judged in terms of certain criteria, but with the development of dance styles, the form and variety of these criteria have changed. The most important criterion, which has remained unchanged so far, is that the ranking of competitors is based on the direct comparison of dance couples (direct and comparative analysis of sports and artistic performances).

C. Traditional Judging System – Judging through the Comparative Process

Unlike any other expression sports, we mention the fact that dance couples compete in groups. During the first stages called qualifying rounds, the total number of couples is reduced by phasing out, until the final stage. The adjudicators' committee chooses a number of pairs according to the type of sports competition (for example, starting from 96 dance couples in the qualifiers, decreasing to 48 dance couples – eighth finals, then to 24 dance couples – quarterfinals, to be qualified in the semifinals 12 dance couples and in the final, 6 dance couples remain).

At the end of each round of any competition, the qualified couples that advance to the next stage are those who have accumulated the highest number of points from the adjudicators' committee (the number of adjudicators is always odd: 5, 7, 9, 11 or 13, depending on the type of competition). In the final stage (6 dance couples), the performance of the dance couples is evaluated (for each of the dance styles) by awarding places from 1 to 6 (1 is the best ranking), the adjudicators of the competition not being able to award to more than one couple the same place (for one dance style).

In order to streamline the judging system through fairness and transparency, the following steps have been created to be taken by adjudicators: signing the Code of Conduct and documents defining ethical standards, participating in special training and examination sessions to obtain judging licenses, creating a system that allows the random selection of adjudicators, sanctions that can be applied by National Federations and by The World Dance Sport Federation (WDSF).

D. Judging System 1.0

In December 2009, a team of specialists and experts from The World Dance Sport Federation presented a new judging system called 1.0. What underlies this first judging system is the comparison of dance couples through clearly defined criteria, a system taken over from the field of figure skating (approved by the Olympic Committee) and which consists of a set of 11 rules.

The initial version was used for the first time in the Grand Slam final (Shanghai), in 2009, the aspects evaluated by the adjudicators being: the positions, the balance and the coordination of the dancers; quality of movement; the movement performed in accordance with the musical support; the partnership; the choreography and the presentation of the couple.

What was unique in using this new system was the numerical scale for evaluating the couples (starting with 1: meaning a very poor performance and finalizing with 10: outstanding performance) and that of the judging sheets (score).

E. Judging System 2.0

In 2013, following the feedback received, a new and improved version was implemented, called 2.0. and was used in all Grand Slam type competitions (both sections: Standard and Latin) that belonged to The World Games and Dance Sport Games. The intention was to implement this new judging system in all competitions held under the dome of The World Dance Sport Federation (WDSF).

The dance couples are judged according to four criteria (two cover the technical aspects of the performance and the other two cover the artistic qualities), for each dance style, separately:

- Technical aspects: Technical qualities, Posture and balance, Balance (static/dynamic; individual/couple), body line, shape, design, postures and transitions (body), Positions of arms and grips, Coordination of movement, body actions (both general, as well as style specific), Movement dynamics (fluidity, weight transfer, synchronization).
- Movement to music: Rhythm, Tempo, Rhythmic Structure, Phrasing/ Timing, Synchronization, Musicality.
- Partnering skills: Physical connection, Communication without physical connection, Coherence; Leading elements, the concordance of the leading elements with those belonging to the character of the dance style.
- Choreography and presentation: Well-balanced choreography (content, mode of travel, spacing, partnership, level of difficulty), Atmosphere, Creativity, Expressiveness, and Interpretive Elements.

The judging committee consists of 12 adjudicators (for each competition), 3 of them judge according to one of the 4 criteria mentioned above (a special software is used to enter and calculate the average score obtained from the 3 adjudicators designated for each criterion (the lowest and highest score counting only 50% in comparison to the average score).

This new judging system can also be used to evaluate 6 - 8 dance couples (a group dance) performing at the same time on the dance floor and the winning couple is the one who gets the highest overall score. Significance of the score (the score is from 1 to 10, with the possibility of awarding half a point):

- 10 = remarkable
- 9 = superior
- 8 = very good
- 7 = good
- 6 = above average
- 5 = average
- 4 = satisfactory
- 3 = weak
- 2 = poor
- 1 = very poor

In the final round, the dance couples dance 3 solo dance styles (they perform individually on the dance floor) and 2 group dance styles. Solo dances are individual performances, and the adjudicators have the opportunity to carefully observe the evolution of a single couple on the dance floor (for example, the final of the 5 dance styles per section, takes place as follows: the pairs perform 2 solo dance styles, then a group dance style, then another solo dance style and ends with a group dance style). The qualifying rounds, prior to the final, take place only in the form of group dances and the establishment of the dance styles, performed solo or in groups, is random.

F. The Judging System 2.1

It was introduced in 2015, by improving the calculation formula in order to obtain the final score. The final results are calculated as representing the sum of the scores obtained for each judging criteria and the ranking of the dance couples is made in relation to the values of the total scores. The importance of the best / worst score must be created according to their distance from the median.

For example:

Scores obtained: 7.0, 7.5, 9.5

The distance between the best (9.5) is 2, compared to the median (7.5), the distance between the weakest (7.0) is 0.5 compared to the median.

Calculation formula:

$$W (\%) = [1 / 1 + (D \times D)] \times 100$$

where

D – median distance;

W1 – distance best score 9.5 = 20% (0.2);

W3 – distance lowest score 7.0 = 80% (0.8).

The value of a criterion is calculated according to the formula:

$$C = (C1 \times W1 + C2 + C3 \times W3) / (1 + W1 + W3)$$

where

C – criterion value;

C1 – the weakest;

C2 – Median;

C3 – the best.

The total score of a dance style is the sum of all criteria:

$$\text{Total Score Dances} = \text{Technical Quality Criterion} + \text{Movement to Music Criterion} + \\ + \text{Partnering Elements Criterion} + \text{Choreography and Presentation Criterion}$$

The total score in the case of a round for a dance couple is represented by the sum of scores of each of the dance styles.

The premiere of this system was in the quarterfinals of some Grand Slam competitions, organized by WDSF, also was used in European Championships and World Championships, Grand Slams and World Cups. The following regulations were kept: the 4 judging criteria and the composition and attributions of

the adjudicators' commission, the scoring of the couples. In the final, however, the dance couples dance 2 solo dance styles, and 3 group dance styles and the solo dance styles are set one year in advance.

The 2.1 judging system was used until mid 2017 for all Grand Slam and International Open competitions, with a huge contribution to the fact that: the adjudicators have enough time to focus on one criterion in the performing evolution of a dance couple, especially in the final round; all criteria are clear, which helps to create and structure training plans; the scores received during all competitions provide direct feedback so that the dancers and teachers can work on improving certain elements, certain components specific to each dance style.

G. Judging System 3.0

This is an improvement on the old judging system, Judging System 2.1., reducing the problems encountered in the past and becoming usable in all types of competitions organized by The World Dance Sport Federation. The design of the Judging System 3.0. was created to continue building on the intellectual property already invested in the previous system, considering the feedback provided by the adjudicators and creating a mechanism that can eliminate "incorrect" scores.

The main features of the new system are the following:

- the judging commission includes 12 adjudicators, grouped in 2 groups of 6 adjudicators (twice as many scores are used as before, 6 for each criterion).
- establishing a median for the 6 scores obtained for each group of adjudicators and using a statistical-mathematical scoring scale to eliminate possible errors in refereeing (the interval for Grand Slam Championships and competitions is set at 1.2 and for competitions such as International Open is 1.5).
- in the quarters round and semifinals round of the competitions, 2 teams of adjudicators are appointed to judge/ evaluate combinations of unique criteria of Technical Quality (including elements of Partnering) or Movement to Music (including elements of Choreography and presentation);
- there is no change in couple evaluation criteria regarding any of the dance styles, allowing the judges or adjudicators to concentrate using the same criteria.
- in the final stage, for the group dance, the adjudicators re-judge the dance couples on the basis of a single criterion.
- in solo dances, in which the couples perform alone on the dance floor, the adjudicators evaluate/ judge according to 2 criteria, each with a separate score (without any change in the criteria assigned to all dance styles, group or solo).
- in case the computer system fails, it is possible to manually calculate the score.
- the formula used to calculate the total score can also be used for competitions with a smaller number of participants with a committee of 10 adjudicators and the president of the competition is not obliged to change the judging criteria.
- there are scoring scales with 0.25 points, derived from the reduction, which are awarded in view of a reduction rather than an addition (for example, if a couple consistently has the qualities of a score of 9, but with a slight deficiency, it can be given a score of 8.75).

H. Performance Evaluation and Judging Criteria according to The Romanian Dance Sport Federation (FRDS) Regulation

In Romania, the current judging system that is used for international DanceSport competitions (Standard Dances, Latin Dances and 10 Dances, for any age category) uses the judging system regulated by The World Dance Sport Federation – WDSF (Judging System 3.0) but, regarding national competitions (like any other National Dance Sport Federations), The Romanian Dance Sport Federation uses the following judging methods:

- in the preliminary stages of the final, each adjudicator (according to the evaluation sheet) selects dance couples by using "x's" (for each dance style), dance couples who meet as many of the evaluation criteria as possible and thus qualify in next round.
- the "x's" given to each dance couple (for all dance styles) are added and those of them that have as many as possible, qualify for the next stage, the last stage being the final.
- in the final of the competition, the adjudicators evaluate the dance couples by scoring/ ranking them between 1 and 6 or 7 (according to the number of dance couples present in the final) for each dance style, 6 or 7 representing the lowest ranking and 1, the best ranking.
- the winning dance couple has the lowest score.
- if, in the preliminary rounds of the final, several dance couples have the same number of "x's", they can all qualify for the next round (except the final), or they will dance again (re-dance) in order for the adjudicators to decide which of them qualifies further.

In the evaluation of the dance couples the same criteria are used, applicable for all dance styles, for the

different disciplines and age grades, but their particularities differ depending on the dance level of the dancers (dance class), having the role of objectifying the appreciation.

The criteria, according to which the judging process is performed, have undergone various changes, starting from 5 criteria, in the past (Movement to music, Balance and coordination, Quality of movement, Partnering and leadership, Choreography and presentation), and since 2019, according to Strelnyk (2019), coach and international class adjudicator, were created 3 general judging criteria (I. Music in DanceSport; II. Body lines and dancers' positions; III. DanceSport Technique) customized according to the value level.

I. Beginner and Pre-Competition Categories (level 1)

Music in DanceSport: Basic Rhythm (recognition): rhythm and tempo; expressing musical accents; performing the steps in the time allotted to them.

Body lines and dancers' positions: Body lines in closed position: posture, connection/holds; the center of gravity of the pair; balance.

DanceSport Technique: the action of the feet; direction of travel (individually / by couple); degree of turn individually / by couple; actions specific to each dance styles.

Hobby and "E" Class (level 2.), all the aspects mentioned above (level 1) plus the following:

Music in DanceSport: Timing (musical value of the steps/figures); Performance accents (classical, percussion, movement).

Body lines and dance postures: Body lines during the change of position in pairs: Standard Dances (right outer position, promenade position); Latin dances (closed positions, open positions, fan positions, promenade and counter-promenade positions).

Dance Sport Technique: actions specific to dance styles (extensive); sole work; exemplification of the process of preparation-action-completion of dance figures; type of action used (Latin dances: impulse/impact); body action type (Standard dances: counter-movement – CBM).

"D" and "C" Class (level 3), all of the above (levels 1. and 2) plus the following:

Music in DanceSport: Rhythm variations – syncope; polyrhythm (timing of body actions); musical phrasing.

Body lines and dance postures: Body lines during the change of position in the pair and the use of various actions: Standard dances - positions: fallaway, contracheck, wing, left whisk, supporting the position and body lines during the execution of body actions: sway, rotation, extension, CBM); position vis-à-vis the center of the pair; balance and coordination action); Latin dances - coordination actions body- arms / body-legs.

DanceSport Technique: Quality of movement: Body actions for Standard dances (sway, rotation, extensions, CBMP) for Latino dances (compression /relaxation, sway, rotation, extension, translation, contraction); Dynamics of movement (weight transfer - heavy /easy, dynamics of performance during musical time, direction, intensity - energy); elements of leadership/follow-up and interaction regarding the dance couples.

"B", "A" and "S" Class (level 4), all the aspects mentioned above (levels 1., 2. and 3) plus the following: increased and varied level of motor actions, endurance, balanced choreography, level increased complexity of choreographic elements, outfit and make-up, creativity, motor and artistic expressiveness, interpretive elements and attitudes characteristic to each of the dance styles, the spectacularity of high-performance dance.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of the judging systems and the one of the judging and evaluation criteria reflect the evolution of the DanceSport phenomenon over time, an evolution that has become vital because of the transformation of technical and artistic nature and the complexity of dance figures and dance elements.

The research papers, which aim at the activity of adjudicators and at the ways of judging or evaluating the performances of dancers or dance couples in DanceSport, focus in particular on issues of ethical, moral and duality regarding this artistic sport, becoming a real help in clarifying the criteria that are being used.

The judging criteria and their particularities remain slightly unchanged in judging systems, because of the biomechanics of motor actions performed during sports performances that are similar. The only differences are those that contribute to shaping the character of each dance style, meaning the artistic side of each dancer.

Judging or evaluating the performance of dance couples during competitions must be done in accordance with impartial ethics and independent morality (it is known that most adjudicators are also coaches/ dance teachers, this meaning that there is a conflict of interests). According to the rules and regulations of The World Dance Sport Federation, certain competitions (World/ European Championships and National/ World Cups) do not allow the participation as adjudicators for those who have trained (in the last three months) a participating dance couple or participated as a guest trainer in a training camp or seminar in the

country where the competition it is organized.

The judging system that evaluates the parameters that belong to the sports performances of the dance couples should be more objective in awarding the final marks, as in the traditional judging system there is a higher probability of influence, and this can negatively influence future development directions.

Although adjudicators receive specific courses and training, in the end, subjective involvement may occur, so strict judging systems have an advantage in terms of the objectivity of awarding the final scores (techniques for determining the correct score regarding the 2.1 and later the 3.0 system) and thus, influencing the progress of this sport.

According to the constant evolution and transformation manifested by the DanceSport judging system, until now, we consider that in the future it will continue to be updated and adapted to existing requirements and requests.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Both authors contributed equally to this study and should be considered as main authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest, financial, or any other type of relationship.

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