

## **Personal comments to the ISU press release on the New Judging system by Sonia Bianchetti**

The ISU issued a press release February 16 about the New Judging System (CoP) being on the Agenda for this year's Congress. While reading it, I wondered whether the ISU leaders still live on this earth or if they moved to another planet.

In their document they say that the New Judging System used at the Grand Prix events requires extensive (and I add very expensive) computer technology. In a desperate effort to convince the Members that the new system could be implemented also in minor senior and junior international competitions as well as in national, regional or even club competitions, they announce that considerable work is being done to develop a PC based version that would be available to ISU Members at very reasonable cost. What "reasonable" means for the ISU is still to be known.

I think the talk of low cost hardware is due to a realization at the ISU that a manual version of the New Judging system is not practical. Instead they are now trying to convince people that computer hardware would be affordable by everyone so that all competitions could be judged using CoP.

I have heard numbers as high as \$20,000 to \$25,000 for a complete system that would run the ISU provided software. For a competition with 9 or more judges, callers and video replay (which is essential to the system) the costs may be a little less, but not much less. The President said that the ISU is putting together two hardware systems to be used at major ISU events (Junior Grand Prix, Senior Grand Prix and all Championships). What would be used at all other international competitions, junior and senior, is not clear. Would the ISU cover the costs of all ISU sanctioned events? Would the ISU expect the host members to provide the hardware and bear all the costs to run the event with the CoP system? I believe these are important details to be clarified.

To use New Judging System domestically, each ISU member would have to purchase one or more hardware system costing about \$25,000 each and ship it every week all over the country from north to south, from east to west. Is the ISU also providing for a mini truck with driver? If the clubs of an ISU member have more than one competition at the same time, will the Member have to buy more than one system?

Assuming the money was available to buy all these systems, you still have to look at the true cost of ownership. After buying the hardware there are additional costs associated with ownership and use:

- Storage
- Insurance
- Shipping from one competition to the next
- Set-up and system integration at each location
- Upgrading each system for new developments
- Repair and maintenance
- Technical support

This is not a system that can just be setup, used and maintained by volunteers. Qualified technical support is required, meaning that at least a part time employee or some sort of service contract is needed. The system requires the use of video so the judges don't lose track of the action while entering all the information. That means video hardware and it is unclear if that is included in the hardware system cost. It also means qualified video cameraman to operate the video system. Since there is no manual backup system the computer hardware has to work reliably ALL the time. A complex computer hardware/software system with the required reliability is not cheap to maintain in perfect shape. Even when that can be done, it is very expensive.

Also we have to consider the wear and tear of shipping the equipment, setting it up, and breaking it down frequently. We can expect that the hardware will need to be replaced about every five years.

After the cost of purchasing the hardware from the ISU or elsewhere, and the ongoing costs of ownership, we have to consider the increased costs at a competition which includes: the larger panel of judges, the callers, the replay technicians, the video people, and the hardware technical support costs.

Finally, from a practical point of view on the local level, getting all this equipment into a small, old, damp arena with an unreliable power system is also an issue. Computer hardware does not like to operate in a foggy, cold, damp environment! It is one thing to set up the system in a modern big arena with a nice environment and plenty of power, and another in a small 40-year old rink, unheated and sometimes only covered. Most of the rinks used for local competitions and championships, at least in Europe, are not equipped with score-boards, nor there are tables on which

to install the computers. In most countries the old boxes with the black and red numbers are still used by the judges to display their marks, which are inserted by hand in a computer, when there is one. As an example I can mention the Italian Championships in Milan this year, although Italy is a wealthy country, as well as the Italian Federation. Sometimes the secretaries still write the marks on the protocol and calculate the results manually. The Members or the local organisers just cannot afford to buy or hire computers or ship them around the country, even PCs.

The CoP equipment cannot be set up the morning before the competition. Someone has to come in at least one day earlier to install it and test it. Besides the equipment cannot be taken down and stored each night. Many rinks run hockey, skating school or public sessions intermixed with competitions, therefore security measures are necessary to lookout for the equipment during the competitions. This means more expenses.

So the cost of the PC and the software, whichever it may be, it is just the tip of the iceberg. Either the ISU “experts” have not thought through the consequences, or they are hiding the consequences to help get their way on this system.

Even assuming that all these financial and technical problems could be overcome, are we sure that the new system can be used in minor or junior international or national competitions with 40 or more competitors? Will the coaches have to provide beforehand the content of the programs of some hundred children? And is the computer programmed for the content of these kind of programs, where the jumps sometimes look more like spins rather than jumps? And what kind of grade of execution will the caller assign to spins with two or three revolutions?

Moreover, apart from the difficulties for the “caller” to identify the elements or establish a level of difficulty at these low standards, is it realistic to think that a judge can award five different marks for the five components to 60 or more baby skaters in a club competition? Unless we accept that it will be like drawing the numbers of a lottery, in fairness, as a conscious judge, I would say: DEFINETELY NOT.

The ISU, instead of telling only one part of the story to make things seem better and easier than they are, should clearly inform the Members and make them aware that if they will vote in favour of the New Judging System, they implicitly will also accept that there will necessarily be two different systems in judging in figure skating, nationally and internationally: the historical and tested 6.0 system and the new and still developing CoP system.