

The level of men's tumbling has never been more impressive. So why is men's floor exercise so hard to watch? Perhaps it's because the routines have become predictable, with seven passes and a cursory wide-arm press handstand inserted somewhere to give the guy a breather. In between passes are repetitive hop-turns that allow the gymnast to step conveniently into the corner. With a 70-second time limit, there is no time to waste with any semblance of creativity.

The primary mission of the modern men's floor routine is to minimize landing deductions, since the current bonus-building combination passes are extremely difficult to stick. And with the deductions for landings streamlined into 0.1, 0.3, 0.5—or 1.0 for a fall—you can understand why these guys want to limit the damage to 0.1 whenever possible.

Let's consider the routine of **Kenzo Shirai**, who may be the best tumbler in the world, at least in terms of difficulty. And let's also evaluate his routine at the 2017 Melbourne World Cup, where he won the gold over **Mu Jile** of China, 14.700-14.466.

Shirai mounted with a triple-twisting double layout, but the ground came sooner than he expected. His clumsy stagger cost him 0.5. He followed that with a tucked triple-double, and staggered forward again, only worse. Another 0.5 off. Then he did a tucked front-full to triple-twisting front layout, with only a small hop (0.1). To his credit, he did an interesting pass down the side: cartwheel; handstand to piked press through his arms; roll-out. Next pass was a 3.5 twist to punch rudi, landed low with a hop (0.3). He came back with a back 2.5 twist to front randi, with a hop to the side (0.1 or 0.3). Then, for the fourth time, he did the exact same corner transition. He dismounted with a quadruple twist, which was under-rotated and forced another stagger to regain his balance (0.3 or 0.5). The irony here is that Shirai walked off smiling and raised his arms to the applause. Fans don't know what they're missing.

In terms of execution, it was a *horrible* routine, which netted him a 7.5 E-score, the second-lowest among the eight floor finalists. But his 7.2 D-score gave him the gold. Obviously, he was glad to have landed all of his passes without a fall or going out of bounds. That's what it has come to for men's floor. Survival.

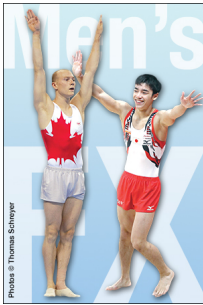
When the open-ended Code of Points came out in 2006, the idea was to reward clean execution, but it backfired. Because the FIG didn't get the math right, the Code rewarded

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difficulty instead, which is why gymnasts are always looking for ways to increase their D-scores. And the Men's Technical Committee, or whoever makes the decisions at the FIG, can't seem to see it. It's like *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

The gold-medal routine of Canadian **Kyle Shewfelt** from the 2004 Olympics has been popping up on Facebook recently. It was a work of art and also didn't skimp on difficulty. It had it all: flow, rhythm, form, originality and, yes, stuck landings. Four brilliant passes were all he needed to entertain the crowd in Athens:



Kyle Shewfelt (Canada) and Kenzo Shirai (Japan)

Shewfelt and Shirai may share the same initials, but their similarities as gymnasts end there.

One of the problems with today's floor routines is that the FIG Men's Technical Committee has refused to lower the counting skills from 10 to eight, which the women wisely did after the 2008 Beijing Olympics. When asked in 2012 why the men had not gone from 10 to eight skills, **Steve Butcher**

, the Men's Technical Committee President at the time, gave this rather dubious reply:

"The MTC fears moving to eight skills ... will create a climate where male gymnasts significantly increase the level of their individual skills. Right now they need to keep their overall skill level at a slightly lower level than what they are capable of performing in order to have the strength to properly perform their dismounts."

Oh dear. Neither of those points is even remotely true. Was Shirai's routine watered down? Of course not. (Did he *really* want to dismount with a quintuple twist?) Male gymnasts are definitely throwing their hardest skills right now, and certainly not saving energy for the dismount.

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Meanwhile, a lack of leadership has eroded men's floor exercise into what we see today, an exhaustive tumbling race. Because of its time limit, floor is the most difficult event in which to cram 10 skills. That's why gymnasts are in such a hurry during their first three passes. There simply is no time to waste.

If the D-score is immune to deduction, why can't the E-score grow when a gymnast shows great amplitude, form and technique? It just doesn't make any sense. It's supposed to be an open-ended Code of Points, but only one component is.

As I've said in the past, the D-score should receive the same deductions as the E-score. That will at least force a gymnast to think before adding a G skill to his routine. If deductions were made to both the D- and E-scores, the top three on men's floor at the Melbourne World Cup would have changed places. Below are the original top three under the current FIG scoring system (D-score + E-score = final score), compared with the results when the deductions were subtracted from the D-score.

Rank	Gymnast	D	E	S
<i>FIG scoring: D + E (10.00 D deductions) = Score</i>				
1.	Kenzo Shirai			
7.2		7.500	14.700	
5.9		1.433	13.033	
2.	Mu Jile			
5.9		8.566	14.466	
5.7		1.633	12.366	
3.	Ferhat Arıcan			
5.7		8.333	14.033	
7.2		2.500	12.200	

First and foremost, the FIG needs to stop rewarding sloppy execution, which was on full display in Shirai's routine. It literally needs to clean up the sport. Because of the 10 skills, true mastery has been replaced by unnecessary excess, a trend that is likely irreversible. Lowering the men's skills to eight would be a step in the right direction.

The FIG needs to take control and govern the sport before it's too late. Perhaps new FIG President **Morinari Watanabe** can make men's gymnastics as beautiful as it is difficult. Given the execution-first goal of the Japanese gymnasts, maybe Mr. Watanabe can make a difference. For all involved — fans, gymnasts, coaches and judges — it will be a welcome change.

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