



The End of the Perfect 10: The Making and Breaking of Gymnastics' Top Score—from Nadia to Now

Dvora Meyers

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A “delightful and insightful” (*The Wall Street Journal*) account of the controversial world of gymnastics and its scoring system, which has propelled powerful and athletic American gymnasts to the top of the sport.

It was the team finals of women’s gymnastics in the 2012 London Olympics and McKayla Maroney was on top of her game. The sixteen-year-old US gymnast was performing arguably the best vault of all time, launching herself unimaginably high into the air and sticking a flawless landing. But when her score came, many were baffled: 16.233. Three tenths of a point in deductions stood between her and a perfect score. But if that vault wasn’t perfection, what was?

For years, gymnastics was scored on a 10.0 scale. During this era, more than 100 “perfect” scores were awarded in major international competitions. But when the 10.0 scoring system caused major judging controversies at the 2004 Olympics, international elite gymnastics made the switch to the open-ended scoring system it uses today, which values both difficulty and technical execution, making perfect scores a thing of the past—and forever altering the sport in the process.

With insight, flair, and boundless love for the sport, gymnastics insider Dvora Meyers answers questions that fans have been asking since the last perfect score was handed out over twenty years ago. She reveals why successful female gymnasts like 2016 Olympics All Around medalists Simone Biles and Aly Raisman are older and more athletic than they have ever been before, how the United States became the gymnastics powerhouse it is today, and what the future of gymnastics may hold.

Bolstered by dozens of exclusive interviews with professionals representing every aspect of the sport, *The End of the Perfect 10* is “the Simone Biles of gymnastics books” (*Slate*), a captivating look at elite gymnastics’ entry into the uncharted world of imperfection—and how it has created stronger athletes than ever before.

The End of the Perfect 10: The Making and Breaking of Gymnastics' Top Score—from Nadia to Now Details

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From Reader Review The End of the Perfect 10: The Making and Breaking of Gymnastics' Top Score—from Nadia to Now for online ebook

Lauren Hopkins says

I first met Dvora Meyers at a sidewalk café in Soho on a hot June evening in 2012, shortly after USA Gymnastics announced that they would not allow Chellsie Memmel to compete at nationals based on her lack of preparedness. As both reporters and extreme gym fans, we met to discuss this whole situation, and ended up talking for four hours, shutting the place down at two in the morning. Since then we've been good friends. I've been aware of this book since she first pitched it, am quoted in it, and read several early editions of various chapters and paragraphs, offering my thoughts (including the invaluable contribution of examples of musicians teen girls love...you're welcome). All of this said, I may seem a little biased in my review, but I am literally so proud of and excited about what it ended up turning into and am reviewing it as a gym nerd, not a friend.

It very well could have been a college paper with a thesis, an argument, and some facts to support it, but instead it takes the idea of the scoring change and discusses the history of the perfect 10, why it needed to change, and then things that were happening both in the U.S. and globally within the sport that were either a result of the change or that coincided with it. There are facts and arguments, of course, but everything is so anecdotal, this is seriously the book gym fans have been waiting for. Not only are there little juicy tidbits and stories thrown in, but fantastic inside glimpses into anything you'd want to know about everything gym, especially as we approach the 40th anniversary of the first perfect 10 and just how far things have come since.

I had many favorite parts, but most fun for gym nerds will probably be the glimpses into U.S. gym life, both at the ranch and in several club gyms (including WCC, Texas Dreams, and MG Elite, all of which currently have gymnasts reaching for spots on the upcoming Olympic team, to be named next Sunday). The look at everything that went wrong leading up to and during the 2000 Games is also fascinating, but I loved Dvora's analysis as to how this team of guinea pigs for the new semi-centralized training system ended up experiencing a necessary evil in hindsight, as it led to one of the most successful programs in history. I also loved the look at NCAA's use of the 10 as a marketing tool and Dvora's analysis as to how NCAA and elite gymnastics have different end goals and thus the reasoning for using the 10 in college-level competitions - putting butts in seats - isn't a valid argument for elite gymnastics, where the goal is to push the envelope and innovate the sport. And as someone who doesn't follow the men as closely, I really enjoyed the whole 2004 MAG all-around debacle - aka the reason for the fast change to an open-ended system after turning down an earlier version. It's explained super thoroughly with great insight from judges who were part of it all.

Long story short, this book is fabulous and is exactly what I've been waiting for as both a gym nerd and as a reporter.

Kelly says

Aside from the obnoxious repetitiveness, this was a really fascinating look at the way scoring in gymnastics has shifted and changed and the impact that's had on everything from who the world powerhouses are to the

way female gymnasts' bodies have changed, too. It was fascinating to see how the changing in scores really alienates viewers of the sport, since no one knows what the scores mean anymore -- 10 MEANT something, even if it wasn't "perfect." It meant "damn great."

The part that was most interesting to me, and where in little time was spent, was the look at collegiate gymnastics. For women, the 10 remains and the sport is more than about power. It's about show womanship, camaraderie, and appealing to the crowd. I'd read a whole book about that please and thanks.

Gymnastics fans will enjoy this, for sure.

Karen says

A really interesting book for gymnastics fans - well-researched, well-written and I discovered a lot about US gymnastics that I didn't already know (especially about the NCAAs). Highly recommended. 9 out of 10

Linda says

I'm only a casual gymnastics fan, but I've always been fascinated by the scoring system. Whether it was ever true or not, there seemed to be Herculean effort put into making it opaque and difficult for the casual observer to understand. I always assumed that was to protect the judges who may or may not have been engaging in secret reciprocal voting agreements with other judges to ensure high placements for the athletes of their own countries. (Think Soviet Bloc.)

Out of that atmosphere of obfuscation stepped Nadia Comaneci and her "perfect 10", which was never meant to signify perfection. It was only meant to place her properly ahead of the other competitors, and there was nowhere else to go from the 9.9 which another athlete had already earned.

Perfect 10, you say? That was something people who only saw gymnastics once every 4 years could wrap their heads around. It became a trend, and then it became a problem. The scoring system was revamped to one with no limits, and went back to becoming impossible for the casual fan to understand.

Whether or not one believes the change was for the better, it certainly benefitted the U.S., which has developed into a powerhouse of gymnastics talent under the new system. This book provides the history of the scoring change, the way the elite gymnasts work their way through the system now, and at the end, how the college programs have kept themselves relevant (even though women's college gymnastics competition occurs at the **end** of a gymnast's career) by embracing the 10 point system.

AJ says

Very interesting, if at times repetitive and perhaps a bit hard to follow for those of us who are only casual observers of gymnastics every four years.

SmartBitches says

Full review at Smart Bitches, Trashy Books

As I write this review, the US Women's Olympic team in gymnastics was just selected, and this is the sport I love more than all others (yes, more than polo). I watch it whenever I can, and I yell as loud as anyone at the absurd crapfire that is NBC's coverage (SHUT UP AL TRAUTWIG NEVER SPEAK AGAIN) (EVER).

Now, those of us who watched gymnastic before 2006, or know our gymnastics history, know about the ideal of the Perfect Ten. Before 2006, gymnastics routines were scored out of a 10, and it wasn't until The Queen of All, Nadia Comaneci burst onto the scene at the 1976 Olympics did anyone actually SCORE a 10.

Thirty years later, gymnastics now has an open-ended scoring system that seems really complicated to non-devotees. This book begins with Nadia's first 10 and traces the events that led to the implementation of the current scoring method. The straw that broke the camel's back was the men's competition in 2004, but a lot of things led up to that, including a ridiculous number of perfect 10s awarded in Seoul in 1988, and a lot of asking, "what's a 9.975 even MEAN?" in 1992).

I think that this book will deepen the experience of anyone who will be watching the Olympics next month, even those of us who know lots of things. Meyers did a great interview with the Gymcastic podcast about the book (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED. The creator and producer, Jessica O'Beirne, has been described as "wildly enthusiastic" and that's the most accurate thing), and she's a regular contributor there.

There are many places for people who want to know more than the vaguely insulting crumbs NBC will toss you, and places where the athletes selected for the women's Olympic team has been hotly debated for the past year. There are so many blogs and discussion points about the dissatisfaction with NBC's coverage that NPR even did a story on it. I'm vaguely hopeful that things might change, but that would involve getting rid of Al Trautwig as the "I don't know nothing about gymnastics" guy (But ALBERT you've been covering gymnastics for MULTIPLE OLYMPIC CYCLES YOU KNOW SOME SHIT BY NOW and also stop being gross about the young women who work their asses off. Having you say, when someone gets injured before a big event, "that's like getting a tear in your wedding dress" is just... shut the fuck up, Al) (I hate him SO MUCH). The Gymternet is primarily women who decided they were going to make their own coverage, and discuss the real issues- that sounds familiar to me.

My point is, if you're a casual fan, if you're a rabid fan, if you just want to know more, this book has something for you.

- Redheadedgirl

Ilena Robbins says

If you like gymnastics you will love this book. If not I'm not sure why you read it.

Mary Flynn says

I am a fiction reader. It is a rare occasion for me to pick up a nonfiction. And this absolutely was worth the read.

This book had such an incredible wealth of information, and I would absolutely love to spend a day just perusing her sources. So many people with such an influence in the sport gave insights for *The End of the Perfect 10*, and I was not expecting that and absolutely blown away. I discovered that Hardy Fink is my kindred spirit and I would love to spend a day with him just discussing scoring philosophy.

This book goes way beyond the surface of just the historical climate that created the new scoring system- the 10s handed out like candy in Seoul, the inability to account for increasing difficulty, and the messiness that was the men's competition in Athens (though, my knowledge of the men being a fraction of my knowledge of the women, I really enjoyed that in-depth analysis). It discusses why the glass ceiling existed before Nadia and why her 10 was such a bigger deal than Nellie Kim's (side note- I was super disappointed that Kirsten Dunst's friend wasn't the actual Nellie Kim). There is discussion of the problems of an overabundance of perfect scores, and how and why that contributed to a need for a new system. The limits of a technically derived score as opposed to scores determined as a measure of the whole exercise and how the best get harsher scoring than the rest is addressed. As a nerd fan who loves considering the nature of scoring, I ate this stuff up.

It went even beyond that, too. Beyond just scoring, *The End of the Perfect 10* explored how the system change has also changed the gymnastics landscape. Why the US has experienced unrivaled domination since 2011, why Great Britain was able to topple Russia for a bronze at the last World Championships and Romania is being swept under the rug by countries whose programs were considered no more than feeble in 2006. The relationship between the Code, training, and resultant success is given high focus. And beyond just elite competition, the book gives a look to NCAA gymnastics and the differing priorities which keep NCAA under the 10 while elite gymnastics has scrapped it. And if you ever wanted a behind-the-scenes look at some of the top gyms in the country- and some gymnasts they train you'll probably see in Rio- this book provides it.

This book was fantastic. It was thorough, ridiculously informative, and fabulously readable. Anybody who is at all interested in gymnastics should read it- die-hard fans will love all the information and exploration of scoring, and it provides great background for those who just tune in for the major competitions on NBC and would like to know a little more.

victor harris says

Quite timely as it was released in advance of the Olympics. You do not have to understand the mechanics and nuances of gymnastics to appreciate the interesting narrative of how scoring in the events has evolved since Nadia Comaneci became a sensation with her perfect 10 in 1976. That opened the floodgates to more 10s and it all transpired against the backdrop of Cold War politics. By the 1990s, the purportedly "perfect score" had become tainted and the push for reform and a new scoring system gained momentum. Although the changes made the scoring intricacies less comprehensible to the fans, it did give judges more latitude in evaluating the increasing complexity of the routines.

A significant portion of the account is dedicated to the U.S. training system and how they now produce the most elite gymnasts and teams in international competition. The commitment of the athletes is remarkable and a reminder that achieving excellence not just winning requires tremendous sacrifice. Very enjoyable sports book that weaves politics, socio-cultural variables, and sports into a fascinating work.

Lauren says

FANTASTIC. As a former gymnast most books about gymnastics end up disappointing me because I don't feel like they do the sport justice. This book went above and beyond. It was a great history of the sport in the modern era that described all the things that contributed to the end of the 10.0 scoring system and how gymnastics has changed under the new system. I loved it and learned so much. Highly recommend.

Jennifer says

3 stars for gym fans (me included), a solid 4 for non-fans. Meyers can write, and she's beyond knowledgeable about the sport. But I think there's some false advertising here - this book should be called "how the current U.S. gymnastics system works, with some random occasional musings about the end of the perfect 10." I wish Meyers had included fewer unnecessary information dumps (while keeping the necessary ones) and focused more on analysis. Basically, it wasn't what I was expecting, but this is a great book if you don't know much about gymnastics.

Mandy says

I found this book via Book Riots, and I highly doubt that I would have found it otherwise. I was never a gymnast but I LOVE the Olympics and if I had been coordinated/flexible as a child I would have taken up gymnastics (I tried, but was embarrassingly bad). Anyways, if you're a former gymnast or Olympic nerd you'll enjoy this book. I wish it focused more on the Olympics themselves, but it was a fascinating look at how women's gymnastics has evolved over time and just how competitive and tough it really is.

Karina says

As a former competitive gymnast myself, I found this book enlightening and transformative. I grew up in the era of the 9.9s and 10.0s, and I loved reading about where my favorite gymnasts have ended up as well learning the names of (and watching on YouTube) the newer crop of inspiring elite and college level gymnasts. The book unpacked the mysteries of the new scoring system and gave me renewed interest in watching gymnastics at Rio.

Although it's been twenty years since I left the sport, it was only until I finished this book that certain wounds from the brutal training, harsh coaching, and confusing politics have started to heal over. I'm so pleased to hear of the new coaching philosophies and strategies for motivating gymnasts, and I look forward to watching future gymnastics competitions with fresh eyes.

Book Riot Community says

As a former competitive gymnast myself, I found this book enlightening and transformative. I grew up in the era of the 9.9s and 10.0s, and this book unpacked the mysteries of the new scoring system and gave me renewed interest in watching gymnastics at Rio. I loved reading about where my favorite gymnasts have ended up as well learning the names of (and watching on YouTube) the newer crop of elite and college level gymnasts. A terrific read for anyone interested in this incredible sport.

— Karina Glaser

from The Best Books We Read In February: <http://bookriot.com/2016/03/01/riot-r...>

Jovi Ene says

Această carte a venit perfect, chiar în zilele Jocurilor Olimpice, pe care le urmăresc, ca de obicei, foarte atent, așa că nu mi-a fost greu să las celelalte lecturi și să o aleg pe aceasta.

Nu Nadia este în prim plan, deși construcția întregii cărți pleacă de la prima notă de 10 luată de ea la Montreal (prima notă perfectă obținută vreodată la JO), urmărind felul în care această notă a schimbat percepția publicului cu privire la gimnastică, dar și modul în care acest sistem a fost modificat cu unul aparent mai complicat.

Cartea este locul din care putem afla, explicat pentru nespecialiști, răspunsul la cel puțin două întrebări pe care ni le tot punem: unde a dispărut echipa noastră feminină de gimnastică și de unde vine această dominație cvasi-totală a americanelor? Poate fi chiar un punct de plecare spre o reconstrucție, dar slabe șanse.
