

POINT AFTER

RULES MATTER

JORDAN CHILES SHOULD KEEP HER DISPUTED MEDAL. HERE'S WHY

► BY PETER CARLISLE



AT THE Paris Olympics in August, Jordan Chiles finished third in the women's gymnastics floor exercise final after Team USA coach Cecile Landi filed an inquiry challenging the scoring of her routine. International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) officials conducted a review, confirmed an error in the judging, and raised Chiles's score, boosting her from fifth to the bronze medal position (and displacing Ana Barbosa of Romania). Five days later, after Chiles had returned home to a hero's welcome, she learned it was all a big mistake.

Unbeknownst to Chiles, on the day after the competition the Romanian Gymnastics Federation appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), alleging the U.S. inquiry had been submitted after a one-minute time frame referenced in FIG rules. News reports focused on whether video evidence could establish the precise timing of the inquiry—overlooking the fact that timeliness had no bearing on the validity of FIG's decision.

The only support for what CAS refers to in its ruling as the “mandatory one-minute rule” is a provision in FIG's rules allowing a coach to submit an inquiry

for the final gymnast of a rotation provided it is initiated verbally within one minute of the gymnast's score being shown. The CAS panel inferred that such language imposes a strict deadline and requires the dismissal of late verbal inquiries.

But this interpretation contradicts FIG's rules, which provide that the discretion of the Superior Jury—the group of officials that rules on inquiries during a competition—trumps the timeliness of verbal inquiries. While officials may dismiss those lodged beyond the one-minute time frame, they are not required to do so. Moreover, a strictly enforced deadline conflicts with numerous other rules and would frustrate FIG's fundamental purpose of accurately scoring gymnasts' performances.

References in the rules to time frames are intended to ensure the inquiry process aligns with the strict time limits for athletes to begin their routines, since it can take several minutes for the Superior Jury to conduct a review. This is not a concern for inquiries involving the last gymnast of a rotation—which Chiles was. As CAS acknowledged in its ruling, the aim of the time frame is to ensure “a prompt closure and

finality of the competition, to avoid a situation of extended uncertainty as to who may have finished in what order.” However, CAS failed to recognize that the timing of the verbal inquiry is only one factor in determining the duration of the inquiry process, since coaches have an additional four minutes to confirm the inquiry in writing. Even if Chiles's verbal inquiry was submitted four seconds late, it did not delay the closure of the competition since her coach filed the written component of the inquiry immediately after—well within the five-minute time frame.

There is no valid basis for its conclusion that the Superior Jury's discretion is subject to a “mandatory one-minute rule.” The Superior Jury was properly authorized to determine the scoring results exactly as it did, and FIG rules state that its decision is final and unappealable. By imposing an unfounded interpretation of FIG's rules, CAS has undermined the integrity of the adjudication process. This decision not only stripped an Olympian of her rightful medal but also sets a dangerous precedent, eroding trust in the arbitration process and the fundamental fairness of Olympic competition. This decision diminishes athletes' confidence that their performances will be judged accurately and fairly, even after the competition concludes. In September, Chiles filed an appeal to the Swiss Federal Supreme Court and she is awaiting a ruling. □

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