

Written by Amanda Turner  
Tuesday, 06 March 2018 11:14

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The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) has adopted official policies aimed at curbing abuse and ethical misconduct in the sport of gymnastics in the wake of the sexual abuse scandal that continues to plague USA Gymnastics and most recently led to the resignation of the CEO of the United States Olympic Committee. Pictured: FIG President Morinari Watanabe of Japan

The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) has adopted official policies aimed at curbing abuse and ethical misconduct in the sport of gymnastics in the wake of the sexual abuse scandal that continues to plague USA Gymnastics and most recently led to the resignation of United States Olympic Committee CEO **Scott Blackmun**.

"Every sporting organization has a responsibility to foster a healthy and respectful environment in which athletes can develop without being harassed, assaulted or abused," the FIG stated.

The FIG confirmed Friday that its Executive Committee formally approved a new set of guidelines, *Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding and Protecting Participants in Gymnastics*, during its meeting Wednesday and Thursday in Lausanne. The FIG EC also approved the establishment of an Ethics Foundation as part of the promise made last year by FIG President **Morinari Watanabe** of Japan, who said the FIG should be allowed to issue sanctions in cases of misconduct.

"As FIG President, I declare that we will not tolerate abuse or sexual harassment in the gymnastics community," Watanabe said. "In the sporting community, we observe the rules because we are educated to do so. But rules cannot be observed only through education and legislation. Severe sanctions are needed. The same level of severe measures as anti-doping is necessary for eradicating harassment."

Initially proposed as the *Duty of Care Code*, the FIG's new guidelines govern the policies regarding misconduct in the sport, including education to combat abuse; reporting and investigating incidents; and issuing sanctions.

Watanabe, who was elected president in the fall of 2016, has taken a proactive approach to the crisis since he formally took office January 1, 2017. While in the United States for this past weekend's American Cup, Watanabe sat down with several American gymnasts to talk about abuse in the sport and how the FIG could be of assistance, an FIG spokesperson told IG on Monday.

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Following the International Olympic Committee's Session last month in PyeongChang, where IOC President **Thomas Bach** addressed the sexual abuse scandal in USA Gymnastics, Watanabe reiterated his commitment to the issue pledged to listen to the American gymnasts who have loudly called for major changes in the sport, spreading the #MeToo revolution and #TimesUp movement to the sports world.

"However, the most important thing for me is how our athletes feel," he [wrote February 8](#) . "For this reason, I will remain available to listen to the US gymnasts who have asked for change. I would like not only to praise their courage but to listen to their ideas on measures that might be taken to foster a culture of mutual respect within the sport."

Watanabe also flew to meet with **Kerry Perry**, the new USA Gymnastics CEO, during her first week on the job last December. During **Larry Nassar**'s first state sentencing hearing in January, Watanabe expressed his shock at the stories of horrific sexual abuse that so many had endured by the once-respected team doctor for USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University, with several survivors also sharing stories of physical and emotional abuse. Watanabe stated that the FIG would establish a fund to benefit the survivors of abuse in the sport.

According to the FIG, the Ethics Foundation will contain a new security and protection group, a compliance committee, a disciplinary commission and an appeal tribunal.

"This new entity, which will be independent of the FIG authorities, will be responsible for dealing with any issue related to ethics, misconduct, aggression and other rule violations. It will be responsible for contacting the relevant legal authorities and offering support to those affected by these incidents," the FIG stated.

Nassar, whose medical license was revoked in April 2017, was sentenced to a combined 300 years in prison by three judges. More than 150 people have filed lawsuits against USAG, MSU, the USOC, as well as individuals who have been accused of enabling Nassar to sexually assault vulnerable patients. Nassar pleaded guilty and admitted that he had sexually assaulted numerous individuals in the guise of treatment he claimed was a legitimate osteopathic procedure to ease pain and help injuries heal. Among the survivors are six U.S. Olympians and three world championship team members, including one who only last week filed a civil suit as a Jane Doe.

The massive fallout since the first Nassar sentencing hearing in January has continued to shake up the sports world and has led to multiple criminal and legislative investigations that remain ongoing. The entire USA Gymnastics board of directors has resigned, along with the president and athletic director of Michigan State University, and most recently the president of the USOC. USA Gymnastics has pledged to reform its entire organization, but has faced continued criticism for its handling of the scandal to the survivors of Nassar's abuse, as well as its historic handling of sexual abuse in the sport. Last week, two-time Olympian **Aly Raisman** also filed a civil lawsuit, stating she was tired of the lack of meaningful action from USAG, USOC and MSU, and the organizations' refusal to take responsibility for the systemic failures that allowed Nassar to

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prey on women and children for more than 20 years.

In addition to the 300 individuals — the majority athletes or dancers — who have reported Nassar for sexually assaulting them, several other gymnasts have recently come forward to share stories of sexual abuse or rape. 1978 world uneven bars champion **Marcia Frederick**, the first female American gymnast to win a world championships title, went public for the first time with her story of being sexually abused by her coach. 1992 Olympic champion

**Tatiana Gutsu**

and current Icelandic team member

**Tinna Óðinsdóttir**

both came forward to allege they had been victims of acquaintance rapes in German hotel rooms by male gymnasts, with Gutsu reporting an assault in 1991 and Óðinsdóttir one in 2016.

Gymnastics Canada has overhauled its policies after allegations of sexual abuse against two high-profile coaches, including the women's national team coach **Dave Brubaker**, who was suspended in December pending the outcome of 10 criminal charges against him.

The creation of the Ethics Foundation will be presented for approval at the next FIG Congress, scheduled for December 2-3 in Baku, Azerbaijan.