

Bermuda Gymnastics Association

Press Statement in respect of Junior Pan American Championship

February 22, 2014

The situation regarding Sadia Wilson and the upcoming Junior Pan American Championship is unfortunate. It has always been the Bermuda Gymnastics Association's (BGA's) desire that Sadia participate in the competition. In line with this, she was initially listed as a member of the Bermuda contingent, together with two other Bermuda gymnasts. It is important to note that for these two other athletes, and only these two because Sadia is not age eligible, the Junior Pan American Championship is their one chance to earn a spot for Bermuda in the Youth Olympic Games in China later this year. Shortly before the deadline to submit the names of the Bermuda delegation, the BGA was asked by the Wilson family to consider adding Sadia's UK-based coach to the roster. This was contemplated by the BGA management committee and the decision was made to continue to extend the opportunity to Sadia to compete under the coaching of the Bermuda coach contingent. With the decision not to include Sadia's UK-based coach, we are now experiencing the consequence of the Wilson family's decision to withdraw her from the meet.

In fact, there had been what appeared to be a workable solution to having Sadia continue to represent Bermuda without her UK-based coach present. BGA Head Coach, Robert 'Duke' Nelligan, and Sadia's UK coach had begun partnering and making plans for the sharing of file footage, vault settings, etc. so that Sadia could indeed compete in Brazil, while under the coaching expertise of Bermuda contingent coaches. However we received a directive from the Wilson family to cease these communications immediately and they communicated their decision to withdraw Sadia from the meet.

As Head Coach of the BGA, Duke is responsible for preparing our gymnasts physically and mentally for all competitions. We are confident that he knows the sport of gymnastics and all of our Bermudian gymnasts well enough to determine the ideal environment for each of them to give their best performance. Our confidence in him to do this is based on his credentials, which include coaching for Bermuda at World University Games, World Championships, and CAC Games, plus 31 years coaching elite level athletes at the University of Maryland, and serving as Head Coach for the BGA for the last five years

Sadly, the negative press around the decision to withdraw Sadia from the Junior Pan American Championship is overshadowing the fact that we still have two talented Bermudian athletes who are competing in Brazil in March. This is the most important meet of their gymnastics careers in that they are age eligible (must be born in 1999) to qualify a spot for Bermuda in the Youth Olympics Games in China. The following is a quote from the Pan American Gymnastics Union on how the Youth Olympic qualification will work:

"The 9 places for Womens Artistic Gymnastics...will be distributed per continent for the Youth Olympic Games 2014 according to the AA (all around) classification in the Junior Pan-American Championships.

The places will be distributed to each qualified National Federation according to each eligible gymnast AA qualifications (15 year-old gymnasts), being clear that the places are not nominal”.

Being born in 2000, Sadia is age eligible to compete at Junior Pan American Championships but too young to earn a spot for Bermuda in the Youth Olympics.

For the benefit of providing clarity:

- Sadia's UK coach was never granted approval by the BGA's Management Committee to join the Bermuda delegation.
- Contrary to what has been portrayed in the media thus far, there is absolutely no FIG requirement that Bermuda have FIG qualified coaches. The coaches traveling from Bermuda as part of the Bermuda delegation do not need to have any specific coaching designation at the Junior Pan American Championship. The Level 4/5 qualification that islandstats.com mentioned is a British Gymnastics qualification, not a FIG qualification, and therefore holds no authority in Bermuda.
- In response to the allegation that the “FIG Level 1 Men’s and Women’s Artistic Academy coaching course is a result of it being recognized that Bermuda does not have a qualified coach in FIG” (islandstats.com), Keith Russell, who is currently in Bermuda as the course leader for the FIG, says: “The purpose of this course was to service coaches in the Caribbean in a multi-country course. The course was chosen to take place in Bermuda because it is now one of the best facilities in the Caribbean. There are no expectations from FIG that the course be used as a means of selecting coaches in national federations. That is an internal matter that FIG does not get involved in. And to my knowledge, the Pan American Gymnastics Union does not have a specification for the level of coaching at its competitions.”
- From the BGA's perspective, the FIG Academy which is currently being held in Bermuda is a BGA initiative. The process of applying to host a FIG Academy in Bermuda began back in 2012, following 4 of our local coaches' experience (including 3 Bermudians) at a FIG Academy in Barbados. The BGA's aim in hosting the Academy is to support our goal of developing more Bermudian coaches and to further our goal of expanding gymnastics into the broader community. This week was intentionally selected as the week to host the Academy in order to ensure that some public school teachers would be available to participate while out on break.
- There is absolutely no risk of FIG sanctions being placed on Bermuda or the BGA. This was always our understanding and it has been further confirmed by Steve Butcher, who is the Vice President of the Pan American Union and Executive President the FIG Men’s Technical Committee.

We are saddened by the way in which this matter has been portrayed in the media. From the BGA’s perspective Sadia Wilson is welcome to compete in Brazil, however we respect and support her family's decision to do what they believe is right for her.