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## ***DanceSport: Ready for the Olympic Games?***

Is DanceSport ready for the Olympic Games? More specifically, are the Olympic Games ready for DanceSport? This question is one that is being debated by devotees and detractors around the world. Ever since formal recognition by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1997, the International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) has raised its hopes for DanceSport being placed on the Olympic Games program, perhaps as early as 2008. The host city, which is yet to be determined, must agree to the inclusion of this artistic “sport” before it can become part of the official program.

But what is DanceSport? The term embraces an activity that is gaining both popularity and momentum worldwide as we enter the new millennium, and is defined as the competitive aspect of ballroom dancing. For years ballroom dancing conjured up a variety of images: old dance styles performed by old dancers, impeccably dressed men and women clutching each other romantically, or awkward dance lessons in early physical education classes where there were never enough boys and the tallest girls had to lead. Today, ballroom dancing incorporates athletic components with the artistic, in an effort to entice young people with a competitive bent to engage in ballroom dancing, and ultimately, in DanceSport.

From an historical perspective, one must look to the folk and peasant dances of Europe for the forerunners of our modern ballroom dances. From the choral dance of the Middle Ages emerged the practice of dancing in couples, which in turn led to the popular court dances of Renaissance Europe. From the 1700s to the 1900s, many dances emerged:

waltz and Viennese waltz, polka, fox trot, jitterbug, tango, cha-cha-cha, rumba, paso doble, quickstep, samba, and others.

Ballroom dancing competitions occurred as early as pre-World War I in European cities such as Paris, Berlin, and Baden-Baden. From the 1930s on, international competitions occurred more frequently, but ballroom dancing experienced a period of ups and downs, both in the social and in the competitive realm, during the decades between the 1960s and the 1990s. The United States, in particular, entered a period of “no-touch dancing” when Chubby Checkers introduced the twist in 1960; disco mania followed shortly thereafter, and an entire generation grew up without dancing together. Competitive ballroom dancing, however, survived nationally and internationally. Many changes occurred in the early 1990s. Barriers between East and West were removed, and a considerable increase in Eastern European ballroom dancing competitors occurred. Asian competitors were on the rise, also, as interest gained ground in the Far East.

Although DanceSport was formally recognized by the IOC in 1997, and is deemed by many as a viable candidate for entry into the Olympic Games, one must consider the pros and cons of placing this artistic “sport” into medal contention. Those in favor of DanceSport argue that it has as much right as Ice Dancing and Synchronized Swimming, sports already in the Olympic Games. DanceSport has been described as “ice dancing on hardwood” by some devotees, and the prospect of having 50 percent women athletes, as well as 50 percent male athletes, provides another positive attribute of this gender-equal sport. Economic costs are negligible; facilities can be found nearly everywhere and special venues would not have to be built. DanceSport is practiced in numerous countries, and on each of the live continents around the world; it does not depend on weather or climate and can be enjoyed by all ages, from young children to older adults.

Those who oppose DanceSport as a medal contender in the Olympic Games are adamant that dance is not sport, that ballroom dancers are not athletes, that judging is too subjective, and that no new sports should be added to the Olympic Games program before some are dropped. Many amateur performers believe that DanceSport is not an appropriate title for an activity that is, essentially, an art form and not a sport, even though definite athletic conditioning is a requisite for competitive dancing. While there are two camps divided over these issues, the momentum appears to be with the proponents of DanceSport.

From a philosophical perspective, DanceSport fulfills one of the basic tenets of Olympism — Sport for All. There is no discrimination regarding race, age, religion, or gender. Can a conclusion be drawn at this time? Perhaps each person must draw his or her own individual conclusion with regards to DanceSport and, perhaps, with regard to the role of art and sport (and “artistic” sports) in the Olympic Games. But a perennial dilemma exists in the Games, that of artistic sports and the judging surrounding each. Nationalism often plays a part in judging and the audience is not usually knowledgeable regarding rules involved in judging. Some of the most popular events in the Olympic Games are the artistic sports, often due to the coverage provided by worldwide television coverage, and the trend is for those particular sports to maintain, and possibly, increase their popularity in the coming years.