

Mrs. Monique Kempff about gymnastics

Gymnastics was my first love. As a four year old girl, as so many girls of that age, I entered the gym, barefoot, a little bit shy, but happy and relaxed. My whole youth I enormously enjoyed the sport. Later on I wanted to be a gymnastics teacher, however my career took a different turn. But I was so proud to become the first female president of the Dutch Gymnastics Federation in 2016. So it looks like the circle is complete.

Unfortunately I found out that gymnastics is not only fun. Training beyond the limit, inappropriate behavior with young gymnasts and the attitude 'performance beats pleasure', are things I can't approve of. These days a lot of those girls have the courage to stand up and tell their stories about the dark side of our beautiful sport. We all know the story of Athlete A and examples of abuse on the national level. These poignant stories have touched me very deeply. That is why I want to get to the bottom of this.

As a president, a woman and for the love of the sport I have to take my responsibility to banish this dark side of gymnastics. The first steps in changing the culture of gymnastics in The Netherlands have been taken in setting goals for a pedagogical sports culture.

Other steps I have taken are:

- I changed that since 2018 the rules about leotards are loosened and shorts are allowed in national competitions.
- In 2019 I successfully argued the maintenance of the minimum age of 18 years in women's elite sports.
- In 2020 I put the Dutch women's Olympic program on hold due to the poignant stories about abuse in the Netherlands. And for the first time in history we launched an independent research into unacceptable behavior and intimidation in Dutch gymnastics. With this outcome I would like to trigger a paradigm shift and change of culture in gymnastics.
- For the recreational gymnastics, I won the bid for bringing in the World Gymnaestrada to Amsterdam in 2023.
- With an alliance of more than ten countries we addressed 'a safe training environment' on the agenda of the FIG's working group on safeguarding.

I'm a game changer. I stand for a safer and happier gymnastics culture. The children from this time have to enter the gym with pleasure, just like I did more than 50 years ago. After running 17 marathons I developed my persistence and I have the courage to discuss difficult themes of our sport on an international strategic level. I stand for sports leadership for better and for worse.

With my transparency, courage and persistence I will raise the bar as a candidate board member of the Federation of International Gymnastics!

Monique Kempff
KNGU