

# FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE GYMNASTIQUE



**Parkour UK**  
**Mr Eugene Minogue, CEO**  
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Lausanne, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Dear Mr Minogue,

Thanks for your letter of 31 March addressed to President Watanabe, which we have shared with our member in the UK, British Gymnastics.

While we would not presume to write to you on behalf of British Gymnastics, you do raise some wider points of principle and claim an international perspective. So with the kind approval of British Gymnastics, I am happy to reply.

FIG does understand your concerns. I would like to commend you for what I understand is more than a decade spent diligently helping the development of parkour and freerunning in the UK.

Please understand that while this letter will necessarily concentrate on parkour, our interests in what constitutes obstacles and apparatus are much wider. FIG is interested, for example, in competition formats that combine various apparatus and obstacles. And we understand these would not fall under the definitions of parkour employed by the early practitioners of parkour, by your own organisation and by many others.

FIG members around the world, meanwhile, have also developed parkour and / or freerunning activities in their national territories. Some of them have for years been recognized by their national governments for providing these activities, as in Sweden with Parkour and Tricking Sweden and in the Netherlands and Belgium through JUMP Freerun.

Further while you write of having undergone a recognition process involving UK Sport, I understand from a meeting with UK Sport's Chief Operating Officer Mr. Simon Morton, that this is not the case. Your letter from Sport England on 20 October 2016 notes: "UK Sport has not been part of the recognition process due to parkour not being part of the current Olympic or Paralympic programme."

Please be aware that decisions as to which national federation is recognized for what discipline of which sport in which country are dependent in part on national sovereignty. FIG would not presume to tell national governments what they can and cannot do.

SPORT IN  
THE OLYMPIC  
PROGRAMME



SPORT AU  
PROGRAMME  
OLYMPIQUE

Please also be aware that while FIG understands some practitioners to use the terms “parkour” and “freerunning” interchangeably, FIG does not understand such conflation to extend to the founders of those disciplines. I understand the respective founders would maintain there continue to be important distinctions between parkour, freerunning and l’art du déplacement even if these distinctions may be relatively imperceptible to those first discovering the practices.

As you note, parkour was derived from the French *parcours*. The earliest practitioners acknowledge using *parcours* for some years prior to *art du déplacement*, *parkour*, or *freerunning*.

The genesis of the usage of *parcours* in conjunction with both natural and artificial obstacles lies in the work of Georges Hébert, even if this was not known or understood by all of the earliest practitioners at the time. I am sure you will be aware that Hébert’s slogan “Etre fort pour être utile” also influenced the noble and altruistic ethos of the very earliest practitioners.

Hébert’s lineage, in turn, is easily traced. In a letter to Pierre de Coubertin of 2 May 1911<sup>1</sup>, Hébert notes: “You can see that Amoros was entirely enough to inspire me.” In the same letter, Hébert elaborates (the following underlining was his, in the letter):

“Amoros, the founder of the first official school of gymnastics in France and author of the first French manual of practical gymnastics notes on almost every page of his work that the primary goal of gymnastics is above all usefulness and altruism.”

In the work<sup>2</sup> to which Hébert refers, Amoros writes: “Men’s greatest degree of skill and strength consists of finding within themselves all of the means with which to overcome obstacles, without having recourse to other tools, which are not always at their disposal.”

Amoros’s work directly informed the creation of the École normale militaire de gymnastique de Joinville<sup>3</sup>, where many of his notions of the obstacle were further developed in order to prepare the French army to fight on varied terrain and in urban areas, instead of the flat open fields of old. Balancing, jumping, climbing, vaulting, height drops, wall runs and many more were practiced on both artificial and natural “found” obstacles.

You may be interested in the following passage from the training manual developed at Joinville with regard to the wall run:

“The man places himself 10 or 12 paces from the wall he must climb, runs towards it, looks straight at the point of support, pushes off the wall with his foot, elevates his body with a lively movement and undergoes an upward extension of the back of the knee, catches the top of the wall or any other reachable spot with one hand, puts his other hand at the same height, makes an effort from his wrists to lift up his body and takes his place atop the wall. At the moment the man launches himself towards the top of the wall, one of his hands should be lifted, palm facing forward, to guard against the impact with the wall.”

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<sup>1</sup> International Olympic Committee archives

<sup>2</sup> Francisco Amoros; 1830; Manuel de l’éducation Physique, Gymnastique et Morale; Paris: Roret

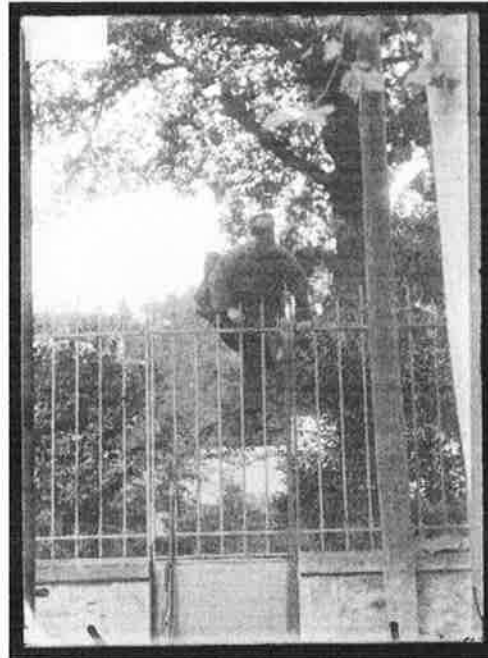
<sup>3</sup> [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataillon\\_de\\_Joinville](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataillon_de_Joinville)

The following early photographs illustrate how this wall run technique was taught as part of military gymnastics at Joinville:



I trust you will also find the following images from the Joinville military gymnastics school illustrative:





Considered the father of French gymnastics, Francisco Amoros is interred at the Montparnasse Cemetery, where his grave is maintained to this day by the Fédération Française de Gymnastique.

Yet even Amoros was not the first to consider such techniques, aimed at allowing their practitioners to move freely through any environment. As Julie Angel writes<sup>4</sup>: “Unknowingly, the activities and innate instincts of the young Parisians from Sarcelles, Lisses and Evry reflected the arguments of some of the most influential thinkers and pioneering physical educators from continental Europe.” She goes on to list those pioneers whose work she describes as being reflected in the development of parkour, including Gutsmuths (author of “Gymnastik für die Jugend”) and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (whose work lead to international gymnastics competitions using parallel bars, rings and high bar<sup>5</sup>).

Given the above, therefore, I do hope you will understand if FIG feels it is not entirely accurate for you to claim of parkour that: “there is no connection and / or lineage to the sport of Gymnastics”.

Dr. Angel, in writing of the “free-spirited, late twentieth-century civilian warriors of the Parisian suburbs” goes on to posit: “Like the original purpose of gymnastics, theirs was a social movement; their own philosophical, educational and personal revolutionary tool.” In your letter, you too speak of the manner in which parkour combines the physical, mental and social.

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<sup>4</sup> Julie Angel; 2016; Breaking The Jump

<sup>5</sup> John Goodbody; 1982; Illustrated History of Gymnastics; London: Stanley Paul

These notions of personal development that is physical, moral and social, with altruism at the core, were also close to the heart of FIG's founder Nicolaas Jan Cupérus. Added to these were Cupérus's clear leanings towards non-competitive sporting practice. FIG honours our founder's concepts to this day as part of our Gymnastics for All<sup>6</sup> discipline, as referred to in the definition of gymnastics in our statutes, where apparatus is not prescribed, where gymnastics is often practiced outdoors; where there is no competition and where the ultimate expression of training is often performance art.

Neither the history of gymnastics, FIG's history nor its contemporary practice support your claims that competition is "fundamental to the sport of Gymnastics", that practicing on a field of play is "fundamental to the sport of gymnastics," that "the sport of Gymnastics is an indoor sport", that "the sport of Gymnastics requires specified apparatus" exclusively and that only prescribed movements are "fundamental to the sport of gymnastics."

Given the enormous success of artistic gymnastics, your misconceptions with regard to FIG's work are entirely understandable. They remain misconceptions nonetheless.

Let us be very clear, however. While FIG understands there to be more than a passing association between gymnastics and parkour, FIG is full of admiration for the young men of Lisses, Evry and beyond. For them to have achieved so much, to have created so much even as teenagers is simply phenomenal. Yes, David Belle may have had a manual of Hebert's and his father's teachings. But as Dr. Angel points out, the parcours that first came to light on Stade 2 in 1997 was very much of the "new and improved" variety. And on the basis of this respect and admiration, our most recent journey began with a visit to Lisses where we enjoyed the privilege of hearing of parkour's inception at first hand.

FIG would not presume to expect any practitioner of parkour to declare themselves gymnasts, even though FIG attributes great pride to the term. I write as a trampolinist who long ago had the pleasure of finding a warm welcome being extended to my fellows and I by gymnasts.

As FIG seeks to best aid its members, it has become clear that some have had more success than others in contributing to the further development of parkour and other obstacle-related practices. A common role of international federations is to help their members learn from each other.

Generally speaking, it would appear that perhaps the more successful (and certainly the more accepted) initiatives have involved directly or indirectly empowering existing communities of practitioners and competitors. This is a principle of engagement and empowerment that we do feel worthy of attention.

In our role as leading contributor to the Olympic Movement, FIG has of course taken particular note of the position of the Mouvement International du Parkour, Freerunning et l'Art Du Déplacement in demonstrating parkour at the Lillehammer 2016 Youth Olympic Games. FIG has further noted the work of many other organisations: some not-for-profit and many others manifestly commercial.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/page/view?id=236>

It is FIG's intention to continue to consult far and wide with those looking for positive dialogue, cooperation and collaboration. I do look forward to speaking with you at an appropriate juncture and in an appropriate manner. You may rest assured that we'll be in touch again soon.

Kind regards,

**Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique**



**André F. Gueisbuhler**  
**Secretary General**



Copy: British Gymnastics