

Clarity Requirements for Dragon Dance Competition Rules and Regulations from the Coaches' Perspective and Construction of the Association's Guidance System



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Abstract: Dragon dance sport originated from ancient Chinese rituals such as rain-praying and deity-worshipping. Since the 1980s, it has gradually advanced toward standardization, competitiveness, marketization, and internationalization. Its competition rules have undergone multiple revisions (from the 1995 to 2011 editions), with supporting regulations for equipment and youth events. However, ambiguities remain in the recognition of rules and difficult movements among coaches, committees, and referees. Using the literature review method, practical method, and logical analysis method, this study analyzes the demand for clarity of rules and regulations from the coaches' perspective and identifies core issues: In terms of difficulty rules: vague movement trajectories, inconsistent recognition of combined difficulties, and the 2011 Edition rules lagging behind innovative difficulties; In terms of equipment rules: unclear weight standards for dragon heads, creating dilemmas for coaches in equipment selection; In terms of "conventional practices" in rules: lack of unified definitions for music requirements. Based on these findings, the study proposes the construction of three systems: (1) A competition difficulty standard system centered on releasing a dragon dance difficulty technology database and updating videos of innovative difficulties; (2) An event information notification system focusing on supplementing rule details, conducting online Q&A sessions, setting up an official website message board, and an event chief referee Q&A area; (3) An event committee Q&A system featuring synchronous display of deduction codes and rule-based interpretation and Q&A. This study aims to enhance the clarity of dragon dance competition rules and regulations and assist the Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance Association (CDLDA) in promoting the further standardization, normalization, and competitiveness of dragon dance sport.

Keywords: dragon dance competition rules, dragon dance coaches, competition rules guidance, clarity of competition rules

Introduction

Dragon dance activities originated from ancient Chinese rituals of rain-praying, blessing-seeking, deity-worshipping, and deity-entertaining. Since the 1980s, dragon dance has experienced a revival across China and gradually moved toward standardization, competitiveness, marketization, and internationalization. Currently, the competition rules for dragon and lion dance have undergone multiple revisions; despite the continuous

development of these rules, there still exist ambiguities in the recognition of competition rules and difficult movements among coaches, event organizing committees, and referees. This study adopts the literature review method, practical method, and logical analysis method to analyze the demand for clarity of dragon dance competition rules and regulations from the coaches' perspective, and proposes the construction of a guidance system for such clarity. It is hoped that this research will enhance the clarity of dragon dance competition rules

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and regulations from the coaches' standpoint.

2. Overview of Dragon Dance Sport

2.1 Origin and development of dragon dance sport

Dragon dance activities originated from ancient rituals of rain-praying, blessing-seeking, deity-worshipping, and deity-entertaining. Dong Zhongshu of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) recorded the term "dragon dance" in *The Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals: On Praying for Rain*, describing the grand scene of dragon dances held for rain-praying in the Han Dynasty (Lei, 2019). During the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907) and Song Dynasty (960 – 1279), dragon dance activities reached their peak; by the Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912), a technical system similar to modern dragon dance had taken shape, and dragon dance gradually became an important activity in festive celebrations.

After standardized development, dragon dance evolved into a competitive sport. Since the 1980s, it has witnessed a national revival and moved toward standardization, competitiveness, marketization, and internationalization. In 1995, the International Dragon and Lion Dance Association (IDLDA) and the CDLDA were established successively, marking the official launch of the internationalization process of dragon dance sport. Currently, the competition rules, competition levels, and scale of dragon dance sport have reached a considerable height: the National Dragon and Lion Championship has been successfully held for 16 sessions, the World Dragon and Lion Championship for 6 sessions, and the Asian Dragon and Lion Championship for 6 sessions. Notably, in 2017, under the leadership of the General Administration of Sport of China, dragon dance sport was added as a new mass competition event in the 13th National Games of the People's Republic of China. In the 15th National Games of the People's Republic of China, dragon and lion dance was designated as a mass exhibition event, with a total of 8 competition categories.

2.2 Development of dragon dance competition rules

In March 1995, the first edition of China Dragon Dance Competition Rules—approved by the State Physical Culture and Sports Commission of the People's Republic of China—was released, marking the formation of an independent competition system for dragon and lion dance sport. The 2001 edition of *International Dragon and Lion Dance Competition Rules and Refereeing Methods*, approved by the International Dragon and Lion Dance Federation, refined aspects such as competition types, age and gender categories, and movement deduction standards. In 2002, the *International Dragon and Lion Dance Competition Rules and Refereeing Methods* officially released by the International Dragon and Lion Dance Federation further standardized event organization and refereeing work.

In 2008, with the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games, China gained more valuable experience in competitive sports. Based on summarizing over a decade of dragon and lion dance training and competition experience, the competition rules were significantly adjusted in terms of difficulty classification and scoring methods, promoting the diversified development of dragon and lion dance competition formats (Xue & Wang, 2013).

In 2011, *International Dragon Dance, Southern Lion and Northern Lion Competition Rules and Refereeing Methods (2011 Edition)* (Hu, 2011), approved by the International Dragon and Lion Dance Federation, was published and has been in use ever since.

In 2017, the Social Sports Guidance Center of the General Administration of Sport of China and CDLDA drafted the national standard *GB/T 34314-2017 Requirements for the Use of Dragon and Lion Dance Equipment* (AQSIQ & SAC, 2017), which specifies the equipment used in dragon and lion dance for teaching, training, competitions, and performances, as well as the material composition, size, color, and shape for the production and use of such equipment.

In 2019, CDLDA approved and released *Competition Rules for Youth Dragon and Lion Dance (2019 Trial Edition)*, which improved the rules for

the National Youth Dragon and Lion Dance Championship. In 2022, CDLDA approved and released *Fitness Dragon Dance Competition Rules (2022 Trial Edition)*, marking the competitive development of fitness dragon dance; meanwhile, national fitness dragon dance referee training courses and the National Fitness Dragon Dance Championship were held.

In 2024, CDLDA approved and released *Referee Deduction Standards for Fitness Dragon Dance (Colored Ribbon Dragon) (2024 Edition)*. On September 22, 2025, CDLDA issued group standards, which further specified the materials, appearance quality, shape, and dimensions of dragon dance equipment (Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance Association, 2025a) and colored ribbon dragon equipment (Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance Association, 2025b).

3. Research Results

3.1 Analysis of the demand for clarity of competition rules and regulations from the perspective of dragon dance coaches

3.1.1 Demand for clarity of "Difficulty" in dragon dance competition rules

Dragon dance is a skill-dominated sport focusing on difficulty and aesthetics. Currently, the competition rule implemented in dragon dance events is *International Dragon Dance, Southern Lion and Northern Lion Competition Rules and Refereeing Methods (2011 Edition)*. According to the 2011 Edition refereeing method, the duration for optional routines, specified routines, and traditional routines in dragon dance competitions is 7 – 10 minutes each.

In the evaluation of optional dragon dance routines, the full score is 10 points, including 5 points for movement specifications, 3 points for artistic expression, and 2 points for movement difficulty. The difficulty score reflects the overall level of a team and is a key factor in winning. Specifically, 10 difficulties earn 1.5 points, with an additional 0.05 points for each extra difficulty; to obtain the full difficulty score, 20 standard difficulties specified in the rules must be completed.

Based on the movement forms of dragon dance, its movements are categorized into five types: figure-eight dragon dance movements, wandering dragon movements, piercing and leaping movements, rolling movements, and formation modeling movements.

In current competitions, there is insufficient clarity in the difficulty rules of dragon dance competitions, manifested in three aspects:

First, the difficulty trajectories are unclear. When performing figure-eight dragon dance movements, the rules provide vague descriptions of the movement's starting point, movement trajectory, and ending position, making it difficult to judge based on a unified standard. For example, in the transpositional spiral jump movement, the dragon head is required to lead the second dragon dancer in displacement during specified dragon dance routines, followed by the third dragon dancer jumping over the second, and subsequent dancers transposing in sequence. However, in a certain provincial-level event, routine inspection referees ruled that the second dragon dancer must jump over the dragon head to be recognized as a transpositional jump, resulting in the transpositional jump in the specified dragon dance routine being judged as not meeting the difficulty requirements.

Second, the rules for recognizing combined difficulties are ambiguous. When different types of difficult movements are combined, the rules do not specify in detail which combination methods can earn difficulty points, nor do they outline specific requirements for aspects such as movement connection time and fluency during the combination process. This makes it difficult for coaches to balance difficulty and score acquisition when choreographing routines. For instance, the 4-person combined difficulty of "shoulder-lying & waist-hanging" is not recognized in provincial-level events, with the reason that this difficulty is not mentioned in the rulebook. However, the same difficulty was recognized as valid in the 2024 China Dragon and Lion Open hosted by the CDLDA. Such insufficient clarity in rules has caused many troubles for dragon dance coaches in

guiding team training and choreographing routines, which is not conducive to the further improvement of the competitive level of dragon dance sport.

Third, by 2025, the forms and manifestations of difficulty innovations in dragon dance sport have undergone significant changes. Although applications for innovative difficulties are required before each event, some difficulties have been widely used as common difficulties among various teams, leading to the lag of the 2011 Edition rules for defining dragon dance difficulties. Such insufficient clarity in rules has caused many troubles for dragon dance coaches in guiding team training and choreographing routines, which is not conducive to the further improvement of the competitive level of dragon dance sport.

3.1.2 Demand for clarity of "Equipment" in dragon dance competition rules

Regarding equipment standards, the current competition rules (2011 Edition) require the dragon head of a dragon dance to weigh no less than 2.5 kg and have a height of no less than 1.85 m. In recent years, the event regulations of competitions hosted by the CDLDA all stipulate that participating teams' equipment must comply with National Standard *GB/T 34314-2017 Requirements for the Use of Dragon and Lion Dance Equipment* (Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance Association, 2024). Meanwhile, the latest CDLDA Group Standard *T/CDLDSA 03—2025 General Requirements for Dragon Dance Equipment* (issued in September 2025) also does not clearly specify the weight of the dragon head.

However, there is no clear regulation on whether the requirement of the dragon head weighing no less than 2.5 kg (stipulated in the 2011 Edition) should continue to be implemented, leading to dilemmas for coaches when selecting equipment that meets the standards. For example, if a coach uses a lightweight dragon head but the referee team and organizing committee enforce the 2011 Edition rule that the dragon head must weigh no less than 2.5 kg during the competition, the team will face the dilemma of being unable to participate. Conversely, if coaches use dragon heads that meet the 2.5 kg standard for training, it may pose a great challenge to

athletes' physical fitness, and at the same time, their teams may be at a performance disadvantage compared to opponents using lightweight dragon heads. Therefore, the clarity of the rules regarding dragon dance competition equipment needs to be clearly defined.

3.1.3 Demand for clarity of "Conventional Practices" in dragon dance competition rules

Currently, there are inconsistencies in the implementation of competition rules across different events. For example, in the National Dragon and Lion Championship, teams are allowed to use self-composed music for the specified routine performances of the dragon dance event. The purpose of this regulation is to showcase the team's movement rhythm and coordination between music and movements, and this rule has been consistently implemented in competitions in recent years.

However, in the specified fitness dragon dance event of the 16th National Dragon and Lion Dance Championship, a team had 1 point deducted by the chief referee for using self-composed music. There is no clear definition in the colored ribbon dragon competition rules regarding whether the music must be the one from the demonstration video. Yet in actual competitions, there exist inconsistent requirements for music between the specified dragon dance routine and the specified fitness dragon dance routine. A 1-point gap could drop a team's ranking from first place to last; however, the lack of clear competition regulations undermines the authority of the event and the honor of participating teams.

3.2 Construction of a clarity system for dragon dance competition rules and regulations

3.2.1 Construction of a dragon dance competition difficulty standard system

First, in view of the current lack of clear definitions for difficulty trajectories and difficulty forms, the CDLDA should take the lead in releasing a dragon dance difficulty technology database. It should conduct video recordings of the difficult movements of dragon dance specified in the competition rules to make the standards for difficulty recognition clear.

Second, it is necessary to supplement the detailed rules for recognizing combined difficulties. For example, movement innovation in competitive dragon dance must be based on "basic movements" and "difficult movements", rather than the recombination and choreography of movements in a general sense. There are various forms and methods of combination, including shape combination, order combination, structure combination, principle combination, part combination, and main-body combination (Yin, 2014). At the same time, it should specify the number of combinations formed by difficulties such as the figure-eight dragon dance with the dragon head and the figure-eight dragon dance performed simultaneously by the dragon head and dragon tail, so as to avoid inconsistencies in difficulty recognition.

Third, regarding innovative difficulties: when an application for an innovative difficulty complies with the competition rules, the difficulty should be filmed in a timely manner, or video clips of the team's difficult movements from competition recordings should be extracted and updated in the difficulty technology database. This facilitates technical development and avoids repeated applications by various teams.

3.2.2 Construction of a smooth event information notification system

First, CDLDA should continuously release and update event rule details, and issue supplementary details when rule revisions are not carried out. Second, CDLDA should take the lead in organizing the Competition Committee and experts to conduct online Q&A communications — for example, regularly releasing a summary of Q&A for dragon dance coaches and athletes through its WeChat Official Account. Third, a Q&A message board should be set up on the official website for timely communication, and a chief referee Q&A area should be established during events to ensure smooth information flow.

3.2.3 Construction of a timely and efficient event committee Q&A system

First, regarding the deduction points for on-site

mistakes and the deduction points made by the chief referee, the corresponding deduction items should be displayed synchronously when the final score is announced. For example, the coded display method used in martial arts routine competitions can be adopted (Wang, 2024). Second, when there are doubts about deductions, the event committee should provide interpretations of relevant provisions or clear answers based on the refereeing method and competition regulations, so as to fully protect the rights of teams to raise doubts or apply for arbitration.

4. Conclusion

Currently, dragon dance sport is developing vigorously, and its events have achieved a certain scale. Although dragon dance competition rules are continuously improved, ordinary coaches still have a demand for clarity regarding difficulty recognition, equipment standards, and rule "conventional practices".

In the future development of dragon dance, CDLDA should take the lead in establishing subordinate committees to construct a dragon dance competition difficulty standard system, a smooth event information notification system, and a timely and efficient event committee Q&A system. These efforts will continuously promote the vigorous development of dragon dance sport toward standardization, normalization, and competitiveness.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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