

Preparing a Young Skater for Competition

Written by: Susi Wehrli-McLaughlin

In today's figure skating world, there are almost opportunities every weekend across the nation for figure skaters to compete. Many figure skating clubs in addition to rinks and Park and Recreation programs host annual "Opens" or "Invitational" competitions. Most of these competitions offer a full range of figure skating events including all levels and age groups from the grassroots to the Senior level in varying disciplines. When a family participates in a weekend competition, most of the time the skater will sign up for multiple events to make the dollars spent a little more worthwhile.

The first and the most crucial step is the **announcement**. Each organizing committee (host of the competition) writes their own announcement choosing the levels and age groups they wish to invite within the boundaries of the rules. U.S. Figure Skating has specific guidelines set forth each year for competition levels, testing requirements and prerequisites that the skaters must follow. One of the most important things about competition is that a skater signs up for the correct level based on their test level and ability. Three signatures are usually required on each application form to confirm that a skater is competing at the correct level, the participant or parent/guardian, a club officer or skating director and the skating coach or instructor. There is nothing that taints a competition event worse than poor judging is "sandbagging" (when a skater signs up a level below their ability to purposely win the event).

Each announcement should contain all of the event information, levels and requirements, practice ice information, hotel and travel information, and a deadline for the applications. These deadlines are fairly strict (especially for qualifying competitions) so mail your form in early. If not, there are no guarantees that you will get in and you will probably be assessed a late fee. Keep a photocopy of the announcement and application. Event schedules are normally sent to the competitors directly and posted at the host arena two weeks prior to the event. Competition schedules are tentative so keep this in mind and plan around it.

Preparation for the competition is really up to the skater and coach. They need to set a timeline to "peak" at the right time, make sure the skating program is the right time length and contains the correct elements. Refer to the announcement. Anytime a skater performs in front of a panel of judges and an audience, nerves are bound to interfere but with proper preparation and confidence, a good result is bound to happen. Regardless of the final placements, one needs to feel that they skated their best and gave 100%. Discuss the game plan with the coach of the ideal training program for the competition months in advance of the big event.

What to do when you arrive at the competition:

Plan to arrive at least one hour before the scheduled event. Check-in at the registration table, turn in your music with the proper label - containing name, skating club/program, event name and group #. Always have a back-up copy available (either with a coach or chaperon). Find your coach/instructor to let them know you have arrived and where you

will be. Try to find a place to sit either in the stands or with friends and let your coach know where you are. Sometimes rinks will have assigned locker rooms for skaters to get ready and leave their belongings. Never leave your skates unattended. Be fully dressed and ready to begin your off-ice warm-up routine (jumping jacks, jogging in place, stretching routine) at least 30 minutes before your scheduled event. Put your skates on, walk through your routine rink side or in the lobby if you can find a quiet spot and start mentally preparing for your performance. It is important to stay warm at this point in time so wear a sweater and gloves or bring a blanket with you.

Now it is your turn. Walk over to the monitor and check in. They will tell you where you need to wait and how long before it is your warm-up time. If you are in a compulsory program event then go to the side of the rink that your event is being held on and check in with that monitor. Figure out your on-ice warm-up routine (stroke around, how many of each jump, which spins to practice and if you want to do a run through of all or part of your program) and discuss this with your coach. There is normally not enough time for coaching during your 3-5 minute warm-up period so unless there is a serious problem, use your time wisely and keep going. You can refresh your thoughts and reminders with your coach after your warm-up. When it is your turn to compete, step out onto the ice, have confidence in yourself, try your best, take each element one at a time (one element is not your entire routine) and most importantly have fun and smile to the judges and audience at least once.

After your performance, your coach should give you some brief feedback about your performance. Be proud of yourself and stay to cheer on the others in your group. You can learn a lot by watching the other competitors. After the conclusion of the event, the accountant will tally the scores from the judges and the final standings will be posted over the starting order sheet in the lobby. Keep your skates on since the award ceremony should follow shortly after the posting of the results. No matter what the final outcome is, you should always be a good sport. Congratulate the winner and congratulate the others for good efforts. There is only one winner per event and everyone will have their good days and could be better days. This is the nature of figure skating so always be proud of your performance and learn from each experience.

Competition Checklist:

- Your skates (both of them), guards, soakers and extra laces
- Competition outfit and back-up outfit
- Girls: Extra pair of tights
- Girls: Hair accessories and make-up
- Two copies of your music
- Competition information – maps, hotel reservations, event times, practice ice
- Gloves, warm-up sweater, club outfit, blanket
- Screwdriver, skate polish, nail polish remover, Band-Aids
- Membership card – is needed at the registration desk
- Video recorder and camera
- Good luck charms

From the Judges Perspective: Tips from the Judge

By: Carolyn Clausius, National Freeskating and Pair Skating Judge

Most judges are former skaters who still enjoy being actively involved in the sport. They want everyone to skate well and have fun in spite of their serious expressions of concentration! Judges don't always agree, but there are a few things that they would all like to see included in your program. Your goal should be to demonstrate a well-balanced program that includes a variety of jumps, several spins, footwork, spirals and strong edges. Jumps only count for a portion of your total score and only cleanly landed jumps will qualify. It's best to include only jumps that you have consistently mastered, as you will not be given credit for falls or jumps that were not complete. You and your coach may agree to include one risky jump that you have recently learned, but that should be the limit.

Judges look for spins that are well centered and have good speed. Advanced skaters need to include three spins, one of which should be a flying spin and another should be a combination of positions. Strong edges spirals and footwork, not just forward or backward crossovers, should connect your elements.

When you are judged, you'll be given two marks. The first is the technical merit mark that includes all the elements you successfully completed as well as your speed and sureness throughout your program. The second mark is for your presentation. This mark is equally important and counts for half of your total score. For this mark, the judges will consider how well you skated your program with the music. They will pay attention to your choreography and how well you demonstrate good timing and expression. Very often when the technical difficulty of the skaters is similar, the skaters with the best interpretation will place higher.

If you find, when the results are posted, that you received a variety of ordinals, it means the skaters in the group were equally matched and the event was difficult to judge. Your goal should be to skate your best performance and not worry about what the other skaters are doing. Don't be discouraged if you make mistakes, a strong finish can make a positive impression. Be confident and proud of yourself and it will show in your skating. Good luck and have a great time on the ice!