

Allocation of Training Resources

There are three important components of a successful figure skating training program - ice time, equipment, and lessons.

Ice Time

The amount of practice time and feedback a skater receives is a result of school and rink schedules in combination with the attendance and punctuality of the skater.

Getting up each morning can be a problem for the skater and the person who has to drive them to the rink and to school. From the number of skaters who arrive at the rink with their skates on belays the fact that it is unlikely the skater performed any off-ice exercises. Skaters who have not properly stretched have a higher risk of a skating injury.

Regular attendance at on and off ice practice sessions enhances the potential for improvement. An appropriate number of hours need to be scheduled and then he needs to attend regularly. Factors such as age, psychology, health, commitment etc. can greatly modify the optimal annual training volume.

Absenteeism and tardiness lessen the actual number of sessions attended. A child should not be at school or in an ice rink when they are ill. Missing practice sessions for family vacations, school activities, car problems, etc., are reasonable excuses; however, frequently missed practices become a major obstacle to developing new skills and maintaining existing skills.

Tardiness is a major problem at schools and tardiness also is at the ice rink concerning practice sessions and lessons.

If a skater schedules five 45 minute sessions a week and the skater is five minutes late for each session, they have missed twenty-five minutes out of a total three hours and forty-five minutes of practice. If a skater leaves five minutes early each day, they will lose twenty-five minutes of practice time each week. Coaches generally will charge for missed lessons unless cancelled 48 hours prior to the lesson.

Most coaches prefer to accompany their skaters to competitions to provide their skaters with a feeling of security and confidence in what can be a very stressful situation. Competitions afford coaches an opportunity to evaluate a skater's performance under pressure so they can develop a training program for the next event or season.

Coaches may miss lessons from time to time due to illness or because they are attending skating competitions, USFS, and PSA Conferences. When it is not physically possible for a coach to travel to a competition with a skater, the coach will usually arrange with another coach to fill in at practice sessions and put the skater on the ice.

The primary coach will review with the substitute coach to provide useful and informed feedback to assist the skater. Substitute coaches should not communicate their own philosophies and drills in the temporary absence of the primary coach.

The time spent in failed communications, by a coach and skater, impacts the potential to achieve progress. The effort the skater expends in their training activities (on and off the ice) should be as efficient as possible.

The longer a coach and skater work together, the more likely they will share the same training principles and develop an understanding of the technical skating principals that is applied during lessons and unsupervised practice time.

Equipment

Skaters who lack properly fitted, good quality equipment cannot expect to make quick progress or acquire good technique. Beginning skaters need boots that fit properly and provide adequate support. However, expensive custom boots are not necessary at the beginner level. Skaters, whose boots fit and are equipped with sharp, correctly mounted blade, have an excellent opportunity to learn the proper skating skills and have fun in the process.

There are many different makes and models of skates on the market today. Parents should contact their coaches before purchasing skates as not only is the type of skate important but when they are purchased because breaking them in must be accounted for in the skater's yearly plan.

Appropriate clothing for skating permits a full range of movement, is comfortable and allows for effective coaching. The skater's body needs to move without impeding the skating technique. Bulky clothing will prevent a coach from seeing a skater's bodyline, which is necessary to give informed corrections about body movement.

Skaters who are practicing advanced skating skills might be well advised to wear elbow pads or hip padding when practicing difficult jumps at speed to protect against an injury. If a skater is repeatedly falling on the same body part, the coach should need to examine the skater's technique.

Lessons

A skater's continuing development requires ice time, proper equipment, and lessons from a quality instructor.

Group and private lessons promote the acquisition of proper technique and instilling good training habits. Positive progress is achieved through a consistent and appropriately timed feedback.

Skaters who skate a lot need a combination of group classes and private lessons to avoid learning and continuing to practice skating elements, jumps, and spins incorrectly.

An effective training session incorporates an opportunity for a skater to experience a continuous flow of activities such as warm-up, review, introduction of new skills, exercises, application of skills, and off ice cool down exercises in positive environment.

The role of the coach:

1. Take responsibility for skaters' progress by developing short and long term goals and objectives.
2. Provide consistent feedback to skaters allowing them to develop without technical errors.
3. Provide positive feedback that reinforces physical awareness of body positions.
4. Instill good training habits at the start.
5. Establish rapport with the skater so he or she feels a sense of support.
6. Communicate a program of comprehensive training of skills.
7. Monitor all factors that affect a skater's progress- equipment, behavior, physical and mental fitness, practice time, etc.
8. In lessons with older skater, communicate the theory of skill execution.

9. Facilitate communication with the skater and parents.
10. Instill the need to achieve quality of performance to provide a positive skating experience.

One-on-one lessons can be very productive, but the actual time spend on a lesson must not exceed the child's ability to absorb the information. Most private lessons that are 15 to 20 minutes long provide the optimum results. Private lessons are not necessary every time the child skates!

Initially, group lessons allow skaters to benefit from instruction and practice ice for approximately the same amount parents might spend just on private lessons. As skater begin to progress through the group classes, arranging a supplemental private lessons allow coaches to present information economically and efficiently compliment the group lessons.

Selecting a private coach allows them to monitor each skater's progress over time and have an opportunity to intervene before problems become chronic. Consistent and frequent feedback is important in developing good physical and mental habits. A balance of group, semi-private, and private lessons is perfectly appropriate and desirable as the skater begins to consider testing and competing.

Each skater needs to learn to practice on his or her own and the proportion of group to semi-private and private lessons will shift. Lessons will become less frequent but more specific.

A distinction should be made between group lessons sponsored by the rink and staffed by a member of the coaching staff and the one-on-one interaction provided by a private lesson.

Group lessons provide benefit of the same quality of instruction as a private lesson, but at a fraction of the cost. Many rinks provide free admission to public sessions when a skater is enrolled in group classes. This does not mean that group lessons are the preferred format for teaching free skating to competitive skaters.

Quality private instruction, is an increased expense, but allows the coach to target specific needs of the skater which results in the skater to progress more rapidly.