

Crossing over

Cycling, yoga, kung fu, great ways to enhance training

BY RHIAN JENKS

Figure skating demands commitment, hard work, sacrifice and passion from its participants. Driven to be the best, athletes frequently push themselves to the brink in hopes of achieving their often lofty goals. However, this constant intense training can result in tired, over-trained and injured athletes rather than top-level ones.

For figure skating in particular, repetitive, precise movements are key to gaining success in the sport. This type of training causes loads of stress to be placed on the body. An injured or over-trained skater will not perform as well as one who is fresh and energized. One way to ensure fresh legs, a rejuvenated spirit and an enthusiastic outlook is to incorporate cross training into your regular training program.

Many U.S. Figure Skating coaches use a training method known as the periodization training model. This is a training outline that divides both the off-season and the competitive season into segments. Different exercises are stressed during each period to ensure an athlete can sustain the rigors of training throughout a competitive campaign. Cross training is incorporated into periodization training in the first stage, known as the "transition" or "active rest," phase. During this time, cross training is highly recommended in order to give the skater a mental and physical break from the ice. After all competitions are completed, skaters are encouraged to engage in physical activity in other sports. As the competitive season draws closer, cross training is also used as a way to give the skaters adequate rest and recovery.

What do you know about cross training? If the extent of your knowledge in this area is that there is a type of shoe known as a "cross trainer," keep reading. You don't need a specific shoe to reap the benefits of cross training. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, cross training is the incorporation of various physical activities into any workout plan. Cross training helps alleviate stress on the body by choosing exercises which allow tired muscles and joints the proper rest.

Cross training helps alleviate lower body stress for skaters in particular. For example, a skater can achieve the same cardiovascular workout through cross training without taking the daily pounding of on-ice work. Also, cross training weaves variety and fun into a training program, helps rejuvenate tired and over-worked muscles, and prevents fatigue and burnout. The benefits from this type of training can be seen in any sport, including figure skating.

Several cross-training techniques are beneficial to figure skating. Cycling, yoga and even karate can incorporate fun and variety into a skater's training.

Noted health and fitness author Dr. Marie Miczak recommends cross training as an effective way to cleanse the mind and the body and adopt a fresh look on the coming season. Dr. Miczak alludes to 2004 World bronze medalist Stefan Lindemann, who found cycling to be an excellent way to relieve tired muscles and rejuvenate his training. Lindemann credits much of his success to the training he did on his bike. Strong quads and leg muscles are necessary for jumping and landing, and endurance is imperative to sustain a three-to-four minute routine.

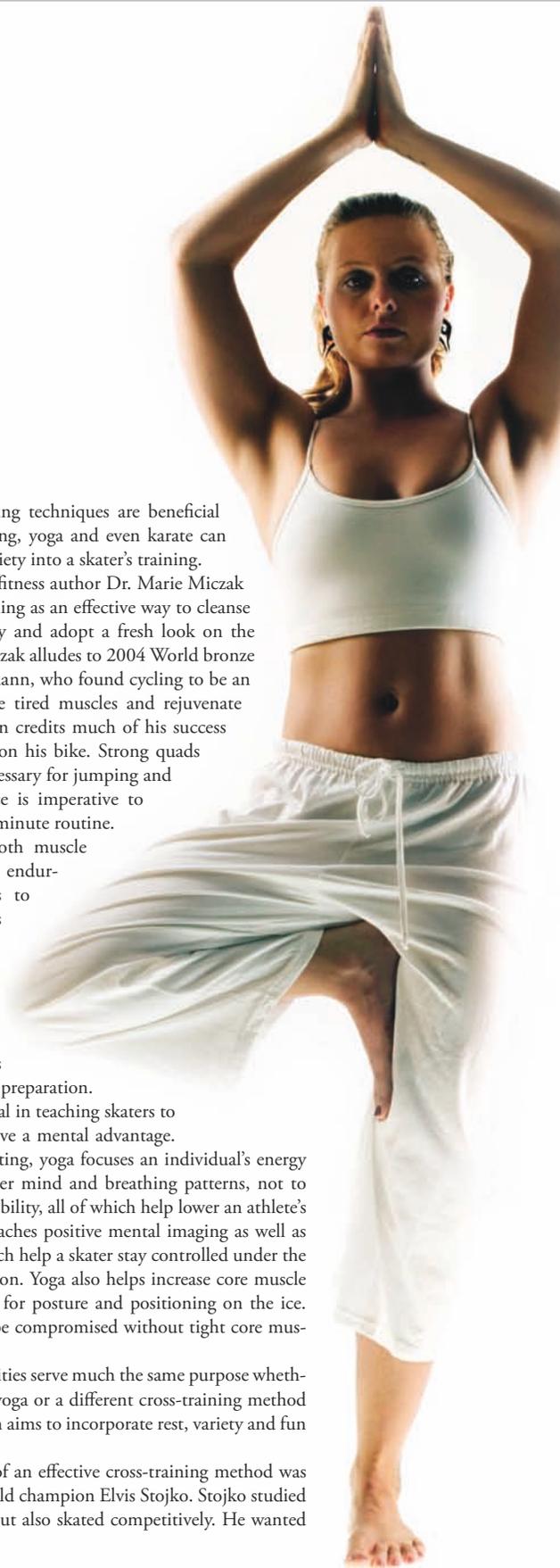
Cycling helps build both muscle strength and muscle endurance, which translates to stronger performances on the ice.

If cycling doesn't appeal to you, try yoga. Oftentimes in sports, intense physical training takes priority over mental preparation.

Yoga can be instrumental in teaching skaters to use their mind to achieve a mental advantage. As a supplement to skating, yoga focuses an individual's energy on controlling his or her mind and breathing patterns, not to mention increasing flexibility, all of which help lower an athlete's blood pressure. Yoga teaches positive mental imaging as well as relaxation methods which help a skater stay controlled under the conditions of competition. Yoga also helps increase core muscle strength, which is vital for posture and positioning on the ice. A skater's balance will be compromised without tight core muscles.

These various activities serve much the same purpose whether you choose cycling, yoga or a different cross-training method such as swimming. Each aims to incorporate rest, variety and fun into a program.

Another example of an effective cross-training method was used extensively by World champion Elvis Stojko. Stojko studied martial arts as a child but also skated competitively. He wanted



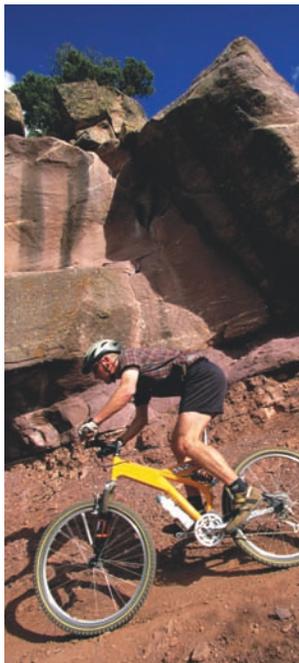
to find a way to incorporate martial arts into his training routine without neglecting either.

Glen Doyle, a three-time Canadian kung fu champion, developed a kung fu cross-training program specifically for ice skaters and worked with Stojko for more than a decade. But what, you ask, do figure skating and kung fu have in common? Doyle addressed this question, arguing that the explosive movements required to execute a triple Lutz, for example, are quite similar to the explosive power needed to execute the moves in kung fu. Both figure skating and kung fu have fluid, circular motion patterns and both require body awareness, balance and self-confidence.

Doyle stresses the importance of finding a cross-training program that meets the demands of your sport. Kung fu mimics many of the patterns and motions in figure skating and serves as a great supplement to a skater's on-ice training. According to Doyle, placing an athlete in a new environment with different demands awakens their muscles and senses, and refreshes their outlook on training. The change can be invigorating as well as beneficial.

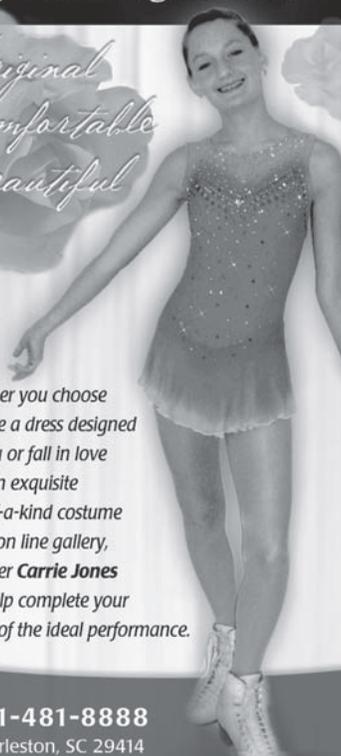
All of the cross-training activities mentioned here are merely suggestions of ways to incorporate variety, rest and fun into your regular training program. Finding one that works takes experimentation as well as knowledge of your sport. Activities that would negate the hard work you've put into your training are not favorable. Therefore, you should discuss your cross-training activities with a coach or trainer. Stepping out onto the ice for your biggest competition is more exciting when you have fresh legs and an energized spirit.

Incorporating cross training into your skating program will help reduce stress on the body, add fun and variety into your program, and provide a beneficial workout to all parts of the body. Maybe the extra bit of core strength gained from doing yoga will make it easier to land your double Axel or the balance training from kung fu will give you smoother edges. The benefits of cross training are endless, and they will ensure a healthier, more well-rounded skater.



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