

Weighing the Strengths and Weakness of Test Performances

By Claude Sweet

Background

In a classroom environment the teacher has specific teaching standards that must be met that are established by county, state, and federal laws and regulations.

The classroom teacher is required to create daily lesson plans that allow a substitute teacher to step in and continue their student's education with the minimum of interruption in the event of an absence of the regular teacher.

Administrators review the progress of new teachers annually while they are working to achieve tenure.

New teachers have to write goals and objectives for all content areas each year and are evaluated on them to insure they incorporate all of the priority issues in their classroom. Tenured teachers write the goals and objectives every other year.

Each teacher is required to keep their classroom lesson planner up to date. The planner contains a detailed description of the goals and objectives of each subject scheduled by day for the week. All teachers are evaluated with in class observations three to five times with more frequent observations of teachers who are performing marginally.

District students are subject to standardized state and national testing that is mandated under the "Leave no Child Behind" policy established under the Bush administration.

USFS Standardized Testing

The testing structure is designed to test skaters to see if they have acquired the minimum performance ability of a series of increasingly difficult skills that qualify them to enter competitions.

The Professional Skating Association is responsible for accessing the professional credentials of the coaches who are hired by clubs and rink management throughout the USA.

The USFS recruits, trains, and certifies the staff of volunteer judges and other officials that are nec-

essary to conduct a national program of testing and hosting competitions.

Tools in Judging Tests

Judging figure skating is very subjective and requires as much effort and practice to develop and maintain the necessary skills as earning gold medals for an individual's skating skills.

I believe it is very helpful for coaches, skaters, parents, and judges to communicate on a regular basis as part of an effort to provide a positive figure skating experience. Coaches and judges need to collaborate if they are to reach agreement of our expectations

When we are judging a test, we must focus on everything that is occurring and record notes that support the MITF and compulsory dance element or free skating, pair, and free dance program technical/presentation marks we give.

When judging tests, I use the concept of the ISU competition Grades of Execution and Performance Components designed to reward positive and negative performances.

The PSA and USFS have established the following standardized set of focus points that include:

- Power
- Extension
- Edges (solid, no sub curves or wobbles)
- Quickness (Rhythm)

Besides these four basic focus points, I use an expanded number of focus points that include:

- Core Body Positions (natural, upright body carriage)
- Turns (effortless, clean, secure, controlled)
- Pattern (balanced use of ice quadrants)
- Transitions (no diagonal centers)
- Presentation/Audience Empathy

Judges do not watch the warm-ups to avoid forming preconceptions of the skaters they are testing. There also is no provision for videotape instant replay to review parts of each test element.

Judges must be able to develop an ability to record what they have seen in clear and concise notes to support the mark for the element.

My Personal System

It is impossible to use long statements to record our observations during the actual test unless you have a clear concept of what you consider are important items necessary to pass each element.

The four focus points provide an excellent starting point. The problem is rooted in what the focus points do not directly address. For example, if we are evaluating a turn, it obviously must start and conclude with a controlled curving edge.

Subcurves and wobbles are negative edge qualities. However, the edges may be ok and yet the skater has control problems performing the actual turn.

Edges must also be evaluated as compared to the ideal pattern's placement in the four quadrants. The transitions from lobe to lobe should conform to the concept of a figure center with respect to long and short axis.

Any deduction taken when the transition is diagonal and the resulting lobes are not equal in size and shape depends on the test level. When skaters are acquiring a new skill, our evaluation should be more forgiving as a skater progresses up the ladder of testing.

Common errors that should disappear as skaters progress through their testing include:

- Breaking at the waist
- Toe pushing
- Step Overs
- Choppy, jerky crossover
- Not fitting pattern into available ice surface
- Skating below power expected for test level
- Nerves and lacking confidence
- Lack of presentation
- Failure to use width and length of ice surface effectively

Errors that are noted on a test should show improvement at the next test level. If a skater does not correct these errors, they will eventually reach a test

level in which a judge is justified in marking the test as a "Retry".

When evaluating simple and complex turns, the form of the free leg and upper body must consider the controlled rise and fall of the skating knee in coordination with the performance of the turn.

The shoulders of the turn's tracing should be even and the actual turn not scraped, skidded, or jumped. Essentially the skater's body should not be contorted before, during, or after the body changes direction. If we look just at the upper body, the skater's progress over the ice should not be affected by and change in direction (back to forward or forward to back).

As a judge, we should reward proportionality (similarity/relationship) of flow, ice coverage, tempo, and control.

Turns on one foot and turns requiring a change of foot are relatively easy to perform when only one circle is required (i.e. outside and inside three turns) and the turning motion is the same as the curve. Turns that involve a reverse turning motion (i.e. bracket, ladies outside Mohawk in the 14 Step and Foxtrot) add to the complexity and difficulty.

Judges do not consider the difficulty of the steps and turns. Each person may find they can perform specific turns with more or less skills depending on their physical body structure and flexibility.

Conclusion

Coaches who regularly invite judges to critique their skaters notice that their skaters are more comfortable performing on tests.

Ideally, the coaches should arrange regular sessions during the summer schedule for skaters to experience the testing experience in front of judges.

Too many skaters have never skated their test on freshly resurfaced ice without having to dodge other skaters.

Many skater suffer from a lack of stamina, especially on longer tests where the performance of difficult moves at full speed can result in a sluggish perform or worse – a major fall/injury.