

Making sense of it all

International judging system a numbers game

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles about the international judging system (IJS) that will be published in SKATING leading up to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and the 2010 World Synchronized Skating Championships. The goal of these articles is to make the IJS more understandable and fan-friendly. This article focuses on singles, with future articles concentrating on pairs, dance and synchronized skating.

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Overview of the IJS for singles

Under the IJS, a skater's score is broken down into various parts. The first part, the technical element score (TES), consists of the base value of all elements in addition to a grade of execution (GOE) score that is added to or subtracted from each base value. The GOE is a measure of how well each element is done.

The second part of the score, the program component score (PCS), is a measure of the overall artistic ability of the skater and is broken down into five different scores that will be discussed in detail later in this series.

The final part of the score consists of any deductions taken. The referee is responsible for taking deductions for costume, time and music violations. The

technical panel is responsible for taking deductions for illegal elements and falls.

When the TES and PCS are added together and any deductions are subtracted, the final result is the total segment score (TSS). Segment refers to either the short program or the free skate when referring to singles.

For every level of skating, there are specific requirements for the short program and the free skate. The short program requirements are called just that. The free skate requirements are referred to as well-balanced program requirements. If a skater performs more than the maximum number of elements allowed, there are no deductions, but the values of additional elements will not be calculated into the skater's score. If a skater performs fewer than the required number of elements, they receive fewer points, not deductions. If the skater performs an incorrect element in place of a required element, they will not receive any points for the incorrect element.

Figure 1 shows the different officials who make up the technical and judges panels and what roles they play in determining a skater's score within the IJS. For the purposes of space, we only show five judges, but a U.S. Figure Skating competition can have up to nine judges on the panel.

Determining element values

Each element in skating is assigned a base value. This is the value of the element before any points are added or subtracted for the GOE. The base values and GOE values are provided in a document called the Scale of Values (SOV). A group of experts, including experienced skaters and coaches, determined all of the element values, which are set by the ISU. Jump values are based on the difficulty of the take-off and the number of revolutions completed so, for example, a triple loop has a higher base value than a double loop. Values for spins and sequences (steps or spirals) are based on levels of difficulty ranging from level one (the easiest) to level four (the most difficult). Skaters can earn credit for a level one element if what they perform meets the basic requirements for that element. In order to earn levels higher than one, skaters must perform a variety of features. Features are defined by the ISU and published in an ISU Communication each season.

The SOV contains a code for each element, which provides a universal shorthand for the sport. Following a competition, each skater receives a report containing the detailed judges' scores, technical panel calls (i.e. the decision of the technical panel on the identity and level of each executed element) and deductions for his or her program. This report is commonly referred to as a protocol. Figure 2 contains a sample protocol. It has fewer elements than an actual program but should give you an idea of how the scoring works.

