



***Special Olympics***

## FIGURE SKATING COACHING GUIDE

Planning a Figure Skating Training & Competition Season



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### Goals

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important to the motivation of the athlete both at training and during competition. Goals establish and drive the action of both training and competition plans. Sport confidence in athletes helps to make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Please see the Principles of Coaching Section for additional information and exercises on goal setting.

### Benefits of Figure Skating

- ◆ Figure skating allows the athlete freedom to grow socially and provides experiences that stimulate communication.
- ◆ Figure skating promotes the ability to follow instruction.
- ◆ Figure skating offers enjoyment of independent movement.
- ◆ Figure skating improves agility and coordination.
- ◆ Figure skating increases total fitness.
- ◆ Figure skating provides an opportunity for families and friends to pursue a sport together.

### Goal Setting and Motivation

#### Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings similar to the competition environment will instill confidence. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches. In goal setting, goals must be:

1. structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term
2. viewed as stepping stones to success
3. accepted by the athlete
4. varied in difficulty — from easily attainable to challenging
5. measurable
6. used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.

Athletes with or without an intellectual disability may be more motivated by accomplishing short-term goals than long-term goals; however, do not be afraid to challenge athletes. Include athletes in setting their personal goals. For example, ask the athlete, "Can you skate a clean routine today? Let's see if you skated a clean routine at the last practice. What is your personal best? What do you think you can do?" Awareness of why the athlete is participating is also important when setting goals. There are participation factors that may influence motivation and goal setting:

- ◆ Age appropriateness
- ◆ Ability level
- ◆ Readiness level
- ◆ Athlete performance
- ◆ Family influence
- ◆ Peer influence
- ◆ Athlete preference



### Performance Goals versus Outcome Goals

Effective goals focus on performance, not outcome. Performance is what the athlete controls. Outcomes are frequently controlled by others. An athlete may have an outstanding performance and not win a contest because other athletes have performed even better. Conversely, an athlete may perform poorly and still win if all other athletes perform at a lower level. If an athlete's goal is to perform a certain skill or to skate a clean program, the athlete has greater control in achieving this goal than winning. However, the athlete has even greater control of achieving a goal if the goal is to skate using the correct form, through the entire routine. This performance goal ultimately gives the athlete more control over his/her performance.

### Motivation through Goal Setting

Goal setting has proved to be one of the most simple and effective motivational devices developed for sport within the past three decades. While the concept is not new, today the techniques for effective goal setting have been refined and clarified. Motivation is all about having needs and striving to have those needs met. How can you enhance an athlete's motivation?

1. Provide more time and attention to an athlete when he/she is having difficulty learning a skill.
2. Reward small gains of achievement in skill level.
3. Develop other measures of achievement outside of winning.
4. Show your athletes that they are important to you.
5. Show your athletes that you are proud of them and excited about what they are doing.
6. Fill your athletes with self-worth.

Goals give direction. They tell us what needs to be accomplished. They increase effort, persistence and the quality of performance. Establishing goals also requires that the athlete and coach determine techniques for how to achieve those goals.

### Measurable and Specific

Effective goals are very specific and measurable. Goals stated in the form of "I want to be the best that I can be!" or "I want to improve my performance!" are vague and difficult to measure. It is positive sounding but difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether they have been reached. Measurable goals must establish a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks for them to be realistic.

### Difficult, but Realistic

Effective goals are perceived as challenging, not threatening. A challenging goal is one perceived as difficult but attainable within a reasonable amount of time and with a reasonable amount of effort or ability. A threatening goal is one perceived as being beyond one's current capacity. Realistic implies that judgment is involved. Goals based upon a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks are likely to be realistic.

### Long- versus Short-Term Goals

Both long- and short-term goals provide direction, but short-term goals appear to have the greatest motivational effects. Short-term goals are more readily attainable and are stepping stones to more distant long-term goals. Unrealistic short-term goals are easier to recognize than unrealistic long-term goals. Unrealistic goals can then be modified before valuable practice time has been lost.

### Positive versus Negative Goal Setting

Positive goals direct what to do rather than what not to do. Negative goals direct our attention to the errors we wish to avoid or eliminate. Positive goals require coaches and athletes to decide how they will reach those specific goals. Once the goal is decided, the athlete and coach must determine specific strategies and techniques that allow the goal to be successfully attained.



### Set Priorities

Effective goals are limited in number and meaningful to the athlete. Setting a limited number of goals requires that athletes and coaches decide what is important and fundamental for continued development. Establishing a few carefully selected goals also allows athletes and coaches to keep accurate records without becoming overwhelmed with record keeping.

### Mutual Goal Setting

Goal setting becomes an effective motivational device when athletes are committed to achieving those goals. When goals are imposed or established without significant input from the athletes, motivation is unlikely to be enhanced.

### Set Specific Time Lines

Target dates provide urgency to an athlete's efforts. Specific target dates tend to eliminate wishful thinking and clarify what goals are realistic and which are not. Timelines are especially valuable in high-risk sports where fear often promotes procrastination in learning new skills.

### Formal versus Informal Goal Setting

Some coaches and athletes think that goals must be set in formal meetings outside of practice and require long periods of thoughtful evaluation before they are decided upon. Goals are literally progressions, which coaches have been using for years but now express in measurable performance terms rather than as vague, generalized outcomes.

### Goal Setting Domains

When asked to set goals, athletes typically focus on the learning of new skills or performances in competitions. A major role of the coach is to broaden the athlete's perception of those areas, and goal setting can be an effective tool. Goals can be set to enhance fitness, improve attendance, increase intensity, promote sportsmanship, develop team spirit, find more free time or establish consistency.

### Goal Setting

Setting goals is a joint effort between the athlete and coach. Following are the main features of goal setting:

#### Short-Term Objective

- Given demonstration and practice, the athlete will participate successfully in an off-ice training program.
- Given demonstration and practice, the athlete will warm up properly before figure skating.
- Given demonstration and practice, the athlete will successfully perform basic figure skating skills.
- Given demonstration and practice, the athlete will advance to freestyle, pairs and dance skills.
- Given standard or modified rules for competition, the athlete will adhere to those rules while participating in figure skating competition.
- While figure skating, the athlete will exhibit sportsmanship at all times.
- While figure skating, the athlete will demonstrate courtesy, safety and adherence to the rules of the rink at all times.

#### Long-Term Goal

The athlete will acquire figure skating skills, appropriate social behavior and functional knowledge of rules to participate successfully in figure skating competition.



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### Assessing Goals Checklist

1. Write a goal statement.
2. Does the goal sufficiently meet the athlete's needs?
3. Is the goal positively stated? If not, rewrite it.
4. Is the goal under the athlete's control, focused on his/her situation and no one else's?
5. Is the goal a goal and not a result?
6. Is the goal sufficiently important to the athlete that he/she will want to work toward achieving it? Will he/she have the time and energy to do it?
7. How will this goal make the athlete's life different?
8. What barriers might the athlete encounter in working toward this goal?
9. What more does the athlete need to know?
10. What does the athlete need to learn how to do?
11. What risks does the athlete need to take?



## Planning a Figure Skating Training & Competition Season

As with any sport, the Special Olympics Figure Skating coach must have a coaching philosophy. The coach's philosophy should be consistent with the Special Olympics philosophy, which is that quality training and opportunities for fair and equitable competition are guaranteed for the athlete. However, successful coaches include fun in the overall plan, along with development of the athlete and the athlete's acquisition of skills and knowledge of a particular sport, as objectives of their programs. In the long run, organization and planning are the keys to a successful season. The following list may assist the figure skating coach in planning a season.

### Preseason Planning

- Ensure that all prospective skaters have thorough physical examinations before the first practice. Also, be sure to obtain parental and medical releases.
- Improve your knowledge of figure skating and your sport skills by attending training schools.
- Locate a local rink for practice sessions.
- Recruit volunteer assistant coaches from home-schooled skaters, adult skaters, local schools or university athletic programs.
- Schedule at least one practice a week for at least eight weeks prior to the scheduled competition.
- Schedule exhibitions or competitions against other skaters prior to Regional or Multi-Program Games.
- Establish goals and write an instruction outline for the season.

### Season Planning

- Continue to use skill assessments to keep track of athletes' progress.
- Plan each practice according to what needs to be accomplished.
- Draw up and manage an eight-week training program, such as the one suggested.

### Postseason Planning

- Review preseason goals and determine how many of them were achieved.
- Ask for comments from athletes, parents and volunteers.



## Essential Components of Planning a Figure Skating Training Session

Each training session needs to contain the same essential elements. The amount of time spent on each element will depend on the goal of the training session, the time of season the session is in and the amount of time available for a particular session. The following elements need to be included in an athlete's daily training program. Please refer to the noted sections in each area for more in-depth information and guidance on these topics.

- Warm-ups
- Previously taught skills
- New skills
- Competition experience
- Feedback on performance

The final step in planning a training session is designing what the athlete is actually going to do. Remember, when creating a training session using these key components, the progression through the session allows for a gradual buildup of physical activity.

- Easy to difficult
- Slow to fast
- Known to unknown
- General to specific
- Start to finish



## Special Olympics Figure Skating Coaching Guide Planning a Figure Skating Training & Competition Season

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### Principles of Effective Training Sessions

<b>Keep all athletes active</b>	Athletes need to be active listeners
<b>Create clear, concise goals</b>	Learning improves when athletes know what is expected of them
<b>Give clear, concise instructions</b>	Demonstrate – increase accuracy of instruction
<b>Record progress</b>	You and your athletes chart progress together
<b>Give positive feedback</b>	Emphasize and reward things the athlete is doing well
<b>Provide variety</b>	Vary exercises – prevent boredom
<b>Encourage enjoyment</b>	Training and competition is fun – keep it this way for you and your athletes
<b>Create progressions</b>	Learning is increased when information progresses from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Known to unknown – discovering new things successfully</li><li>• Simple to complex – seeing that “I” can do it</li><li>• General to specific – this is why I am working so hard</li></ul>
<b>Plan maximum use of resources</b>	Use what you have and improvise for equipment that you do not have – think creatively
<b>Allow for individual differences</b>	Different athletes, different learning rates, different capacities



## Tips for Conducting Successful Training Sessions

- Assign assistant coaches their roles and responsibilities in accordance with your training plan.
- When possible, have all equipment and stations prepared before the athletes arrive.
- Introduce and acknowledge coaches, athletes and volunteers.
- Review intended program with everyone. Keep athletes informed of changes in schedule or activities.
- Alter the plan according to the weather.
- Change activities before the athletes become bored and lose interest.
- Keep drills and activities brief so athletes do not get bored. Keep everyone busy with an exercise even if it is rest.
- Devote the end of the practice to a group activity that can incorporate challenge and fun, always giving the athletes something to look forward to at the end of practice.
- If an activity is going well, it is often useful to stop the activity while interest is high.
- Summarize the session and announce arrangements for next session.
- Keep the **fun** in fundamentals.



### Tips for Conducting Safe Training Sessions

Though the risks can be few, coaches have a responsibility to ensure that athletes know, understand and appreciate the risks of figure skating. The safety and well-being of athletes are the coaches' primary concerns. Figure skating is not a dangerous sport, but accidents do occur when coaches forget to take safety precautions. It is the head coach's responsibility to minimize the occurrence of injuries by providing safe conditions.

- Warm up and stretch properly at the beginning and end of each practice to prevent muscle injuries.
- Establish clear rules for behavior at your first practice and enforce them.
  - Keep your hands to yourself.
  - Listen to the coach.
  - When you hear the whistle: Stop, Look and Listen.
  - Ask the coach before you leave the ice.
- Check your first aid kit; restock supplies as necessary.
- Train all athletes and coaches on emergency procedures.
- Review your first aid and emergency procedures. Have someone who is trained in first aid and CPR on or very near the ice during practice and competition.
- Train to improve the general fitness level of your skaters. Physically fit skaters are less likely to get injured. Make your practices active.



## Figure Skating Practice Competitions

The more we compete, the better we get. A figure skating practice competition can consist of skating skills or program run-throughs or exhibitions. Part of the strategic plan for Special Olympics figure skating is to drive more sport development at the local levels. Competition motivates athletes, coaches and the entire sport management team. Expand or add to your schedule as many competition opportunities as possible. We have provided a few suggestions below.

- Practice badge skills in a competition format.
- Practice program run-throughs.
- Hold exhibitions.
- Enter local competitions.



## Eight-Week Training Program (1 hour sessions)

### Week 1

- Instruction on Basics of Equipment and Fitting (10 min.)
- Dry Land Skills Instruction: Walking, Falling and Getting Up with Skates On (10 min.)
- On-Ice Skating Skills Instruction (40 min.)

### Week 2

- Skating Skills Instruction and Assessment (40 min.)
- Supervised Free Skating (20 min.)

### Week 3

- Skating Skills Instruction and Assessment (30 min.)
- Supervised Free Skating (30 min.)

### Week 4

- Skating Skills Instruction and Assessment (40 min.)
- Introduction to Competition Format (20 min)

### Week 5

- Skating Skills Instruction and Assessment (30 min.)
- Supervised Free Skating (30 min.)

### Week 6

- Skating Skills Instruction and Assessment (30 min.)
- Complete Skills Assessment Cards (30 min.)

### Week 7

- Skills Review (30 min.)
- Competition Preparation and Format (30 min.)

### Week 8

- Simulated Competition (40 min.)
- Supervised Free Skating (20 min.)



## Selecting Partners

The key to the successful development of a traditional Special Olympics Unified Sports® partner or pair or dance team is the proper selection of team members. We have provided some primary considerations below for you.

### Ability Grouping

Unified partners work best when all partners have similar sport skills. Partners with abilities that are far superior to their partner's will either control competition or accommodate others by not competing to their potential. In both situations, the goals of interaction and teamwork are diminished and a true competitive experience is not achieved.

### Age Grouping

All team members should be closely matched in age.

- Within 3-5 years of age for athletes 21 years of age and under
- Within 10-15 years for athletes 22 years of age and over

## Creating Meaningful Involvement in Unified Sports

Unified Sports embraces the philosophy and principles of Special Olympics. When selecting Unified pairs, you want to achieve meaningful involvement at the beginning, during and end of your sport season. Unified pairs are organized to provide meaningful involvement for all athletes and partners. Every partner should play a role and have the opportunity to contribute to the team. Meaningful involvement also refers to the quality of interaction and competition within a Unified pair. Achieving meaningful involvement by each partner on the team ensures a positive and rewarding experience for everyone.

### Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- Partners compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Partners compete according to the rules of competition.
- Partners have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.
- Partners understand how to blend their skills with those of other athletes, resulting in improved performance by athletes with lesser ability.

### Meaningful Involvement Is Not Achieved When Unified Partners:

- Have superior sport skills in comparison to their partner.
- Act as on-ice coaches, rather than partners.
- Do not train or practice regularly, and only show up on the day of competition.



## Figure Skating Attire

Appropriate figure skating attire is required for all competitors. As a coach, discuss the types of sport clothes that are acceptable and not acceptable for training and competition. Discuss the importance of wearing properly fitted clothing, along with the advantages and disadvantages of certain types of clothing worn during training and competitions. For example, long pant jeans or blue jean shorts are not proper figure skating attire for any event. Explain that athletes cannot perform well while wearing jeans that restrict their movement. Show the athletes what is appropriate for practice attire and what is appropriate for competition attire.

Clothing must be suited to the activities involved. In general, this means comfortable, non-constrictive clothing, and well fitted ice skates. Properly fitting and clean clothes tend to give athletes a boost. Although the saying, “You play as well as you look,” has never been proven, many athletes and coaches continue to believe in it. The appearance of the skater is considered when awarding points in competition.

### Socks

It is recommended that the skater wear the thinnest hose possible. Thin socks provide the best foot grip, and thus better balance, in the tight fitting skate boot. Thick socks are too bulky and promote the sweating process.

### Figure Skating Outfit

The outfit for female figure skaters should include tights that are comfortable and a skating dress that is well fitted. Also, the athlete should select an outfit that pleases her. That will give the athlete confidence in her appearance and perhaps tend to make her a better skater.

The outfit for male figure skaters should include a shirt and/or sweater and pants. Long pants are recommended for male skaters. Pants should cover the top of the boot, but not be so long that they touch the blade. Pants should be loose to allow for unrestricted leg and hip movements, but not so baggy that they appear ill fitted. The shirt should be loose to provide ease of arm movement. Sweaters should not be so bulky that they look sloppy and hinder the skater’s precise movements.

### Shirts and Sweaters

The skater should select a long-sleeve shirt for comfort and warmth. The shirt should be loose to provide ease of arm movement. Sweaters should not be so bulky that they look sloppy and hinder the skater’s precise movements. Shirts should be tucked into pants at all times.

### Hair

For safety reasons, each competitor should have his/her hair away from the face. It is highly recommended that the athlete does not use bobby pins in case the bobby pins fall on the ice.

### Hats

For recreational skating, a hat, earmuffs or headband is recommended to provide insulation and comfort. These should not be worn during competition.

### Warm-up Suits

Warm-up suits or sweat suits are useful for warming up before and keeping warm after practice or competition. They should not be worn during practice or competition because of their weight and bulk.

### Gloves

A properly fitted pair of gloves or mittens is recommended for recreational skating. They are also useful for warming up, but should not be worn during figure skating competition.

### Helmets

It is recommended that beginning skaters and skaters who lack sufficient muscular control wear a protective helmet.



## Figure Skating Equipment

The sport of figure skating requires the type of sporting equipment below. It is important for athletes to be able to recognize and understand how equipment for the specific events works and impacts their performance. Have your athletes name each piece of equipment as you show it and give the use for each. To reinforce this ability within them, have them select the equipment used for their events.

Coaches should use the proper equipment and teach the athletes how to use the equipment correctly at all times. Be alert to safety hazards and problem areas, such as damaged ice or damaged mats, and do whatever is necessary to avoid them. In addition, coaches should perform periodic safety checks and preventive maintenance on all pieces of equipment. Often local sporting goods stores are willing to provide new or used skating equipment at cost or no charge to Special Olympics programs.

### Skates

The coach or athlete must select a properly fitted boot before attempting to ice skate. The boot should have firm arch support and should allow some movement in the toes. The blade should be positioned under the boot so that the blade runs between the big toe and second toe in front of the skate and intersects the heel in the back. The sharpness of the blade should be checked. When putting on the skates, the lacing should resemble the cross pattern used on shoes. The boot should be snug enough to allow for only one pair of socks, but not so tight as to cut off circulation. The greatest support should occur at the ankle. The boot should be loose enough at the top to barely allow a finger to get inside the boot. Excess lace should be tucked inside the top of the boot. Rollerblades can also be an excellent tool for off-ice training. They can be used to develop power, speed and strong knee action.

### Ice Skating Area Preparation

The skating area, whether inside or outside, should be defined and well marked. This permits more time to spend on useful activities and less on disciplinary measures. The surrounding area should provide no physical hazards that might result in injury to an athlete or damage to a rink or its equipment. A smooth skating surface is required. The ice should be cleaned of all debris (i.e., limbs, trash, leaves, etc.) and holes and ruts should be repaired. An indoor rink with the appropriate equipment for making new ice would be best. An uncluttered environment provides fewer distractions to the athlete while learning. Therefore, do not set up equipment until you are ready to use it.

### Securing Ice Time

Ice skating can be an expensive sport if one considers the cost of ice time, skate rental and incidentals. It is recommended that the ice skating program director contact an indoor rink manager who will charge a nominal fee per skater, instead of the usual fee per hour. The fee for each skater should include ice time and skate rental. Usually the manager needs to fill hours during the week and should therefore be willing to offer some reasonable accommodations, or possibly donate ice time and skate rental fees.

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