The Role of the Test Chairperson

The test chairperson of the local Figure Skating Club plays a very important role in the life of a skater. They are all too often taken for granted, but without their services skaters would be unable to take the tests necessary to enter the regional qualifying competitions.

Clubs usually will give priority to testing its home club members. Applications to test from skaters representing other clubs and USFS independent members depend on space available. Increasingly, there may be skaters who practice and take lessons at a rink, but who represent another club. Many clubs charge an extra fee for arranging tests for skaters who are not home club members.

Clubs in close proximity who cooperate to organize a series of test sessions that rotate between their respective clubs forgo extra charges from members of the consortium.

Related testing fees
The rules for arranging a test for skaters outside of the area usually involve an additional processing fee.

Sometimes there is a need to acquire judges who have specific credentials such as testing International dances. Some clubs will schedule one session a year for such testing with not additional costs. However, the additional expenses for special requests are usually the responsibility of the test candidate.

A fee for hospitality is usually charged so that a healthy menu of food suitable for the time and length of the event – breakfast, lunch, or dinner: hot soups, sandwiches, and other entries, plus fruit, nuts and other snacks, and especially hot and cold beverages are provide for judges and club volunteers.

Plan test dates for the entire year
The number of test sessions a club hosts depends on the availability of judges and ice time. While many clubs in urban areas attempt to schedule on a monthly basis, clubs in smaller, more remote cities may schedule tests less frequently to maximize the number of tests per session.

Increasingly clubs may combine a test session with hosting a competition as a means of reducing the expenses of acquiring judges, especially those with gold ratings in Singles and Dance.

Not all rinks operate on a year round basis. Some seasonal rinks close in the spring and do not reopen until after the summer. In some areas the rink may open for a few weeks in the summer for hockey clinics and/or Figure Skating Camps and then close until early fall.

Test chairs are aware that skaters must pass their tests prior to September 1 each year so they may submit their application to enter the fall regional qualifying events. Skaters who do not pass a test must wait 28 days before they can retake the tests so test sessions are scheduled accordingly.

Judges hold specific ratings that allow them to judge different levels of MITF, Free Skating, Pairs, and Dance tests. Judges who hold dual gold ratings in Singles and Dance allow the club to accept test requests for all levels and kinds of tests. Frequently test chairs must restrict the type and level of test applications they accept because they are unable to obtain three judges with the necessary certification.

Scheduling dance tests also requires coordination with coaches to arrange to “import” dance partners if not locally available.

Limited Availability of Judges during the week -
Test chairs are increasingly finding it difficult to secure gold MITF, Free Skating, Pairs, and Dance judges who are available during the weekday for test sessions especially when the test session starts at a time that conflicts with peak highway traffic patterns.

Test Sessions are Expensive to Conduct -
The club’s reimburse judges for their mileage. A round trip of two hundred or more miles calculated at the IRS rate becomes a major expense second only to ice rental. Test chairs in some areas consider themselves fortunate to secure three judges; however, it really can become a major problems if a judge becomes ill at the last minute or a freeway accident delays a judge on their way to the test session.

Increasingly our sport is depending on judges who are retired, but it is not realistic to expect them to drive two or more hours to arrive a half hour early for a session that starts at 8:00 a.m. or earlier. Clubs are resorting to putting judges up overnight to secure judges for early start times.

Clubs may offer perks such as a hot breakfast as an incentive to get judges for their early morning test sessions. Judges who travel long distances may be enticed to come if they are provided lodging.

The role of the hospitality chair is extremely important at long sessions that may start early in the morning and extend into the evening.
Scheduling a long warm-up or a practice session at rinks that are especially cold can provide judges with a break to get warm, eat, and use the restroom.

In some geographic areas with large concentrations of skating facilities there may also be a pool of retired and judges with flexible work schedules who are available during the day and reside within a 30 - 45 minute driving radius, test chairs are able to reduce the expense of testing skaters by double paneling tests.

**Test Sessions are Tightly Budgeted for Time**

It takes planning and coordination to schedule a test session that runs smoothly and is on time. Cancellations due to illness or injuries do occur. Sometimes a skater from a waiting list can fill the spot otherwise the result is the club suffers a financial lost if the cancellation is considered valid and money for the test is refunded.

Reducing testing expenses can be accomplished through the following procedures:

- Using single judge panels for eligible tests.

- Running multiple single judge panels tests concurrently.

- Running two tests at the same time. (double panels) This, in theory, can be used for any test with the caveat that elements cross the center line of the rink must be evaluated for skaters interfering with each other.

- Note: Concurrently running two different levels of tests can posed conflict problems of two skaters wanting to start in the same spot. But, with the cooperation and coordination by coaches the affected test candidates will practice in a way to avoid such conflicts.

- It is very important that coaches have their skater in position and ready to begin when the judge in charge signals they are ready to judge the next element. This is not the time and place for a coach to give a lesson.

- Coaches can help by only scheduling tests when the skater's skills is substantially over the minimum passing level and takes into consideration testing anxieties affecting performance. The preparation of skaters should exceed the minimum level to pass to avoid stress related poor performance when actually testing.

- Judges can help by reducing the time elapsing between elements by shortening their comments while giving the skater and coach the necessary feedback to support the marks.

Most judges developed their own shorthand, abbreviations, or symbols for free skating tests prior to the IJS codes. Competitive judges tend to use the IJS codes for jumps, spins, and foot sequences.

MITF judges use the test sheet’s standard focus points when evaluating test elements. Some judges use all of the Rulebook’s focus points (TR 22.08) by using abbreviations in place of writing extensive comments.

Dance judges tend to use focus points and dance abbreviations when making comments on dance test sheets. This helps to minimizes the elapsed time between elements.

**Communicate Realistic Pre-test Expectations**

Unfortunately too many parents have unrealistic expectations of what their son or daughter can achieve given the family’s resources and their belief that they will be on the Olympic team.

Parents place far too much responsibility on the coach and pressure on the coach who may be tempted to shift the responsibility to the judge’s for retrying at test.

**Mistakes can happen to any skater, but well prepared, confident skaters help to reduce the need for a reskate of a specific element, especially when the schedule is timed to the minute and no time has been factored into the schedule.**

Judges would prefer to judges skaters who are skating their best performance, not struggling to remain standing. Skaters exhibit positive confidence and assurance or negative body language.

**Judges and Coaches Communication**

While the USFS Rulebook TR 23.01 defines MITF errors and TR 22.08 lists the focus points which judges should use when evaluating tests. All focus points have equal importance despite the listing of primary and secondary focus point on test sheets.

Judging still remains a subjective sport despite efforts under the IJS to codify the competitive aspects of judging.

Sometimes there are coaches and judges who seem to be on the same page and consistently put up tests that are extremely well prepared. I refer to these coaches as elite coaches who can pick and choose who they wish to coach.

Most coaches will be very lucky to have a few of their skaters qualify to compete at a national level in their discipline. The bulk of the skaters of most coaches will be attempting to balance school with a part time job, and train to pass various USFS tests.
Many skaters lack the personal drive, self-discipline, and opportunity to train at an elite level necessary to maximize their skating potential. This is especially a problem if the rink does not have a resident elite skating coach who requires their skaters to adhere to a high intensity on and off-ice training program.

**Elite skaters tend to inspire other skaters and coaches to expect (demand) more of skaters in their training and performance at daily practice sessions and in preparation for testing and peaking for competitions.**

Having one or more top level skaters training at a rink can set the mood of other skaters and coaches to set the goals of all skaters at several levels higher than might otherwise be the case.

The availability of having one or more gold judges available to critique skaters prior to testing or competing, can also be a very positive factor in skaters performing at their best.

Far too many skaters do not understand that judges would rather pass than retry tests. However, it is up to the skater to do their part. A well-prepared and confident skater radiates positive body language when they step onto the test ice. All that remains is for judges to enjoy a skater, who has been well trained, perform their best so judges can make positive comments necessary to “Pass” the test!