

# Strategies for Passing Compulsory Dances

The Professional Skating Association (PSA) and the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA) have worked together to produce a small booklet on Compulsory Dances that every dance coach, skater, and judge should possess.

The idea behind the manual was to condense the information that everyone agreed is important in establishing a reasonable level of expectations for both teaching the dances by coaches and evaluation standards used by judges.

Dancers have two tracks in which to take tests:

- **Standard Track** with a partner and solo for Silver through Gold Dances. No solos for International Dances. Dancers must pass the Standard Dance tests to become qualified to enter qualifying dance events.
- **Solo Track** without a partner. There are no solo dance events in Adult Competitions.

Dancers may elect to take dance tests and be judged as Adults and master levels that do not require solos and are scored at lower marks than the standard tests.

The focus points are described as follows:

- **Continuous Power** should be representative of what an average dancer would be expected to achieve and maintain in a free skating test or MITF test at the equivalent dance test level.
- **Edge Quality** assumes that the skater is skating round full or half circles or performing a series of steps and turns that constitute part of a large circle.
- **Turn Quality** assumes that the skater is skating on secure edges while performing a series of two foot turns

(Mohawks, Choctaws) and one foot turns (3-turns, rockers, counters, brackets, Twizzles) that constitute part of a lobe.

- **Extension** does not mean the free leg will be held in a spiral position. The forward and backward extension should be equally high and not strained.
- **Timing** – Timing is the constant and correct tempo in the performance of edges, steps, and turns to music with a steady/ even beat, rhythm or cadence that also reflects the character of the dance.
- **Expression** relates to the dancers ability to convey the character of the dance even when skating without the benefit of music. When a skater combines their technical performance with the music, the result (sum) should be greater than the individual components: Technique, Timing, and Interpretation.
- **Interpretation** goes to the heart of dancing – the ability change their body movement from a Tango to a Waltz, March, Foxtrot, Latin Rhythm, etc.
- **Pattern** – does the first half end at the midline or extend past it causing the skater to run out of room at the end of the rink.
  - The **Quality and Placement** of the lobes on the proper axis is considered in the evaluation of the dance's pattern.
  - **Transitions** from lobe to lobe should be equally balanced
- **Core Body Posture** should be erect with the head up. Hands should be held about waist level and shoulders should not be elevated
- **Body positions and Presentation Skills** should reflect confidence and self-assurance

- **Unison** is an important consideration in dancing. They must initiate the start of each edge or turn together. This quality is essential in the performance of every dance.
- **Leading and Following** - The male test candidate should demonstrate they are able to lead their partner and the female test candidate should demonstrate they are able to follow their partner's lead.

## Strategies For Success

Coaches, skaters, and judges may have different opinions on the relative value and importance of the various focus points in passing a dance test.

Judges evaluate the range of positive and negative performance of the focus points for each quadrant of each pattern when determining their marks. Some judges use the IJS GOE rating system - +3 for excellent; +2 for very good; +1 for good; -1 or -2 for poor to very poor, and a -3 for a total disaster as part of their approach to marking and supporting comments

Every judge formulates their technical standard for evaluating dance elements. Evaluation of each of the various focus points can receive a -3 to +3 notation. It is then a simple matter to add up the notations and divide by 2 if there are two sides or the number (2 or 3) patterns (complete circuit rink).

This approach provides very specific feedback to the skater and coach as to the strengths and weaknesses the judge observed.

## Interpreting the Comments

A deduction taken for a poor pattern generally indicates the skater ran out of room and could not properly fit the element into the rink without crashing into the end barriers.

Dancers are trained to be very aware of placement of their patterns and use the hockey lines and marks, signs, colors on the walls of the building as visual check or reference points.

This information suggests that the error actually occurred earlier in the pattern with the lobes not being placed relative to the hockey lines on the rink or permanent reference items in the stands.

A skater may have very poor technique caused by poor posture, toe pushing, or other poor technique. These errors result in a negative notation from the judge; however, the power and/or edges of the test candidate might receive a positive notation.

If a skater bends over at the waist, their extension component would receive a negative unison mark, but their edges might be steady, thus earning a positive comment.

There are repetitions of two or three patterns of dances, depending on the test level. Silver and above dances also require the skater taking a Standard test to perform two patterns of the dance solo.

Starting at the silver dances, judges also evaluate the skater's solo dancing skills (technical and timing/expression) and if they do not meet minimum standard of the dance level, then judges reflect their opinion of the solo skills in the overall marks of a standard dance test.

The elements on each test have various degrees of difficulty, yet they are not factored. The easier elements should, if well performed and provide the skater with a cushion to compensate if a part of the dance gives the skater a problem on the day of the test.

In dancing, like figures, each level of dances build on skills that should have mastered on previous tests. Core Body,

edge, and turn control must be acquired as a solo skater and are fundamental in becoming a good dance partner.

Power in dancing involves achieving the desired level of flow from the introduction and then maintaining that flow by pushing on every edge throughout a pattern while using the full width and length of the rink.

Many skaters have not achieved the desired level of stamina to perform the required patterns with a partner and then perform two patterns as a soloist, if required. A loss in performance from the first to last pattern partly has to do with their training strategy not involving starting and completing the full number of patterns when practicing.

Skaters frequently have strong and weak directions or portions of a dance. They should work at correcting and performing the problem areas as a solo skater before concentrating skating with a partner.

There is a big difference between practicing on ice that is cutup and smooth ice after resurfacing. This will affect how far and fast a skater goes with the same push as when pushing on rough ice.

Clear ice makes it much easier for judges to observe shifts in pattern when skater start the second pattern.

Dancers must practice to different music since they will not be able to skate to their own compulsory music selection at competitions and test sessions. The club or competition music chairperson will make those decisions.