

Strategies for Passing Free Skating Tests

The Professional Skating Association (PSA) and the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA) have not as yet worked together to produce a small booklet on free skating that every free skating coach, skater, and judge should possess.

A free skating manual is needed to condense the information that everyone agrees is important in establishing a reasonable level of expectations for both teaching free skating by coaches and evaluation standards used by judges.

The focus points are described as primary and secondary focus points. There are four focus points listed:

- **Power** should be representative of what an average free skater would be expected to achieve and maintain in a free skating test at the equivalent MITF test level.
- **Edge Quality** assumes that the skater is skating round half or partial circles when performing a series of steps and turns that constitutes transitions in their free skating program.
- **Extension** refers to free leg being held in a natural, not a spiral position. The forward and backward extension should be equally high and not strained.
- **Flexibility** refers to free leg being held in a spiral position with a nice, unstrained arch in the back and head. The forward and backward extension should be equally high and both elevated and lowered with complete control.
- **Execution of Skating Skills** skater's ability to performing edges, steps, and turns while reflecting the character of the music.

- **Well Balanced** – does the skater use all portions of the ice arena when performing the various jumps and spins?
 - The **Quality and Placement** of the highlights should be choreographed to reflect the musical score with front-loading of the jumps.
 - **Transitions** from element to element should be choreographed to reflect the musical score.
- **Artistic Expression** relates to the skaters ability to convey the character of the music 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, and Interpretation.
- **Interpretation** goes to the heart of skating – the ability use body movement to convey the composer's musical theme using the medium of skating.
- **Choreography** is the carefully constructed program that considers both the technical requirements and the selected music to produce a complete package artfully presented and communicated to the audience.
- **Core Body Posture** should be erect with the head up. Hands should be held about waist level and shoulders should not be elevated
- **Presentation Skills** should reflect confidence and self-assurance

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 free skating test.

Judges should reflect the range of positive and negative performance of the

focus points for each quadrant of each pattern using a scale of -3 to +3.

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

Most test judges also are trained in using the IJS marking system. The awarding of GOE marks is gradually becoming a way of denoting the quality of required elements on free skating tests.

Skaters must be aware of the quality and speed into and exiting a jump. The takeOff and landing must be clean and the jump fully rotated. Free leg position in the air is evaluated and a wrapped leg position receives lower marks. High and or delayed rotational jumps receive higher marks.

Spins are also evaluated for the entrances and exits. Skaters should understand that judges start to count the rotation of a specific position only after the position is achieved. Skaters who can center a spin and increase the speed of the spin receive positive marks.

Flying spins need to first achieve a flying position if they expect judges to accept the spin as being acceptable as a required element.

Interpreting the Comments

A deduction taken for an unbalanced program when jumps are front-loaded.

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 might justify 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.

Every judge formulates their technical standard for evaluating free skating elements. Evaluation of each of the various focus points would receive a plus, minus or acceptable ranking ranging from -3 to +3. "0" would be acceptable. It is a simple matter to add up the notations and divide by 2. The exception is the brackets in the field that has 4 items in that element.

The skater does not receive extra credit for repeating elements or substitution more technically demanding elements for simpler required elements.

It is important for judges to determine the quality of the skater's transitions and then incorporate the evaluation into the presentation mark.

Judges sometimes fail to mark high enough when the element is performed at a good, very good or excellent level (a plus 3) or at a poor, very poor, a total disaster level (minus 3).

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 skater has an "off day" when testing.

In free skating, like figures, each level of free skating test is built on skills that should have mastered on previous tests. Core Body, edge, and turn control must be acquired and are fundamental in becoming a good free skater.

Power in free skating involves achieving the desired level of flow from the minimum number edges and turns and then maintaining that flow by pushing on every edge throughout the program while using the full width and length of the rink. In judging terminology, the skater must utilize both their personal and public space as part of a well-balanced program.

Many skaters have not achieved the desired level of stamina to perform their program and finish with the same energy as they started the program. A loss in performance from the beginning to end has to do with the training strategy and not daily doing a full run through of the program with all of the content. Starting and stopping a program when practicing does not produce the needed stamina.

Skaters frequently have strong and weak directions or part of their program. They should work on correcting and performing the problem areas before including the element in their test or competition program.

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.

Skaters should always practice several times in their new skating outfit. Waiting until the test session to discover if you can move your arms freely or the crotch is too long or short is an unpleasant surprise that sets a negative mood in even the most well prepared skater.

Coaches should advise skaters sharpen their blades at least a week or two before the test and be sure to completely dry the blades before using dry guards to protect the blades.

Don't leave your skate bag out in the trunk of the car when it is blazing hot or zero degrees outside or even in the garage.

Don't leave your music out in the trunk of the car when it is blazing hot or zero degrees outside or even in the garage. Always have a backup copy that is used only for competitions and is a different copy from music used when practicing.