

# FOCUS FOR PARENTS

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Edna Chang-Grant  
Chair,  
Parents Committee

With input and ideas from our Parents Committee meeting at the 2004 Governing Council in San Diego, we have the opportunity to accomplish more for skating parents. It should prove to be an exciting year because of solid goals set at our meeting to deliver

the following projects:

- Sequel to the Parents Survival Guide
- Parents Committee web site
- Meetings at regional qualifying competitions for the skating community
- Code of conduct policy

A code of conduct policy is something parents and clubs have asked us to develop to guide and help deal with problem parents and skaters. Several clubs have submitted their code of conduct policies, and we would appreciate any others if such a guideline exists for your club. Please send them to Susan Ward via e-mail at [susan.ward@carlinandwardpc.com](mailto:susan.ward@carlinandwardpc.com).

This past spring the Competitions Committee Task Force developed the new Percentage and Proportional Plans for advancing skaters to sectionals and the U.S. Junior Championships. It is now the Parents Committee's responsibility to present these plans at regional competitions across the country this year. Please look for locations and dates these meetings will be held at each regional competition. Information should be available at the registration desk, and flyers should be posted at the rinks. Your feedback on these new plans is important, so please attend these meetings in October before one plan is selected at our next Governing Council.

Doris Bodmer addresses a significant aspect of skating — the cost. Often parents ask "Is skating worth it?" Having two daughters who have skated from pre-preliminary to senior level, I would say Bodmer's assessment is accurate.

## WHAT DOES IT COST TO SKATE COMPETITIVELY?

BY DORIS BODMER

Is skating worth it? Absolutely, providing you can afford it. What does skating give our kids? It gives them confidence, develops dedication, commitment, discipline and passion. It makes them stand apart from others. Employers and colleges look for these qualities in candidates, and many recognize that skaters are top employees and outstanding college or graduate school students.

I have chosen a girl as an example, but when there is a difference between boys and girls I mention it. The figures given are approximate and can vary by area. Also, the cost discussed is for skaters with ambitions to be serious competitors. You can have a lot of fun skating by taking tests, ice dancing socially, joining a synchronized skating team and being involved in ice shows for far less money.

### getting started

Your daughter loves to skate and you love her enthusiasm, so lessons start. U.S. Figure Skating offers classes in the Basic Skills Program presented by Marshalls that are about \$92 for 10 weeks. So Friday afternoon becomes skating day.

The child begs for more practice so another day is added. A competition is announced and your child wants to try. You give her one or two private lessons and she wins the competition! The private lessons are kept up and another day of skating is added. You watch a competition on TV and your daughter says, "I want to be like Michelle Kwan." She watches the good skaters at the rink, and before you know it ambition has struck. Tests are taken and your child becomes a pre-pre-skater.

Pre- to pre-juvenile can cost about \$9,000–\$10,000 a year, which can be manageable in many family budgets. But soon the pre-juvenile becomes a juvenile skater and then things get serious. Instead of one lesson it is now five lessons per week, at roughly \$20 to \$35 for 20 minutes. Ice time climbs to at least seven 45-minute slots and costs about \$8 per slot. Off-ice training is highly recommended for injury prevention and body strengthening.

If a competition is out of town, add the cost of a motel and gas. Coaches also charge for being at competitions. A coach going to an away competition is an added cost of about \$1,000 per person. Some parents may consider taking their child through a competition on their own. I recommend against it. It can be difficult and cause many problems.

Ballet is also recommended about once a week at a cost of around \$10 per class. Boots and blades become more expensive. Other costs include blade sharpening, outfits and charges for skating music among other things such as choreography lessons.

So how much is all of that going to cost? A thrifty person may be able to manage a sum of \$18,000 per year and up. It just never seems to end,

and it won't until your child is done skating. Of course you can economize and sometimes you simply must. If your skater is talented she will come to the limelight sooner or later. But when can you tell if there is real talent? Talent involves not only skating ability but the ability to compete, the drive of the child to want to succeed, and, as Sasha Cohen said in an interview, "To do what it takes."

Many parents wonder if they should wait to become serious, especially when the child is so young. But if you wait to decide whether or not to go for it, you could waste valuable time — time that cannot be made up in later years.

### the intermediate through senior years

So you thought things would stabilize? Well, maybe in a way they do. Your whole conception of money changes. If you compare any expense with that of skating it seems little.

Intermediate skaters demand somewhat more than juveniles in competitions and lessons, but not that much. The away competitions become a must. The off-ice training becomes a must. You could cancel ballet since you do pay a choreographer, but compared to everything else, ballet is a small drop in a big bucket of skating expenses.

The expenses for intermediate? I would say around \$20,000 and up.

Novice is more expensive, mainly due to increased lessons and travel. The good thing about novice is that you get a feel if real and sustained talent is actually there; if the drive in the skater has not diminished; if activities at school don't take place over going to practice; if the body does not change too much.

Body changes are inevitable, and how they affect your child's skating depends on the degree of change. The body shape that we tend to see in the successful skaters is slender at the waist and hips with strong legs. Sometimes a body simply does not develop for skating.

Now the "weeding out" time begins. If your child is struggling with body changes, you may have to do some serious thinking. Get your child to finish as many tests as possible. It will be invaluable for teaching and gives the skater a feeling of achievement.

With boys there is less worry about body development. Boys stay competitive longer with their slender hips, which allow triple and quadruple jumps to come easy.

Once these body changes have been assessed, you and your skater may look at other skating options. Maybe your skater's body type is better for ice dancing or synchronized team skating. It is important to find the best fit for your skater.

But when all is said and done, novice is a bit more expensive at about \$35,000–\$40,000 a year for a

serious competitor. A good junior or senior skater is not that much more expensive than a novice. These skaters can also make some money with shows and teaching skating. The few — and mind you, I mean the very few — make a nice amount of money. Look at Evgeny Plushenko who bought his parents an apartment!

### is it all worth it?

Yes, a hundred times yes. Your children not only learn skating but also how to organize their time between practice hours and homework. They learn to make choices like going out with friends or resting their body. They learn discipline and that life is not always fair.

Disappointments do occur but they will learn how to deal with them. There also remains much to do after the competitive time is over, including teaching, ice shows, judging and more. Yes, skating is an expensive, time-consuming sport, but one which brings pleasure for life. ■

*Doris Bodmer, a former Swiss ladies champion, has been a coach for 35 years and is master-rated in both the United States and England. She has been judging for five years and wrote the book, "How to Raise a Competitive Figure Skater."*

