

The Comfort Zone

By Shannon Ward

What is a Comfort Zone?

A Comfort Zone refers to that private, personal space inside all of us where we feel the most comfortable and safe. When we move outside of this space we feel uneasy, scared and sometimes even embarrassed. Here are some examples:

“This music and choreography makes me feel and look corny.
My friends will laugh at me.” (**Embarrassment**)

“I don’t want to skate that fast into my jumps.
I’m scared I will fall.” (**Fear**)

“If I start skating faster through my program, my coach will expect me to skate that fast all the time.” (**Commitment**)

Skaters who refuse to break free of their comfort zone will probably never succeed in skating. They lack the courage and commitment to push beyond internal barriers. These barriers threaten a skater’s ability to land those jumps consistently or to bare their souls to an audience.

What is a Base Mark?

A base mark is comprised of the following elements: **quality** of stroking, **degree** of power, **difficulty** of footwork, edge **quality**, spin **quality**, and jump **quality** (not quantity). These are the qualities that judges are looking for when assessing base marks. High Base Mark skaters are fast, confident, and charismatic. Low Base Mark skaters are slow, boring, and uninspiring.

During a performance, a skater is in the air for approximately five seconds. The rest of the program consists of pure skating, i.e. stroking, edgework, footwork, spins, and so on. Clean jumps are certainly weighed heavily in a skater’s final placement, however, judges like to watch skaters who know how to skate! Often, they will place a high Base Mark skater with fewer jumps over a low Base Mark skater with a zillion jumps. Remember, it is the quality of your program that matters, not the number of tricks you can do.

How can I improve on my Base Mark?

First of all, spend more time practicing Moves in the Field everyday. Moves were invented to help skaters perform solid connecting steps between elements (jumps and spins) in order to link together a total performance. They help develop strong edges, flow, and power. Secondly, try improving on the quality of your jumps and spins. Judges like to see fast, centered spins with pleasing body positions. They also like to see higher, faster jumps with landings that flow. Work hard with your coach to improve in these areas. And finally, you must **BREAK OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE** in order to achieve that total performance the judges are looking for.

How do I break out of my Comfort Zone?

1. Take advantage of your available resources, i.e. coaches, choreographers, ballet, strength training, sports psychologists, etc.
2. Practice something different everyday that challenges you to push beyond those barriers. For example, skate into a jump at a speed that is a little uncomfortable for you. If successful, then skate into the same jump again at an even faster speed.
3. Get involved in choosing music for your programs.
4. Ask yourself this question: “Do I really want this? Is it really worth it? How far am I willing to put myself out there in order to get the results I want?”