

Practice Productively

By Shannon Ward

After 15 years of teaching figure skating, it still disturbs me when I see my students out on a practice session skating around like zombies in Zombie Land. The light is on in the house, but nobody is home. Figure skating is 80% mental and 20% physical. In order to progress in skating, you have to use your brain.

In a 1999 issue of “The Professional Skater Magazine”, Christy Ness (coach of 1992 Olympic Champion Kristy Yamaguchi) wrote an article entitled “Consistency in Skating.” In it, Christy explains that “no coach or parent can truly make a child practice. The skater can go through the motions, but unless they are really concentrating, not much will get done.” I see so many skaters out there practicing bad habits and making careless mistakes simply because they lack the will and desire to practice in a thoughtful and productive manner. Personal success in the sport of figure skating depends on how well you conduct yourself during practice sessions.

Setting daily goals and working towards them will give you the motivation you need to practice responsibly and consistently. I hand out daily goal sheets to my students three to four times a year. They use these as guidelines for practice sessions. On the sheet is a list of elements that the student is currently working on and how many to do of each element. There is also a space to mark the number of successful jump landings. After the student has completed practicing that element, they put a check mark next to it and move on to the next element. The goal here is to have completed every item on their worksheet by the end of practice. Following these sheets has truly helped my students (the ones who follow them) improve on the quality of their workouts. At the end of the month, they can look back at the progress they have made. There is nothing more motivating to a skater than the realization that he or she is improving and reaching personal goals.

Practicing in a timely manner is so important. So many of you waste precious ice time by standing around drinking from your water bottles and discussing current events with fellow skaters. A skater’s mind should be focused on skating, not gossip. Parents are paying for their children to learn the art of figure skating. This is a very expensive sport, so mindless practice

is unacceptable. You have the responsibility to use your time wisely and with the intention of accomplishing something by the end of the session. So do it!

You have the ability to turn a bad practice into a good one! Sometimes we have bad days, when no matter how hard we try we just can't do anything right. Just remember that tomorrow is another day. Get through this day as best you can and with a mature attitude. Try to avoid the "quitter mentality." Be a fighter! If the jumps aren't working, then maybe spend a little more time on spins or choreography. Avoid finishing a practice in an angry mood. You have to leave the rink with some feeling of accomplishment. Before you get off a practice, perform an element that you really enjoy. Afterwards, take a deep breath and look forward to tomorrow's practice.