

How to Begin and Maintain a Ballet for Figure Skaters Program for Your Club

From the inception of my website “Balletforfigureskaters.com” in 1999 as well as the e-group by the same name which ran for several years, coaches and ballet instructors from all over the world have asked numerous questions on how to start and maintain a ballet program at their rinks. This is a compilation of suggestions and ideas which I have used over the years in helping others to form a viable ballet program for figure skaters. Of course every skating club is run differently and some of the issues and applications discussed will be more applicable than others depending on the dynamics of your particular club.

After reading through this section you may be inspired to write up your own set of guidelines which you feel might best suit the club you work for and present it to the board or to the coaches you most frequently work with. *Ongoing clear communication, mutual respect and visionary cooperation are the most important features to maintaining a workable program.* Through my many years of teaching at rinks and corresponding with both coaches and ballet instructors of figure skaters around the world, I can say with some accuracy that ballet lessons most frequently fail at rinks because of lack of on-going collaboration, respect and communication between the ballet instructor and the coach.

I – Things to think about and discuss:

- **Unity of teaching method is imperative to training the figure skater...** the more teachers/styles/philosophies of training methods abound the more confused the skater will become as to how to utilize the information given especially for the very young. The result will be that a lot of money will be spent with very little artistic or technical finesse gained. This is not only frustrating for the skater; it is frustrating for the parents, coaches and club in general. Every type of instructor at a rink needs to be in tune with every other type of instructor so as to provide a unified and collaborative atmosphere in which the skating community as a whole can thrive. I think that every one can agree that supercilious attitudes and words can spoil it all in a very short time frame.
- **Classical Ballet Technique must not be viewed merely as choreography or just another “Style” of dance...** it is the fundamental training technique for all Western Dance. Styles may change but the physics of movement does not. Correct ballet technique addresses accurate biomechanics as well as artistry so that any dance style learned afterwards will be more easily incorporated and used by the dancer/technician. Classical ballet frees the body to express the full range of emotions, ideological concepts, relationships and musicality.
- **Correct body alignment/awareness and centering cannot initially be taught on the ice.** There is too much going on for the average person when “velocity” as well as balancing on a blade are added into the mixture of proprioception. Initially these concepts must be taught on the floor “flat footed,” and with mirrors as unambiguous focus is required to instill these perceptions within each individual.
- **Choreography can produce “quick fixes”** to specific pose related problems (outward appearance), but only “programming” the correct neural pathways will ensure that the skater can produce consistent, biomechanically sound movement no matter what the choreography.