

Parenting an Athlete

At the recent Bank of Montreal Sectional Skating Championships in Central Ontario, National Coach Consultant Marijane Stong was asked to present her thoughts on the role of the parent in an athlete's development. Combining her 40 years of experience in coaching with her on-going role as a parent, the following represents a synopsis of her thoughts.

1. Choose Wisely (Part One)

Choose a club, clubs or skating center that will accommodate the needs of your child, whatever they may be.

2. Choose Wisely (Part Two)

Select your coach carefully. Choose the right person for their teaching and coaching abilities but also consider that the coach will be a role model for your child. The coach will spend considerable time with your child and this must be a positive experience in all aspects of overall development. Take time while shopping for a coach and remember that a picture is worth a thousand words. Watch them teaching other children and see how they interact and present themselves.

3. Let the Coach Be the Expert

Support your coach, and understand what the coach expects from you. Together, the parent(s) and the coach can create a wonderful package. Packaging is what it's all about today. Let the coach be the coach. They are the experts.

4. Trust

A trust must develop between coach and parent. Honesty on both sides is a must. Always be realistic. Your coach may set up a "coaching team" to meet your needs and the challenges of competitive figure skating; if this is their suggestion, trust them. At the same time, don't let a coach coerce you into something you cannot afford or with which you don't feel comfortable. Trust works both ways. Such situations can be avoided if you are involved in the planning process. So, number five is...

5. Be Part of Planning

Take part in the planning process. After all, the parents are the consumers.

Some key points to consider when planning are:

- Budget – do only what you can afford
- Develop a yearly plan
- Make short and long term goals
- Decide on your commitment
- Discuss equipment long before it's needed to avoid last minute panic
- Consider what off ice programs are essential
- Evaluate progress realistically
- Insist on days off from the ice rink
- Set up appointments with the coach to discuss and to decide on all the above

6. Be Aware of Over-Lessoning

The “more is better” approach to lessons does not always work. Insist on the development of independence and good work habits. An athlete should have at least one day each week to take control of their own training. Baby sitting is not good coaching. If nothing is learned then nothing has been taught. Supervised practice is beneficial but can be more cost efficient in a group lesson format. There are learning curves however when lessons must be repeated and this must always be taken into consideration.

7. Integrate Off-Ice Training

Off-ice training plays an important role in the development of figure skaters. Conditioning and some type of dance class are essential for a competitive skater. The skater will progress at a much faster rate if the body is fit. Proper fitness levels will also help insure that athlete’s remain injury free. Any off-ice training plan must be established with the coach, the athlete, the parent(s) and applicable experts in the field.

8. Be Proactive in Your Child’s General Health

If a machine is to perform well it must be properly fuelled. It is the parents’ responsibility to provide proper nutrition and care for the general health and well being of their child, both physically and emotionally. It is important to understand that your child’s nutritional needs as an athlete will differ from that of a child not involved in competitive sport. Turn to experts for assistance if this is an area with which you are unfamiliar. Your coach should be able to provide guidance as to available resources.

9. Encourage Education

A good education is important to a good athlete.

10. Review Scheduling

Days off are essential for rest, family time, homework and friends.

11. Become Aware

Understand Skate Canada’s programs and skating development system. Know the game you are playing along with its challenges and opportunities. Seek out information from your club, Section office and Skate Canada. A subscription to *Keeping in Touch*, Skate Canada’s official newsletter, and regular visits to www.skatecanada.ca will provide you with all the information you need to know.

12. Be Positive

Support your competitive skater with positive feedback. Be there for your child always. Love your child as much after a poor performance as after a great one. Your child’s place in your heart does not depend on his/her place on the podium.

13. Keep a Sound Perspective

Enjoy the process – the rewards are greater. A good skating parent is simply a good parent. A baby thrives on love, security and routine. This formula endures.

A child's involvement in sport has incredible impact on their development as human beings. Providing a sound and supportive environment will ensure that this development is a happy and healthy one.

by Marijane Stong, National Coach Consultant