

Competitions - What to expect as a skater

Excited ??? -- You Bet !!

No question about it, your first competition will be one of the most exciting, most confusing, and most stomach-churning days you will ever experience in skating! Just remember, you're doing this for fun, so go out there, show off a little, and enjoy the experience. Do your best job, but always remember to keep an even perspective on the day... Parents, too, remember how much courage it takes to get out there all alone on that huge sheet of ice in front of all those people. Make sure your child knows about that fluttery feeling of pride you feel in your chest when you see them out there.

First, Just a Little Bit of Philosophy

An important thing to remember as you go into a competition is to skate against yourself-- not the other skaters. It's great to "win" or to earn a medal, and we all want to strive for that as a goal, but if that is your only goal, you're bound to come away disappointed very often. It's important to remember that you can control how well you skate, but you have no control over who you are competing against. At any given competition you might face competitors who are more advanced, equally advanced, or less experienced than yourself. Your final position will be greatly affected by the level of that field. You could skate exactly the same performance in 2 different competitions and end up in first place one day and last place the next, depending on the abilities of the other skaters. Strive instead to always "better" your last performance. Every time you go out on that competition ice, try to do just a little bit better than you did the last time. If you do that, the medals will take care of themselves. If you can come off the ice feeling good about your performance, knowing that you've done your best job, then you should be happy.

How to Find Competitions Near You

Most likely, your pro will know about the competitions in your area, and will advise you as to which ones you should enter. Your pro knows your abilities, and knows the general range of abilities expected at the various competitions held in your area. If you're searching, one of the best places to look is Skating magazine (sent to all USFSA members). Skating lists coming competitions in the "Calendar of Events" section which appears monthly. Your pro or club may get the competition "announcement packet" in the mail about 2-3 months before the competition. If not, you should call the host club and ask for one. Usually, entry deadlines are about 6-8 weeks before the competition, so don't wait too long to look for it.

Sending in Your Application

Application forms are usually included in the Announcement Packet. This packet will list all events, the eligibility requirements, and the required elements for programs. You may enter more than one event if you wish, and in general, "additional" events are cheaper than the "first" event. In our area, local competitions usually cost around \$50 for the first event and \$15 for additional events. This may differ in your area. There will be an entry deadline listed in the packet -- make sure you get your form in on time! Usually the form will require a signature by a club officer or your test chairman to attest to your eligibility. Don't wait til the last minute to get this signature -- sometimes people go out of town, or don't show up at the rink on that one day you left to try to find them. Sometimes they require a signature from your pro to attest to your readiness.

With help from your pro, decide what events you will enter, fill in the form, get the necessary signatures, make a copy (I never mail anything without keeping a copy), write a check, and mail it all away. Often, clubs will suggest that you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) which they may use to return your event schedule.

When do I find out my event schedule?

Usually, you will get a mailing from the host club about 10-14 days before the competition. This mailing will list your event day and times, and will provide a map to the rink, parking instructions, and other necessary information. In general, it won't help to call earlier than that, since they can't make up a firm schedule until they have all the entries and go through a huge scheduling effort to make it all work. They'll mail it as soon as they know it's a solid schedule.

Will I have to miss any school?

Probably. Most competitions run over a weekend. But because of the number of entries that most get, many have to start before Saturday. Sometimes Friday, once in a while Thursday too. In general, they start with the lowest level skaters on the earliest days and save the weekend for the high level skaters and the "final rounds". So if this is an early competition for you the chances are pretty good you'll miss a little bit of school...

Who will you compete against?

You will compete against other skaters of approximately similar experience. You may or may not be competing against skaters of similar age. The basic separation is by test level. This means you will be competing against other skaters who have tested "no further" than you have. Many competitions allow skaters to "skate up" one level (skate in a level that is one test more difficult than they have actually passed), but no competition will let skaters skate in a level below where they have passed.

Of course, even within a test level, you will find people of widely varying experience and ability.

Generally, you will skate in a group of no more than 8 - 10 skaters. Most clubs try to schedule so that this can happen. If there are substantially more than 10 people entered in a single event, they will break up the group into separate "flights", which will then be considered completely separate events. Usually if this is done, the flights are grouped according to the skater's ages.

When should you arrive at the Rink?

The club mailing that has your schedule on it will tell you what they expect of entrants. In general though, you should expect to check in at least an hour before your scheduled event time. When you get to the rink, they will usually have a "check-in" table near the doors. You need to go to that table and say your name and event (if there is an "event number" associated with your event you should be prepared to tell them that also). They will find your name on their list and "log you in". If your event requires music, you should give them your tape at this time (see elsewhere in this document for more information on music). They will probably have "Program Booklets" available at this table for a nominal charge. You'll probably want one for your scrapbook. Once you're checked in, you can watch other events until it's time for you to get dressed. The club will provide locker rooms for you to change in, and you can usually leave your clothes and skating bags in that room while you're competing.

When should you get dressed? When should you get on the ice?

Again, your host club or your pro may tell you their own special expectations. However, the general rule is that you should be fully dressed and ready to check in when the flight before yours actually "takes the ice". Usually there will be an Ice Monitor standing somewhere near the skater's "entry door" (usually with a clipboard in her hand). You should find the Ice Monitor at this time and tell them who you are and that you are present and ready. Then don't go too far away, but don't hover too close and bother everybody either... The Ice Monitor will tell you when it's time for your flight's warmup.

Generally, you should say your "good-byes" to your parents up in the bleachers, then report to the Ice Monitor along with your pro. The pro can usually stay with you up to and during your event. Your parents should not.

What's a Warmup?

The "Warmup" is a short opportunity (usually about 3-4 minutes) for you to get out on the ice and warm up your muscles before you compete. Your pro may have a few specific somethings for you to work on during this time, but in general you should use it to stroke around and loosen your muscles. Do a couple jumps to get a feel for the ice quality. Try to familiarize yourself with the size and "look" of the rink so that you don't get surprised during the competition if the rink is smaller or larger than your home rink. Visualize where you will start, and where key elements of your program will occur. You should probably not run through your entire program, but you might want to try out a few of it's key elements. The judges will not be judging your activities during this period, although some will watch to help them get a general feel for the "level" of skating that they will see in the group.

They will generally sound a horn or make an announcement when you have 1 minute left in the warmup, then tell you to leave the ice when it's over. Don't go too far, and try to keep your muscles warm and loose. If you choose to watch the other competitors you may do so.

Skating Order

Usually this will be posted on a convenient wall somewhere around the "concourse" of the rink. When you first arrive at the rink, you can ask the people at the registration desk where the skating orders are posted. You will find a sheet for each of your events that will list all the competitors in the order in which they will skate. It will probably NOT be the same as the order printed in the program booklet (which is usually just alphabetic).

Warmup Groups

Sometimes when your flight is large, it will be divided into 2 or 3 "sub-groups," each of which gets to warm up separately. For instance, if you are in a flight of 12 skaters, it might be broken up into 2 groups of 6. The first 6 would warm up at the time listed on the ice schedule, then they would skate their programs. Then the next 6 would warm up, then skate their programs. All are judged as if they were one group, it just ensures that the final skaters don't get too "cool" waiting for their turn to skate. It is

generally done when the flight size is greater than 9, and generally only at levels of about Intermediate or higher (when the programs start to get long).

Your "Skate"

When it's your turn, the Ice Monitor will give you instructions to go on the ice. Skate out to wherever you will strike your initial pose, and indicate your readiness to the judges and the music person. If this is a competition with music, then they will start it as soon as they know that both you and the judges are ready. If your program is not done to music, you should wait until they announce something like "skater, you may begin".

Take a deep breath, relax, and skate your best...

When you are done, take your bows then skate off the ice. If you are in a "half-ice" competition and someone else is skating on the other half, it would be courteous to wait until they are finished before you skate off the ice.

Results

Usually it will take about a half-hour or so for results to be posted. You will generally find them posted in the same place where the skating orders were. The results sheet shows your final position, and shows the ordinal (position) marking that each of the judges gave you. Usually, you can purchase copies of the results sheet for about 25¢ from the host club.

Medals, Ribbons

Different clubs do this differently, but usually if you are in the top 3 positions you will receive a medal of some sort. They will usually have award ceremonies scheduled periodically during the competition to award these medals. They often take "official pictures" at this time as well. If you have earned a medal, you should check to see when the award ceremony is, and whether or not pictures will be taken. If they do take pictures, you will probably be expected to be in your skating outfit and skates. At many competitions, those skaters who placed below the "medal positions" will be eligible to receive a ribbon. Check at the registration table to find out where you go to get these.

Before you leave the arena

Don't forget to pick up your tapes (audio, and video)!!

Music Tapes

Most clubs expect you to bring your music on standard audio cassette tapes. The competition announcement will give you specific instructions. Usually, you should bring 2 copies of your tape. Give one to the registration desk when you arrive, give the other to your pro or someone else close to the ice for emergencies. Your tape should be well labeled with your name and your event. Your music should be the first and only song on the tape, and it should be rewound when you turn it in. If you can find the real short 5- or 10-minute cassettes, use those. They generally have a "thicker" tape which works better in the cold, damp environment of the ice rink. If at all possible, make a "Brand New" copy of your music for the competition -- do not use the same tape which you have played over and over again during your practice sessions. Tapes do wear out and get scratchy sounding, and you'd like to have the best possible sound for your competition. If you do make a new tape though, make sure you listen to it at least once, just to make sure it recorded properly!

Dress

Appropriate dress for skaters varies according to their age and level.

At higher levels, competitors will often have special custom skating outfits for each event.

At beginning levels, boys may be very appropriately dressed in dark pants, shirt, and turtleneck or sweater. Girls may be in a simple skating dress or skirt and sweater. Warmup suits, windsuits should not be worn during a competition program. Gloves or mittens may be worn during warmups, but usually are not worn during a competition. Warmup jackets or sweaters are appropriate during the warmup, but should be removed for competition (remember that pullover sweaters or sweatshirts may muss the hair when removed).

Skates should be cleaned and polished for every competition. Make sure your laces are in good shape before you get to the rink -- old laces tend to break at the most inconvenient times!

Hair should be done tidily and securely. Bobby pins, scrunchies, rubber bands, etc, if used should be very securely placed. These items present a hazard to skaters if they should fall off and lay on the ice.

Competition outfits at all levels are required by USFSA rules to be modest, and appropriate to athletic competition. Except for "Artistic Showcase" type events, they should not be theatrical in nature.

Many experienced skaters bring a "backup" outfit to every competition. Emergencies do happen and it's pretty nice to have an option available. If you don't bring a spare outfit, girls should at least bring a few spare pairs of tights, and all skaters should have spare laces available.

Competition Conduct

Remember, every child competing is special to someone. Skaters and families should be respectful of all competitors.

In the audience, refrain from entering, exiting, or wandering the bleacher area while skaters are performing. There's plenty of time in between skaters to move around. Be supportive of your skaters, but refrain from obnoxious calling and activities. Never "Boo" or otherwise harass other skaters. Be attentive to and appreciative of the efforts of all skaters.

Skaters, refrain from displays of temper or displeasure. Nobody wants to watch them.

Photography/Videography

For the safety of the skaters, NO FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY is permitted during competition events at any Figure Skating Competition. Still photos may be taken with available light (use a "fast" film). Video taping is usually permitted as long as courtesy is observed.

At most competitions a professional videographer is available to take videos on your tape for a nominal charge. Their professional equipment and operators get better pictures than you can, and you can spend the time watching your skater perform. Many skaters keep an on-going tape that has their entire competitive history on it. They take it to every competition (pre-positioned to the end of the last prior event), and have their new events appended to the tape.