



Landing Learning Theory on Ice

Skaters Owning More Responsibility

Many skaters come to the rink without a pre-thought-out plan for what they want to accomplish. These days so much is done for the skaters at home some simply expect their coach to get them their double Axel without having to put the hard work into the process.

To be successful, skaters and coaches should set clear expectations that are agreed upon with their families. Basically skaters, parents and coaches have a frank and clear conversation which yields stated goals for being mentally and physically prepared to train.

Some of the coaches I work with have family meetings quarterly to review progress and to monitor and adjust yearly goals, acknowledge accomplishments and highlight areas that need continued work – including the skater owning appropriate levels of responsibility for their training. Some aspects of responsibility include arriving on time, warming up before taking the ice and being prepared for lessons.

Coaches might consider developing a checklist of ideas and concepts for the skater's journal to be committed to daily. Examples might include coming to the ice with a smile on their face and being ready to work hard. Skaters should know that poor attitude, fatigue, or whinny behaviors are not acceptable for either practice time or lessons. These can be challenging issues to deal with at the rink but consistent reinforcement on the part of the coach and family can change behaviors into becoming permanent positive change.

On December 4, 2014 shortly after the passing of legendary coach Don Laws, Ice Network wrote a tribute article about him which contained a lot of insight into how a coach can teach responsibility and help a skater become a stronger person and competitor. The following is an excerpt from that article:

Don Laws provided Scott Hamilton with more than just coaching techniques. He did more than tweak his triple Axel and shore up his school figures.

"He taught me responsibility," Hamilton said. "It was an extraordinary gift."

Laws, a U.S. junior men's and ice dance champion who went on to coach many of the sport's great skaters for more than six decades, most notably Hamilton, died Tuesday morning of heart failure at the age of 85. He was being treated under the care of Montgomery Hospice in Sandy Spring, Maryland.

The two began working together formally in the spring of 1979 but had known each other for years leading up to that. But when Hamilton signed on with Laws and moved to Philadelphia, Laws established firm rules. Under Laws, Hamilton said he learned not just how to compete, but how to train.

"At first, he had a leash for me that was about three chain-lengths long," said Hamilton, who started working with Laws after a difficult split with Carlo Fassi. "Then, slowly over time, he gave me more leash. By the time we were in Sarajevo [for the 1984 Olympics] the leash wasn't there anymore. He was about showing up every day. He would tell me, 'You do what you want, but don't let it show up at the rink.' He awakened something in me."

With Laws as his guide, Hamilton went from being a self-described "serial underachiever" to a U.S. champion, world champion and an Olympic champion.

Setting expectations for behavior with a skater and their family can help diminish negative behaviors. Some coaches even set consequences for negative behaviors such as time-outs or ending a lesson early.

Coaches can help skaters create an organized and careful progressive off-ice and on-ice warm-up to prepare their bodies to jump, spin, work on choreography and perform strong program run throughs. Skaters need to be honest about the quality of their run throughs and commit to repeating elements that were poorly executed.

Finally skaters need to commit to cooling their bodies down with light jogging to dissipate the lactic acid from their muscles. This should be followed up with specific stretching goals which are also codified in their skating journals.

About Increase Coaching Success Using the Secrets of Master Educators© 2014 - Responsibility

Merry Neitlich, M.A. in Education, is the Director of the Coach's Edge, a marketing consultant, presentation skills coach and educator. She is also a competitive figure skater who has earned four national gold medals at the U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships. Since 2009, Merry has been developing enhanced strategies working with coaches to apply proven educational theories and research to the teaching of figure skating to increase the rate and degree of the success of their athletes. This article strives to codify and expand upon the way many coaches organically utilize the principles of the educational models presented herein.