

Making the Transition from Group Lessons to Club Membership

Great skaters make it look so easy – gliding along effortlessly, spinning fast and centered, jumps high and strong, and with all the intricate edgework and moves connecting it all together – but it takes a lot of dedication for them to get where they are. Regardless of the chosen discipline, skaters must practice for hours and hours to master the fundamentals of the sport. How do you set about on a similar path? Keep reading.

Practice makes perfect!

If your child wants to improve, it takes practice. The rule of thumb is for every group lesson taken, he or she should practice at least one hour to work on what he or she was taught. You can use public skating sessions or ask if there are any club-sponsored or “open skating” sessions to which you can go. Get a list of things to practice from your instructor or bring your record book to the session so you know what to work on.

Another idea is to ask your skating director about signing up for more than one class lesson per week. The learning curve increases rapidly being on the ice twice per week, plus there’s the advantage of constant supervision in the early stages of learning. Learn to Skate USA encourages beginner skaters to complete at least the levels through Basic 6. Many specialty classes become available at this point – through either a Bridge Program or junior club program – to learn more about free skating, pairs, ice dancing, Artistry in Motion, synchronized skating and Theatre On Ice (TOI). Participation in these classes helps skaters become well rounded while being exposed to all the different aspects of figure skating.

When is the right time to join a figure skating club?

Joining a club is an important step in a figure skater’s life, as this becomes your training home. Once a skater is ready to take official U.S. Figure Skating tests or compete in competitions beyond Compete USA levels, joining a club becomes necessary. Joining a club after group lessons is the first step to becoming a more advanced skater. A club gives skaters a place to call home when training. Most figure skating clubs sponsor monthly or weekly ice sessions, provide test sessions with judges for skaters to advance, support synchronized skating or TOI teams, host ice shows and exhibitions, sponsor fundraising activities, social events and awards banquets, and host competitions for their members and others to participate. Check with your skating director or the rink’s website for information about joining the local club. Some areas have more than one from which to choose, and every club offers different membership packages and benefits, so gather the information from all of them and shop around.

Skating clubs are run mostly by volunteers. If possible, take time to volunteer with your club. You will learn more about skating and, at the same time, you and your child will make lifelong skating friends.

Test Structure

The test structure is the backbone. All skaters must participate to advance to the next level. Moves in the field tests (which essentially took the place of figures) are the

prerequisite to the other proficiency tests – free skate, pairs, ice dancing. Each level has specific required elements that skater's must perform for a panel of 1-3 qualified judges. The pass rate decreases as the level increases. On average, 99 percent of skaters taking the pre-preliminary test pass, while around 54 percent of skaters taking the senior test pass each year. Each level has a set standard to be considered "passing." If the combined total of skills performed does not meet this standard, then the test is considered a "re-try," and the skater needs to retake the entire test.

Competitions

U.S. Figure Skating provides a full competition structure for its members. From Learn to Skate levels to adults, invitational club competitions, artistic, synchronized skating and qualifying events that lead to the U.S. and World championships and the Olympic Winter Games, there is something for everyone.

Once a proficiency test is passed, then the skater normally stays at that level if he or she wishes to compete. All skaters may compete in Compete USA and opens (invitationals/nonqualifying), but the qualifying system is where the "road to the Olympics" begins. The participation numbers in the qualifying system break down as 80 percent girls/ladies, 12 percent boys/men, 4 percent pairs and 4 percent ice dancing. Skaters may choose to never compete and continue up the ladder of tests to gain credentials for coaching, judging or to help stay motivated while working on more difficult skills.

Synchronized Skating

Synchronized skating is a popular discipline both within the United States and around the world. Synchronized skating is a team sport in which 8-20 skaters perform a program together. It is characterized by teamwork, speed, intricate formations and challenging step sequences. As with other disciplines, teams perform a program with specific elements, including blocks, circles, wheels, lines, intersections and moves in the field. Skaters have a lot of fun participating on a synchronized team because it is a team effort and they have a chance to skate with their friends. Look for a synchronized skating team in your area; most are either supported by the local figure skating club or the Learn to Skate USA program.