

# Speedskating Race Preparations

10/23/02

This outline is intended to give skaters (and their parents) an idea of what to expect at a speedskating competition, along with tips for how to avoid common mistakes that can mar your enjoyment of the event.

**Parents:** Your main concerns should be equipment, the schedule, food and drink, and moral support.

- Equipment: skates should be sharp, deburred and ready to go. Check them after each race for nicks or dullness. If you aren't sure they are in good shape, have the team coach (in the coaches' box) check them. Be sure to have knee pads, shin guards, gloves and a neck protector ready for each skater. The track will be kept wetter than at practice, so have extra tights, socks, underwear, sweatshirt---pretty much extra everything in case your child gets soaked. Bring a hair dryer to dry out wet articles between races since you may need them again.
- Schedule: You can help make sure your child doesn't miss warm-ups or races by having them ready on time. There will be a warm-up before races start. Encourage your child to skate some easy laps, a few fast laps, and a couple of practice starts. There is little value in getting exhausted during the warm-up.

Before the races begin, make sure you **know the schedule**. Get a printed order of events when you check-in, but it can change! Listen closely to announcements on the PA system for changes, and look for a posted schedule which shows changes. These changes can alter when your kids skate. Skaters are usually called to the heat box about 10 minutes before each race. It is a good idea, if time permits, for the skater to loosen up a bit 15-20 minutes before each race. Not a lot---jog for a couple of minutes, do a few jumping jacks or other vigorous exercise, and stretch.

- Eating and drinking: Most skaters aren't especially hungry before and during competitions. A good breakfast is important at least an hour before the warm-up starts. During the meet, it is good to eat a little at regular intervals. Orange slices are highly recommended, or a granola bar. Equally important is keeping hydrated. Make sure your child gets plenty of water. Carbonated soda pop should be avoided during the meet.
- Moral support: Your child is likely to be nervous and excited. To skate their best, they need to be calm, relaxed, and confident that you will not be disappointed or upset if they "lose" or fall during their race. Be a calm, supportive parent. Things will happen that are outside the skater's control. A shove, a slip on rutted ice, somebody falling in front of them....all these can mess up any skater's race. Remember the old saying "That's speedskating" and start thinking about the next race or the next meet.

**What parents should expect:** Many skaters struggle in their initial competitions. A common cause is “trying too hard”. The skater forgets all about good form and smooth technique and just tries to go fast. This is usually counterproductive. Remind your skaters to stay low and skate smoothly, with power.

**Advice to Skaters:** Being prepared mentally and physically will help you to skate your best at any meet.

- Take advantage of the on-ice warm-up: Skate some slow laps and get comfortable on the ice. Don't skate so many you get tired. Then do a couple of hard laps. Maintain your very best form at all times. Do a couple of starts, one easy and the last one hard. Then a couple of slow warm-down laps.
- Know when you are going to race, and warm up before each race: Before you get called to the heat box, jog a little, do a few jumps or jumping jacks, and stretch. But don't get caught out in the parking lot when your race is called!
- Plan your race: If it is a short race, try to beat your competitors off the line and take the lead. If it is a longer race, it's fine to be in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> position and then try to pass the leaders in the last couple of laps. Try not to lead a long race from the beginning....you will be exhausted and easy to pass at the end.
- Expect to be pushed, shoved or tripped: There is a lot of contact in many races, especially during the starts. Don't back off from it and give up your place to a more aggressive competitor—defend your space.
- Be tough, but don't commit fouls: Don't shove other skaters, ever. And when you pass, you need to be a step in front of the other skater before you cut back into their lane. In other words, it must be a “clean” pass with no interference.
- Don't let hunger or thirst weaken you: Have a good breakfast before the meet, and eat a little during the meet. Orange slices and granola bars are good. And drink plenty of water...stay hydrated.
- To go fast, skate with good form. Many skaters try too hard during their races, and forget all about good technique. Stay low, with a smooth arm swing, and push with power....all the things we have been practicing!
- Be a good sport and have fun! You can be friends with your competitors even though you are trying to beat each other. Don't brag or boast, or put down “losers”. And be gracious if you get beat. But most of all, have fun. These competitions are exciting and nerve-wracking, and you will remember them for all of your life....so enjoy every minute!

**What skaters should expect:** All skaters get tense and nervous before races. Most of us have to go to the bathroom before each race. Remember that you can't skate well if you are tight and tense. So relax, stretch, and jog a little before each race. Take a few deep breaths before the start, and focus on how you plan to skate.

Most of us tend to fall more during races than we do in practice. The turns will probably be heavily watered, so expect to get wet if you do fall. Make sure you have a change of clothes to switch into before the next race. Falling isn't necessarily a bad thing, since it probably means you were really pushing yourself to go faster.

Don't engage in "trash talking", but don't be surprised if you hear some. Just ignore it. Most skaters practice good sportsmanship, and so should you.

Don't get hungry during the races, but don't overeat either. Trying to race with a full stomach can make you sick to your stomach.

Finally, talk to your coach after each race and find out what you did well, and what you can do better in the next race. The coach should be in the coaches box by the boards.

Good luck and have fun!

Your coaches,

Elise, Brian, Carl, Chris, Lisa and Mark