

Judging the Inline Skater

by Jeff Higgins

For you judges out there, or critics who want to compare one skater to another, here's what to look and listen for when watching the inline dance skater. For you inline skaters who think they can continue to get away with sloppy skating, your days are numbered.

Double take-offs or Clunking - Listen for thumping on the floor as the skater fails to set the direction of the stroke properly for the intended travel. When the skate is set down incorrectly, the wheels resist the angle of attack, causing the skate to hop up into the air, and "clunk" as the full weight of the skater is applied. You may not hear it, but the skater will know when it happens. It's a like setting a bowling ball down too hard, causing it to bounce once before it finds the right direction.

Patterns full of angles instead of lobes - Even if a baseline is adhered to, watch for angled take-offs, and noticeable struggling to maintain speed and flow. You'll notice that the pattern appears to be a series of angled flats instead of circular lobes. Usually the pattern will seem small for the amount of effort. This is a fairly severe error and indicates a need to look in the direction of intended travel and practice doing true edges by following (or dancing with) quads skaters. (Asking them to practice on a figure circle is a futile effort, though.)

Pedaling - Ex-Ice skaters will pedal quite a bit more than ex-Quad skaters. Pedaling is picking up the heel of the free leg before setting it back down for the next stroke...like pedaling a bicycle. This is because of fear of the toe-pick catching the ice, causing unexpected falls. It is also a result of laziness or ignorance. (i.e. poor coaching). Less pedaling = higher score, all else being equal.

Progressing - The skater will walk, or step-ahead, instead of stroking from the parallel-and position. This is the result of leaning too far forward. To keep from falling, the skater must step ahead instead of stroking. The fix for this is pushing from the heel, and skating over the center of the skate instead of the front wheel. Judges should reward the skater who appears centered over the skate.

Although evidence of the past is not always indicative of the future, take a look at the wheels of the skate up close, if you notice uneven wearing left to right and uneven wearing among wheels, (especially on the front wheel), the skater has been skating incorrectly for quite some time. Point this out to coaches if there is any argument concerning leaning forward and thus progressing. On today's indoor roll-on floors (even concrete) one set of wheels can last a year without significant uneven wear.

Two-footed skating - One-foot lobe transitions are extremely difficult to perform on inlines...much more difficult than on quads. Give them some slack. Skaters may choose to cheat by sliding the free-leg on the floor during the swing to stabilize and set the new edge. This is not too different than the 'scuffing' on the Counter/Three-turn on the International Iceland Tango.

Flats - On inlines, it is very difficult to set the direction of a new edge perfectly every time. Incorrectly set edges cause "clunking", flats and scalloped edges. The accomplished skater will be able to set more edges correctly. You should reward this effort, because there is no 'subtle' recovery from a poorly set edge, as with quads or ice.

Twisting - Twisting (or any exaggerated torso movement) is employed by the skater as a quick fix to correct other problems such as incorrect starting position of the torso and incorrect amount of shoulder rotation begun during take-offs. This takes special concentration during each step and should be rewarded. Other causes for twisting are poor take-offs, incorrect angle of lean, and poor posture baseline (double leans).

Slipping/noisy edges/chirping take-offs - Inline skate are noted for being very quiet, but occasionally you'll hear squeaking as the wheels slip on the floor surface. Almost always it is a result of not putting the weight over the center of the skate. If the weight is mainly over the front wheel, it will slip more easily than if the weight is evenly distributed over all wheels. There should be no sounds from the wheels at all, except a low rumble as they roll over uneven boards on the floor.

Turns - As a general rule, Mohawks are harder to do on inlines; and three turns are easier on inlines. Judges should reward accordingly.

These are all I can think of, for now. Questions, comments??? jhiggins@scsinet.com

Some of this I agree with.

The lobing

The twisting

The stepping ahead

- But this is no different to "judging" quads!

Change of edge on one foot is definitely harder, so too are holding spread eagles.

Mohawks are NOT harder than 3 turns; I disagree with this, although you need to strike the blade on to the correct edge so adjust the foot placement to allow for this.

Three turns on edges certainly deserve more credit (not flip- flops or flat- flats) as do turns held on one foot, but again it's no different to judging quads.

The ability to maintain roll and flow when skating on one leg for a length of time is a huge reward area as this is a sign of good balance and skate control. My advice is to look at the foot and watch for the loss of balance over the rocker, look for base lines right down to the angle of the ankle as this alignment should go all the way down, not break at the ankle to foot. For quad skaters doing inline I think we need to work on smooth edge stroking not walking in the mud looking like you are wearing wellington boots. Quality skating with effortless roll is always a clear winner.

Happy Skating

Susan Brooks