

Hiring Your First Private Coach

There are many reasons why your family might want to hire a private coach: to excel at a faster pace than in group lessons, to supplement your group lessons with an occasional private one, to get assistance on a difficult skill or to begin training more seriously. Whatever the reason, the information here will help you with choosing a private coach.

Ask the skating director of your local program for a list or brochure of local coaching staff for the rink and figure skating club. Select two or three potential coaches from this list and set up face-to-face meetings. A meeting gives you the chance to ask important questions and find out how you and your child interact on a personal level with the prospective coach. Things to consider when selecting a coach are personality, learning and teaching styles, experience and technical know-how. A few questions we recommend asking include:

- How long have you been coaching?
- What are your greatest coaching accomplishments?
- What is your skating background? Do you specialize in coaching certain disciplines (singles, pairs, ice dancing, synchronized skating)? What levels have you passed? Did you skate competitively?
- Are you a member of U.S. Figure Skating and the Professional Skaters Association?
- Are you compliant per the rules of U.S. Figure Skating?
- How do you stay current with the sport and the profession of coaching?
- What are your rates for lessons, competitions, cutting program music, etc.? How often do you bill for charges? When do you expect to be paid?
- What is your policy if we must cancel a planned lesson?
- Are there any other policies that we should be aware of in advance?

Even if your child only skates a few days a week, your skater's coach will have a significant influence on his or her life. Therefore, it's important that you and your child are comfortable with the person you choose. Take as much time and talk to as many people as necessary until you are satisfied that you are making a good choice.

What Makes A Good Coach?

- Knows the sport — *and* kids. He or she must understand the physical development of boys and girls and what children are and are not capable of doing.
- Knows about differences in personality — what is right for one child is not necessarily right for another.
- Understands motivation for skating. Some kids are very serious about competing; others are there because a good friend is skating.
- Understands and can deal with differences in physical and emotional maturity and appreciates each child for his or her individuality.
- Is sensitive to children from various social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. The coach must give attention and instruction to all the skaters and make them feel a sense of accomplishment. A good coach has more than just winning in sight. Long-term goals of helping young people develop physically, psychologically, and socially should take precedence over winning.
- Is skilled at teaching the fundamentals of skating. Skill development is the major reason kids participate in sports — most want to improve their abilities. Improvement is the primary source of enjoyment for athletes.
- Teaches young athletes to enjoy success and respond to failure with new determination.
- Emphasizes improvement, competence and striving for excellence.
- Teaches and models behavior that reflects desirable basic values.