

Report from the ISU Global Seminar, Frankfurt, July 2015

Technical Controller and Technical Specialist Re-certification

Congratulations to Janet Coton, ISU TC (Dance), Kevin Marshall, ISU TS (Singles) and David Hartley, Int. TS (Singles) who all successfully re-certified in their respective disciplines.

Program Component Moderators Seminar

Ann Findlay and Maggie Worsfold attended this seminar, the outcome of which was to develop seminars on program components to be delivered nationally.

Ann and Maggie will be preparing the format and content for national seminars which will be delivered during the coming season.

Youth Development Seminar

Chris Hockaday attended this seminar and has provided a full report of discussions:

NISA Report from Frankfurt ISU Youth Seminar

The following report contains feedback and discussion points that I have taken from the ISU Global Seminar in Frankfurt. These are ideas and suggestions that the ISU raised and were debated during the week. The ISU are not enforcing any of these points, but this was my interpretation of what was debated and discussed over the course of the week.

Audiences, Social Media and Funding

The general consensus from the ISU is that the ratings from figure skating have seen a sharp decline over the past few years, events mainly now being watched on television by women over age 50. There is an incredibly small proportion of viewers between ages 14-49, approximately 4% of the viewership (in Europe), which needs to be addressed. This is worrying as the current strong and loyal viewers/supporters will not be around after the next few decades, so the sport may witness further drops in viewing figures. Streaming has been introduced to Junior Grand Prix events and posted on YouTube by ISU's Junior Grand Prix channel, but these views are still not substantial, even though more popular than their regular ISU YouTube channel.

With the development of social media and technology, there needs to be a more modern approach to accessibility within the sport, and athletes given more opportunity to become role models and personalities that the aspiring skaters can live up to. Television broadcasters need to be approached for better coverage of events. More events need to be organised and the skaters need to be in the public eye to inspire others and giving an incentive for sponsors to get involved with them. We all live in the real world and appreciate that football/ tennis/ cricket/ rugby all play a much bigger role in British Sport than skating so we know the challenges facing us).

The National Governing Bodies (NGB) as well as local ice rinks, need to approach big sponsors to help fund events, get more people interested and participating in sport and, possibly, help develop the sport and its televisual suitability/sustainability.

The bottom line is that news whether good or bad is still news, and skating since Torvill and Dean's 'Dancing on Ice' has finished its last season on television, there has not been an increase in participation but rather the opposite, with no skating news to report for over a year. Ice skating has not been in the public eye whereas plenty of other sports do have that constant attention. We need something else to drive people into ice rinks. We need successful skaters to get companies to not only support, but also bring investment into the sport.

Athletes can do this more by promoting themselves through social media and other means (video blogging, local radio, etc.). Also the NGB can have profiles of the skaters currently representing GB on their website, and make sure the information is easily accessible to the public so young skaters can see their role models and competitors.

Audience demographic needs to be carefully researched and taken on board when approaching companies/businesses/sponsors for funding or provision of services. The sponsor needs to be getting a good deal, so matching their product to the right person (for example not asking Guinness to sponsor a predominantly youth amateur sport/team), otherwise there is no interest or driving force for the partnership.

Advertising

Member associations/federations of the ISU need to take a stance at Congress to have the rules changed on the Advertisement of Sponsorship on the skaters. I think every Member is in agreement that the sponsor's logos should not impact on the competition attire during the performance, but why not let the skaters have their practice jackets and skate bag and other articles advertising their chosen sponsors, and perhaps even in the Kiss and Cry zone (the suggestion being that the sponsorship is advertised on the screen behind the athletes before the scores are announced).

These small changes would not impact detrimentally on the sport and should:

- a. encourage skaters to seek sponsoring to cover the cost of their training and
- b. attract more sponsors into the sport where currently we are low on the numbers.

A possibility is (to use other sports as an example) for sponsors to be projected onto the ice surface when being televised, like they do in other sporting events. The ice is predominantly a blank canvas and can have sponsor projections on it when events are televised, this doesn't impact on the event as it is all media technology and not a live projection at the venue, similar to that of Football games. There was some suggestion that a logo could be displayed on the boot or heel of the boot, however this was not a widely popular suggestion as it would become a distraction and could impact on the performance.

These things are not significant to the inner machinations of the sport, however we risk our sports dying out, like Handball which failed to increase its popularity in Europe and has been at an all-time low, and so we need money injected into the sport on a federation scale and also an amateur athlete scale.

Live streaming can also include a backstage component whereby the cameras can grab skaters after they leave the ice and go behind the scenes to ask them fun questions that can be used to share personal information and memories to their fans so the skater becomes more of a personality for other skaters to attach emotion to. The USFSA being an example where they have introduced this to their National events and the videos became very popular, asking questions like “what’s the most embarrassing thing that has happened to you at a competition”, videos being available on YouTube. The ISU have also launched a campaign to interview skaters more informally and less confrontationally, to see their characters displayed off the ice. These videos have been called ‘wait...what?’, ‘a moment with...’ and ‘what’s in my bag?’ They are just examples of three different interviewing ideas which bring some humour into the event.

Judging Discussion

A very long discussion took place to discuss whether Judges should be paid, whether judges are scared to give the variety of marks that they feel truly represent their views on a skater’s components (e.g. skating skills value of 7.00 but a transitions component of 3.50).

Another area of discussion was whether judges should keep the anonymity of their marks, which is a bone of contention in many countries and subject to heated debate, especially with young new officials/athletes in the sport. An overwhelming majority of young officials feel their marks should not be hidden and they should be held accountable for their marks. Of course if their marks are open to public viewing, then they can also be open to manipulation from external sources or pressurised by some member federations to give marks that reflect someone else’s opinion rather than that of the association or not be invite back as an official in proceeding years, which is leading us back towards another 2002 scandal. So it is a very difficult decision to make, and up to the member federations at Congress.

Synchronised Skating in the Olympics

A dialogue was opened about the decision not to include Synchronised skating into the 2018 Winter Olympics, briefly explaining that part of the reason for this by the IOC was that they felt that Asia is not involved enough, particularly China, and also there are not enough teams. A bold effort was made at the 2014 Synchro World Championships by a group of male exhibition skaters to get support with their ‘Why not Synchro’ performance, however it did not help. With that being said it will become an exhibition at the 2015 Grand Prix Finals in Barcelona in December which is still a step forward towards 2022 Olympic dreams for the sport.

Music Rights and the Legal Implications for Skaters

Selina Vanier (ISU Communications and Media) spoke about the changes the ISU are making and listening to their Member federations and officials to make sure they move with the times, including updating their website and using social media. They are also including a technical bar on televised skating to show the current technical marks of the skater as they are skating (which were both ideas that were suggested at the 2013 Youth Seminar and taken on board).

However the side-topic came up from this about using music with lyrics (which was a recent change in updating the sport to more modern opportunities). Now that lyrics can be more widely used in the disciplines, the skaters need to be

careful about Music Rights. Every athlete must sign a form to say that they have ensured that they have the rights to use the music at events, however there are some artists (such as Prince and Taylor Swift) that do not allow their music to be reproduced on social media like YouTube, but the rights are down to the skater to secure, it is not up to the Member Federation or the ISU.

The performer is responsible, even if the performance was videoed by an external entity and then uploaded to Facebook/YouTube/etc. without that performer's knowledge. This has been a very real issue for the ISU in the past, as some artists refuse to allow their music to be reproduced and to be cut/edited. The ISU have almost received bans on the internet for using music in videos that has not been authorised by the artist, which is the same risk with skaters uploading their own videos, or other people uploading videos of them.

This has been a grey area and no one at the Youth Seminar had ever heard of such a responsibility to the music's viability before now. It is a suggestion that the member federation could inform the coaches or skaters in more detail of the mechanisms for reproducing music and using it at events, as it will be the skater that suffers if they are picked up for using music that has not been cleared with the music company. After all it seems pretty infeasible to contact all the music production companies responsible to get consent to use their music.

Increase Audience Numbers

One last suggestion was that more local groups could be contacted to attend events, especially when attendance has been so low for so many events, like schools and small community groups/companies, or maybe even potential sponsors, which helps to fund events and potentially provide more of them. Another possibility, using other sports as an example again, could be to provide live entertainment at events to keep audiences happy and engaged, like they do in many US sporting events. Whether that is interaction from the Zamboni or Mascot or other forms of entertainment, which might not be too hard to organise.

As I mentioned earlier in this document, these are all just ideas and suggestions that were banded around in Germany and some of which are now being considered by the ISU for their viability and practicality.

Many thanks

Chris Hockaday