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Hosting a Competition: What's in It for You?

by Dianne Powell

Hopes and dreams electrify the air as excited skaters, anxious parents and nervous coaches assume their places. It's competition time.

Endless hours of practice boil down to a crucial few minutes of ice time. "Just do your best" echoes throughout the arena as each skater, pair or team takes the ice. And when it's over, smiles abound as proud skaters accept their medals and parents, friends and coaches beam their approval.

Is hosting a competition worth the planning, preparation, toil and hard work it entails? A survey of some of ISI's experienced event hosts nets a resounding "yes."

"It's hard work, but the benefits far outnumber any negatives," says Paula Wagener, Skating Director at Seven Bridges Ice Arena in Woodbridge, IL, site of two ISI Synchronized Skating Championships. "It's absolutely fantastic exposure for the rink. It's very rewarding to see the children participating in a sport they really enjoy, earning their medals and trophies and doing well, and it's an extremely good revenue source for the facility."

Competitions as Revenue

"Hosting a competition is not only a chance for your skaters to compete at their home rink, but for the facility to realize monetary benefits," says Janis Rychlinski, former ISI District 6 Director and representative of the Wayne Community Center rink in Wayne, MI, site of two ISI national championships.

Competitions whet enthusiasm for skating and enthusiasm can be turned into dollars by building on the excitement such events garner. To do so, involves marketing the event and your rink along with it.

"Competitions generate excitement in a facility and help promote skating programs," explains Patti Feeney, ISI Managing Director of Member Programs and Services. "This results in skaters purchasing more ice, lessons and equipment. Facilities realize an impact of hosting an event up to six months prior to and six months following the event." Not only do you get more revenues from selling ice time in conjunction with the event, explain Wagener and Rychlinski, you also profit from increased concession/café, vendor and pro shop sales.

Other Benefits

Hosting a competition helps "build camaraderie within your facility," says Terry Green, Skating Director at Highland Sports Center in Seattle, WA, site of the 1996 ISI World CHAMPS. "You develop some continuity and goals for your program. It's also good publicity locally, and that boosts your program. The more publicity you get the more credibility you get in the community."

Press coverage of competitions, according to Rychlinksi, "encourages the public, young and old, to think about taking skating lessons so that they can participate in the future."

"It adds a lot of credibility to your facility to be able to host a competition," echoes Wagener. "It's also great to have coaches from other rinks come in and get feedback from them, share ideas and gain new insights."

“The friendships that develop between the skaters, families and coaches traveling to a competition and your own skating families are a wonderful plus,” says Rychlinski. “You get to know skaters from not only around your state but from neighboring states as well.”

“The smiles are what make it worthwhile,” says coach and rink manager Larry LaBorde from the Ice Chalet in Knoxville, TN. LaBorde has been involved in competitions for over 10 years. His boss, Robert Unger, pioneered the first ISI competition in the South over 30 years ago.

Many ISI former event hosts echoed Robert Unger’s philosophy of competition as good motivation for skaters to work hard all year. “A sense of team spirit is fostered at ISI competitions,” says Feeney. “Skaters learn to work together in groups, as teams, toward a common goal. The emphasis is on the excitement and fun of participation rather than solely on winning.”

“Competitions are important to help instill a feeling of accomplishment, both as individuals and as members of a team,” says Unger.

Whether you’re hosting an in-house competition or a national event, there are points to consider, tips to remember, and a lot to be learned from experienced competition hosts.

Keys to Success

“The main key to a successful competition is in having plenty of well-trained volunteers,” says Green, who developed a step-by-step flow chart of every aspect of World CHAMPS to help her volunteers understand the process. Green says the flow chart made a big difference in increasing understanding. “It also increased their ability to answer questions as to why things were going as they were.”

“The success of an ISI competition relies heavily on the volunteer force and an enthusiastic and flexible staff,” says Feeney.

“Good organization, teamwork on the part of volunteers, everyone excited and willing to help out” – these are crucial components for success according to Wagener.

“We asked every participant or some member of their family to put in two four-hour shifts during the week,” says Green. “We put out a list of all the chairpersons and when we had a meeting, we gave them a list of their job descriptions and answered their questions. That way you go into the competition with people who have a good idea of what they’re doing.”

“With friendly volunteers, building personnel, and a fair, well-organized event you have the makings of a successful competition,” says Rychlinski.

Advice from the Experts

“You need to start planning for a competition a year in advance and to provide detailed training sessions for volunteers,” says Green, who also recommends asking local restaurants and grocery stores for donations for your hospitality room. Green provides food for judges and referees and for volunteers who donate four or more hours.

“The advantage of hosting an ISI national event is that ISI headquarters handles the scheduling chores,” says Green.

“The Ice Skating Institute’s Competition Standards Manual has everything you need to plan, set-up and run a competition,” says Rychlinski. “The Competitor’s Handbook is also a must.”

In addition to creating the competition schedule, ISI collects all entries, supplies the computers, arranges for hotels, judges and referees, purchases all awards, and provides judges sheets and

program books. The ISI makes all arrangements connected with the event, including supplying a detailed manual of responsibilities and guidelines for running the event.

“Basically,” says Feeney, “the ISI arrives with everything required to run an event. Any arena that meets the ice surface requirements can host an event. It’s great PR for the arena and the recreational ice skaters are a pleasure to work with.”

Summary

In an article written a number of years ago on why ISI holds national championships, Robert Unger wrote, “Preparing for a competition, and in particular for a National Championship, is most motivating for your skaters. Increased enthusiasm and activity will spread into your community, draw attention from the media, expose the general public to ice skating, and will bring new skaters to your rink.”

“The name of the game is to offer a goal for everyone, to keep them ice skating, to keep them motivated,” continues Unger. “You know, or most of you realize, how difficult it is to keep the doors of an ice rink open. If we cater only to the few gifted, and money blessed skaters, the number of ice rinks staying in business will diminish.”