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Capitalizing on Olympic Fever

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The Participants

- Tom Anastos
- Manager
- Suburban Arena Management LLC
- Farmington Hills, Mich.

- Donald Bartelson
- Owner
- Ontario Ice Skating Center
- Ontario, Calif.

- Diane Dailing
- President
- The Skate School LLC
- Geneva, Ill.

- Glyn Jones
- Manager
- Tampa Bay Skating Academy
- Oldsmar, Fla.

- Patrick D. Quigley
- Business Manager
- Cleland Multipurpose Sports Complex
- Fort Bragg, N.C.

- Jeremy Rogers
- Assistant General Manager
- Chiller LLC/CoreComm Ice Haus
- Columbus, Ohio

- Scott Slavensky
- Owner
- Skatetown
- Roseville, Calif.

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Ice sports get a concentrated dose of free publicity every four years, and ice arenas get the opportunity to make the most of it. Are you ready for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games?

Do you anticipate the 2006 Winter Olympics to spark increased interest and participation in ice skating and/or hockey at your facility during the coming year?

ANASTOS: Yes I do.I believethat the increased television visibility and international focus onthe Olympics will help us stimulate interest.

BARTELSON: Absolutely. This is my 12th Olympiad in the ice skating industry, as either a coach or a facility owner. I'm anticipating a 30 percent increase in business January through April, and I look for a 12 to 15 percent increase in gross revenues for 2007.

DAILING: I certainly hope so! We have noticed an increase in our learn-to-skate classes just from the release of the Ice Princess movie. I also think the state of the economy before, during and after the Olympics will be a deciding factor in how much this Olympic exposure boosts our industry.

JONES: Of course, our jump in business, as we all expect will happen, will depend on how well the U.S. figure skating and hockey teams perform. In the early 1990s the Olympic year was a great boost to our business, but after that time the jump hasn't been as great.

QUIGLEY: As we are just in the process of restarting our ISI learn-to-skate program, we see the upcoming Winter Olympics as an advertising bonanza (and at no cost to the facility). In the past, we have experienced similar boom times during the Olympics.

ROGERS: Obviously, the increased interest in figure skating and hockey will have the greatest impact on our business and those are the areas we need to focus on the most.However, based on our experience from the last Winter Olympics, I'm anticipating huge interest in both speedskating and curling.They both have such a unique novelty appeal that I expect our phones to ring off the hook with people interested in giving them a try.

SLAVENSKY: We anticipate an increase in interest in ice-related activities.

How do you plan to capitalize on "Olympic fever"? Do you plan to adjust programs, schedules or fees?

BARTELSON: The biggest change patrons are going to see in our facility for this Olympiad is that they're going to be entertained when they come in. We're going to be doing major light shows during all public sessions. This is the type of environment that parents are looking for, and we can provide that within the wholesome atmosphere of an ice rink. I've done a lot of research, visiting entertainment venues to pick up ideas that I feel we can use in our business.

I only change my schedule once a year — every September — and I have built in exactly what we're going to be doing this winter. We've added more public sessions and more skating school slots, and we're targeting prime times that parents are available to come to the rink, rather than setting the times that are convenient for the ice rink. Our schedule is user-friendly.

We absolutely will have no rate increases. I have selected a price point that is profitable for the rink, yet very attractive to young families in households with multiple children.

ROGERS: The first thing we plan to do is increase our advertising leading up to, during and immediately following the Olympics. Our advertising will focus on Olympic themes and be targeted to air, on occasion, during major events featuring our sports. We also have to adjust our programming to make sure we have ample offerings for new participants to go into. Obviously, there's nothing worse than bringing in a lot of potential customers and then having to turn some away because you didn't have enough classes, enough instructors, or you didn't plan ahead for the demand. We're also participating in the Arnold Classic Fitness Expo for the first time next March.The Arnold Classic is one of the largest fitness shows in the world, hosted by Arnold Schwarzenegger and featuring 30 sports. We are putting together a hockey skills event, figure skating competition and speedskating meet all in one weekend. The Classic brings unbelievable amounts of promotion and PR, so coming off the Olympics, this event should bring huge exposure for our programs.

DAILING: We want to maximize class offerings and participation within our current time, with no

changes in our pricing or scheduling. We will be offering Olympic family enrollment incentives for our learn-to-skate programs. We will be focusing on participation and preparation for our in-house and open ISI competitions, which will take on an Olympic flavor. Special classes will be offered to prepare for competitions. We will time the introduction of our tot figure skating program during the Olympic exposure.Our focus for this class will be frills, twirls, music and fun. For our hockey skaters we will be having ongoing friendly, in-class skill competitions. We also plan on exposing our programs heavily in the local media at this time in hopes of some free publicity.

ANASTOS: Things we are considering include creating a mini Olympics competition in our arena and adding some Olympic theming to the decor of the arena. We are also talking about the possibility of creating a "corporate Olympics" and ice-sport related events that could be used as a fun team builder for various local corporate partners.

JONES: We have already secured dates for a number of our coaches to go into the schools and give talks on skating. We are very fortunate to have professionals on staff that have either competed at the Olympics or have had skaters participate at the Olympic Games. At the schools we will be giving out discount coupons for our learn-to-skate and Hockey 101 and 201 programs. We will, of course, be contacting the local media the closer it gets to the games.

How will you convert new impulse traffic to regular customers?

ROGERS: We plan to give customers the opportunity to try Olympic sports during special public skating sessions and open clinics. For example, we'll have speedskates available to rent, coaches available to instruct, current students available to demonstrate/perform and opportunities for people to push pucks and throw curling stones.

QUIGLEY: We are aiming to expand our group lesson program to accommodate additional classes to serve the new market. We also expect to see a rise in the hockey side. After our winter house league season ends in late February, we will be instituting a cross ice program for the younger ages to capture and retain some of the new hockey players.

SLAVENSKY: Our belief is that most people come to our facility initially for a public session or birthday party. The trick is taking the steps to make sure that they have a good initial experience. Some of the things we do include:
·Make sure that the facility is immaculate
·Make our birthday parties and public sessions nonstop fun
·Minimize time guests have to wait in line
·Have plenty of friendly, trained staff on hand
·Provide quality rental skates with sharp blades
·Personally fit everyone with skates and make sure they are properly laced
·Have a fun DJ on staff to entertain the crowd, play games, run the light show, promote programs, etc.
·Make sure that we have plenty of literature on hand for our programs and trained staff who can answer questions about our programs
·Have EZ gliders available for new skaters; we section off one end of the rink with border patrol pads where EZ gliders can be used

·Complete quality assurance surveys on weekends
·Schedule events opposite our public sessions that will promote those events

Once people do get involved in one of our programs, they must continue to have fun or they won't stay involved.

BARTELSON: We have hosts and hostesses that work our public sessions during the Olympics

season. They will start Thanksgiving weekend. They work the floor, helping put skates on and checking to see that everybody's skates fit. They carry printed materials for our programs on them. They go around and help the beginners. We also give free coffee and cookies on skate school evenings, with a host or hostess working the crowd. You'd be amazed at the response you get.

ANASTOS: Like we always do — try to create a fun and entertaining environment that provides great service.