

Summer Fun on the Ice

by Margy Bennett

Take those lazy, hazy days of summer and turn them into ice time for school aged skaters. Summer is the perfect time to move skaters from the beginner group lessons program to the next level and to intensify programming for intermediate and advanced figure skaters. Arenas' slower daytime hours are perfect for these groups.

Planning a Summer Skating School Program

Begin your summer skating program plan by consulting the local schools' calendars and checking the availability of ice in your arena. Your goal is to schedule a consistent time for a period of four to 12 weeks. Consolidated programs can be just as successful as programs that are stretched out over a longer period of time.

Is your summer skating school program for beginner, intermediate, advanced or elite skaters? Ice time and off ice activities vary greatly for these levels and must be incorporated in your plans.

Beginner programs can incorporate a daily group skating lesson as well as off-ice activities such as games and crafts. Programs that offer extended hours and activities over the course of a summer are often attractive alternatives to day care for parents. This camp-like program may require licensing by a local municipality or state; be sure to check regulations prior to planning your summer skating school camp. An alternative is to offer a program for one day a week for an extended period of time.

Intermediate and advanced figure skating programs require a fairly large amount of ice time. Plan to expose your summer skaters to new areas of interest such as ice dancing and moves in the field to deepen their enjoyment of and commitment to skating.

A well-rounded program for intermediate and advanced skaters will include off-ice activities such as strength training/conditioning, ballet and periods of rest. Large numbers of skaters can be accommodated by rotating groups using on- and off-ice activities. This level of skater may prefer private lessons, but the arena will not be able to accommodate large numbers of skaters unless some instruction is given in group situations. The revenue from group lessons is greater than from private lessons, and this may help justify and balance the large amount of ice time devoted to figure skating.

Elite training programs use the most ice time with the least efficiency. This level of skating requires fewer skaters on the ice with very individualized programs and sessions. Elite skaters also need off-ice training every day and this necessitates space and equipment such as weight rooms, ballet rooms and music studios.

If your summer program is to attract overnight or out-of-town guests, you must plan for this in advance. Are you prepared to offer housing, transportation, meals and most important, supervision 24 hours a day?

Policies and Procedures

Summer programs offer different opportunities for the arena, instructors and skaters, and therefore some policies may need to be adjusted. Will you have guest professionals involved with your program? What are your policies and incentives for these professionals? Will temporary instructors be classified as employees or independent contractors?

All ice time and private lessons should be paid for in advance. Payment plans may need to be established using deposits and installments. Most facilities don't grant refunds for unused ice time without a doctor's excuse. You will also need to have a policy in place regarding instructors' charges to customers related to music editing, competition and test session coaching, etc.

Successful summer camps require disciplined behavior. Policies and consequences regarding behavior must be clearly explained to all. Tardiness, absenteeism and poor work ethics are areas to address.

Special needs of participants, whether medical or legal, must be known. The arena's application form should provide space for listing special needs, including medical, custodial and emergency contacts.

Program Development

Regardless of the size or type of program you decide to host, confirmation letters with daily schedules should be sent to all participants with detailed instructions such as maps, check in/check out times and arrangements, food/snacks, off-ice programming needs, etc. This information should be mailed to all participants prior to the start of the summer program. A welcoming packet should greet the participants when they arrive the first day.

In order to make the program more rewarding, evaluations or progress reports for participants may be written or on video. You can help skaters achieve their goals by offering exhibitions, test sessions and competitions. This adds to the success of your program.

Social activities will enhance the atmosphere of your summer school. Plan to mix fun in with the work with weekly themes, parties and fun activities.

At the end of your summer school, follow up with participants to find out what they liked and what could be done better. This is the basis for planning your next successful summer skating school.

Marketing a Summer Skating School

Programs that get the word out early and keep getting the word out reap rewards for their efforts through higher registration numbers. Advertising in national skating publications and in local skating competition programs reaches targeted audiences.

Informational brochures and flyers should be prominently displayed at the arena and mailed to skaters on your arena's mailing list, including participants in local competitions. If your facility has a website, be sure to post information on your school as early as possible. Help to spur interest in the school by announcing a contest with a free week of the program as a prize. Build excitement with your skaters and turn them into enthusiastic word-of-mouth advertisers for skating and your program.

The goal of your summer skating school should be to turn customers into repeat customers, and eventually, into skaters for life.