

Tips on Running Skating Camps and Clinics

by Dianne Powell

Is a skating camp or clinic a good idea for your facility? If you're planning to add a camp or clinic to your arena schedule, what do you need to know?

To compile this article, the *EDGE* interviewed several ISI members experienced in hosting camps and clinics. All agreed that the benefits of hosting a camp or clinic are positive for rinks, skating directors, instructors and students. Barb Yackel, ISI National Events Coordinator and Skating Program Director, says, "A clinic enhances your skating school. It gives skaters more variety. If you zero in on a footwork class or spotlight numbers, presentation, choreography, all those specific areas make more well-rounded skaters. It gives them opportunities they might not otherwise have." Off-ice conditioning clinics have proven successful at Schwan's, and ballet is being added to the offerings. Yackel looks forward to hosting residential camps in the future. Patti Feeney, ISI's Managing Director of Member Programs and Services, says, "Students benefit from the concentrated focus of information and skills work. Teachers learn from the instructors who come in to teach at these camps and clinics; it's a good educational tool for them. For the rink, it obviously means revenue. Those focused camps, if run properly, are big profit centers for the facility. If they're using an outside vendor to run the camps, that vendor also stands to make considerable profits." Dan Despotopolous, owner/president of D & D Sports in Bend, Oregon, and former owner/manager of the San Diego Ice Arena, points out that rinks also benefit from the training their instructors receive from guest instructors. Vicki Korn, varsity coach of the 1999 U.S. National Champions, the Miami University Synchronized Skating Team, and an experienced camp and clinic host and frequent guest instructor, says, "For rinks, a skating camp or clinic brings people into the facility and brings in income. For instructors, it gives them a chance to see what other people are doing and perhaps to learn from the person being brought in. For the skaters, it's a great opportunity to experience an instructor that possibly they'd never have a chance to have contact with." "For rinks," says Dianne DeLeeuw, chair of ISI's Instructor Section, "camps fill up dead ice, draw new customers, increase the skills of existing customers and expose instructors to more skaters." Before you start planning a camp or clinic Despotopoulos advises that you first ask, "Why are we planning to offer a skating camp or clinic? Are we doing it to make money, to enhance our program, to give our program participants another level of accomplishment? You need to know why you're doing it, because generally you have to change other programs to accommodate the camp or clinic. If you're doing a camp for several days or a week or more, six or seven hours a day, it's obviously taking away from your other business. Not everybody is going to participate in the camps." "Second," says Despotopoulos, "you have to decide what product you're going to produce – hockey or figure skating, what instructors are available. Then you might get to your budget and schedule." "You have to consider your market and target audience. Are you drawing from in-house skaters or outside?" says DeLeeuw. Toni Friedland, who is hosting her first synchronized skating camp at Glenview Ice Center in June, says, "The first thing I did was nail down the ice and coach Vicki Korn." Kathy Wainhouse, at Harry Sprinker Recreation Center, Tacoma, Washington, warns that it's important to make sure your facility is available for your proposed times, "not just the ice but also rooms to hold off-ice sessions. You need to work out your time schedule, whether it's for one day, a series of days or weeks. "Plan everything in exact detail. Follow a schedule, coordinate with everyone from management to the maintenance staff," cautions DeLeeuw. "Make sure you have a full understanding of what you're trying to

present," says Korn. "Know what your audience is going to be and prepare appropriately. You don't want to be prepared to talk to adults and have tiny tots. Know what your market is. Know what is going on in your area and don't over-saturate the market." "You need to be well prepared ahead of time. The more organized you are, the better your chances of success," says Julia Tortorella, who is known for her successful residential ISI Boot Camp at the Owens Center in Peoria, Illinois. "You need a plan, a back-up plan, and to always be flexible. Plan, plan, plan, change the plan," laughs Tortorella. "Two things to remember," says Tortorella, "are organization and supervision. You cannot be organized enough. If you've thought of every possible thing that can go wrong, more will. No matter how well staffed you are, you always have to have an extra body to take care of the child with a cut finger or the one who needs to go to the bathroom. Things tend to occur, which take you out of the norm. Somebody is going to get a bug bite or not feel well or twist an ankle, and you have to make sure you have enough personnel to cover situations like that." "You must prepare for the unexpected," agrees DeLeeuw. "We had an off-ice presenter not show up and needed to fill 30 minutes with no ice. I rounded up an assistant manager to take the kids on a tour of the rink – the compressor room, resurfacers area, etc. This turned out to be a highlight, especially the dumping of the snow." Wainhouse, who refers to her clinics as seminars, says, "The last seminar we did, the kids had to bring a sack lunch and the thing I didn't allow for was parents to monitor the kids during lunch time." In organizing and planning your schedule, "it's really important to walk through the day with all your helpers," says DeLeeuw. "You need to plan and arrange for where you need props for games and activities. You need lots of helpers to coordinate where and when you need everything. Make sure you set everything up early, and be prepared for late comers. If you're going to have younger kids, you need to plan alternative activities for them. We have some Snoopy skating videos upstairs, so if the little kids get bored, they can go upstairs and watch cartoons." "I send a memo to each instructor involved telling them what is expected of them and giving them a timeframe for what they're to do," says DeLeeuw. "I do an individual time schedule for each skater that they receive at check-in. In time blocks where different things are offered, I highlight where each skater is supposed to be. When the kids come in, they get an admission sticker, based on their group, so we can very quickly identify which group they are in on the ice." The biggest mistake that camp or clinic planners make, according to Korn is "not anticipating the sheer numbers of the event. They are overwhelmed. They'll have registration scheduled from 7:00 to 7:15, registering over 100 kids, and that just doesn't work." A good check-in system, with ample volunteers or staff to assist in the process, is critical to getting your camp or clinic off to the right start. Other determinations you'll need to consider include: residential or non-residential (housing options for residential programs); length of camp or clinic; staffing (rink staff or outside vendors); classes to be offered; age range; class sizes; extracurricular activities; and student/instructor ratios. Keys to Success The keys to a successful camp or clinic are "early registration, good organization, and marketing," says Janice Forbes, Sprinker Recreation Center. "Get the word out early. We do that through our newsletter and flyers posted on our bulletin board. We also have the staff helping out, making sure their kids sign up." Friedland distributes flyers and brochures announcing her clinic at competitions and at her district meeting. Some rinks also display posters of their events. DeLeeuw reports that her rink offers a \$5 rebate to coaches for each student they enroll. "This gives them the incentive to participate in the camp, because they don't lose so much money on their private lessons, and it gives us a big base of campers for the skating camp." "The keys to a successful camp or clinic are organization and having the best interest of the kids in mind and making sure they have a good time," says Korn. Forbes suggests establishing a theme for your clinic or camp. Then you need to print an eye-catching brochure, says DeLeeuw. "You need to include as much information on what you're offering on the brochure as possible, so people will get excited." "Getting your information out in a timely fashion is important," says Yackel. "Make sure the communication to the parents and skaters is complete. If you're putting on a footwork or power clinic, make sure you're supplying the best instructor for that, and keep the costs attractive. Start your planning early. You need enough lead time to get information out so people can plan. If you're going to have a summer camp or

clinic, you have to have your information out by February or March. If you're going to do a summer event, right after the first of the year you'd better have your ducks in a row." Additional Suggestions:

- *If you're planning an end-of-camp performance or exhibition, don't forget to apply for your ISI endorsement.*
- *Divide your skaters by age and ability. Sometimes you may need to be flexible and make exceptions. On-ice sessions can be divided by ability and off-ice sessions by age, so participants get to meet more skaters.*
- *Don't forget to have parents sign appropriate medical emergency forms and waivers and provide emergency telephone numbers.*
- *Make arrangements for back-up medical services.*
- *If there are going to be games, what prizes will you provide? Make sure you have enough prizes.*
- *What arrangements will you make for food and beverages, meals and/or snacks?*
- *Will you be providing participant premium gift items or awards? If so, allow plenty of time for ordering and delivery.*
- *Send confirmation letters to early registrants and enclose a general schedule, list of what they should bring with them, forms and waivers to be signed, and a map.*
- *Have some contingency plans in case an instructor doesn't show up.*
- *Know your limitations.*
- *Plan to provide the best program you can.*
- *Start on time and keep the day moving.*
- *End each day with games.*
- *Make it fun as well as a learning experience.*
- *At the end of the camp or clinic, survey your participants - guest instructors, parents and skaters - to determine what classes were popular, what went over well, what they want again.*

Korn says a skating camp or clinic is successful when the skaters go away with a good feeling about what they've done, what they've accomplished, and the parents feel comfortable that their children have been well supervised and well instructed.