

Building good character should be top priority

By pam dawson

There are so many people who influence the lives of our skaters: officials, coaches, choreographers, partners, team members, teachers, family, friends and most of all parents. As parents, we always wonder what type of person our child will grow up to be and the contributions he or she will make to society.

Building character in our skaters is more complicated than teaching them to do a double Axel or back inside three-turn. It involves the heart as well as the head. The goal is to make good thoughts and conduct a matter of habit. We want our skaters to know what's right, to want what's good and to do what's good.

We try to instill virtues such as honesty, respectfulness, responsibility, fairness and kindness. These virtues are especially important now as athletes are routinely tempted to make ethical choices in regard to their sports. Because we instill these virtues, figure skating has been one of, and remains, a "clean" sport. Revisit the positive lessons you learned from your teachers and let those lessons inspire you to provide a positive and character-building experience for your child.

Effective character building is captured in the acronym T.E.A.M. – Teach, Enforce, Advocate and Model.

We teach character by promoting values and developing the ethical virtues that make up a moral person: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. We have to be sure our skaters understand what each of these traits look like.

We entrench these values by enforcing them, and by being sure to back up our words with actions. Advocating values means we passionately and relentlessly state our commitment to good character so our skaters have no doubt what we want and expect from them, both on and off the ice.

Finally, we have to lead by example. We have to model the virtues we want to see in our skaters. We teach values by the way we deal with pressures, frustrations and fatigue, and everyday action, especially in what we say and do when we think no one is looking.

I want to thank Carol Rossignol, PSA education and accreditation director, for allowing me to reprint parts of her article from the September/October 2007 *The Professional Skater PS Magazine*.

In closing, I'd like to share with you a quote and letter to his daughter from Michael Josephson, founder of Josephson Institute of Ethics based in Southern California. The work of the institute is to emphasize the importance of character and to educate people about ways to live more ethically.

Continue to reach for your star!

**Pam Dawson, Chair
Parents Committee**



What I want my daughter to get out of sports

Several years ago, when my daughter Carissa was about to enter her first gymnastics competition, I wrote her a letter expressing my hopes and goals for her athletic experience.

Here's a revised version:

My dearest Carissa,

I know you've worked hard to prepare yourself to compete, and I know how much you want to win. That's a good goal. You'll always get the best out of yourself when you strive for victory.

But winning is not the only goal or even the most important one. What's most impor-

tant is to have fun and learn. I want you to love the sport so much that you find pleasure in the effort itself and in the friendship of your teammates and other competitors.

I want you to know you can do well no matter who takes home the medals if you do your best. And you will be a winner if you keep getting better.

I want you to pursue excellence with all your heart, not to please me or your mom or anyone else but to experience the joy of accomplishment.

If you wobble, keep going. If you fall, get up and continue. No matter what happens, keep your head high. Don't give up or give in.

If things don't go your way, don't cry, whine or make excuses.

Always conduct yourself in a way that brings honor to your team, your coaches, your family and, above all, yourself.

I want you to be a model of good sportsmanship, treating the sport, its rules, your teammates, other competitors and judges with respect.

But most of all, I want you to know how proud of you I am.

Michael Josephson of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, © 2007 Reprinted with permission of Josephson Institute. www.charactercounts.org