

What Makes an Ice Dance Champion?

In ice dancing, many factors separate the good skaters from the champions. If you want to be an ice dance champion, here are some tips that will help you.

Posture

One of the most important aspects of ice dancing is your posture. Good posture makes you look elegant and exude confidence. It improves balance and control and enables your partner to connect with you.

Timing

Timing is critical in ice dancing. If you and your partner do not dance in time with the music, no amount of proficiency in any other aspect of your skating can compensate for this. The music is the boss; it must guide and lead everything you do on the ice.

Line

By “line,” we mean the length and stretch of the body from head to toe. Maintaining a good line involves more than very high free leg extensions alone; it involves your entire body. When skating with your partner, it is important that your lines (head, body and legs) match, in order to enhance and improve the quality and unison of your dancing.

Hold

“Hold” is the correct and unaffected positioning of the body parts when you perform dance holds. There should be symmetry of the partners’ arms, which come together to form the dance position. Although this position changes in size, it should remain constant in shape so that you and your partner remain in the correct body position relative to each other. As a team, your silhouette should always be pleasing to the judges and the audience.

Poise

Poise is the stretch of the woman’s body upwards, outwards, and leftwards into the man’s right arm to achieve balance and connection with his frame, as well as to project outwards toward the judges and the audience.

Togetherness

Togetherness means the melding of two people’s body weights into one so that leading and following appear effortless, and the dancers are totally in synch with each other.

Musicality and Expression

These two terms involve the basic characterization of the dance with regard to the particular music that is being played, as well as the choreographic adherence to musical phrasings and accents. Musicality and expression also involves the use of light and shade to create interest in response to these musical phrases and accents. When dancing compulsory dances, a championship-quality dance team can make it obvious to anyone what rhythm they are skating to (waltz, tango, cha-cha, etc.), even if the spectator can't hear the music and doesn't know the steps.

Presentation

Are you and your partner selling your performance to the judges and audience? Are you dancing outwardly, with enthusiasm, exuding your joy of dancing and confidence in your performance? In other words, are you and your partner both physically and emotionally involved in the performance? If so, then your presentation is at a championship level.

Power

“Power” simply means “energy.” Energy is exciting to watch, but it must be controlled, not wild. Powerful movement can be an asset in a waltz or fox-trot, for example, but only if it is channeled into the correct swing of the body, rather than simply skating with powerful strokes and performing high extensions. When applying power to your moves, the lilt of the music must be matched by the action of the body. For example, in a waltz, the dancers' body action must clearly show the influence of the one down beat and two up beats—the release of power into the beginning of a sequence must be controlled and sustained during the rise at the end of that sequence.

Foot and Leg Action

The stroking of your feet across the floor during the fox-trot to achieve smoothness and softness; the deliberate lifting and placing of your feet in tango to achieve a staccato action; the correct bending and straightening of your knees in rumba to create hip motion; the extension of your ankles and pointing of the toes of your non-supporting foot to enhance the line of a figure; the sequential use of your four joints (hip, knee, ankle, and toes) to achieve fullness of action and optimal power; the bending and straightening of your knees and ankles during a waltz to create rise and fall; the use of the inside and outside edges of your feet to create style and line—all of these have to do with your foot and leg action, which is an important aspect of championship-level ice dancing.

Lead and Follow (Unison)

Championship teams perform in unison. Does the man lead with his whole body, instead of just his arms? Does the lady follow effortlessly, or does the man have to assist her? At the championship level, unison should be effortless for both partners, as if each can sense precisely where the other will be and how strongly the other will execute a skating stroke—in short, to know how to react without thinking.

Intangibles

Intangibles has to do with how a couple “looks” together, whether they “fit” emotionally, their neatness of appearance, costuming, the flow of their choreography, and, basically, whether or not they look like “dancers.” All these factors have an effect on a judge’s perception and, therefore, on his markings.