

Q and A from U.S. Figure Skating Club Webinar on Rink Relations

Presented by Jeff Theiler, COO of STAR (Serving the American Rinks)

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1. Our club operates out of multiple rinks...does STAR have any resources or guidance for Clubs in this situation?

A: I would recommend that your club appoint one person as rink liaison to communicate with the operators/managers of each rink. Doing so may help provide consistency in ice contracts and operation of club sessions at each rink.

2. Could you address issues with skating directors and how to make sure the board and skating director are on the same page?

A: Constant communication is the key. Each of you has different roles and responsibilities and it is important that first you define these and set a plan for consistent, open dialogue - back and forth. The best thing you could do to get this going is set up regular meetings with the skating director to discuss upcoming events, opportunities, any issues or concerns, and find different ways to collaborate. A successful club needs a strong feeder system and the skating director is the link. If you don't have good working relationship, then improving it should become a priority of the board.

3. If we are signed up for this Webinar, will we get notices for future ones?

A: Yes you will. We send out the invitations to all past participants.

4. Do you know of any successful before school programs?

A: Every area is different, so I feel that having a meeting with your coaches would be best to figure out different ways to make the most of before school ice time. The coaches are the ones who counsel their skaters on where/when to skate. Have them think about different ways to promote usage i.e. - by offering semi-private, small group lessons/clinics, MIF classes, create package discounts. Another idea is to survey your membership to find out what their needs are. After all, they are your customers.

5. We have a challenge with bridging skaters from the Basic Skills Program....seems like the program wants to hold on to them as long as possible and doesn't want to work with the Club.

A: My first reaction to this question is what is the Club offering to attract new members? Please have every member of your board answer this question- "Why should someone join our club?" What additional benefits, services, incentives are you offering to beginner skaters? Do you have a presence in the facility? Is the progression to the Club

clearly defined? A Bridge Program is the missing link and can be customized to meet the needs of both. For more information about Bridge Programs and Clubs, go to www.usfigureskating.org and click on the “Clubs” tab.

6. Can you briefly review what a rink’s revenue from concessions should be? Our rink currently outsources concessions and takes a percentage. Rink Management is not happy with this situation and has talked about user groups taking over to make profit to help pay for ice. Would this be more profitable?

A: Unfortunately this is a tough question to answer without the following information: Area of the country the rink is located, the number of ice sheets in the rink, the months of operation, hours of operation, programs offered at the rink, number of dining choices in close proximity to the rink, concession menu choices, etc. The concession operations at the rinks I have managed in the past were able to generate between 3% and 5% profit.

7. What can be done when a rink owner feels he has the right to tell the club board how the club will be run? Such as whom the club should have in certain board positions.

A: In my opinion, if the rink owner is not a dues paying club member, or does not hold a position on the club board then he/she does not have the right to tell the club how it should be run. However, the owner can decide who he/she will or will not do business with, so you will have to be careful. I would recommend taking a very business like approach to all dealings with this individual.

8. How do you get the coaches to buy into things like splitting up the ice – this can take away their private lesson time?

A: We are all here for the skaters and offering them the best possible experience with our sport. The best approach is to host a coaches meeting to discuss different ideas and opportunities the Club would like to explore. Again, they are the ones counseling their skaters on where and when to skate so without their support and participation, new initiatives won’t be successful. Working together is the key.

9. How would you get reduced ice rates during the “off season”? Our rinks do not seem to understand that we can get more skaters in the summer if they charged less.

A: Your rink may be in a financial position that leaves them no other choice other than to charge full ice rate year round in order to break even. Most rink operators will give reduced ice rates for bulk purchases of ice. (i.e. - the more you buy the better rate you get).

10. May I share your slides on our Club Facebook page?

A: Yes, please feel free to do so.

11. What would be considered a reasonable discount for ice offered to a club for peak season ice used for a competition?

A: It is generally not common for a rink to discount their prime time ice during the peak season, because they need to generate sufficient revenue in the peak season to cover expenses during the off-peak season. However many rinks will discount their ice rates for groups if purchased in large quantities over a long period of time (i.e. - 25 hours a week, over 6 months). Some rinks may be willing to provide a small discount 5% to 10% of the ice rate for purchase of a whole weekend worth of ice (Friday – Sunday).

12. What are your feelings on skaters paying the rink for ice instead of the club paying?

A: This is very common at rinks all over the country, because often times the club does not have the funds to purchase ice time. This is usually referred to as “Rink sponsored freestyle”. I feel that it is better to have skaters pay the rink directly for “Rink sponsored” sessions, than to not have any ice at all because the club can’t afford to guarantee it through a contract.

13. For our annual competition, our rink does not want us to bring in homemade food provided by volunteers and want us to have catered food only. Any advice in approaching the rink as this affects our competition budget?

A: This is very common at rinks all over the country. If the rink allows your club to do this, then they would have to let all of their user groups to do the same. I have compromised by allowing clubs to provide homemade food for the judges and volunteers only, not competitors or spectators, during competitions held at rinks I have managed.

14. Our rink offers no free skating ice other than what the club buys at full price. Often, they would rather let the ice sit idle during “off season” hours like in the summer than sell it to the club at a minor discount. What business reason could they have for not selling ice time? We currently pay \$300/hour as at a privately owned facility in the Midwest.

A: The only reason I can think of would be that the rink is in a very poor financial position. It may be very likely that even at \$300 per hour, this ice rate still is not high enough to cover the rinks expenses. As crazy as it sounds, the rink may possibly lose less money by keeping the building empty during certain times of the year.

15. Have you ever run a rink that has two clubs calling it their ‘principal rink’? How did it work? What didn’t work well?

A: There are less than a handful of rinks in the country that have two or more clubs declare it as their principal skating headquarters. Although it is possible, it can be a tricky situation and confusing to customers. One of the most important aspects of any successful figure skating club is the ability to develop a strong working relationship with

its home facility. The critical partnerships that need to be developed and nurtured include relationships with rink personnel, coaching staff and other user groups within the facility. Trouble lies ahead for clubs that do not cultivate positive relationships with these constituents. Two-way communication is a key ingredient to building these successful relationships. It is U.S. Figure Skating's goal that all member clubs are considered a strong asset to the facility, a contributing tenant and ambassadors of the sport within the community.