

Before changing coaches, think things out

BY KATHY CASEY

Lack of communication is a big issue. When communication breaks down between the coach, skater and parents, things start to get tense. Weeks before a coaching change, all parties generally feel things are not right.

There are many reasons skaters decide to move on, and in my 30 years of coaching I have heard them all. Here are some reasons I've heard:

- The parents think the coach is favoring other skaters
- The past year produced mediocre results
- The skater was solicited by another coach
- The coach is not qualified to take the skater farther
- The parents have unreasonable expectations for their child
- There are personality conflicts
- The coach does not like the skater anymore or the skater

just needs a change.

I urge parents to make sure their reasons for changing coaches are in the skater's best interest. When the time comes to change coaches, I suggest you give it another 90 days to make sure your decision is right. During this time, everyone involved should make every effort to improve things through open communication and positive change. If all fails, it is time to change.

The coach should be the first person notified. Changing coaches is a personal matter, and your actions and feelings should be kept private. Changes generally do not happen without hurt feelings. While that is not what anyone wants, that is indeed what happens.

If a coaching change must happen, I advise a face-to-face meeting with all parties involved. It should last no longer than 15-20 minutes. Honesty and sincerity are important. The reasons for changing coaches should be discussed, but I do not advise bringing up heated issues from the past. At the meeting, all lesson and rink bills should be paid. Kindly thank the coach for everything that he or she has done for the skater, smile and wish them well. The meeting is over.

It is a good idea for the new coach to speak with the old coach before any lessons are given. It is imperative that the Professional Skaters Association Code of Ethics is strictly adhered to by all. (The code of ethics can be found at www.skatepsa.com.)

What are the worst ways to change coaches? There are many, and I have experienced a few of them. Here are a few methods I don't recommend:

- Leave a message on the coach's answering machine
- Send an e-mail
- Say nothing and start taking lessons from another coach
- Go to the coach's home uninvited and be confrontational
- Send a nasty letter
- Have the new coach send the old coach a fax;
- Cause a scene at the rink

You often find that once one skater at the rink

changes coaches, everyone thinks it is the thing to do. I urge parents to make decisions that are right for their own children and stay away from malicious gossip.

Coaching changes are one of the most unpleasant parts of our sport. It has happened or will happen to every coach who has ever given a lesson, whether he or she teaches Basic Skills skaters or Olympic champions. I have experienced unpleasant coaching changes a number of times, and my advice to everyone involved is to get over it. It is unhealthy to let bad experiences eat at you. Instead, look at the positive things our sport has to offer and enjoy the ride.

Sometimes skaters find a coaching change was a positive move for them, and other times they find it was a negative move. Make sure you are making intelligent decisions, because the grass is not always greener on the other side.

Kathy Casey is a World and Olympic coach with more than 30 years experience. She has been a guest presenter for Team USA camps for U.S. Figure Skating and conducts skating seminars for clubs and rinks worldwide. She recently joined U.S. Figure Skating Headquarters as its new director of athlete performance enforcement and tracking. ■



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