

When Should My Figure Skater Join a Figure Skating Club?

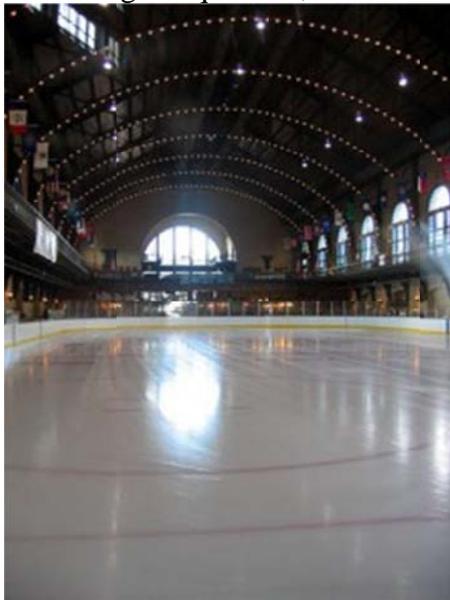
7/21/2010 courtesy *Icemom.net*

Today's question comes from reader Maria. She writes:

When do you have to (or rather when does it make sense) to join a figure skating club – at what level? Is it when you start using their club ice time? At what level does that start? I understand that the price of ice is lower if you are a club member, and I have heard about some parties/fun events held by a local club. Also, once your kid finishes the skating school (through Freestyle 4 at our rink), the kid needs to be a member of the club to participate in competitions, is that right?

Are there any other benefits, in particular are there any benefits (besides parties) for a kid who is still a beginner and in the skating school?

This is a great question, Maria. **The short answer:** join a figure skating club when your skater's private coach tells you to do so.



The long answer: you should join the club when it makes *sense* to do so.

Your local figure skating club offers some benefits to its members: when you pay your membership fees, a portion will go to USFS and a portion will remain with the club. They'll handle registering you with USFS as a member. The figure skating club might require that you, the adult, register with the club, along with your skater member. Readers, correct me if I'm wrong, but most figure skating clubs require an adult member in addition to the skater member so the adults can run for the figure skating club board and vote in club elections.

Club Ice: You're likely to receive a club member's rate on club ice and preferential treatment when contracting for ice. In other words, members pay less and are more likely to skate when ice time is limited. If your skater isn't on the ice that much, this probably won't affect you in a big way. If you're struggling to get your skater on the ice in the middle of hockey season, you'll want to be a member of a club and maybe even a second club.

Club Events: Figure skating club members can attend club parties and events. End-of-the-year picnics, winter sledding parties, and selling cookie dough for the club fundraiser are all club events. The good news is that member skaters can join in the fun. The O.K. news is that it's a *club* and you'll probably be expected to volunteer at the club's competition or sell concessions at the rink's hockey games.

USFSA Sanctioned Events: You're right: after Learn to Skate, figure skaters who want to compete in US Figure Skating sanctioned competitions, test in USFS sessions, or appear in USFS sanctioned exhibitions will need to be members of USFS. That doesn't necessarily mean your skater needs to belong to a *club*, though. Your skater can be an individual USFS member (more later).

Skating Magazine One USFSA member per family will receive *Skating Magazine* in the mail. This is USFSA's official magazine and it covers national- and international-level skaters and competitions, adults in skating, synchronized skating, club news, and young skater profiles.

Basic Skills Participants: US Figure Skating considers Basic Skills participants Basic Skills members. These skaters and their families don't have to join a club, but they can. If a Basic Skills member wants to compete in a Basic Skills competition, that's just fine. No USFS membership beyond participating in Learn to Skate and having the permission of the skating director is needed.

Introductory Memberships: USFS offers introductory memberships for families who are just trying club membership on for size. Introductory members pay a lesser fee for their first year of membership in the club and USFSA, but receive all the benefits of full membership.

Individual Memberships: Sometimes people don't want to join a club. That's fine. USFS will accept you as an individual member through its [online application](#). Individual members receive a rulebook and a pin (first year). They can attend USFSA sanctioned events, but possibly not club events, like a barbeque or an exhibition. They're not going to receive club member treatment or club member rates when contracting for ice, either. The good news: you'll never have to sell a magazine subscription or a tin of mixed nuts.

Collegiate Memberships: We all know college students barely have enough money to pay for their ramen noodles and peanut butter. USFS has a four-year deal for them. If they sign up through a club, they'll pay a lesser membership fee, but receive all the membership benefits. It's a one-time deal, though, and lasts for four consecutive years.

When did we join a club? Ice Girl and I joined a club when it became clear that she needed club ice to work on her programs. She was still in Basic Skills, but had a private coach. Ice Coach told me when to request the membership forms and that's what I did. I think it's best for the coach to lead the family in this decision about when to join a club. However, it's also a good idea to think of your own wallet. If your skater is in Learn to Skate and isn't skating enough to make the club member ice rate attractive, you can hold off joining the club for a while. Explain to your skater's coach that you're watching your skating budget and see what she advises you to do.