

My Skater's First Speed Skating Meet

Pacers Speed Skating Club of Ottawa

www.ottawapacers.ca

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Short Track

You are planning to attend your skater's first short track speed skating meet. Here are some tips from parents who have been to lots of meets. Hopefully you and your skater will have lots of fun, meet new people, and improve your skills. The best way is to get involved.

A good idea is to start with an All Points or Ability meet. This type of meet matches up skaters by ability levels, not age. Competing against people of like ability is a good way to get started for a first meet. With that first meet under your belt, you will be well prepared for age class meets too. Go for it!

All provincial level meets are age class meets.

How does a typical meet run?

Most meets are for two days. When you arrive, dressing rooms will be assigned by speed skating club, with most dressing rooms shared by several clubs. Look for your club's name on the dressing room door. Get there early to get a good spot, but remember, only one seat per skater. Space is always at a premium. Other family members need a seat in the stands, not the change room. Keep your gear together and tidy and out of the way. That keeps it from being stepped on!

There will be a warm-up time on the ice by age groups, typically around 7:30 a.m. The time is often listed on the meet announcement. (The announcement is usually on the OSSA web site, (speedskatingontario.org)). You will need to be at the rink about a half hour before warm-up to give your skater time to be dressed and ready at their warm up time. Each age group will have about 7-10 minutes on the ice. Don't miss your skater's allotted time.

This will be followed by a flood, (the "dance of the Zamboni"), and then racing begins, usually starting with the youngest skaters first. A listing of the race order for each day will be posted, and copies are usually available. Note all the races for your skater's age group, so you can be well prepared at race time.

Skaters will skate two distances each day. There will typically be heats, and perhaps quarter and semi finals before finals for each distance. How many heats depends on the number of skaters in each age category.

The track will likely be flooded after the finals for each of the two distances. There may be other flood breaks as well. Usually there is a lunch break. Skaters are responsible for being ready for their races, so it is up to the skater (and their parents) to pay attention to how the racing is progressing.

The announcer will give the number of each race as the day progresses. In some arenas, the race number is also posted on the rink scoreboard, or there may be some other indication of current race number or group.

After each race, the results are posted, usually somewhere near the lobby. Race results are generally posted about 30 minutes after the race finishes. Nearby will be the "heat sheets" giving the listing of who is in each heat, and their order on the start line.

Keep a log of your skater's distances and times, so you can celebrate personal bests, ("PBs") as your skater progresses over time. A very key one is the 500 metre time, which is used for starting order seeding times for meets.

Your skater will probably enjoy watching some of the more senior skaters, but you will need to plan on something to entertain very young skaters or family members.

At the end of the day, be sure you know the warm up times for the second day. Make sure you have collected **all** the skater's equipment and supplies. Equipment cannot be left at the arena overnight. Make sure the change room is clean and tidy before leaving.

The second day will progress much the same way. Often there will be relay races between the two distances of the second day. They are great fun to watch, and to skate!

At the end of the second day of racing, there will be an awards ceremony. Be sure to gather up all the equipment and supplies, and ensure your area is clean before leaving the change room for the awards ceremony.

Preparing for a meet.

Registration

First you need to register. There is a calendar of each season's events on the OSSA web site. With each event there is a downloadable registration form. It will list the time, location, and entry deadline. Someone at your club will be responsible for collecting the entries and the entry fee ahead of the deadline. Someone from the club will also handle "check in" of all that club's skaters the night before the meet. You will need to know the age group to which your skater belongs, (midget, bantam, etc.). This is based on birthdate.

Be sure to advise if you will not be attending a meet for which you have registered a skater. A missing skater affects the make up of the race schedule.

Mark the registration deadline on your calendar so you do not miss out.

You will need to make travel and hotel arrangements for the weekend of the meet. Usually there will be a hotel holding a block of rooms at a preferred rate, but these tend to go quickly.

Usually families will drive to a meet, but in some cases a bus is arranged. Again you will need to sign up and pay early for a bus to ensure your spots.

Equipment

At least a week ahead, go over all of the skater's equipment. Ensure all the required equipment, (proper helmet, gloves, neckguard, knee pads, shin guards, and skin suit), is present and in good order. In particular, go over the skates carefully, and check for weak or broken laces, and re-tighten *ALL* bolts and screws. Look for any cracks on metal parts and have them checked or replaced long before race day. (It is not unusual to see someone's blade come loose during a race. This is a big danger to that skater and to other skaters. It is entirely avoidable.) Be sure you have the correct wrenches or hex wrenches in your tool kit to keep the skates and blades tightly assembled. Check all the straps or buckles on helmets.

Have a skater's bag to hold all their skating supplies, tool kit, suits, clothing etc. A wheeled bag lets young skaters be in charge of their own kit.

Make sure everything is labelled with the skater's name and number. Having the club name along with the skater's name helps get things returned quickly too.

What to bring

Certainly the skater will need all his racing equipment, (skates, skin suit, helmet, gloves, neck guard, knee pads, shin pads). In addition, the skater needs a tool kit with the required wrenches or hex wrenches specific to their skates. Spare laces! A towel to dry the blades, skate guards, blade "socks", spare gloves perhaps, in case the first pair gets wet.

(As the skater progresses, the skater will need a sharpening jig, sharpening stones, oil for the stones, etc. A tool box can work well to hold all this).

Each skater will need something to keep warm in the heat box while waiting to get on the ice for their race. A fleece blanket works really well. It keeps them warm, is easy to get on and off, and hard to lose!

Pack a hair dryer to help dry wet clothes. A small kettle allows easy preparation of hot foods, and a small kettle heats up much faster than a large one. A small cooler is useful for packed food.

Spares for clothing is a big help, and to help be comfortable in warmer or cooler arenas.

Good food to bring: cut up fruit, cut up vegetables, noodle/soups that need just hot water, sandwiches, perhaps a treat.

Why are they pouring water on the ice?

At meets you will see track stewards pouring water on the racing track at the ends of the arenas. This is to help repair the ice where it has been worn by previous races. The racing track actually consists of five different tracks, each about a meter and a half apart up and down the rink. After each few races, the track stewards move the corner blocks to the new track to spread out the wear. So the water isn't there just to get skaters wet; it is there to make the racing better and safer. When skaters do fall, they can get quite wet. That's why it's good to have a hair dryer, some extra clothes, and a towel to blot up the bulk of the water.

Who are all those people and what do they do?

As you start to watch around the rink, you will see lots of volunteers doing their part to make the meet run smoothly.

In the centre of the rink will be two or three people skating around, usually in blue blazers. These are the referees. The chief referee is the one in charge, and is there to ensure a fair meet, with the rules applied properly.

The folks who move the corner blocks, put down water, and generally care for the racing track are the track stewards. Usually there will be about four on the ice at one time, two at each end. Off ice are some folks keeping those water buckets coming.

On one side of the rink, usually the side opposite the stands, are a whole bunch of people.

On the far right will be the coaches for the various clubs. Often eight to twelve people. (They are often very noisy folks!)

Next to them, right by the finish line, are the timers. There is a chief timer and about six to eight other timers.

On the left side of the timers are the place judges. There is a chief judge and about four to six place judges.

In the centre section, depending on the layout of the area, are the announcer, the chief recorder and assistants, (who tally all the races and racers). For some meets there are also people running the electronic timing, who will be there in addition to the regular timers. There will also be several runners getting results to be posted.

On the left side of the big group are the lap counters. There will be a display showing the remaining laps for the lead skater. Lap counters are also the people who ring a bell for the beginning of the last lap for the lead skater.

You will also see the starters with distinctive orange armbands. Which side of the arena they are on depends on the distance being raced. 500 and 1500 metre races begin on the side opposite the crowd of officials. The finish is always right in front of the crowd of officials.

Harder to see, but probably more important to your racer, is the Clerk of the Course and assistants. They are the ones who marshall the skaters into the proper heats, and proper starting line sequence, and get racers on and off the ice. This is a very busy place as twenty to fifty skaters are being arranged into the proper sequence at any time. Note that parents are not allowed in the marshalling area.

Coaches

A Coach from each club will be assigned for each meet. Find out who this is. The Coach will issue the assigned helmet cover for each skater before the warm up. (Be sure to return the helmet cover to the coach before leaving at the end of the meet.)

Coaches are at the meets to help skaters prepare for their race. Ask a coach about strategy or a what to do in different distances. Skaters can ask coaches how they did after your race and perhaps what to do differently next time. If you have any questions or problems during a meet, don't hesitate to talk to your coach

Getting your skater ready to race

Your skater is set up in the change room, and you have checked the race schedule. Your skater should be ready at least ten races ahead of their race. Watch for others in the same group getting ready. Perhaps pair up with an experienced parent. It is better to be early. There is no race for latecomers. A yellow helmet cover will have been issued by the coach for racing this weekend. **DO NOT** switch helmet covers!

Help your skater to get ready, but the goal is to have the skater soon get to the point of getting themselves ready.

Re-check the equipment as it goes on. Ensure all the required equipment is present: helmet, helmet cover, neck guard, cut proof gloves, knee and shin pads. For short track

racing, skin suit hoods should be tucked inside. Don't forget the blanket or coat to keep warm in the heat box.

Bring your skater to the Clerk of the Course area. The volunteers will take over from there. Your skater needs to speak up when called. The marshalling staff will get your racer into the proper heat and onto the ice. Designated volunteers will move coats and guards to the ice exit area, and have them there for your skater to pick up following the race.

Parents are not allowed in the Clerk of the Course area. This is not the place for parents to do last minute adjustments, photographs, etc. The area is too crowded for parents to be present. There is a system to get your skater into the right race, and on and off the ice. Let it work.

When races are started on the spectator-stands side of the arena, it is imperative to have no movement or noises or flashes in the area around the start at the time of the start. Sudden movements can cause any racer to false start and be penalized. That is not fair to any racer. For the same reason, flash photography is not allowed when races are going on

Anything to do after the racing is done?

Be sure you have recorded your skaters times for each race and distance of the day in your log book. Are there any equipment changes that need to be done or added before the next day or next meet? Any things you saw to try next time? Make sure the yellow helmet cover is returned to your skater's coach at the end of the meet. There is a big financial penalty for missing helmet covers.

Volunteering

This whole system runs on volunteers - parent volunteers. If one parent from your family can be free for even half a day, then volunteer. Let the meet coordinator know you are available. Try a range of different tasks. See what you enjoy. There is lots of fun, and learning, in volunteering. Volunteering can be anything from being a gate assistant, to timing, to being a runner, to helping with water, to helping set up the rink the night before - and more. Try a bunch of jobs. We need your help.

If you want to learn more, the rules are all available on line. A better way is to take a Level 1 officials course. It covers all the tasks and rules in an overview. You can go on and become more involved at any level. It will help your skater because you will know more of what goes on, and why.

Long Track Meets

Long track meets are held outdoors. The big change is being prepared for a varying range of weather conditions.

A warm blanket is still one of the best ways for a skater to keep warm while waiting for a heat to start. A blanket covers lots, and is easy and quick to get on and off.

Officials will be more spread out around the oval. Starts will be in various positions around the oval. Watch where the starter with the orange armband goes.

There will likely be two Clerks of the Course. One will be where skaters get on the ice. Skaters need to check in there before going onto the oval ice. The second Clerk will be at the starting line to get racers into their proper order for each heat.

Note that there are two main areas or lanes on the oval. The inner most lane is for warm ups. Your skater can skate there at any time, but it's important that they pay attention to the progression of the racing, and not miss their race! The outer lane(s) are for racing only. All skating is counter-clockwise.

Consider the weather. A warm skater is going to be more comfortable, and skate faster than a frozen skater, especially with younger kids. Hood? Face mask? Ski goggles?

With racing being outdoors, but skaters warming up indoors, it is more difficult to hear announcements. Extra care is needed to ensure you are aware of how the race schedule is progressing. Your skater does not want to miss their race!

Long Track skating is something we are very lucky to have available in Ottawa. Take advantage of the opportunity. Many think it is the best speed skating!

GO FOR IT!

Be sure to check the Ottawa Pacers website often. www.ottawapacers.ca

We hope this guide helps you prepare your skater for their first meet. If you have any suggestions on how to improve this guide, please let us know.

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