

A Fairy-tale Figure Skating Weekend (one amateur's perspective)

Once upon a time in a land called Langley, BC, a former British colony, there lived nearby an adult-world's skating champion named Diana Barkley. One day Diana decided to organize a weekend skating seminar that turned out to be, well, a nice ice event, well attended, managed and scheduled. "A what?" you may be asked critically by poo pooers, and nay-sayers stuck at home on the couch among Pringle crumbs and sugary cola stains. Just tell them that they "_____". (Finish sentence with your personal choice of defense or reciprocal insult).

Of course Diana was accompanied and assisted by her big-helper elf, little James W. who took glamorous on-ice photos of you, filled your goodie bags with unlikely but hugely-popular skaters' stuff like Frank's Red Hot, original cayenne pepper sauce in the 148 ml size bottle. He's the one who also made sure you signed your rights away if you dared to hurt yourself, or somebody else. Did you know that he probably checked out every one of you (mostly the women) as a potential, competitive ice-dance partner?

Now, Diana is a talented woman and she used her communication skills and James's extensive email list to attract participants including our American friends, from far away exotic places like California, Washington and even New York. And be it noted that it was great to see some of our Kamloops' area skating compatriots like Cheyenne and friends who graciously hosted a similar fun time and event for us in June of 2010. In all, over 40 skaters at every level of skill came to Langley to play, descending upon an impressive new arena – get this - built mainly for hockey (sacrilege!).

What some may not know is that hockey ice is normally harder than figure-skating ice and so is not as desirable to figure skaters. However, the ice here was soft and smooth, thanks to Mr. Zamboni and his conscientious driver. It's only a sheet of ice some critics would say but it's a skater's playground and its ice manager gave it his personal focused attention, not unlike lovingly petting the family cat. The building itself was warm too and pleasant for an ice rink but the planners could have employed an architect who believes in stairs that connect different levels without one needing a GPS and an elevator to get around the building.

It was my impression that the "beau of the ball" had to be professional skater, coach and general fun guy, Tyrrell Cockrum (Ty), whom some of us met at the fabulous Sun Valley skating camp last August. Personable and a dazzling skater he patiently led our multiple smaller groups through various skills and still made himself available to skate socially with any interested women on the ice-dance sessions. I'm not aware of any guys to ask for a dance but the girls were absolutely giggly and giddy about skating with him. He didn't disappoint.

Ty was accompanied by our dear old friend (oops – long time friend) Moira North, the Founder and Artistic Director of Ice Theatre of New York, a highly-acclaimed skating performance company whose office was basically wiped out and washed out by recent Hurricane Sandy. (Moira must have a lot on her mind and our warmest supportive thoughts go with her.) Moira worked with Ty and our group adding fluidity grace, and creative hand, arm and body movements to the skills they jointly demonstrated as they challenged the group to perform. Moira also introduced some half-dozen sexy skating stops that looked terrific but some found nearly impossible to execute. Fortunately, these exercises didn't likely spell the demise of the old-fashioned snow-plough stop to keep one out of trouble. Moira and Ty's choreography session produced a fun and showy routine with intricate and complex combinations of group moves including the hugely-popular and unforgettable cinnamon-roll move. I don't know how any group performance could be complete

without it. Don't forget to check it out on You Tube possibly under title, "The Cinnamon Roll – A Skaters' Hug for the Ages". Or, " You can't eat it but you can skate it"

From the archives of 1988 Olympic skating history appeared our own legendary Karyn Garossino, now a sports psychologist and corporate trainer, who treated us to neat tales of her personal and professional experiences along with helpful insights on skating performance and competition. Addressing the psychological and emotional rationales for skating, Karyn offered for thought a belief of the ancient Egyptians (those renowned desert skaters) to suggest that we choose to skate, in spite of many odds against perfection - for the purpose of "JOY". She covered symptomatic grounds of butterflies, dry mouth, racing heart, need to pee and, I think she implied, that to-be-ever-feared performers' diarrhea. (Maybe the elf told me that one.) Karyn addressed the performer's saboteur, the skater's own mind. She also related very practical advice to the women folk on how to avoid getting their dresses snagged and sabotaged by the toilet immediately prior to their next Olympic competitive skates. Unfortunately the men were left cold on this one as those of us guys who have never donned women's clothes or simply tried on a skating dress are still trying to figure out the constructive make up and dynamics of dresses, and the deductive logic of these very instructive but non-intuitive suggestions. In her demonstration Karyn was able to trick a whole roomful of grown-ups into simultaneously quitting to breathe while we clapped our hands ferociously for no good reason at all but looking like clapping monkeys in a research lab. It is with regret of the skating community that Karyn, a truly-great skater and brilliant choreographer, has moved from the skating world to other professional and family-related pursuits. A great personal skating history and she gave us a lot of pleasure. We wish her all the best in the pursuit of life and family "joy".

We were truly fortunate and honored to have national skating treasures and 2006 Olympians, Megan Wing and Aaron Lowe, here to put us through drills of skills and thrills, assisting us with performance-enhancing edges, stroking, turning and other skating maneuvers. They are currently coaching and producing wonderful competitive ice dancers in the Vancouver area. However, I wonder if Megan and Aaron really realize how important they are to the figure-skating world and how closely we have followed them throughout their competitive careers. They have always been a stunning team and one of the classiest, best-dressed couples in the skating world. Any skater would be blessed to have them as coaches. Don't tell Megan that I really appreciated her giving me a skating compliment – not a regular phenomenon in my case.

Diana led two well-received stretch, hurt and suffer sessions prior to lacing up for the ice. When I first arrived, a bit late, I thought I may have stumbled into a Lululemon advertising photo shoot when I witnessed the rear-end view of some 35 women all dressed in black tights, some with little white logo circles on their right calves. Even some of the five greatly-outnumbered men took lead from the female masses and donned black-legged knock offs.

Zdenek, former Czech Republic senior men's champion and Olympic competitor led a good, informative jump-and-spin session. He showed us how to spin and circle our bodies with a few of us resembling a dog chasing his tail at warp speed, but with fewer feet. Demonstrative and technical in his presentation, he assisted everybody individually with their spins and jumps. One tip that I particularly focused on was, " don't look at the ceiling or you could end up with your ass on the ice – head to follow."

Colleen Laferriere, long-time and professional head coach of the Aldergrove Skating Club, was ever-present and ever-busy in both the skill sessions and the routine-formation exercise to assist skaters with technique and patterns. Thanks to Colleen for being instrumental in securing her club's ice at the Langley Events Centre for our skating pleasure. Outside this weekend seminar we also

really admire Colleen for her willingness to travel throughout our large lower mainland region to teach and coach. We really appreciate Colleen and hope she will continue to work with us in the years to come.

Never to forget the ever-critical element of food, we also had a nice free lunch in combination with Karyn's presentation. Yes, I know that free lunch is an oxymoron but it was at least nice anyway. Saturday night's dinner and Sunday's lunch at Moxie's Grill also produced very tasty food and lots of cute waitresses - just in case you needed to know that.

Thanks to the Aldergrove Skating Club for hosting us, to Diana and her big helper for creating a fun weekend and to everyone who came and "enJOYed". If you are on edge you really should be skating.

As with Jim's liability disclaimer, I take no responsibility for anything I have just said.

Signed, Anonymous