

# Social interest of an ice rink

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 Interest of the community

Ice sports come particularly close to the ideal of “Sports for All”, a concept envisaging the promotion of health, communication and quality of life through sports. These sports stand for health and enjoyment while being socially and recreationally relevant to both sexes within a wide age bracket. An arena gives opportunities for the community to enjoy a great diversity of ice sports. From skating to figure skating, to ice hockey, standard and short-distance speed skating, the range extends to curling and broomball, while providing opportunities for everyone. An ice rink always attracts crowds, whether it’s individuals, schools or clubs, single athletes or teams. As long as it is supported by diverse, well-organized utilization programs and opening hours, an ice rink encourages many people to identify with skating. Schools and clubs are the entry-level motivators generating an interest in skating beyond the level of basic skills. From here, one development will lead to recreational sports as a lifelong athletic pastime, while another may take the enthusiast to competitive sports in an ice hockey or skating club.

Ice rinks are attractive sports and recreational facilities promoting health and social activity as a key element of “quality of life”. Experienced physicians, responsible pedagogues and social scientists, forward-looking communal politicians, and all stakeholders in the world of sports have underlined this.

The public interest in ice hockey, figure skating, speed skating, curling and broomball that has emerged in many countries has led to the situation that ice sports today are no longer viewed as a special or even exclusive kind of athletic activity. However, all-weather facilities available during 6-9 months of the year are usually in short supply. Natural ice surfaces, with their dependence on climatic conditions, are equally unsuitable for continued, wide-scale recreational use as they are for regular training, exciting competitions, or charming figure skating events. Artificial ice rinks have therefore become indispensable in today’s increasingly sports-related recreational environment, whether to meet older people’s growing interest in ice-skating, the steadily growing demand for competition venues, or quite simply, spectator requirements.

During the ice-free remainder of the year, these facilities also become an ideal site for inline



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skating, and other indoor sports activities. So-called dry-floor events such as exhibitions, meetings, shows, music events and theatre are other potential uses.

The possibility of year-round use is a necessary and valuable condition, as it were, for considering the construction of such a facility. High capacity utilization can warrant the investment and the recurring annual operational costs.

### 2.2 Activity programs and services

#### Ice hockey

Of course, youth and adult hockey programs will provide the greatest number of users of a facility. It is vital to the success of the rink to program as many hours of usage as possible. Scheduling youth programs to utilize as many early evening, and weekend hours, as possible will leave late night times to be filled with adult hockey programs.

A typical youth hockey program will occupy weeknight ice from 5 PM to 10 PM, the majority of Saturday ice from the early morning to the evening, and most of the day and evening also on Sunday. Depending upon the country or the time of the year, youth hockey players may also be able to skate during a weekday or on holidays.

As previously mentioned, rinks need to maximize their ice usage. Adult hockey should be scheduled to fill late night hours throughout the week. It is not uncommon for adult hockey leagues to begin at 9 PM, and have games ending as late as 1 AM. Sunday evenings, depending on availability, are also common times for adult hockey.



*The rink is virtually never closed. Young hockey players arrive for practise.*



*Practise makes perfect.*

Another program that has gained prominence is recreational or open hockey. Ice time is reserved and players register individually for each session. Sessions are typically either one hour or 90 minutes in length. Scheduled times can vary depending upon the community, but late Friday and Saturday nights, weekday early morning or “lunch time” sessions and also Sunday mornings have been found to be successful. It is also possible to rent ice time to adult hockey groups, who may fill odd hours at the facility. In any event, the pick-up sessions should be scheduled to fill the less desirable, or “quiet hours” in a facility.

#### **Learn to Skate & Learn to Play Hockey programs**

The Learn to Skate and Learn to Play Hockey programs are the foundation of a successful facility. In these programs, casual participants can be turned into more serious customers that return to the facility three to four times a week. If children can demonstrate a minimum proficiency on the ice, it becomes more enjoyable to return to the rink and develop as athletes.

These types of program are very important to keep skaters coming back to the rink. The Learn to Skate and Play programs, targeting the 5 to 12 year old children, will constantly provide new skaters for your more advanced programs.

Classes can also be offered to very young children, ages 3 to 5 years old. These classes can be offered during weekday mornings when the older children are in school. Again, this provides the rink another program to fill those “quiet hours” when the rink is under-utilised. These Learn to Skate classes will also provide a feeder program to your classes for the older children. Similar programs may be offered during the “quiet hours” that target the adult or senior community.

An advantage of the Learn to Skate and Play programs is that during each session, as many as 8 different classes, with approximately 10 children

in each class, can be put on the ice at the same time. Each class may be 30 to 45 minutes in length. This scheduling will allow the facility to schedule 3 to 4 class sessions during a 2 hour time period. The financial benefits of maximizing your ice utilization can be substantial for the rink.

For these programs, one weekday afternoon session and a Saturday morning or afternoon session should be offered as a minimum. The weekday session will serve as an after school activity, and could be operated from 4 to 6 PM. Depending on the community, this time frame could be very popular.

Saturday sessions provide the opportunity for all family members to participate. Parents, and even Grandparents, may have a better chance of attending weekend sessions. This session should be offered immediately before or after a public skating session so that your customers may spend more time at the facility.

Once a skater progresses through the Learn to Skate and Learn to Play programs, they will choose the sport that they will concentrate on, either figure skating or hockey. It is important for rinks to have a balance of both programs in order to maximize the ice usage, and community participation, at the facility. In a single sheet facility, it is difficult to accommodate the needs of all the user groups, but it is important to create an environment where all can participate.

#### **Public skating**

In many areas, especially those regions where hockey is not part of the culture, public skating sessions are important in operating a successful ice facility. A public skating session is when ice time is set aside so that any individual may, for a fee, skate at the rink. A public skating session is usually an inexpensive means to introducing customers to your facility.

Public skating also allows the rink management to introduce customers to other, structured



*Public skating is an inexpensive means of introducing customers to your facility.*

programs that are offered at the facility. Use the consumer's general interest in skating to entice them into more visits to the rink. Public skating will allow your entire community to enter your facility, and give you an audience to market to.

Most public skating sessions average two hours in length. In many communities, weekend evening sessions on Friday or Saturday nights have become traditional. Starting at 7 PM or 8 PM and lasting until 10 PM or 11 PM, both youth and adults can skate and socialize. As an added feature, a "theme night" program might be instituted. Rock or Popular music Fridays may attract a crowd.

Weekend afternoon sessions are popular with families. Parents are able to skate with their children, or group outings and events can become part of the facilities programming options. Many facilities now offer Birthday party programs that are connected to afternoon public skating sessions. It is best to start weekend afternoon sessions at 12 pm or 1 PM and finish at 3 PM or 4 PM.

These are the suggested minimum public skating times. Every area has a different need and this should be evaluated continuously. There are other public sessions that work quite well in some regions, including:

- ✓ Early Sunday evenings. This session, from 6 PM to 8 PM, could become a family, or "end of the weekend" event.
- ✓ Weekday mornings. Make these sessions available for school groups, adult or senior citizen groups.
- ✓ Weekday afternoons. An after school skate, from 3 PM to 5 PM with music that caters to the 10 to 14-year-old crowd.
- ✓ A weeknight session. This session, 7 PM to 9 PM, will work around your learn to skate classes, and may help bring more adults to the facility.

### Figure skating

In a typical rink, figure skating programs fill ice time that hockey programs cannot, or will not, utilize. Early morning, mid- and late afternoon hours have become standard for most figure skaters. As an individual sport, it is easier to fill these odd hours with 10 to 15 individuals, as opposed to a team of 15 to 20 hockey players.

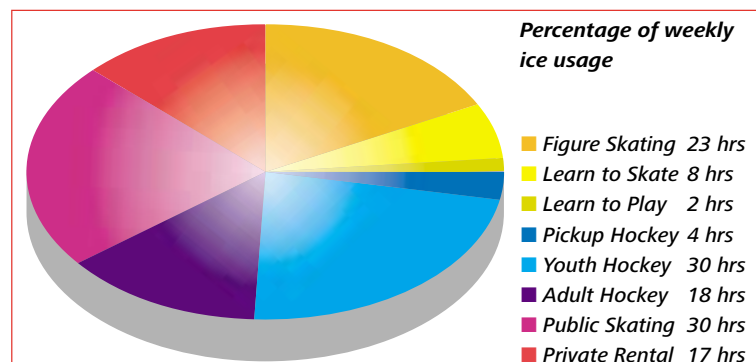
As figure skaters develop and become more advanced, they spend more time on the ice. It is common for advanced skaters to practice twice per day, 5 or 6 times each week.

A new figure skating activity, synchronized team skating, is gaining prominence around the world. This program should be received with open arms by the rink industry. A synchronized skating team can put 15 to 20 skaters on the ice for a practice session, incorporating more skaters into a program.

Figure skating clubs operate to take care of the skaters coming out of the Learn to Skate program. They can also take care of marketing and promotion of figure skating programs and events for the facility.

The serious skaters will not hesitate to skate on weekday mornings before school, from 6 AM to 9 AM. If the demand is there, some mornings can go longer or begin even earlier. The rinks that can successfully fill these odd hours with skating programs have a better chance for success.

The advanced skater may begin as early as 1 PM during a weekday afternoon, depending upon their school schedule. Otherwise, 3 PM to 6 or 7 PM, several days each week should be made available for the figure skating programs. Some nights go longer and some nights may end



at 5 PM. It is also important to schedule your figure skating afternoons around the Learn to Skate and Learn to Play programs. This way, the beginner skaters can view the more advanced programs, and understand the next level of participation at your facility.

### Other ice sports

There are other ice sports that may or may not fit with a particular facility or community. Speed skating, curling and Broomball are three activities that may complement a rink by filling “quiet hours” in the facility.

### Community programs

It is important to bring as many members of the community to the facility as possible. With this in mind, there are several programs which rink management can use to bring the public to the rink.


























School field trips can be very popular. The rink may create relationships where schools may bring large groups to the facility during the facilities “quiet hours” throughout the school day. The rink is selling ice time that it may normally not be used, and it provides the rink with an opportunity to market their programs to potential participants.

In a similar manner to school groups, companies and other community organisations such as youth organisations and church groups may also be interested in skating at the rink. It is important for the rink management to seek out as many of these opportunities as possible. Private birthday parties, as explained in the public skating section, are becoming more popular events as well.

### Sample weekly schedule

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6 AM	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
7 AM	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
8 AM	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
9 AM	Private Rental	Adult Public Skate	Private Rental	Adult Public Skate	Private Rental	Learn to Skate	Youth Hockey
10 AM	Private Rental	Adult Public Skate	Learn to Skate	Adult Public Skate	Private Rental	Learn to Skate	Figure Skating
11 AM	Private Rental	Adult Public Skate	Learn to Skate	Adult Public Skate	Private Rental	Learn to Play	Figure Skating
12 PM	Public Skating	Public Skating	Pickup Hockey	Public Skating	Pickup Hockey	Public Skating	Public Skating
1 PM	Public Skating	Public Skating	Pickup Hockey	Public Skating	Pickup Hockey	Public Skating	Public Skating
2 PM	Private Rental		Private Rental	Adult Learn to Skate	Private Rental	Public Skating	Public Skating
3 PM	Private Rental	Learn to Skate	Private Rental		Private Rental	Public Skating	Public Skating
4 PM	Figure Skating	Learn to Skate	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Public Skating	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
5 PM	Figure Skating	Learn to Play	Figure Skating	Figure Skating	Public Skating	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
6 PM	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Learn to Skate	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
7 PM	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Public Skating	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey
8 PM	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Public Skating	Youth Hockey	Public Skating	Public Skating	Adult Hockey
9 PM	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Youth Hockey	Public Skating	Public Skating	Adult Hockey
10 PM	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Public Skating	Public Skating	Adult Hockey
11 PM	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey
12 AM	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Adult Hockey	Private Rental	Private Rental	
1 AM					Private Rental	Private Rental	

### 2.3 Ice rinks throughout the world

	Australia .....	20		Latvia .....	4
	Austria .....	24		Lithuania .....	2
	Belarus .....	10		Luxembourg .....	1
	Belgium .....	12		Mexico .....	12
	Bulgaria .....	3		Namibia .....	2
	Canada .....	2703		Netherlands .....	20
	China .....	15		New Zealand .....	6
	Chinese Taipei .....	1		Norway .....	29
	Croatia .....	2		Poland .....	20
	Czech Republic .....	112		Portugal .....	1
	Denmark .....	17		Romania .....	4
	DPR Korea .....	2		Russia .....	84*
	Estonia .....	3		Slovakia .....	40
	Finland .....	202		Slovenia .....	7
	France .....	128		South Africa .....	6
	Germany .....	149		Spain .....	9
	Great Britain .....	58		Sweden .....	285
	Greece .....	2		Switzerland .....	82
	Hong Kong .....	3		Thailand .....	1
	Hungary .....	4		Turkey .....	5
	Iceland .....	2		Ukraine .....	7
	Israel .....	4		United Arab Emirates .....	3
	Italy .....	49		USA .....	2500
	Japan .....	57		Yugoslavia .....	2
	Kazakstan .....	5			
	Korea .....	15			

\* Apart from the 84 indoor rinks, Russia also has 951 outdoor rinks.

