

Confessions of a skating Mom

Lorna Simmons Nolt, R.D.1, Mount Joy, is the mother of Jeff and Suzy Nolt, who were fourth ranked pair figure ice skating team in the eastern United States last winter.

by Lorna Simmons Nolt

People have been known to shudder noticeably when I use the pronoun "we" when I talk about our son's and daughter's sport-avocation-preoccupation, figure skating.

I don't talk unless enthusiastically encouraged, but when I do I say such things as "we're going to Atlanta" for this or that, or "we're getting new skates," or "we're really working hard this summer." Skating has become as much a part of all our lives as eating and sleeping and, like it or not, it looks as if it's here to stay.

But it's undeniably their sport. They spend the six hours a day, the ten months a year on the ice. They've lived the last ten years, winter and summer, shut up in ice rinks doing such fascinating things as school figures, back loops, double salchows.

But haven't I too spent thousands of hours in freezing ice rinks, driven thousands of miles up and down the East coast, sewn costumes and sequins, fixed hair and ponytails, dried lots of tears? Haven't their dad and I gone to every

competition, every test session, every show?

Of course. And that gives us the right, besides managing and encouraging and paying for lessons, to get involved, stand by the barrier, shout instructions, get angry when they don't do something our way. Doesn't it? They're our children, after all. We expect them to do as we say, live up to our expectations, do the thing right. We have to be involved, and loudly, or we're not doing our jobs as parents. Doesn't that make sense? Isn't that right? Well—isn't it?

No, no. A THOUSAND times NO.

Now don't get me wrong. A child's involvement in a competitive individual or team sport is a family affair. It affects all of us in every way. Parents and siblings share the decisions, costs, and energies with the athlete. His participation reaches into every facet of family life. Make no mistake about that, ever.

But over the years I've discovered that the line between being supportive and enthusiastic as opposed to being dictatorial and pedantic is a thin one. We parents are walking on very thin ice every single minute, you might say.

Athlete children need management. They need support. And they certainly need the devotion which helps to feed their dedication.

But guess what. Dictator-

ial, vituperative parents are unhappy, unsatisfied, trying to live vicariously through their children. Unhappy parents make unhappy children, not to mention unhappy athletes, who usually end up quitting because they can't live up to anybody's expectations, even their own.

And the anger and the hurt and the disappointment, not just at their non-accomplishments at their sport, but also at their crumbling relationships with their own family members, are very, very hard to heal—on both sides of the end zone, or base line, or track.

To me, there is no sadder sight than watching an unfulfilled and unhappy parent berate or belittle an opposing coach, player, or—even worse—his own child in a fit of temper and anger that he doesn't understand himself and that he finds impossible to control. I think parents like this are angry, not at their child, but at themselves for their probably unrecognized feelings of inadequacy and unhappiness. They don't realize it, but, even more importantly, their belittled child doesn't have any idea that it is something other than his fault.

The answer, I think, is to be perceptive rather than pushy. Forget your embarrassment at his failure to catch that ball, run that play, come in first. Try to understand his feelings and

support him with consistently optimistic and positive observations and evaluations. After all, life is a series of failures as well as successes, and there is no better gift a parent can give a child than to help him to learn to deal with his own shortcomings and his own failures.

Pushing him to be something more than he is, is another parental pitfall with exactly the same causes. Not every athlete can be a Pete Rose, a Sam Bowie, a Bobby Orr, or a Peggy Fleming. Where would each of them be without the coaches and the strong infielders and backfielders and defensive linemen who supported them year after year, with few accolades and little fanfare? They too are heroes.

We've always felt that we were raising children first—to be responsible, feeling adults—and that we were raising athletes only secondarily.

There's an old adage floating around skating rinks and baseball diamonds and swimming pools and ski runs. If that athlete out there on that track, or field, or pool, wants to do it and has the necessary positive support from his family, he will be successful and achieve what he wants to achieve. He'll be a winner, not just on the narrow playing field his sport lays out before him, but in all aspects of his life as well.

Mount Joy composer discusses Rock'n'Roll music

Feeling foolish again the other day, we decided it would be a good thing to stop in and visit the wisest man we know in these parts, Chester Wittell, who has devoted at least the last seventy of his eighty odd years to learning everything he possibly can about this world and its culture.

Dr. Wittell lives alone in Mount Joy, his genius unknown to people he daily passes on the street. He has composed three symphonies and innumerable concerti, sonatas, etc. In addition to his musical compositions he has written eight thick volumes of verse, most of them sonnets perfectly constructed according to rigid classical specifications. Moreover, he is fluent in several modern languages, especially Italian, and has taught himself Sanskrit and Arabic. He reads the Koran for entertainment.

Since he is conversant with a large share of the culture produced on this planet by various civilizations, he is an excellent man

to consult when one is feeling confused at this time and place in history.

It seems to us that our loud popular music is particularly confusing to our mind, so we asked Dr. Wittell what he thought of it.

"It fits in with the cultural decline of the times," he said, "the attempt to raise jazz to an art form is basically unsound, because it is dance music, in which the rhythm is paramount.

"Music is by far the most scientific of the arts. None of the other arts can compare with music in that respect. In fact, when you get into subjects like counterpoint, you must deal with music in a most mathematical sense.

"Music can be said to have its roots in mathematics, dating back at least to Pythagoras.

"As complicated as music is, it recognizes only three ingredients: namely, rhythm, melody, and harmony.

"Rhythm and melody are prehistorical. Musical antiquarians have devoted great effort to research and have found savage tribes that have only a drum. At a higher level they have a pipe. If they have a pipe, they have a drum. If they have a string instrument they have a pipe and a drum.

"Man has never been able to improve on the savage drum. It has always been a hollow cylinder with skin stretched over the end.

"A drummer has become the butt of some joking in a symphony. A conductor once said that he had 60 musicians, and a drummer. But what the conductor didn't say is that the drummer can wreck the orchestra.

"All dance forms, from the Charleston to rock and roll, won't stand as art forms.

"Today the textbooks are being thrown overboard, and anything goes. A pianist lately played with a pencil in one hand and a darning egg in his other hand. He played

with his fist and an elbow. A German critic wrote that he was surprised the pianist did not turn his back on the keyboard and play it with his, uh, behind.

"Music, according to the *Britannica*, is the art which expresses ideas by means of sounds."

"Singers and conductors who go through all kinds of motions are performing for sight, not sound. Their gyrations are not music.

"I would like to add to the *Britannica's* definition: music is the art which expresses ideas by means of sounds and arouses emotions. People have been known to shed tears when they hear music, and they cannot tell you why they are crying. Everyone has a different reaction to the same piece of music.

"Rock and roll, and the other experiments with music are interesting. In dance music rhythm is the thing.



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