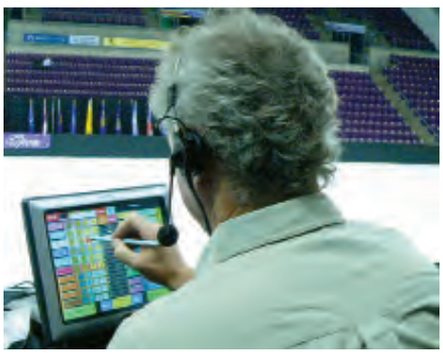
Understanding the IJS

Element identification primary role of technical panel

Editor's note: *This is the second in a series of articles about the international judging system (IJS) that will be published in SKATING leading up to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and the 2010 World Synchronized Skating Championships. The goal of these articles is to make the IJS more understandable and fan-friendly. This article focuses on the role of the technical panel.*

By Juliet Newcomer



The role of the technical panel

The technical panel consists of the technical controller (TC), technical specialist (TS), assistant technical specialist (ATS), data operator (DO) and video replay operator (VO). During an event, all five technical panel officials will wear a headset so that they can communicate with each other.

The technical panel is responsible for identifying all executed elements and rewarding skaters for any features they use to increase the level and value of their elements. The technical panel does not care how well an element is done; they are only responsible for verifying that each element was done according to requirements, and that all features attempted were completed according to specifications.

The TS calls the elements as they are performed. The TC is responsible for making sure each element meets the program requirements. For example, if a skater is required to do a triple flip in the short program but instead performs a triple loop, it is the job of the TC to make sure that the skater does not receive any points for the triple loop because it is not according to requirements. The technical panel is also responsible for identifying any falls or illegal elements performed by the skater and making sure that any necessary deductions are taken.

Prior to each competition, a skater submits a planned program content sheet (PPCS). This form lists the elements the skater is planning to do; however, it does not specify the levels the skater will be attempting for spins, steps or spiral sequences. The skater is not required to complete her elements as she has listed them on her PPCS; the sheet is simply there to assist the members of the technical panel, particularly the VO and the DO, in capturing and entering the elements efficiently, which allows the technical panel to review elements more quickly once the program is completed.

Once the skater begins the program, the TS will call each element out loud as it is performed so that the DO can enter it into the computer. The ATS and TC will also identify the elements to themselves. If either disagrees with a call of the TS, he will immediately say "review," which will be noted by the DO. At the end of the program all elements marked for review will be brought up on a video screen, one at a time. The person who asked for the review will state why, and the panel will immediately watch the element on video. The video screen provides the technical panel with tools to identify the elements as accurately as possible, including super-slow motion replay and a clock that can be used to count how long positions were held for elements such as spirals.

If the TS, ATS and TC don't agree on the call of an element, the call will be determined by the majority vote. Once all the elements that were called for review have been reviewed, the TC will verify the list of elements that the DO has entered into the computer. Once the TC verifies that all elements, falls and illegal elements have been recorded correctly, the list of elements is ratified and the next skater is called to the ice to perform.

Calling the executed elements

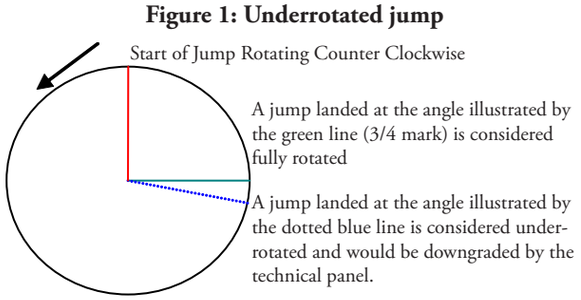
We're now going to discuss in more detail what the technical panel is looking for in each type of element. We're going to look at one example of each type of element in singles (jump element, spiral sequence, spin and step sequence).

Jump element

When a skater performs a jump element, the TS has to identify the takeoff (i.e. the type of jump) and the number of rotations in the air. The TS must also determine if the jump was fully rotated and make sure that it took off from the correct edge[1] if it is a flip jump or a Lutz jump. Finally, if the skater does more than one jump in a jump element, the TS must determine if those jumps were done as a jump combination or a jump sequence.

In order to be considered fully rotated, a jump must achieve at least three-quarters of the final rotation – so a triple would need to rotate at least 2.75 times in the air prior to any part of the blade hitting the ice for the landing. If a jump achieves less than three-quarters of the final rotation **(see Figure 1)** it must be downgraded. This means that if a skater attempts a triple, but doesn't complete at least 2.75 rotations, the jump would be downgraded, so the skater would only receive credit for the base value

Figure 1: Underrotated jump



of a double An average jump will only be in the air for eight-tenths of a second, which makes it difficult to identify an underrotated jump with the naked eye, even for a trained official, so the final decision to downgrade a jump is usually determined in the review process using slow motion replay.

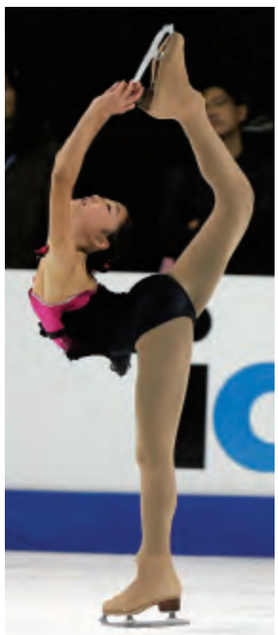
Spiral sequence

Remember from last-month's article that a spiral sequence is one of the elements whose value is based on levels of difficulty ranging from one to four. Predefined features, published by the ISU, are the method by which skaters can earn higher than a level one. Below are the features for the 2009-10 season:

2009-10 spiral sequence features

1) A difficult variation[2] of position
2) A difficult variation[2] of position on a different foot significantly different from the first variation
3) Change of edge[1] in a spiral
4) Unsupported change of free leg position or direction of skating maintaining the spiral
5) Free leg in a total split position, one or both arms hold possible
6) Holding spiral position for six or more seconds without changes in position/variation

A skater must perform two of these features to earn level two, three features to earn level three and four features to earn level four. In addition to the information provided above, there are other conditions a skater has to meet to get credit for a feature. For example, any position which is going to receive credit must be performed on an edge[1] and held for at least three seconds. If the feature involves a change such as a change edge spiral or an unsupported change of position, the positions before and after the change must each be held for at least three seconds. Finally, in order to achieve a level three or four, the skater must perform spirals on each foot, forward and backward and on inside and outside edges.



This is a good example of a difficult variation because it requires more physical strength and flexibility.
Photo by Paul Harvath

As a skater performs a spiral sequence, the technical panel is tracking how long each position is held and paying attention to the skating foot (right or left), edge (inside or outside), direction (forward or backward) and free leg position (forward, backward or sideways) of each spiral. In addition, they are looking specifically for the features listed above.

At a senior event, most skaters are going to be trying to earn a level four. Below are three common mistakes that will keep them from earning that high a level:

- One or more positions are not held for enough seconds
- One or more positions do not meet the criteria to receive credit as a feature (see Figure 2)
- One or more positions are not performed on an edge

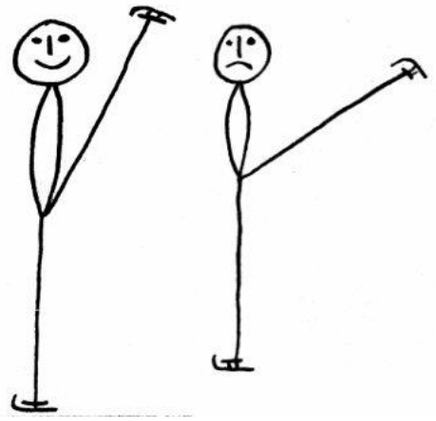
Spin

Like the spiral sequence, spin values are based on levels of difficulty ranging from one to four. At the senior level, in the short program, all skaters must perform a defined solo spin, a combination spin and a flying spin. In the free skate, they can perform a maximum of three spins, and each spin must be of a different nature, meaning each spin has to have a unique code.

If a spin is a solo spin, the nature is determined by the position. The four different types of solo spins are sit (SSp), camel (CSp), upright (USp) and layback (LSp). In a solo spin, adding a change of foot or a flying entry will also change the nature. So a camel spin with a change of foot (CCSp) has a different nature than a flying camel (FCSp) or a standard camel spin (CSp).

The other types of spins are the combination spin with a change of foot (CCoSp) and the combination without a change of foot (CoSp). A spin becomes a combination spin as soon as there is a change of position. It doesn't matter how many, what or in what order positions are performed in

Figure 2: Full split The drawing on the left is an example of a full split. The drawing on the right is an example of a split that would not be considered full and would not receive credit for a feature.



terms of determining the nature; however, beginning a combination spin with a flying entry will affect the nature because it changes the code (FCoSp or FCCoSp).

This idea of nature is a new concept brought in by the IJS, and it affects the strategy of a program because the penalty for performing two spins with the same nature is harsh – a second spin of the same nature performed in a program will receive no points. This is the equivalent of spotting the field anywhere from 1.2 to 5 points depending on what type of spin gets thrown out. Furthermore, the skater cannot add a fourth spin later in the program to make up for the mistake because she only has the opportunity to earn credit for a maximum of three spins and any spins performed after the first three will not receive any points, even if one of the first three spins also didn't receive points.

2009-10 spin features

1) A difficult variation[2] in a basic[3] or (for spin combinations only) in an intermediate[4] position
2) Another difficult variation[2] in a basic[3] position which must be on a different foot and/or in a different position than the first one, except for spins that don't change position or foot, in which case it must be different than the first difficult variation.
3) Difficult change of foot
4) Backward entrance/Difficult variation of flying entrance/Landing on the same foot as take-off or changing foot on landing in a flying

sit spin
5) Clear change of edge in the same basic position (for each spin counts only once)
6) All three basic[3] positions (for spins with change of foot – on each foot)
7) Both directions immediately following each other
8) At least eight revolutions without changes in position/variation, foot or edge (camel, sit, layback, difficult upright), counts twice if repeated on another foot
9) One change of layback position backward-sideways or reverse, at least three revolutions in each position
10) Biellmann position after layback spin

This is a good example of a basic sit spin position and a difficult variation. **Photo by Michelle Harvath**

As with the spiral sequence, a skater must perform two of these features to earn level two, three features to earn level three and four features to earn level four. There are additional stipulations that skaters must meet to earn some of these features. For example, with the exception of feature 9), all features must be held for two revolutions to receive credit and increase the level of the spin.

As a skater performs a spin, the technical panel is tracking how many rotations each position is held and paying attention to the number of positions, types of positions, changes of positions and changes of foot. In addition, they are looking specifically for the features listed above. Below are some common mistakes that will keep a skater from earning the level he is attempting:

- An attempted difficult position does not clearly fit the definition of difficult
- A position is not held for enough rotations
- A position is not in a basic position (for example, a skater is not low enough in a sit spin)
- A skater does not hold both edges for two rotations in the change of edge feature
- A position is not attained in the air in a flying spin (feature 4)

Step sequences

The fourth type of element usually performed in a singles program is a step sequence. There are three types of step sequences: 1) circular (CiSt), 2) serpentine (SeSt) or 3) straight line (SlSt). As with spiral sequences and spins, values are based on levels of difficulty ranging from one to four and a skater must perform two of the defined features to earn level two, three to earn level three and four to earn level four.

2009-10 step sequence features

1) Simple variety[5] (level two), variety[6] (level three), complexity[7] (level four) of turns and steps throughout. This feature is compulsory, meaning a skater must meet this feature before he can receive credit for any of the other features to earn a higher level.
2) Rotations (turns, steps) in either direction (left and right) with full body rotation covering at least 1/3 of the pattern in total for each rotational direction
3) Moderate (full for level four) use of upper body movement
4) Quick changes of rotational direction executed with turns and steps

As a skater performs a step sequence, the technical panel is tracking the entry and exit edges of all turns, the different types of steps and turns and their distribution throughout the sequence. In addition, they are looking specifically for the features listed above. Of all the elements, the step sequence is the most difficult to earn a higher level, particularly a level four, which has only been earned a handful of times throughout the world in the past two seasons. Below are some common mistakes that will keep a skater from earning a higher level.

- Exit and entry edges of turns become flat and the turns do not receive credit
- Exit and entry edges change, changing the type of turn performed and causing the skater to not have enough different types of turns

Summary

The information above hopefully provides you with a basic understanding of how the difficulty, and thus base value, of elements is determine by the technical panel. If you are interested in learning more about the levels of difficulty and definition of features visit the Technical Information section at www.usfigureskating.org.

In the next article, we will look more carefully at the role of the judging panel and how the grades of execution are determined and add to or subtract from a skater's base value.

Glossary of IJS terms

1) Edge: the side of the blade on which the skater is balancing, causing the skate to travel on a curve as opposed to a straight line. There are two basic edges: 1) inside, which is achieved when the skater is leaning toward the inside of the foot; and 2) outside, which is achieved when the skater is leaning toward the outside of the foot.
2) Difficult variation of position: a movement of a body part, leg, arm, hand or head, which requires more physical strength or flexibility and has an affect on the balance of the main body core.
3) Basic spin position: There are three basic positions: camel (free leg backward with the knee higher than the hip level, however layback, Biellmann and similar variations are still considered as upright), sit (lower part of the buttocks not higher than the upper part of the knee of the skating leg, the upper part of the skating leg at least parallel to the ice), upright (any position with skating leg extended or almost extended, which is not a camel position).
4) Intermediate spin position: Any spin position that does not fit the definition of a camel, sit or upright position.
5) Simple variety: Must include at least six turns and four steps, none of the types can be counted more than twice.
6) Variety: Must include at least eight turns and four steps, none of the types can be counted more than twice.
7) Complexity: Must include at least five different types of turns and three different types of steps all executed at least once in both directions.