SYNCHRONIZED SKATING: YOUR ROLE IN THE TEAM

A successful synchronized skating team is made up of more than just athletes. Parents, coaches and team managers all play an important role in the success of the team.

PARENTS of synchronized skating athletes. The cheerleaders and bankers
1. Select a team that meets both your child’s goals and your philosophy regarding commitment, cost, academics, etc. Read and understand the team handbook before signing up, make a good decision and stick with it.
2. An ambassador of goodwill – teach the skaters good sportsmanship in success, failure and everything in between.
3. Support the team under all circumstances; do not speak poorly of any team members, parents or professionals in the presence of your child.
4. Respect the decisions of the coach! The coach is a hired professional, and parents must respect and support all the coach’s decisions and demonstrate this to their child.
5. Understand that being a member of a team is different than being a singles skater. Coaches will make decisions for the best interest of the team, which will not always line up with the interests of individual skaters.
6. Understand the commitment to the team and make sure your skater follows through.

Synchronized skating COACHES. The magicians
1. Put every effort into ensuring the success of the team.
2. Set goals and expectations for the team and clearly communicate these to athletes, parents, etc.
3. Make all major team decisions, including practice, competitions, travel, costumes, team selection, competitive level, etc.
4. Respect the parents and athletes and be open minded when listening to their comments, concerns and suggestions.
5. Make all decisions in the best interest of the team as a whole.

Team managers and TEAM OFFICERS. The glue that holds it all together!
1. The prime supporters of the team: athletes, coaches and parents
2. Take care of the off-ice details, so that the athletes and coaches can focus their efforts on the ice.
3. Have an open line of communication and a partnership with the coach.
5. Listen to the concerns of all team members.
6. Be an avid supporter of the coach.

Synchronized skating ATHLETES. The performers
1. Give 100 percent at every practice and demonstrate good sportsmanship at all times.
2. Understand how you contribute to the success of the team and follow through with your commitments.
3. Respect the coach and the decisions that they make.
4. Respect and work with teammates toward the success of all members individually and the team as a whole.
5. Understand that decisions need to be made in the best interest of the entire team.
6. Continue to improve individual skills throughout the season.

Team CAPTAINS. Leaders of the pack!
1. Serve as the spokesperson for the athletes.
2. Set a good example for team members by demonstrating hard work, an excellent attitude and dedication to the team.
3. Keep the coach and team manager informed of athletes’ concerns.
4. Help the coach communicate information to the athletes.
5. Foster good feelings among the team members.
TEAM MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Below is a list of duties that are necessary for managing a team, and a suggestion of how to break them up. It is recommended that between three and six people share these responsibilities.

1. **General Oversight of the Team**
   - Serve as the primary liaison between the coach, the athletes, the parents and the skating club
   - Serve as the primary team contact
   - Schedule ice time with arena as defined by the coach
   - Serve as the primary spokesperson for the team’s board and parents
   - Schedule and prepare agenda for all officer and team meetings
   - Order or purchase team clothing and other items (i.e. warm-ups, costumes, T-shirts)
   - Keep team members and parents informed of all the board’s decisions
   - Delegate any unassigned tasks that arise
   - Accompany the coach to any private meeting with parents or athletes*

2. **Financial Responsibilities**
   - Keep a ledger detailing all financial transactions of the team
   - Work with the director of synchronized skating/head coach/management team to create a budget
   - Allocate money for team purchases and expenses
   - Collect and deposit dues from team members
   - Keep a ledger detailing each member’s financial obligations and current status
   - Organize fundraisers for the team
   - Pay all team bills incurred by team
   - Prepare financial reports for the management team, figure skating club and team members

3. **Administrative Responsibilities**
   - Record minutes from each meeting
   - Distribute a monthly calendar to all members detailing team activities and practices
   - Distribute a team roster, phone list and e-mail list, and set up an e-mail user group for the team
   - Complete and submit competition applications, either electronically or by mail
   - Register team with the U.S. Figure Skating
   - Follow up to ensure that each skater is an eligible member of U.S. Figure Skating
   - Collect and retain copies of athletes’ birth certificates, membership cards, moves-in-the-field test certificates (if applicable) and health insurance information

4. **Travel Arrangements**
   - Book hotel rooms, airline tickets and arrange for ground transportation (vans or buses)
   - Work with the coach to establish the team’s schedule during a competition
   - Help with administrative responsibilities to complete competition applications

5. **Publicity and Communications**
   - Communicate with other teams for ideas
   - Create advertising or recruiting tools and materials for the team and coordinate recruiting efforts
   - Serve as a contact for athletes interested in joining the team
   - Distribute information about the team to local media outlets
   - Keep your skating club informed of any team activities, and write articles for the club’s newsletter, website and/or bulletin board, etc.
   - Work with treasurer in soliciting sponsors for the team

* It is important that the coach does not meet alone with any athlete or parent. An assistant coach, team manager or other trusted person should always be present. Select carefully, and, if possible, this individual should not be the parent of another team member.
ROLE OF THE CLUB-LEVEL SYNCHRONIZED SKATING DIRECTOR

The synchronized skating director at the club level is often the most experienced head coach in the pool of coaches within a synchronized skating program. In addition to his or her day-to-day coaching responsibilities, he or she has the additional responsibility of overseeing, developing and encouraging the growth and success of synchronized skating within a specific figure skating club, rink or organization.

This position becomes more important as a club or rink desires to grow one synchronized team into a multi-team organization. The synchronized skating director can report to the rink’s skating director, figure skating club or management team of the organization.

Regardless of who they report to, the most important key to this individual’s success is that he or she has the authority and support as the “expert in the field” to make and be responsible for all major decisions related to the synchronized skating teams in his or her organization.

JOB DESCRIPTION:

1. Develop long-term goals for the organization and a strategic plan to reach them
2. Oversight of the coaching staff, including individual team head coaches and assistant coaches
   - Develop standards for hiring of additional coaching staff. Make final decisions in hiring/retaining coaching staff.
   - Establish a review process for the performance of coaching staff
   - Work with the other coaches in the program to establish season goals for each team within the program that support the overall organizational goals
   - Communicate regularly with coaching staff to ensure their success and make sure they have the necessary tools to do their jobs effectively
   - Support and assist all coaches in the program in enforcing program policies, encouraging athlete development and dealing with parents and athletes
3. Develop and implement a parents education program
   - Write a curriculum of parents education classes to keep parents feeling involved and connected, and to ensure that they understand synchronized skating, U.S. Figure Skating and where their children are in the big picture of synchronized skating
   - Delegate individuals to teach the classes. (This could include synchronized skating director, other coaches, team manager, officials, guests, etc.)
   - Set schedule and ensure communication with parents
4. Lead the development and implementation of team policies, rules and contracts
   - Create team policies that support the goals, philosophies and direction of the organization
   - Write the team contract with input from the volunteer officers, figure skating club and other coaches
5. Oversight of tryouts and determination of competitive teams fielded
   - Work with coaches in determining the skills and expectations required of the athletes, and how the skaters will be divided into teams
   - Determine how the athletes will be informed of the decisions of the coaching team
   - Implement a process for evaluating and providing each athlete with feedback on his or her skating skills
   - Work with coaches to establish the competitive levels for each team in the current season in addition to a long range or 2-3 season plan for the continued success of the program

Role of a Coach or Director of Synchronized Skating / Paying Your Director and Coaching Staff

US FIGURE SKATING
6. Implementation and oversight of a program to recruit and train new skaters to ensure that there are always athletes moving through the organization’s pipeline
   - Work closely with the skating director/Basic Skills director to ensure that synchronized skating is presented as a favorable option for beginning skaters
   - Ensure that each athlete entering the program has a good experience
   - Work closely with the figure skating club to ensure that athletes at all levels see synchronized skating as a viable, favorable experience that will enhance their skating career
   - Work to develop a strong relationship with the singles/dance professionals at the club or rink to ensure that they support the synchronized program
   - Develop and oversee an ethical recruiting program that is adhered to by the entire synchronized coaching staff and supported by the skating director, figure skating club and club professionals

7. Develop a retention plan for the current athletes
   - Work with coaching staff to establish policies for athlete feedback, parent consultations, etc.
   - Be aware of problems within organization and be proactive in helping solve them
   - Ensure that a system is in place to help athletes feel successful and productive, and that there are realistic, challenging and achievable goals for them to reach
   - Ensure that all the coaching staff is supporting the goals of the program in the most positive light possible. Ensure that all coaches with whom the athletes interact are quality instructors with a positive attitude.

8. Oversight and development of the budget
   - Ensure that the budget for each team in the program supports the philosophy and goals of the program
   - Ensure that the budgets for each team are similar and reflect the differences in level, expected commitment, etc.

9. Oversight of the volunteer/parent leadership of the program
   - Delegate administrative tasks to team managers/officers
   - Oversight of the “job descriptions” of volunteer positions and input into the individuals filling these roles
   - Set up regular meetings with volunteers to ensure that everything is getting done, and to address potential challenges

10. Act as the liaison to the skating director/rink manager and figure skating club
    - Report as necessary on the activities of the synchronized program
EXPECTATIONS OF A SYNCHRONIZED SKATING COACH

When a synchronized team hires a coach, it is hiring a professional that is an expert in the field. It is important to expect a certain skill set and base of knowledge. Below are expectations that clubs, rinks and skating directors should have of their coaches, or those that they are looking to hire:

- Membership in U.S. Figure Skating and the Professional Skaters Association (PSA)
- A knowledge of basic First Aid/CPR
- An in-depth understanding of the sport and of U.S. Figure Skating. Coaches should understand all the levels and requirements, where their team fits into the "big picture" and where they want to go. They should be able to communicate this with their team.
- A thorough understanding of the U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook and ISU communications. It is the coaches’ responsibility to know all the rules and make sure their team is following them.
- Strong working relationships with other synchronized skating and figure skating coaches in the area
- Knowledge and support of the PSA and U.S. Figure Skating ethics rules and expectations
- An ability to network with judges, technical controllers and technical specialists. These individuals should be consulted throughout the season.
- Strong communication and problem-solving skills. Coaches must be able to communicate effectively with athletes, parents, team managers, assistant coaches, etc. They also must be able to address challenges when they occur with strong leadership and confidence.
- A working knowledge of basic nutrition, including being sensitive to athletes and understanding where to go for more information. The American Dietetic Association (ADA); [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) has great information.
- Strong skating skills and knowledge of how to choreograph an age- and skill-appropriate program for the team
- Ability to make good decisions in selecting the costume and music
- An understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, and how they can be augmented with the assistance of outside professionals and assistant coaches
- Continuing education. Coaching members of U.S. Figure Skating and the PSA are expected to make use of all the continuing education opportunities available to them. This includes attending seminars, online learning, searching out documents on the website, reading magazines, etc.
- An enthusiasm and love for the sport, good sportsmanship and a strong work ethic. Athletes learn from their coaches, and one of the first jobs of a coach is to teach their athletes to love the sport, and to be able to deal with both success and failure while trying their best.
PAYING YOUR COACH

The amount a synchronized skating coach should be paid, and how he or she should be paid, is always a “hot topic” among team managers, parents, clubs and the coaches themselves.

It is important to understand that U.S. Figure Skating is not involved in any way in how coaches are paid, nor is there a great deal of information available on the topic. The compensation agreement is strictly between the coach and the team.

There are, however, certain areas that should be considered, and different options to consider.

METHOD: There are a few primary ways that teams and organizations can choose to pay their coaches. Teams and coaches should look at these different options and figure out which is the most advantageous to both parties. There are pros and cons to each method.

1. A PER-HOUR RATE: Many coaches are paid per hour, by the team, for the exact number of hours they actually spend on the ice coaching or for off-ice training.

Pros:
- The team is paying the coach only for the hours that he or she actually works.
- The coach generally enjoys a high hourly rate.
- Most figure skating professionals are used to being compensated this way.
- It is easy to calculate, and coaches can create invoices for accurate record keeping.

Cons:
- The team does not know exactly how much its coaching fees will be per season.
- The team may be reluctant to add in extra practice during the year, even if it is necessary.
- Coaches may be reluctant to spend adequate time preparing lesson plans and working outside of ice time if they don’t feel they are being compensated for it.
- Conflicts may arise around how to compensate the coach during competitions.
- Coaches may feel resentful if they believe they are spending too much time on team issues outside the hours they are paid.

Considerations: The team must create an agreement with the coach that addresses all the areas in the “Cons” section in order to minimize potential conflicts. It should include how many hours the coach will work, how time spent off ice will be compensated (a different lower rate, for example), how adding practices will be decided, if the coach needs to estimate or get permission for doing paid off-ice work, how the coach will be compensated at competitions, etc.

Possible way to “simplify”: To determine the most appropriate hourly wage, the team should base it on what the going rate is at its rink, and in its area, for private lessons, and then increase this by 20-30 percent to account for time spent on organizational or off-ice issues.

For example, if the “going rate” for private lessons for a coach with equivalent experience is $50 per hour in your area, you might pay the coach $65 per hour, with the agreement that he or she will be required to take care of off-ice management issues, parents meeting, lesson planning, etc., at no additional charge.
PAYING YOUR COACH (cont’d.)

2. A FIXED “SALARY” FOR THE SEASON, PER TEAM: Some synchronized teams find it better to pay their coach one all-inclusive amount for the whole season, providing regular pay checks on agreed-upon dates.

Pros:
- The team knows exactly how to budget for its season. There are no surprises.
- If the coach wants to add practices, it doesn’t increase coaching fees, and the team can be confident the coach feels it is absolutely necessary.
- The coach does not have to keep track of his or her hours.
- The coach is more likely to put in the time required off the ice, in a management role, to make the team more successful.
- Reduces conflicts with regard to payment during competitions.
- The team can provide a raise for the next season and know exactly how that will impact its budget.

Cons:
- Coaches could feel they are being taken advantage of if they are pressed to add extra hours or spend an excessive amount of time in meetings, with parents or dealing with management issues.
- The team may feel “slighted” if the coach needs to take a day off due to emergency, illness, etc.
- The team may be critical of the work being done off the ice.

Considerations: The team must create an agreement with the coach that addresses all the areas in the “Cons” section in order to minimize potential conflicts. This agreement should address all the areas that a coach is expected to take care of, a list of the types of meetings they will need to attend and an expected minimum amount of hours worked. Another way to minimize conflicts is for the team to provide an end-of-the-year, merit-based bonus to the coach, if it is warranted. This will provide incentive for the coaches to do what it takes to get the job done successfully, and will reward them for hours they may feel they haven’t been compensated for. It also allows the team to appreciate and recognize a really good job, or to now reward a poor job.

3. A FIXED “SALARY” FOR THE SEASON, FOR THE WHOLE ORGANIZATION: Established, multi-team organizations may choose to pay their coaching staff a salary to direct and coach the whole organization, not an amount per team.

Pros:
- Allows the management team of the organization flexibility with athlete dues. Decisions can be made in the best interest of the organization as a whole, not just on a per-team basis. The more families there are over which to spread the costs, the easier it is for decisions to have less financial impact.
- Allows the head coach/director of synchronized skating the ability to focus on the needs of the entire organization and balance his or her resources accordingly. It also gives greater flexibility with assigning coaching staff to teams.
- Encourages the coaching staff to bring success to the overall organization.
- Removes any incentive to place skaters on particular teams.
- Ensures that attention is paid throughout the pipeline, so there will always be “higher”-level teams for “lower”-level athletes to aspire to.
- Management/off-ice expenses are divided among a greater number of families.
• All the “Pros” listed in the above section

PAYING YOUR COACH (cont’d.)

Cons:
• Skaters on teams of a lower level may feel they aren’t getting the same amount of attention as skaters on a higher-level team.
• Skaters on a team that skates fewer hours may feel like they are subsidizing higher-level teams.
• All the “Cons” listed in the above section

Considerations: The organization must create an agreement with the coach that addresses all the areas in the “Cons” section in order to minimize potential conflicts. The organization should have a management team or some type of compensation committee that can determine the appropriate salary. In addition, it will need to figure out how to bill each individual team for its coaching expenses.

In determining how much each individual team should be responsible for, considerations should include the amount of time spent on off-ice management issues benefiting the whole organization (divided equally among all teams/families) and the approximate percentage of time spent on each team. A juvenile team in the organization should not have the same coaching fees as the organization’s senior team. However, it is reasonable to subsidize coaching fees for the highest-level team, as having that team at that level greatly benefits the entire organization, and is likely what attracts athletes to the organization in the first place.

NATIONAL AVERAGES: A survey was done in the fall of 2008 asking teams how, and how much, they paid their coaches. The survey was completed by 192 teams from 75 figure skating clubs nationwide.

For synchronized skating teams that paid their coaches BY THE HOUR, the averages, per region of the country, for a HEAD COACH:

NORTHEAST/NEW ENGLAND: $ 60.50 per hour  
SOUTH ATLANTIC: $ 49.00 per hour  
MIDWEST: $ 40.00 per hour  
WEST/PACIFIC COAST: $ 72.00 per hour

For synchronized skating teams that paid their coaches A SALARY PER TEAM for the entire season, for a head coach:

NATIONAL AVERAGE $4,391 per team, per season

There were not enough teams in each part of the country to break down the averages any further. The range of a season salary was volunteer ($0)–$30,000 per team, per season.

There were not enough teams in the survey that paid their coaching staff A SALARY PER ORGANIZATION for the entire season to report an accurate average.