

STAGE 5: READY FOR FLIGHT (LEARN TO COMPETE)

The FIFTH stage in South Africa's LTPD program is, READY FOR FLIGHT (LEARN TO COMPETE).

In this stage we continue to see differences between females and males. These differences must be accounted for in programming and coaching. More complex figure skating skills are introduced and basic fundamental movements are consolidated.

The chronological ages of participants in this stage are:

LEARN TO COMPETE	FEMALE	MALE
READY FOR FLIGHT	9-13	10-14

PHILOSOPHY: Athletes in this stage are exposed to greater performance and competition opportunities. The competitive experiences that occur during this phase focus on performance and not solely on outcome and/or results. Training plans become even further individualized to the needs and abilities of the athlete than in the previous stage. It is imperative that athletes consolidate a solid general physical foundation including speed, strength, endurance and flexibility. It is in this stage in which the metamorphosis from participant to athlete occurs. Therefore it is important that all individuals involved in athlete development have a solid understanding of this stage of development.

General Objectives

To consolidate and refine basic skills, and add variations as well as acquiring new skills relevant to the stage of development

- To further develop and consolidate artistic knowledge and expression
- To develop and consolidate a choreographed program tailor-made to the athlete
- To develop a solid conditioning base (speed, strength, endurance, flexibility)
- To further develop fundamental mental skills introduced in the previous stage and to introduce the ideal performance state of mind
- To develop self-confidence and positive attitude
- To increase the commitment level of athletes to the sport of figure skating, athletes should be involved in two sports (figure skating and one other but with minor involvement)
- To further increase the knowledge and use of the language of figure skating
- To further develop ancillary capacities (warm-up, hydration, cool-down, stretching, etc.).

The Sensitive Period

The following physiological factors must be introduced and developed through specific programming and coaching and in accordance with age and gender:

- *Suppleness (flexibility) (female/male: 6-10)*
- *Skills (female and male: 8-12)*
- *Speed (female: 11-13; male: 13-16)*
- *Stamina (at the onset of Peak Height Velocity)*

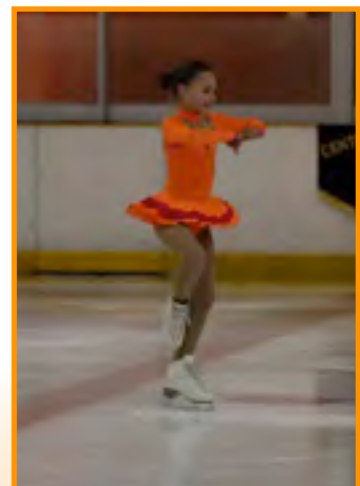
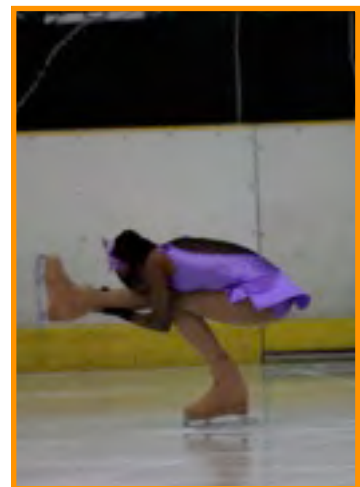
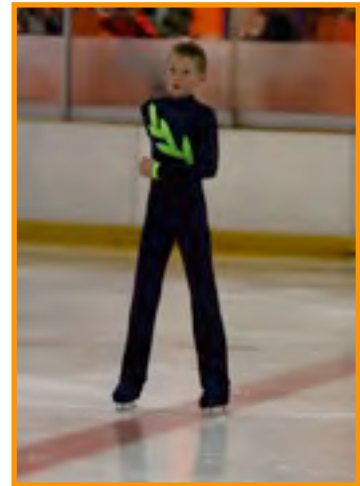
In this stage, the coach must further develop sport specific skills and flexibility as well as introduce strength training using body weight, medicine balls, and exercise/ stability balls. On average the onset of Peak Height Velocity (PHV) occurs around 10 years of age for females and around 12 years of age for males in most countries 12 and 14 respectively. These figures do not take into account individuals who mature earlier or later. It generally takes about two years to reach PHV. The onset of PHV and the peak growth spurt are the two indicators to develop stamina and strength.



Guiding Principles

In order to allow athletes to develop and acquire the skills outlined, the LEARN TO COMPETE stage must:

- ☑ Include the monitoring by coaches of the PHV and the windows of optimal trainability: speed; endurance and strength for both females and males
- ☑ Account for the growth, development and maturation process
- ☑ Focus on a 75% success rate when performing elements in a program
- ☑ Foster the development of an athletes inner strength and focus in order to be able to push themselves to the limit of full performance capacity on a regular and consistent basis
- ☑ Emphasize the linkages of skills with transitions so as to prepare athletes for competitive and SAFSA accredited tests.
- ☑ Include training plans that gradually and progressively increase the training load (volume and intensity) in order to reach competition and testing requirements
- ☑ Encourage the performance of skills and movements in a state of light to moderate fatigue in order to prepare the athlete adequately for competition requirements
- ☑ Emphasize the importance of athletes to focus on the desired performance for a specific competition as opposed to the outcome (score)
- ☑ Adhere to the principles of single or double periodization in an athletes yearly plan
- ☑ Emphasize the role and expertise of SAFSA officials in the judging process, ensuring a smooth transition from coach-based to official-based assessment



MISSION OF THE COACH

- LEARN TO COMPETE -



The mission of the coach is to raise the performance capacity of the athletes by focusing on the sensitive periods (i.e. the 5 Ss) applicable to females and males in this particular stage of development. Furthermore, coaches need to prepare athletes to perform to an identified personal level of achievement at identified competitions and reach a peak performance at the decisive competition of the year.

Coaches at this level need to frequently visit SAFSA (South African Figure Skating Association), and ISU (International Skating Union) websites to ensure they have the most current technical/program information. They must also continue to develop and provide athletes with a solid foundation in sport specific and general skills. This will not only create strong figure skaters but also healthy and functional adolescents.

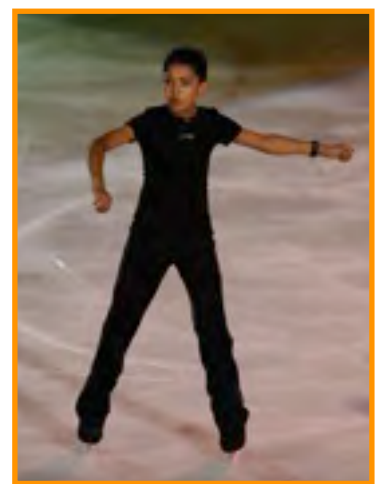
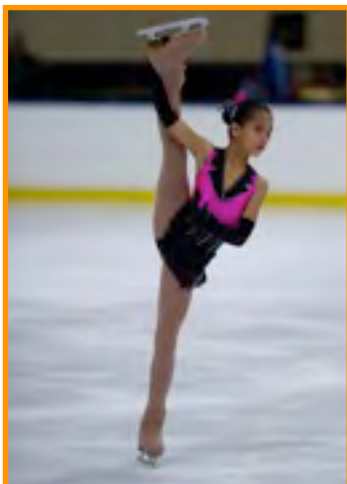
Good basics provide the base from which performance and competition can be developed. That said, coaches need to focus on skill acquisition and overall athlete development rather than performance outcomes. As much as possible, coaches of athletes in the READY FOR FLIGHT (Learn to Compete) stage should begin to work as a team with support from seasoned coaches. This enhances athlete and coach development.

FEMALES (9-13) and MALES (10-14)

SPORT SPECIFIC SKILLS:

Athletes should be able to demonstrate a relative mastery of the sport specific skills outlined below at the exit point of this stage.

<p>SINGLES: TECHNICAL</p>	<p>Edges/Turns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All edges and turns acquired are performed with speed, flow and control on both feet and in both directions • Edges and turns are being incorporated into step sequences and spiral/field movements sequences from this stage onward <p>Stroking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execution of correct stroking technique, demonstrating balance, posture, power, speed and strength in both directions, forwards and backwards. <p>Jumps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to execute all double jumps with good technique including double axel • Beginning to attempt triple jumps with confidence and good technique • Double/double combinations are consolidated • Ability to demonstrate maximal rotation through both on and off-ice jumping drills. <p>Spins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to demonstrate eight revolutions of all basic positions on both feet with good control,. • Mastery of back entries of all positions. • Death drop. Flying sit with change of foot must be introduced. • Change combination spin with the three basic positions on each foot must be introduced <p>Field Moves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to perform both supported and unsupported spiral positions as well as other field moves (i.e. spread eagles, Ina Bauers, pivots, etc.) • Demonstrated ability to maintain speed and flow in basic field movement positions • Learning to perform simple field moves in transitions
<p>ARTISTRY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletes should be able to demonstrate an understanding of beat, tempo and simple rhythmic patterns through movement. • Introduce various musical themes and instill an appreciation of the differences. • Introduce use of full body and different levels of movement (i.e high, medium, low) • Participation in ballet and other types of dance training in addition to off-ice classes.



FEMALES (9-13) and MALES (10-14)

General Skills

General skills (i.e physiological, psychological and social) are developed through involvement in the sport, and determines the overall development of the individual.

PHYSIOLOGICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued development of speed, stamina and strength. (NOTE: THIS IS THE SENSITIVE PERIOD OF TRAINABILITY TO DEVELOP STRENGTH IN FEMALES AFTER THE ONSET OF MENARCHE) • Development of flexibility, particularly during the growth spurt • Attention must be paid to male's flexibility at the entry stage if not already developed, as the window of opportunity is closing at this time
PSYCHOLOGICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop fundamental mental skills and the importance thereof • Ability to explain the IDEAL PERFORMANCE STATE • Continue to develop management and anxiety management strategies, and an awareness of what is needed where • Ability to explain the importance of setting short, medium and long term goals
SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough knowledge of the rules and ethics of sport • Skaters must be able to demonstrate an ability to take risks and meet challenges presented to them • Increased ability to measure success through self evaluation. To focus on personal achievement instead of outcomes • Continuing emphasis to athletes that schooling and education is of paramount importance

On Ice Training

The relative amount of time skaters may practice various activities, can be expressed as a percentage of their TOTAL ice time per phase. Skaters will spend about 70 - 75% of their on-ice time dedicated to technical training, which includes jumps, spins, edges and turns, stroking and field movements. Skaters will spend about 25 - 30% of their time on program component development, which includes skating skills, transitions, performance and execution, choreography and interpretation.

READY FOR FLIGHT (LEARN TO COMPETE)

	Session length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 or 2 45 minute sessions per day
	Days / week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 - 5 days / week
	Weeks / year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44 - 46 weeks/year

Off Ice Training

At the LEARN TO COMPETE stage, athletes should be participating in off-ice activities three to five days per week, and 46 to 48 weeks of the year. Each session should be approximately one hour in length and should include some type of dance and movement classes for both males and females. Strength training sessions for females are of particular importance. Sessions should focus on exercises that utilize body weight, medicine balls, and exercise/stability balls.

Stamina also needs to be a focus for both females and males and cardiovascular conditioning sessions should be introduced. We encourage athletes at this level to remain involved in another sport outside of figure skating, but on a minimal commitment level.



Competition

This LEARN TO COMPETE stage is CRITICAL to an early skill acquisition sport such as figure skating. It is also the phase when most athletes will experience their peak growth, development and maturation. Therefore, there are great windows of opportunity for developing skills and acquiring new ones before the onset of the growth spurt. Too many competitions take away from training as the athlete is always preparing and refining skills for competition rather than for present and future skill progression. In other words, too much competing at this level will hinder overall athlete development. Over-competing should be avoided at all costs.

In preparation for competition, quality program run-throughs are imperative. During the off-peak seasons (i.e. July, August, September) back-to-back program run-throughs should be added to the athlete's training plan. In addition, to refine and perfect programs, focus on particular sections should be encouraged and monitored. Coaches must instill in the athlete the understanding that the "training" of the program is the key to consistent performances in competition. Also, the more thoroughly executed programs are in practice will make competitions seem more like training sessions. Every run-through is a simulation!

As the competitive season begins, athletes should be performing one to two run-throughs per day, plus continue to work on sections of the program to consolidate their skills and the performance of those skills in the context of the choreography. In preparation for those important competitions in each athlete's yearly plan, there should be one full run-through of the program per day and re-working of any sections of the program as necessary.

Similar to a gradual and progressive increase in the intensity of training as an athlete progresses through the READY FOR FLIGHT (Learn to Compete) stage, the number of competitions should also gradually increase. For optimum athlete development, the recommendation for the number and timing of competitions is indicated in the chart below:

NUMBER OF COMPETITIONS IN THE READY FOR FLIGHT STAGE			
AGE	AUTUMN/WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER
9 - 11 years	One	Two	Two
12 - 14 years	One to Two	Two to Three	Two

