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NATIONAL COACHING APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM GRAND PRIX FINAL, QUEBEC CITY

Doug Schmierer

Three Alberta coaches, Jessica Gosse, Garry Knox and Doug Schmierer, participated in the National Coaching Apprenticeship Program (NCAP) at the Grand Prix Final in Quebec City during December 8-11, 2011. It was an excellent opportunity to witness athletes compete at the highest level in figure skating while mentoring with Mannon Perron (coach of Joannie Rochette), Michele Leigh (coached Jennifer Robinson), Richard Gauthier (coach of David Pelletier and Jamie Salé).

Although the technique of skating is always similar from Juvenile to Senior, athlete management at the international level takes a higher degree of insight and expertise. The focus of the NCAP was devoted to this topic. There were many frank discussions regarding the tools and resources each mentor coach has applied in different circumstances.

While every situation is unique, we can learn from past experiences of which we had a zamboni full. Within hours of arriving, Patrick Chan was misquoted in a Globe and Mail story that threatened both his mental focus for the event and his popularity among Canadian fans. It was interesting to witness how this was managed from the perspective of his coach and from Skate Canada officials. Barb MacDonald, the Media Relations person for Skate Canada, provided information on this and other media issues.

We were also privy to the tragic story of Joannie Rochette and the passing of her mother at the Olympic Games in Vancouver, British Columbia. Both Mannon and Joannie's Sport Psychologist, Wayne Halliwell, offered behind the scenes detail to this amazing athletic achievement. It demonstrated that each athlete and coach requires a team of individuals with expertise in many areas to achieve elite status. This team is used at all levels along the path to the international podium and allows the athlete to succeed when the 'unforeseen and unplanned' occurs. It was the prior work of Joannie, Mannon and her team that provided her with the tools necessary to triumph. Her performance under incredible circumstances has become one of the greatest displays of strength and guts in all of sport.

Patrice Lauzon, two time World medalist in dance, provided insight from an athlete's perspective. His experiences from training and competing on the international stage were useful and moving. Julie Marcotte also added to the seminar with her thoughts on the 'program component' aspects of competitive programs.



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In addition to the discussions, were many opportunities to watch practices and events. It was notable that on the day of the event, many skaters performed 90% of the long program during their practice session. It was also interesting to view the various and different warm up strategies of the coaches and athletes. Perhaps the best experience was simply watching the world's best performing at the Junior and Senior levels. It is worth mentioning that the best Juniors in singles are often better than the best Seniors.

Canada has a long history of success. It is up to each of us, skaters, coaches, officials and parents to continue this. Watching the Junior Grand Prix events put a scare in all Canadians in attendance but we are up to the task. We have the best coaching, officiating and athletes in the world and it begins today at each training session in Alberta.

If any coach or official would like to obtain further details of the NCAP experience please contact Cassandra Copp at the Section Office and she will provide you with a contact number.

