

Figure Skating

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Champion fancy skater of the world

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THE Lady of the Snows will soon once more spread her virgin mantle over old Montreal, and tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, the merry sleigh-bells tell that Jack Frost has come to pay us another long and cheery visit. Summer frolics will be forgotten, and now society will live on ice. Skating in Canada is the sport par excellence: always has been, and always will be; as there is no pastime in which ladies may so gracefully join, and whose pleasures are participated in to such an extent by all classes of society. It is fascination itself. The fair ones "just love it." Apart from its intoxicating joys, I may safely say there is no pastime so beneficial to the human body, or more capable of strengthening it. There certainly is nothing in gymnastics that displays equal elegance, and excites such exquisite pleasure in the mind of the performer, and I would certainly recommend it as the most efficacious remedy to the misanthrope and hypochondriac. What sublime joy, even to the beholder, to follow the figure's graceful flight through mazes of artistic evolutions; to catch with puzzled eye the intricacies of ever-varying gyrations. When man can note each motion in the multiform quick acts of limber fish, of nimble birds, the writhings of serpents, the surgings of the sea, and mark the every movement of a whirlwind, then may he realize the infinite variety of twists, vines, and whirls that may be accomplished on the glittering blades. What complete luxury to the performer, also, is this fascinating pastime; the rapid motion, the graceful semi-circles of the serpentine; the winding in and out of the labyrinth; the grand sweeps of the spread-eagle; the graceful evolutions necessary for the accomplishment of the pirouette; the perfect circle of the eight, and the bird-like motions of the edges, vines, etc., in which one seems to move by the mere impulse of volition—all of these, to the skater, are incomparably more delightful than the most beautiful dance to the sweetest music. How bright the scene when a myriad of graceful figures, all in dainty costumes, gaily gliding to the accompaniment of ringing laughter and merry jest—now in, now out—weave their many beautiful designs over the fast-frozen waters.

Like language, music, painting, and many other accomplishments, skating ought to be learned in youth. To children, there is nothing formidable about it; the motion, once learned, is almost as easy as walking, but, at first, there are some difficulties to overcome. The young beginner feels terribly nervous when he finds himself on the ice in a perpendicular position, his feet slipping and sliding from under him in every direction, except that in which he wishes them to go; but, as he has not far to fall, nor much dignity to lose, he scrapes along until, finally, he masters his edges, and is soon seen darting hither and thither over the glassy surface as the newly-arrived swallow flits over the meadows.

To the beginner, I would say, first, last and always, do not wear inferior skates, as good ones are inexpensive articles, and add considerably to the skater's comfort. Dispense with straps if possible, as they bind the foot and thereby prevent proper circulation of the blood. A strong leather laced boot, fitting snugly at all parts of the foot, is a desideratum.

There is a graceful proportion of the parts of the body, as essential to perfect harmony in movement, as it is essential to harmony in repose. In an individual gifted with such proportions, grace is instinctive, intuitive. Gallini says that "the simplicity of nature is the great fountain of all graces, from



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which they flow spontaneously, when unchecked by affectation, which at once poisons and dries them up." Grace may be seen in a natural air, an unassumed easiness of motion, elasticity, and lightness of step, harmony of movement, softness, pliability and elegance in the disposition of the limbs—an insensible melting of one movement into another. To women, especially, grace is even more essential than to men. Finer in their construction than men, they are quicker in perception, more open to clear impressions. Their sensibility being more lively, they are naturally quicker in adjusting their motions to their thoughts. Where we find such sensibility, we find that wonderful inborn fascination—grace. To those of the fair sex so gifted, it is only necessary to give the proper position of the body and limbs while skating, and they quickly pick up the rest.

I have no hesitancy in saying that the Dominion of Canada has supplied more experts of the steels, both in speed and figure-work, than any country in the world, but regret to add that, within the last few years, really very few good fancy skaters have come to the front. There seems to have been lack of interest in this important branch of the sport, as is easily demonstrated by the slim number of competitors who enter for the American and Canadian championships.

There will, no doubt, be a revival of at least combined skating this season. Combined or hand-in-hand skating consists in the execution of single movements by two or more persons. It is certainly the most fascinating of all styles, though in acquiring proficiency much time and practice are required. Still, the result, when it is attained, well repays the labor. "Combined skating," it may be remarked, is at the present increasing in popularity. Nearly all the movements that can be performed singly can also be performed in combination, though of this fact comparatively few skaters seem to be aware. Hence it is that the more difficult figures are seldom attempted in combination. The popular and generally accepted method of "combined skating" is to execute "rocking turns," "brackets," and a small selection of figures of "three" and of "eight." Waltzes and quadrilles, though commonly to be seen in Canada, where they are performed accompanied by music, and in time therewith, are but seldom seen elsewhere,