

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the ISU New Judging System

Please note that the questions and answers below are focused on singles figure skating but the same principles apply to pair skating and ice dancing.

Q1: Will you please describe the ISU 6.0 system?

A: The 6.0 system requires each judge, guided by general criteria in the ISU Special Regulations, to award a skater *only two* “marks”, each expressed as a number on a scale from 0 to 6.0. Each judge must compare the quality of the individual skater’s performance with that of all other competitors (“relative” judging) and award the two marks accordingly.

The *first mark* is a single mark for Technical Merit. In the short program, this mark is awarded for performance of the required jumps, spins and footwork (Technical Elements). In the free program, this mark is awarded for the quality of Skating Techniques. The mark is awarded at the end of the skater’s performance.

The *second mark* is a single mark for Presentation (artistry, timing, music, interpretation, and expression). The mark is awarded at the end of the skater’s performance.

Neither of these marks expresses any real value. They serve only the purpose of placing the skater into a specific ranking position. In fact, often the judge first decides which place to award the skater and then uses the marks to implement this decision.

Q2: Will you please describe the ISU New Judging System?

A: The New Judging System is a simple method of “real time”, detailed scoring that awards points based upon multiple “*first marks*”, that is one for *each* Technical Element skated (jumps, spins and footwork), rather than a retrospective single “*first mark*” at the end of the skater’s performance. Each Technical Element has an Element Base Value. Element Base Values have been determined by a group of experienced skaters, coaches and officials.

A Technical Specialist identifies each Technical Element as it is performed by the skater. Each judge, using a touch-entry computer screen, and guided by precise criteria, determines the Grade of Execution of the Technical Element on a scale from -3 to +3. This Grade of Execution is entered into the computer and, if different from the Element Base Value, adjusts (plus or minus) that Base Value as decided by the judge. The adjustment is in proportion to the Base Value. For example, a Grade of Execution of +3 adds 3 to the value of a triple jump in single skating but adds only 1.5 to the value of a single jump, which has a correspondingly lower Base Value.

The five “*second marks*”, for Program Components consist of separate point grades to reflect the quality of the Skating Skills, Transitions, Performance/Execution, Choreography and Interpretation. These five marks are entered by each judge via the touch screen at the end of the skater’s performance. Again, precise criteria displayed on the touch-screen guide the judge in awarding grade marks for each Program Component.

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A judge is not required to compare and score each skater directly in relation to all other skaters. This permits each judge to focus on the *quality* of (1) *each* Technical Element performed and (2) the *overall* Program Components, and to enter into the computer, via the simple, informative touch-screen, performance grades for each component.

The computer records the individual scores as entered by the judges, and compiles aggregate scores for each skater to determine the final rankings. The points awarded are weighted so that the Technical Elements will account for approximately half of the total score and the Program Components make up the other half.

For further details, including Element Base Values for all Technical Elements, see ISU Communication 1207.

Q3: How does this work for Ice Dancing?

A: In the Original and Free Dance Required Elements already exist. Three levels have been introduced for every Required Element and each has been assigned an Element Base Value. The judge then gives a Grade of Execution rating to each Element Base Value. The five Program Components are the same as in the other disciplines.

Compulsory Dances have been approached differently but the same basic principles apply. Each Compulsory Dance has been divided into a number of Required Segments for each sequence and an Element Base Value has been assigned for each Required Segment. More difficult segments of the dance have higher Element Base Values. The judge then gives a Grade of Execution rating to each Required Segment. The Compulsory Dances consist only of Required Segments. There are only three Program Components for the Compulsory Dance – Timing, Performance (which includes Style and Unison), and Interpretation.

Q4: What are some of the advantages of the New Judging System over the current system? (See also the summary under Q18)

A: It produces a detailed record and transparent measure of performance quality.

Under the 6.0 system the judges do not score the quality of each Technical Element skated. Based on *only two* marks, one for Technical Merit, and one for Performance, they rank each skater relative to all other skaters. A judge must try to remember each Technical Element skated, and the Performance quality of all previous skaters, and then rank the current skater in the right place. It is clearly difficult to make careful, consistent comparisons of elements and styles as performed by many different skaters.

In contrast, with the New Judging System the judge enters a point score for each Technical Element, as performed, and at the end of the performance for the each of the five Program Components. Statistics of the competition will be easier to understand for both skaters and fans. In addition, the “points” will show whether, for example, skaters who are ranked 2nd and 3rd are close or far apart. The 6.0 system cannot provide this information.

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A: More feedback for skaters and coaches.

From the skaters' perspective, the current *single mark* does not give detailed information to allow a comparison of the Technical Elements of their program with the program of other skaters. The skaters are only informed where they ranked within the group.

In contrast, under the New Judging System each competitor will receive a tabulation of the marks awarded to all skaters for each Technical Element and the five Program Components. This will help skaters and their coaches identify strengths, weaknesses and possible areas for improvement.

A: Better consistency among judges.

When using the 6.0 system, judges must try to remember up to 30 other performances in attempting to decide where to rank a skater, which obviously makes it difficult to compare one of the last athletes to skate with an earlier competitor.

Also, currently, results may reflect differing priorities among judges. Judges may rate skill qualities differently. This aspect of current judging is illustrated by the very mixed placements often seen for skaters in the middle groups of a competition. Typically, these skaters provide judges the biggest challenge because they demonstrate different and opposite strengths and weaknesses. When judges award only two marks, slight differences between judges can have a significant impact on the end result.

In contrast, judges marking under the New Judging System are guided by the same specific criteria for each Technical Element, and the judges award *a mark to each element performed*. The judges also award five separate marks for each of the five Program Components immediately after the skater's performance. These marks are also based upon specific criteria. The computer provides the memory for the numerous marks, and also a permanent record. Accordingly, marks should be more consistent for all judges. The judge is free to concentrate on proper scoring of each element *during the skater's performance* without having to think back at the end of the performance. Once a skater has finished and the marks have been entered the judge can focus entirely on the next skater's performance.

A: The New Judging System provides better measurement of the differences between skaters and programs, and allows more changes of position between the short and long programs.

The current 6.0 system does develop a sequential ranking of the skaters, subjectively determined, but it does not measure the precise differences between the performances of the skaters.

Experience demonstrates that only the top 3 skaters in the short program have a chance of winning the event unless one or more skaters drop out of the top 3.

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The New Judging System permits more skaters to challenge for victory when the point spreads between performances are narrow. For example, if the top six skaters are all closely packed in a narrow range of points after the short program, any of the six might win if they produce an outstanding free skating program.

Q5: Why is a secret and random draw used to determine which judges' marks will form the result? How can the judges be accountable? Does it not make it easier for judges to be dishonest?

A: Background

The procedure of selecting a group of "scoring" judges anonymously from a larger pool, all of whom judge the competition, was approved for the Interim Judging System by a large majority (including 77% of Figure Skating Members) at the ISU Congress in June 2002.

A: There are reasons for anonymity.

As long as the exact marks awarded by specific judges can be identified, the risk of external pressures and influences exist. Pressure might be implicit or explicit, and applied before or after an event from a variety of sources. The response to such pressure could be conscious or sub-conscious. Anonymity reduces the risk of external pressures acting on judges. The results of the 2002/03 competitions using the Interim Judging System (with anonymous judges) were generally well accepted, indicating a positive effect. In particular, many commentators noted the good results of lesser-known competitors at several events; these competitors were seen as justly rewarded.

A. The New Judging System provides data to hold judges accountable.

The computer record of judges' marks for Technical Elements and Program Components will be audited by ISU specialists to identify incompetent or biased judging. In addition, marks can be checked against video footage.

The process for assessment of scores in the New Judging System is more rigorous than before as analysis of scores will be carried out several times per season by audit of detailed scoring data summarized by the computer. Increased evaluation already has been initiated during the 2002/03 season for competitions judged under the Interim Judging System.

Prior to 2002-2003, with only limited 6.0 system data available, marks were reviewed during the season and the judges assessed only once at the end of the skating year.

Once the New Judging System is in place in accordance with ISU Rules, a judge with unsatisfactory performance evaluations shall no longer be allowed to officiate at future ISU Events for a prescribed period of time, the minimum period proposed being two years. The ISU is committed to conducting performance evaluations strictly and fairly.

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A. A more detailed record of the “marks” awarded by each judge makes it extremely difficult to skew the results by a dishonest vote.

In the 6.0 system, the judge does not mark the quality of *each element* of a skater’s program. This lack of data reduces the scope of analysis of the marks given. While the judge may be asked for an “explanation” of an anomalous mark, the 6.0 system allows the vote to stand. Unless there is overt, demonstrable evidence of misconduct, the judge will continue to officiate at events.

The Element Base Value for each of the recognized Technical Elements is the same for all skaters. By simply touching the appropriate box on the touch-screen in front of them, the judges may award the Element Base Value, or adjust the Base Value within a range of +3 above to -3 below the Base Value. The skater is therefore guaranteed to receive credit for elements performed and the judges are guided by precise criteria in deciding the Grade of Execution in each case.

The skaters determine which of the optional elements they will include in their programs and can provide their written programs in advance as a guide to the Technical Specialist operating the system. They are, however, free to change their program at any stage before or during the performance.

For *each* Technical Element scored by the judges who have been secretly and randomly selected, the New Judging System excludes the two highest marks and the two lowest marks (with 9 judges) or the highest and lowest (7 judges). The remaining marks for that element are averaged to produce the “trimmed mean”. It is this mark which is awarded to the skater *for that element*.

The mark awarded to the skater for each Technical Element therefore represents the central opinion of the selected judges and ignores the excluded anomalous marks.

Similarly the high and low marks for each of the five Program Components are excluded from the final calculation of each skater’s mark, and it is the mean of the remaining marks which forms the skater’s score for each Program Component.

In conclusion, the judges can assess the skaters to the best of their ability without fear of pressure either before or after the performance. Any outsider wishing to influence a judge would not know (1) whether that judge’s vote would count, and (2) whether the judge actually voted as instructed.

The New Judging System makes also any “bloc voting” practically impossible. In the present system, which is based on the majority of placings, it is theoretically possible for 5 judges out of 9 to form a “bloc” favouring a particular skater. In the New Judging System, judges seeking to favour a particular skater would have to try to award a higher Grade of Execution numerous times during the program of that skater. Such repeated over-grading would be immediately noticeable and the judge would also risk that their high mark would be excluded from the scores. Any judge attempting to manipulate scores in this way would therefore risk being identified as incompetent or biased without even knowing whether their marks would have any impact.

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Q6: Will the judges “save room” in the New Judging System? Will a skater’s point scores be publicly available?

A: The skating order will no longer have a significant impact on marks.

In the 6.0 system a skater who performs in the first group may be disadvantaged as the judges generally “save room” in their markings. Many persons have questioned why early performers who skate very well generally do not achieve high marks. In fact, in the 6.0 system, the numerical value of the mark only has relative importance since skaters are ranked mainly by comparison to each other, and not on an absolute point basis.

It is generally assumed, however, that the skaters in the last groups for the free program (who finished higher in the short program) are better and will earn higher marks. Accordingly, the judges may “leave room”. This assumption has been questioned by many observers, and the public.

In the New Judging System, every skater’s score is based on performance, irrespective of the order skated or perceived ranking. There is no practical upper limit to the number of points to be scored, and accordingly, the concept of leaving “room” for higher marks is irrelevant to the New Judging System.

A: Statistics may now play an interesting role in Figure Skating.

In the 6.0 system there are almost no statistics. In the future each skater could have a personal best total score, highest jump total score, highest spin total score, highest interpretation total score, and so on. It is possible that a world record could also be recognized.

The information display for the display boards is still being developed but the skaters, media and public will have access to results for all competitors showing, total scores, scores for each Technical Element and scores for each Program Component.

Q7: When will the New Judging System be implemented?

A: The New Judging System is being implemented on a test basis during the 2003/04 skating season for the Nebelhorn Trophy (September 2003) and the ISU Senior Grand Prix series (2003-2004). Future use of the New Judging System, including at ISU Championships, will be determined at the 2004 ISU Congress by the Figure Skating Section.

Q8: Will we see the New Judging System used in our country?

A: Each individual ISU Member country will make their own decision as to how they apply this to their national competitions.

Q9: Does the New Judging System apply all the way to local club level?

A: It will be up to the ISU’s Member Federations to decide but this system can be operated on paper in a similar way to the current system. The judges would identify the elements (and level of difficulty, if applicable) and give a grade of execution for each element as laid out in

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the new rules. They would then give marks for the other 5 Program Components and hand the paper in to be entered into the accountant's computer as happens today.

Q10: Why give the Technical Elements of the New Judging System an Element Base Value?

A: In the current 6.0 system the skater has no guarantee that a performed Technical Element has been given credit. In the New Judging System each performed element has an automatic value and, depending on the quality of the performance, points may be added or taken away. This provides the skater guaranteed value for elements performed. A group of experts, including very experienced skaters and coaches, have determined the Element Base Value for each Technical Element.

Q11: What exactly does the Technical Specialist do in the New Judging System? Why do we need one?

A: In real time, as each skater performs, the Technical Specialist identifies the element being performed and the level of difficulty (if applicable), as specifically laid out in the New Judging System. This allows the judge to concentrate on marking the quality of each element and the skating performance overall. The Technical Specialists appointed will be highly trained and tested. They will come from a national/international skating/coaching background and be involved in skating on a weekly basis. They are supported by the Technical Coordinator and another Technical Specialist to ensure that any potential mistakes are corrected immediately. If the Technical Specialist proves inadequate, he/she will be immediately replaced.

Q12: Why not let the judge do this as they do now?

A: The 6.0 system does not include any specific value for an executed Technical Element and a value is not assigned to the discrete aspects of the Presentation of a skater's program. Marks are deducted when a mistake is made and credit is given for difficulty but the judges merely decide on relative rankings.

Figure Skating has progressed to a very high standard. However, in the current system there is no guarantee that performed Technical Elements have been accurately and consistently evaluated from skater to skater.

The New Judging System is focused on giving credit to the skater for every element performed. It is logical for the Technical Specialist to identify the Technical Element and allow the judge to concentrate on the quality of its performance. In this way the skater is guaranteed to be judged and properly awarded points for each element performed.

Q13: What happens if the Technical Specialist makes a mistake?

A: There are two other individuals present watching the decisions of the Technical Specialist. If there is a mistake in identifying a Technical Element, the Technical Controller may overrule the call and make an edit. This has no effect on the judge's Grade of Execution for that

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element. All of these individuals are being recorded with an audio tape and of course there is also the video tape to verify the calls.

Q14: How does the Technical Specialist determine the level of difficulty for spins, footwork and other moves?

A: There are very specific criteria for the level of difficulty in all technical areas other than the jumps, which are identified by type and the number of rotations. Skaters will therefore receive value for each and every element. They will also know that a difficult spin performed well, for example, will receive more credit than an easier spin.

In the current 6.0 system there is no fixed value for spins or footwork.

The complete Levels of Difficulty for single and pair skating are published in Communication 1224.

Q15: Will the judges play a comparable role in the New Judging System?

A: Yes, a vital and critical role. Their focus will be upon scoring the *quality* of each Technical Element as executed, and the *quality* of the five Program Components, all based on specific criteria, to provide a comprehensive assessment of the skater's skills and performance. Keeping track of comparative scores, recording results and calculating the totals to determine rankings are left to the computer.

Q16: Will the New Judging System turn competitions into jumping contests?

A: No. The New Judging System has a definition of the "Well-Balanced Program" which specifies the number of elements available to the skater. It is not dramatically different from the current restrictions; however, it does limit the number of jumps for the long program, which the current system does not. For example, for Senior Men, 8 jump elements may be executed. Two may be jump combinations: one consisting of two jumps and one consisting of up to three jumps. This results in the possibility of up to 11 jumps in a program. Existing rules about not repeating the same jump will remain in place, as will the required elements for the short program.

Q17: How is the current "presentation" score judged in the New Judging System?

A: Under the New Judging System the "presentation" of Figure Skating, the Original Dance and the Free Dance is graded on five Program Components, namely: Skating Technique, Transitions, Performance, Choreography and Interpretation. For the Compulsory Dance there are only three Program Components: Timing, Performance (which includes Style and Unison) and Interpretation.

Each one of the Program Components has specific criteria and is marked out of 10. The sum of the scores for Technical Elements is weighted to count for about 50% of the total score and the five (or three) Program Components will count for the balance of the total score.

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Q18: How would you summarize the benefits of the New Judging System?

- Results will better reflect the skaters' performances and the differences between them;
- Skaters will receive credit for every element and aspect of their performance;
- All the numerical scores for each skater from each judge will be published, providing complete transparency of information for skaters, the public and the media;
- Skaters will be able to assess strengths and weaknesses and monitor their progress;
- Average point scores are used but the highest and lowest marks awarded for each element are not considered, ensuring that anomalous marks do not affect the result;
- Judging anonymity returns the focus to the skaters and protects the judges from external pressures;
- A "Round Table Discussion" for judges and officials at the end of the competition gives each individual an opportunity to voice opinions; and
- The additional statistical information enables rigorous assessment of judges.

Further detail respecting the New Judging System may be found in ISU Communications 1207 and 1224 accessible on www.isu.org . The ISU instruction guide for the New Judging System is also available on the same web-site.