

# Artistic skating now team sport

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STAFF WRITER

Figure skating has been a big-time sport for many years. It's often featured on prime-time television and is one of the glamour events of the Winter Olympics. But figure skating is about to become, literally, even bigger, with the increasing popularity of precision skating.

Precision skating features teams of 12 to 32 skaters performing a thematic routine that lasts from three to 4½ minutes. It's analogous to synchronized swimming on ice, but on a much larger scale. And like synchronized swimming, precision skating may soon become an Olympic event.

For now, however, precision skaters in the United States are looking forward to this weekend's national championships at Cobo Arena. Two defending championship squads are part of Team Elan, which is based at the Detroit Skating Club in Bloomfield Hills.

Jeannine Cullen of Rochester Hills is director of Team Elan. A former competitive figure skater and ice capades performer, Cullen has been with the team for eight years. She was attracted to precision skating because "it's the only team sport for a figure skater."

Cullen explained that while very few skaters can even dream of reaching a national skating competition as an individual, "we have teams and we can offer 32

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Jeannine Cullen  
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skaters the opportunity to go to a national final."

Team Elan has 141 skaters in six age-levels. The team's youngest skater, 6, skates in the Preliminary age group. The other groups are: Juvenile, Intermediate, Junior, Senior and Adult. The senior group, ages 16-22, features the team's top skaters. The Adult group includes skaters age 21 and over. Team Elan's oldest skater is 52.

All of Team Elan's six age groups qualified for the nationals by placing in the top four at the Sectionals in North Dakota. Team Elan's Adult and Junior squads are both two-time defending national champions. The Intermediate group has won two straight bronze medals while the Seniors took a silver last year.

Precision skating programs are



Team skating: Kara Connor of Farmington Hills is a member of Team Elan that will compete for a national championship in precision skating this weekend in Detroit.

judged similarly to individual or pairs programs, using a 6.0 scale. Novice precision skating spectators should remember that "the name of the game is precision skating," said Cullen. When watching the programs, Cullen advised fans to watch for "unison and precision" from the teams. "Precise moves from the head to the toes — every head, every arm, every hand."

All of Team Elan's skaters have individual or pairs figure skating backgrounds. "Some have gone a long way on their own," Cullen said. "But none have made it to a national level at singles." Skating for a team, therefore, "gives them a much better chance of making it to a national level."

The younger skaters and the Adult squad practice one or two hours per week during the seven-month season. The Junior teams practices about three hours in a typical week while the senior teams works for four hours.

The skaters all take their sport seriously, Cullen said, including the Adult team, which she terms "very competitive." They need to be serious about the sport because precision skating is expensive, with a typical skater paying about \$3,000 per year for instruction, ice time and costumes. The skaters supply their own skates.

As with figure skating, a large

majority of precision skaters are female. For now, precision skating doesn't have separate men's and women's competitions, although Cullen believes that separate competitions may become necessary as the sport expands and more men begin competing. Team Elan has no male skaters.

Overall, Cullen says that precision skating is "quickly becoming very popular. It's on the fast track to becoming an Olympic event."

Precision skating was officially recognized by the International Skating Union last year, which put the sport on the road to becoming an Olympic event. The sport's rules, which have been slightly different in many countries, will soon be made uniform worldwide. There will also be an international championship held in Finland next January. The top four Junior and Senior teams in this week's Nationals will qualify for the international event.

## Track from page 1B

of CC's first-place state Class A championship 3,200 relay squad (7:58.0).

Other losses include Kevin Rosinski, who cleared 6 feet, 2 inches in the high jump; T.J. Kitchen, who went 53.0 in the 400; Aaron Shepoh, 2:07.7 in the 800; and Brian O'Reilly, 4:42.1 in the 1,600.

But look who's back.

Senior sprinter Eric McKeon, who owns or shares at least four school records, leads a strong nucleus.

McKeon paced the area in the 200 dash (22.0) and 400 (49.3). He also clocked 10.9 in the 100 dash and took second overall in Observerland in the 800 run (2:00.1). McKeon was also a member of last year's Class A champion 3,200 relay squad, along with senior Brandon Daniel, who went 2:20.4 in the 800 a year ago.

Another standout returnee is senior Mark Eden, a versatile performer who led Observerland in the 110 high hurdles (14.7) and 300 low hurdles (39.7). Eden took eighth last year in Class A in the 110 high. He was also a member of CC's school-record 1,600 relay squad (3:25.4).

Other returnees include senior Kevin Jakubowski, who tossed the discus 131-1 last year; junior Freddie Taylor, a sprinter and long jumper (20-44); Rob Clark, 10-6 in the pole vault; senior Damon Harris, 9:54.4 in the 3,200; senior Jamie Fitzgerald, 10:04.1 in the 3,200; and senior Joe Suhadja, 44-4 in the shot put.

And if that's not enough, how about returning state Class A cross country champion Mike Mittman in the distance races?

Other returnees include senior sprinter Brady Pankow, junior shot putter Nick Kallias, who took sixth last weekend at the Huron Relay with a toss of 49-8; senior Chris O'Keefe in the 800; and senior Jeff Wollschlaeger in the distance events.

"We'd like to experiment the first two outdoor meets," Magni said. "Our distance people really didn't do much over the winter, but hopefully at the end of the year they'll be right there."



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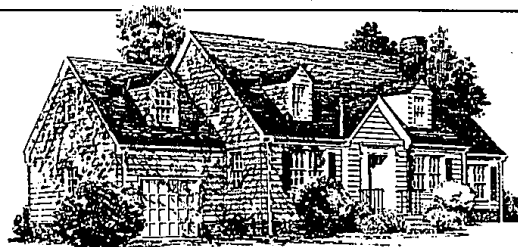
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