

## FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE ROLLER SPORTS

### COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL DE PATINAGE ARTISTIQUE

#### EXTRACT FROM "DANCING ON ICE" BY ERIC VAN DER WEYDEN FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1951

A very interesting article about Dancing on skates (whether it be ice or rollers) which I think Dance enthusiasts should read :-

The advice given to the budding figure skater is substantially the same as that which be given to the budding dancer, in that no skater can ever be a really good dancer without a fairly sound knowledge of the principles of figure skating.

I am starting with the assumption that the reader already knows something of skating and can do all the edges, even if not all the turns, reasonably well. It fact, it would be fairly safe to say that the majority of skaters who take the trouble to read this book, do so, not with the intention of *learning* to dance (for such knowledge cannot be acquired from just book-work), but with the object of *improving* their dancing. These are the people for whom this book has been written, primarily. Any attempt to dance without edge-control is just a farce, and probably gives the spectators more amusement than the "performers", although I have known cases in which people have protested indignantly that they only wished to learn dancing, and that nothing on earth would compel them to waste time on practising edges.

Obviously hard work and plenty of it, is essential for success, as in any other art or sport – for skating in any of its branches, is both, and to a high degree.

However, correct knowledge is of the utmost importance, or much of the hard work done is not merely wasted, but definitely derogatory, since nothing is more difficult to correct than that which has become a "bad habit".

If the reader has taken lessons in any of the dances, or has been helped by a competent friend (and all friends, even if ever so slightly better than oneself, appear competent), questions are bound to arise some time later on information which has seemed ambiguous, or on some forgotten detail. It is here that a text-book is of the greatest use – checking of points in doubt can save much time, and temper, and even if that is all that this work does for you, then it will not have been in vain.

The snag in writing any book on skating lies in the fact that no two skaters have the same faults, which is why I consider that it is impossible to learn entirely from a book. We can tell you how it should be done, and how to get the best results, but when you have endeavoured to do all that was laid down, many individual difficulties crop up which could not be foreseen, so that only the experienced observer can spot why your best efforts have gone astray.

Fortunately, the National Skating Association (N.S.A.) dance committee take a broad view of the exact manner in which each dance shall be performed, and have no desire to kill all individuality in dancing by turning out couples like a string of sausages. Personal mannerisms, providing they do not alter timing, specified edges, or accepted ideas of deportment, are not frowned upon.

Correct time, as distinct from *keeping time*, must always be strictly observed. By this, I mean that it would be quite possible to be in time – or on the beat with each step – and yet to so alter the value of each edge that the whole character of the dance would be changed.

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Correct sequence of steps is also of obvious importance, and in dances like the Rocker Foxtrot or Argentine Tango, which have been designed with a view to correct geometrical placing, great care must be taken of the geography of the dance, or wrong edges will result.

Lastly, but of no small importance, is carriage and deportment. We should have a good grounding in this in our school figures if we take enough trouble over the four edges.

After taking into consideration all the points that must be right, one could be forgiven for thinking that not much scope was left for the individual to introduce his own personality into the dances. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth, and for illustration, I will mention a few of the characteristics that vary with each person, and are not governed by any hard and fast rules: we have the degree to which the free leg is turned out, the stretch of the free foot, the amount of bend in the tracing knee, the degree of flexibility that can exist in either a very bent or rather straight knee, the height to which the free leg is lifted, how close the free foot is kept to the tracing foot during turns, the strength with which edges are struck, the speed at which the dance is skated, how close together the partners dance, etc. etc.

All these details, and many others, are capable of vastly different interpretation, without detracting from the academic correctness of the dance, although extreme exaggerations are never pleasing to watch. Just as over-rotated shoulders in the Walz can be ridiculous in appearance, and uncomfortable for the partner, perhaps even if not theoretically wrong, so also can an over-turned-out toe look hideous, though I must admit the latter is a fault seldom encountered.

Every skater must decide for himself (or herself) just how far to carry these points. It is partly a matter of individual taste, partly physical build and ability, and partly temperament that will decide on most positions and movements, but as one cannot see oneself, the very thing that one is conscientiously trying to avoid may be actually taking place, unknown to oneself, and here of course, the only remedy is to seek advice from a competent professional, or an ugly habit will form that may become almost beyond correction later on. The right pro. Will always give a candid opinion and helpful advice, but if you cannot take it, well, save your money. Far too often have I heard people reply, "Oh yes, I know I don't do that" or "Mrs. Brackett (or Mr. Loop) thinks I do it awfully well". Just bear in mind that friends rarely like to criticise too severely, for fear of breaking the friendship – especially if you throw a good party – whereas the pro. only keeps his reputation by turning out the good, no matter how it hurts.

Once you really can skate, there is no difficulty in the actual steps of any dance – it is more a question of how you put it over, and this naturally depends a lot on synchronising with your partner, for two good dancers of different (and possibly contrasting) styles do not necessarily make a good pair, even though excellent individually, which brings us to the delicate question of suitable partner.

No matter how well each of the partners skates, the effect will never be anything but ragged if they are not in unison. It is, of course, impossible to alter one's style to suit each different partner, when dancing purely for pleasure with various and sundry people, and any slight variation is of no great account, but it is of the utmost importance that the lady should always try to follow the man, since it is a recognised rule that the man takes the lead, and is responsible for the guidance and safety of the couple – not to mention the comfort of the other couples.

For any dance partnership to be really successful, something more than mere technical ability is required – that is, a real love by both partners of the art for its own sake, and not merely for the sake of pot-hunting and medal-gathering. *I am inclined to think that the enjoyment derived is almost as important as the actual ability acquired. We have all seen people go through tests just to prove that they can dance, even though not really caring for it. The result is always the same – even though accurately skated the whole effect is just that of a machine, with just about as much soul, and completely divorced from inspiration.*

*Whether you get a kick out of dancing, or not (metaphorically speaking, of course), depends rather upon your own make-up and temperament, and I do not see how that can be altered, but there is another important point that rests in anyone's grasp if perfection is to be attained, and that is to have sympathy and understanding of each other's difficulties. It requires a good deal of give and take on both sides.*



*It is up to the man, if he is the better skater, to show the lady to best advantage, or if the lady is more advanced, she should come down a little to her partner's level in speed and strength of edge. Nothing looks worse than seeing the lady take the lead, no matter how good a skater she may be..*

*Providing that the more expert partner can give helpful advice, and not merely belittle genuine effort, and that such advice is taken in the right spirit, progress is bound to follow, so whatever you do, even if you know yourself to be the better skater, do lend an ear to any suggestion your partner may make. Often a less advanced skater is not so biased by technical considerations, and sees something from the purely aesthetical aspect which may be beneficial if given a chance. Believe me you do not lower your prestige by pocketing your pride now and then.*

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President CEPA/CIPA

**Eric Van der Weyden and Miss Eva Keats were English Professional Roller Dance Champions in 1923, 1924 and 1925. They invented the Westminster Waltz, the Viennese Waltz, the Rocker Foxtrot and the Keats Foxtrot.**

**These dances were invented at the Queens Ice Rink in London during the era when the Argentine Tango, Paso Doble, and Quickstep were also invented by Reginald Wilkie and Daphnie Wallis.**