

Masters' Report 2009 - 2010

Ottawa Pacers Speed Skating Club

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Masters' Representative

"I just love being able to participate in a sport where there is so much support for us old folks who are just learning."

- Pacers masters skater, February 2009

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1 MEMBERSHIP AND REVENUE DATA

The following table lists membership information for the masters' 2009-10 season.

	Half-time (one night per week)	Full-time (two nights per week)	Long-track only
Fees per member (base fee + \$80 OSSA fee + required fundraising)	\$490 (\$300 + \$80 + \$110)	\$690 (\$450 + \$80 + \$160)	\$150 (\$70 + \$80) (no fundraising required for long-track- only)
Number of skaters registered by end of season	14	17	2
Head coach	Gavin Thulien		Mike Rivet
Assistant coaches	John Cox, Grant Edgar, Iain McCallum		Gavin Thulien
Masters' representative on the board of directors	Gail Bouchette		

The following table shows the masters' revenue and expenses for the 2009-10 season.

Item	Amount
Revenue from regular membership (inc. OSSA fee)	\$13,468
Revenue from trial skate program (inc. OSSA fee)	\$3,445
Revenue from fundraising	\$2,863*
Fees paid to OSSA	(\$1,920)
Ice cost	(\$17,842)
Net profit	\$14

* This value is a conservative estimate calculated by summing only the fundraising contributions of masters skaters with no children in the club. If masters with children in the club are included in the sum, with 50% of their contributions considered as masters revenue, this value rises to \$3503.

2 ENROLMENT AND RECRUITING

This was a successful season for enrolment and recruiting in the masters group. The masters program covered its costs this year, which is a great improvement over last season.

Background context:

2008-09 was the first season in which the masters had two nights of skating per week. The transition from one night to two nights coincided with a significant increase in per-hour ice costs and consequently membership fees. As a result the masters group went from having a waiting list to having too few skaters to meet ice costs. Several recruiting strategies were implemented with varying levels of success, as recorded in that year's masters report, but ultimately the program ran a large deficit in 2008-09 (approximately \$6000).

2009-10 season:

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Using lessons learned from the 2008-09 season, a more effective recruiting program was run this year, with much more success. The primary recruiting tool was the trial skate program. The traditional two-week "try before you join" program was replaced with a series of four-week trial skate sessions starting and ending on specified dates throughout the season; each session included a separate off-ice orientation night for skate fitting and technique introduction. These sessions were heavily advertised using flyers distributed at local sporting events, arenas, and sports stores. Composing and delivering the flyers was done by volunteers from the masters group, as well as some non-master parents. Printing the flyers incurred the only financial cost of the program.

The three pre-Christmas sessions had good attendance and brought several new members to the club before January; a February session was also run. The March session had very high attendance and is expected to result in several new members next year (at least four have expressed interest). As is usual for an Olympic year, there was a great surge in interest in February and March.

Because of the trial skate program the masters roster has shown significant growth throughout the season, , indicating that registration next year may be at sustainable levels. At year-end the roster was only two full-time skaters short of the number required to meet ice costs.

Fees for the trial program brought in approximately \$3 500 in revenue, offsetting the deficit in regular membership revenue (see table above). Including this revenue the masters' program broke even this season, covering an ice cost of approximately \$18 000, a great improvement over last year.

Future seasons:

Recruitment and retention is expected to be an ongoing challenge for the masters group as ice costs continue to rise in the future. The programs implemented this year should be continued, improved, and integrated into the club's normal operations.

The Pacers currently have a policy allowing certified coaches of youth to skate the masters program free of charge. This year only two coaches took advantage of the offer, but this policy could become costly as more coaches become certified and more masters are encouraged to volunteer as coaches. The policy may need to be re-evaluated in the future.

3 SHORT TRACK

Coaching and the short track program

Response to this year's new short track program was positive. The two-night program comprised one night of technical focus (on Tuesdays) and one night of fitness conditioning focus (on Thursdays). Skaters found this new approach very useful and an improvement over last year's division of the nights into 'general' and 'advanced' practices.

The fitness conditioning night was well received; several skaters gave positive reviews of the increased skating time during practice – compared to previous years there was less down time spent in the middle of the ice.

Some skaters still feel that there was insufficient skating time, primarily because of delays getting on the ice and time spent removing mats. There is support for having the flood five or ten minutes earlier to give the masters extra ice time, which would compensate for the time required to remove mats.

The four-week trial skate program (Experience Speed Skating) was run on Tuesday nights. Some club members skating on Tuesday nights were somewhat unsatisfied because the regular program was modified to accommodate beginner trial skaters. For example, one skater reports that "the coaches were then very often busy with beginners" and were unable to provide a challenging program for the regular members; another found that "the skills focus seemed to be back to square one most times."

The trial programs will likely continue next year with some modifications. The number of trial skaters may be capped and only skaters with prior skating ability will be accepted, to reduce the impact of the program on regular

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members. The current methods of sharing the ice between the two groups can be enhanced to improve the skating experience for all skaters.

Off-ice warm-ups

The off-ice warm-up sessions before each practice were sparsely attended but highly praised by those who did attend. Feedback from skaters suggests it would be helpful if a coach or other volunteer devised a few standard warm-up programs. Following a program would make the warm-ups more effective and time-efficient, and allow them to be self-led by the skaters.

If the warm-up programs are standardized and/or designed to tie in to the evening's on-ice activities, it may be possible to turn the warm-up into a regular part of the practice. It is currently viewed by most skaters as an optional activity separate from the on-ice session, but it would be an improvement to the skating program to integrate the warm-up as an important part of the practice.

Sensplex

The ice quality at the Sensplex is usually very good. The flooding service improved greatly over last year, although there were still some occasions on which resurfacing was late or didn't occur. Some skaters would prefer a full flood rather than a track flood; especially on nights when attendance is high there is often activity on all parts of the ice.

Some masters skaters were pro-active in initiating and maintaining good relations with the ice maintenance staff, making flooding requests in person and providing positive feedback when the ice was good. A continued effort to foster friendly relations is recommended. One skater suggests inviting some of the staff to attend a trial and try the sport.

During negotiations of our next ice contract (which will take effect in the 2011-12 season) it may be possible to obtain a written commitment to high quality ice services. For example, a clause could be included stipulating a rebate for every ice session at which a flood is missing or late. Such an agreement would ensure good ice services and reflect the decreased value to skaters of poor quality ice.

Two nights a week next year

As discussed above, this year's two-night skating program was very well received. Most skaters are in favour of retaining two nights per week of ice time, assuming enough skaters can be found to cover costs without increasing fees. Enrolment is likely to be high enough to meet ice costs without significant fee increases, as discussed in the Enrolment and Recruiting section below.

4 LONG TRACK

The masters were very pleased with ice quality at the oval this year, despite the short season. One suggestion received was to keep a list of maintenance volunteers with phone numbers and day-time email addresses. This list could be used when ice maintenance is required on short notice. Another skater mentioned that more advanced notice would help bring out more volunteers.

Many masters skaters took advantage of the long-track coaching program. The program was well-publicized and most members were aware of the program. Skaters were satisfied with the availability of coaching and the quality of the programs posted in the trailer.

Relatively few new masters participated in long track. An effort to publicize long track among the new short-track skaters may help build the long-track program among masters.

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5 FUNDRAISING

Not many masters used the Fundscrip program, although most of those who did found it suited their needs at least as well as the Loblaws program of previous years.

There are some misconceptions regarding how the program works: some skaters believe there is a distinct "buy-out" option as there was with Loblaws. Others think that there is a minimum monthly purchase required to participate, which discouraged them from signing up. Many skaters are unaware that they can earn money back through Fundscrip, receiving a cash rebate at the end of the season or a discount on next year's membership.

A clearer explanation of the flexibility of Fundscrip and how it works could increase participation among masters. With 2010-11 being the second year of the program, participation will likely increase as the program becomes better understood.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

1. Create a reference document describing how the four-week trial skate was run, including advertising efforts and post-program retention tactics. This document can be used and modified as recruiting efforts continue in the future.
 2. Continue the short track program of one technique night and one conditioning night. Investigate ways to improve the skating experience of Tuesday skaters who share the ice with beginner trial skaters.
 3. Publicize the long track program among new short track skaters to increase participation.
 4. Publicize the fundraising program and explain its flexibility better among masters to ensure all skaters understand how the program works and can take full advantage of it.
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