

[IMAGE]

Take to the Ice

By Editorial Staff

Ice skating tones the body, builds cardiovascular fitness and can burn almost as many calories as jogging. Find out how a healthy diet, physical fitness and chiropractic care have helped two professional figure skaters realize their dreams.

The U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships is the most prestigious adult ice skating competition in the United States. First held in 1995 in Wilmington, Del., the event has occurred annually ever since, with an average of 500 competitors per year. Ice skaters from all over the U.S. gather to pursue dreams of gold medals, flawless programs and perfect 10s.

After years away from the sport, pair skaters William Abel, 40, and Choeleen Loundagin, 39, returned to the ice, winning gold at the 2007 adult championships. Their program won top marks with music from the *Cutthroat Island* soundtrack and a series of intricate leaps and throws, including an overhead press lift with one arm, split double twist, throw double toe and throw double Salchow.

Even for accomplished skaters, making time during an intense training schedule and staying in shape for the challenge of competition can be difficult when maintaining jobs and a life outside of skating. Despite their hectic schedules, Choeleen works as a sports psychology consultant and William is a landscape designer in Sonoma County, Calif. In this exclusive interview, William and Choeleen explain why with proper nutrition, exercise and chiropractic care - young or old, amateur or professional - it's never too late to skate.

How do you prepare psychologically for competition?

Choeleen Loundagin and William Abel pair skating. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Choeleen: I have a master's degree in sport psychology, I teach a sport psychology class, I wrote *The Inner Champion: A Mental Toughness Training Manual for Figure Skaters*, and I co-produced a performance enhancement CD, "Skate for the Love." In addition, I coach competitive figure skaters and I work as an athletic performance enhancement consultant. One of my primary motivations for returning to competition after a 22-year hiatus was to challenge myself to practice what I preach. I wanted to prove to myself that the skills I teach athletes would in fact allow me to perform my best while also enjoying the experience. I am happy to

say that I was able to do just that by using imagery to prepare for the experience, affirmations to keep my confidence up and my perspective in check, controlled breathing to remain relaxed yet excited, and goals to keep my focus on what I can control (which was having fun while focusing on doing one element at a time to the best of my ability). The mind-body connection is an amazing thing.

Can you describe your training regimen? Has it changed over the years?

William: My training regimen as an adult is much more focused and goal-oriented than it was when I was younger. I don't have the same amount of time to devote to training as I did 20 years ago. Spending four hours on the ice every day, plus many more hours of off-ice training isn't realistic anymore. I only have an hour on the ice with my partner five days a week, so we really have to use that hour wisely or else we won't be able to do everything we need to do on a daily basis. Every day, I have a mental game plan for our practice session.

We begin with a good warm-up (some days at 6 a.m., this is really more of a wake-up), then when we are ready, we begin executing each element from our program from easiest to most difficult. This warms up each move and prepares us for the run-through of our routine, which we skate with music once every day. If we miss anything during this run-through, we go back and do the entire section of the routine where the problem occurred until we do it right. Then, in any remaining time, we either work on one of our moves to make it better or we work on a brand new one. This focused and repetitive training regime has given us very good results in a short span of time, and also has caused us various physical problems for which we have needed to seek chiropractic help.

How did you first get involved with chiropractic?

William: My first experience with chiropractic was when I was 18. I had a persistent pain running down my left thigh for almost six months, which wasn't precipitated by any specific incident. Some days it would really bother me and some days I could manage it, but it was always there ... whatever it was. I went to see my family's medical practitioner whose advice I don't remember, but whatever it was, it didn't offer any relief. One day, my older brother told me about a chiropractor he went to see for some problem, mentioning how quickly his problem was eliminated. I went to see this chiropractor as soon as possible, and within a few adjustments over a couple of weeks, my leg pain had gone away.

How does chiropractic care improve your performance?

Choeleen Loundagin and William Abel pair skating. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Choeleen:**

There are so many ways! Skating is a very imbalanced sport in that we are required to land on the same leg repeatedly for jumps, spin again and again in one direction, etc. Falls also are a part of skating, especially when going from singles to pairs in a short period of time. Just one fall can really change your body alignment, not to mention the bruising and possible scar tissue buildup. Lastly, the intensity of our training took a toll on my body in the form of muscle strains and tendonitis. Some days my body felt so sore and out of balance that I wondered how it would be able to continue to function at such an intense level. Luckily, I knew our chiropractor, Dr. Dumbadse, would be able to address all that comes with intense training as an adult with successful results. In addition, she has always taken a holistic approach in giving care, including ideas for nutrition/supplements, psychology, and cutting-edge, sport-specific training methods. She is a wealth of information!

How often do you visit your chiropractor?

Choeleen: In the weeks before the competition, I was visiting my chiropractor two or three days a week. Often, the group of adults training for the competition from our rink would race each other to Dr. Dumbadse's office after morning training time.

What is your health and wellness philosophy?

William: My philosophy on health and wellness is to maintain mental, emotional and physical balance. I work to accomplish this by continually trying to learn new things (taking classes and pursuing personal interests), having a spiritual practice (taking time for meditation and inner reflection), and exercising regularly (skating, weight training and yoga).

What exercise and nutrition recommendations do you have for people looking to improve their health and lifestyle?

Choeleen: Find several activities you enjoy. If you are having fun and doing a variety of activities, your chances of staying active are fairly high. As for nutrition, I am a vegetarian. I don't preach this type of eating, but I do promote eating organic, whole foods as much as possible, as well as drinking plenty of water. I also don't believe in denying yourself treats. I would live on chocolate, red wine and ice cream if I could - instead, I eat them in moderation.

What is it like to compete professionally at this age? Which aspects are harder, and which are easier than they were 10-15 years ago?

William: Competing at 40 in a figure-skating competition is more of a personal challenge than it was when I was competing in the standard qualifying competitions for elite skaters who are aiming for the Olympics. For me, it's more about what I can still do without causing serious injuries to myself, rather than winning an event so that I can qualify to compete further. Winning truly is secondary. I also feel that I am having much more fun with the sport than I did when I was a younger, more serious competitor. Even though the same pre-competition nerves - that went dormant for more than 16 years - have found a way to resurface, I find that my life experiences have made it easier to put them in perspective, which makes them less of an obstacle. As far as the actual skating part goes, the only physical limitation I have is my ability to do multi-revolutionary jumps. They were never my strong point anyway, and because of the difficulty in executing them and the risk of injury they present, I have mental blocks about them and I feel unwilling to attempt the most difficult ones. What is great about pair skating is that there are so many qualities other than jumping that I can focus on and still be competitive at the adult level.

Do you have any advice for aspiring skaters?

Choeleen: Dream big, set goals, stay focused on what you have control of to attain your goals, and make every training session count. Most of all, enjoy the process and the performances. It isn't always easy, but finding the fun in pushing yourself to your limits each day will make all the difference!

Is the experience of pair skating significantly different from single skating? Do you do any special training or worry about any particular injuries in pair skating?

William: Pair skating is considerably different from single skating in many ways. In pair skating, you not only have to perform the same jumps and spins that a single skater has to perform, but you have to sync them with another person. This can take a pair team years to master, and there are even Olympic-level pair teams who never seem to be able to do it consistently. I have been a pair skater since I was a kid, so I developed the awareness of having somebody skating next to me at an early age. My partner, Choeleen, had never pair skated until we started working together in the fall of '06. She had to learn to be in the right place and to trust that we weren't going to hit, kick or crash into each other.

Of course, in pair skating, the only way to learn your boundaries *is* to actually hit, kick and crash into your partner at times - not deliberately of course, but it happens. I like to tease her by telling her that I have a scar somewhere on my body that corresponds to every one of our tricks ... and I'm only partly kidding. The other elements of pair skating are lifts, throws, death spirals and pair spins - all of which require strength and body awareness by both skaters, and both have the responsibility of committing to their part or both could get injured. Pair skating can be made to look easy, and it actually is once both skaters reach the point where they are working as one, but a lot of repetitive practice is required to reach this level. I don't think most people realize how hard pair skating is on the body unless you are the one doing it.

The repetitive practice of lifting on one side of your body, throwing your partner's body weight from the same side of your body in the same direction over and over, being spun around from your shoulder, or landing on one foot after being thrown three feet in the air - all of these things cause your body to become out of alignment and unbalanced over time. In addition to chiropractic care, I have found yoga to be an important part of my overall fitness and injury-prevention strategy.

With the 2007 U.S. Adult Championships behind you, what do you hope to accomplish next?

William: As of right now, the U.S. Adult Championships is the largest adult skating competition happening. There are several others throughout the year in other parts of the country and world, but because of the balance I am trying to keep with skating and the rest of my life, I would like to stay home and continue to practice, make improvements and compete in the U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships again in 2008 - hopefully with an even stronger appearance than we had in 2007.

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