How to Interpret Your Scores

Scoring at amateur figure skating events is not complicated, but it is different than probably any other judged sport. Contrary to popular opinion, the judge's scores are not added or averaged. Neither the high nor the low score is thrown out. The system is designed to perform a "majority rules" weighting on the scores, while effectively minimizing the negative impact of judges whose scores differ from those given by the majority. It works like this...

There are from 3 to 9 judges at all amateur figure skating events. Each judge awards marks to each competitor on a scale ranging from zero to six. A mark of six is theoretically for a "faultless" score, five is "very good", four is "good", three is "mediocre", two is "unsatisfactory", one is "bad", and zero is "not skated". Separate scores are generally awarded for the "technical" quality of the program and the "presentation" quality of the program (the actual names of these categories vary between the various skating disciplines).

Except in National competition at the highest level, the crowd rarely sees the actual scores, however. Instead, they see a "processed" version of the judge's scores, called "ordinals". Even in competitions where the actual numeric scores are announced, only the ordinals are used to actually compute the standings.

What are the "Ordinals" ???

Ordinals are simply the ordered ranking or placement assigned by each judge to all of the skaters in the flight. Each judge issues both a "technical" score and a "presentation" score to every skater in the event. These two scores are added to arrive at a composite score for each skater. When the event is completed, it is easy to look at each judge's scoresheet and find the skater with the highest total score. That skater places 1st on that judge's sheet, and receives the judge's number "1" ordinal. The skater with the second highest score gets the judge's number "2" ordinal, and so on, until the last placed skater.

> You will see that, since the actual score numbers are not used to compute the final placement for skaters, a judge that marks consistently high or low will not have a negative impact on the ultimate result. Only the final ordered placement is counted.

An example of the translation process from scores to ordinals is shown here. Assume that there are 5 skaters in a PreJuvenile Freestyle event. The table below shows the results given by one judge for those skaters, and shows the translation of the results to ordinals. This process would be repeated for each judge on that event's panel.

Skater	Technical Merit Mark	Presentation Mark	Total of Marks	Ordinal Value
Amber	2.7	2.7	5.4	2
Jill	2.8	2.7	5.5	1
Tori	2.5	2.6	5.1	3
Haley	2.3	2.3	4.6	5
Nikki	2.4	2.4	4.8	4

Combining the Results of Many Judges

Once you've found the ordinal values for each skater you can combine the results from the full panel of judges in order to find the ultimate winner. All amateur figure skating competitions have a panel composed of an odd number of judges, ranging from 3 to 9, depending on the level and nature of competition.

> Why do they have more than one judge? It's another one of the ways they guarantee that the scoring system consistently works well to place the skaters in the right positions. The people who wrote the rules recognized that even with a good solid understanding of what makes a technically correct jump or spin, there is still a lot of "subjectiveness" in the process of judging a group of programs composed of a mixture of many different elements, some of which will be performed well, and some of which will be performed less well. Having a mixture of judges guarantees that a variety of "opinions" will be considered – some of which will favor spins, some of which will favor jumps, some of which will favor speed & power, some of which will favor "gracefulness". Even though the results of that panel might sometimes look a little mixed on the wall, it is that mixture that helps to ensure that all skaters are treated fairly.

The method by which the judge's results are combined is one of the ways figure skating differs from most other sports. It's also the part of the system which confuses many people, and about which there are many misconceptions. But really it's quite simple.

In the simplest case, the skater with the most "1's" wins. The skater with the most "2's" gets the silver medal, and so on. Of course, it's never really that simple…

1st Place	First place is usually pretty straightforward. Whoever gets a majority of "1's" gets it.
2nd Place	Once you've figured out first place, you can take that skater "out of the pot". You look at the remaining skaters. You mentally change any remaining "1" votes to "2's". Then you find the skater with a majority of "2's". That skater gets second place.
3rd and Later	You do these by the same mechanism you did 2nd place. You always convert "remaining" higher valued scores to the value of the level you're looking for. Then you look for a majority at that level.

On the result sheets you see hanging on the wall, the column labeled "LOW MAJ" (Low Majority) indicates the basis upon which the position is calculated. An indication of "4/1" means that the skater got credit for four (4) 1st place ordinals. An indication of "3/4" means that the skater got credit for three (3) 4th place ordinals.

Hopefully, the rules given above make sense, and will help you to figure out most of the scoresheets you're likely to find. But there are a few details that usually manage to crop up to make things a little harder.

That "Majority" Thing…

Remember at the beginning of this section, it said "whoever gets a majority of 1's" ? You probably read that as "whoever gets the most 1 votes". Well, it really means majority. For instance on a 5 judge panel, you've got to get at least 3 of something in order to get that place. If the judges are pretty split and nobody has a real majority at a certain level, then you start counting the votes for the next place down. Imagine for example, that nobody has 3 "1" votes in an event. You'd convert all "1"s to "2's" and see who has a majority of "2" votes. That person

would get 1st place. Then you'd proceed down the list to award the other positions. The following sample should clarify this a little:

COMPETITOR	J1	J2	J3	J4	J5	LOW MAJ	TOM
KAYLEE	1	2	2	2	2	5/2	
BRITTANY	2	1	1	3	4	3/2	
CHRISTINE	4	4	3	1	1	3/3	5
LINDSAY	3	3	5	4	3	3/3	9
JENNIFER	5	6	6	5	5	3/5	
SEVEY	6	5	4	6	6	5/6	

In this rather messy example, no skater had a majority (3) of "1" votes. So first place was determined by counting who has the most 2's. And Kaylee, even though she received fewer 1st place ordinals than Brittany and Christine, still had the most judges that thought she should place near the top.

> *This example also demonstrates another rule, that of "Greater Majority". You'll notice that both Kaylee and Brittany have a majority (3 or more votes) of 2nd place ordinals. So rather than immediately looking for 3rd place ordinals after placing Kaylee, you use Brittany's lesser majority of 2's to place her in second. Kaylee was higher because she has the "Greater Majority" at that position*

Ties… What if 2 Skaters Get the Same Number of Votes?
Ties are possible, and occur fairly often. Because of the fact that you "mentally convert" higher scores to the score for the level you're looking at, it is quite likely that 2 or more people can end up with the same number of votes at any given level (the example sheet at the end of this section shows a situation where this occurred). The Rulebook specifies several procedures by which ties can be resolved.

First Level Ties – TOM
The first mechanism used to resolve a tie is called "Total of Majority", or "TOM". Remember that when calculating the number of votes for a given level, you've already mentally converted higher-value ordinals down to those representing the level you're trying to resolve. When you've got a tie, you should favor the skaters who had some higher-place votes. And that's exactly what TOM does.

If 2 or more skaters are tied on the basis of Low Majority, you add up the actual values of the ordinals that compose their majority (you add the values of the ordinals as actually given by the judges, not the "down-converted" values). Whoever has the lowest sum receives the better placement. Consider the following example:

COMPETITOR	J1	J2	J3	J4	J5	LOW MAJ	TOM
KIM	2	4	5	6	1	3/4	7
KELLY	5	5	3	4	4	3/4	11

If these two competitors are under consideration for 4th place, you would have found that both of them have three (3) 4th place votes. That's why they both say "3/4" in the LOW MAJ column. So you now add up the actual value of the majority votes to see who gets the lowest "Total of Majority". In this example, we add up Kim's 2+4+1 to get a TOM of 7. For Kelly, we add up the 3+4+4 to get a TOM of 11. So in this example, Kim places 4th and Kelly gets 5th.

Second Level Ties – TOO

Sometimes skaters remain tied even after TOM is applied. In that case you can apply yet another level of resolution, called "Total of Ordinals" or "TOO". To do this, you add up the actual ordinals given the skater, except this time you add up ALL of the ordinals, not just those which comprise the majority. The same principles apply though, and the person with the lowest TOO gets the higher placement. Consider the following example (this one with only 3 judges):

				LOW		
COMPETITOR	J1	J2	J3	MAJ	TOM	TOO
SHEILA	2	3	4	2/3	5	9
KATELYN	3	6	2	2/3	5	11

In this case, both Sheila and Katelyn were being considered for 3rd place. Each had two (2) 3rd place ordinals, so were tied on the basis of LOW MAJ. After adding up the TOMs they each got 5 (2+3 = 5), so they were still tied on the basis of TOM So now we add up all the ordinals, getting 2+3+4=9 for Sheila, and 3+6+2=11 for Katy. Sheila, having the lower TOO gets the better final placement.

Third Level Ties

And sometimes, even after application of TOO, the skaters are tied. In that case, there is no further resolution. They're just… tied.

Other Stuff

There are other rules that deal with the combination of Short and Long programs in higher level events, and which resolve some issues in the conversion of actual scores to ordinals. But the notes in this section explain most of what you need to know to interpret the results on the wall at competions you go to.

> *If you want to get the full set of details, consult the Rulebook, in section CR 16.00*

Final Example

The following page has a sample results sheet, showing the results of an entire event. Short notes explain some of the key points.

How would YOUR results be posted?

The results posting shown below is representative of what you might see hanging on the wall at most local competitions. The numbers are from a for-real event, though the names have been changed. The boxed notes explain the way the scores are computed.

WESTFOREST INVITATIONAL SKATING COMPETITION

WESTFOREST FIGURE SKATING CLUB
NOVEMBER 16, 1999

PRE JUVENILE FREE SKATE "A"

*** FINAL STANDINGS ***

> 2. The "1" in Nicole's row gets counted as a "2", and she has 3 2's, placing her in 2nd place.

> 1. A majority of the ordinals for first place (4 of 5) were given to the first place skater.

JUDGES
1. L. BOBSKID   2. D. JEEP   3. B. DOORMAN
4. J. CUPID   5. D. KORTE

PLACE	COMPETITOR	J1	J2	J3	J4	J5	LOW MAJ	TOT TOM	TOT ORD
1	LEAH	1	1	2	1	1	4/1		
2	NICOLE	4	5	1	2	2	3/2		
3	DEANNA	2	2	8	8	3	3/3	7	
4	ERIN	3	4	3	3	6	3/3	9	
5	MICHELLE	5	6	4	4	4	3/4		
6	AMANDA	8	3	6	5	5	3/5		
7	KELLY	6	7	7	6	8	4/7	26	34 TIE
7	LAURYN	7	8	5	7	7	4/7	26	34 TIE

(column headers: JUDGE'S ORDINALS — J1 J2 J3 J4 J5; LOW MAJ; TOT TOM; TOT ORD)

> 3. Deanna and Erin each have the same number of "3" votes, so the tie is broken by adding up the total numeric value of the ordinals in the "majority place" (in this case, the 3's). Deanna gets 2+2+3=7, and Erin gets 3+3+3=9. So Deanna has a lower value for TOM and places 3rd.

> 4. Both skaters are initially tied for 7th, with (4) "7" votes. On TOM (note 3) they both get a total of 26, and are still tied. So we add up all the ordinals (6+7+7+6+8=34 for Kelly and 7+8+5+7+7=34 for Lauryn). Since both have the same value for TOO, they're really TIED. Had the TOO numbers differed, the lower number places better.