

The White Papers of Figure Skating
Opinions of coaches, officials, great skaters, fans on the
state of figure skating

After publishing my Open letter to Ottavio Cinquanta I received a huge number of letters from coaches, great skaters, officials and fans from all over the world, expressing their support and agreement with the content of my letter but also to convey their concerns, their suggestions and their wishes for the future of our sport.

I think that it may be of interest for all those who care about figure skating, nationally and internationally, to become aware of the feelings of the people who are deeply involved in the sport as well as those who just love it and would like to enjoy watching it again. Of great interest is to note that there is a large convergence of opinions on the reasons why our sport has lost most of its appeal.

Due to the high number, I selected only a few letters from each "category", coaches, great skaters, officials and fans, but all were of great interest, encouraging and most appreciated. Thanks to all.

For privacy reasons the identity of the writers has been omitted, as well as the parts of the letters that could lead to the identification of the author

Here are the letters:

The GREATEST LETTER EVER, I can't agree more with EVERYTHING you said. I have never been so bored with skating, they all look alike. I never thought I would hate to watch skating but I am there. I only hope someone will listen to you, and SOON. Thank you for doing this.

Dear Sonia,

I agree with you 100%! I am a skating coach in

Making up programs with the new system is so hard. I don't use the music any more to determine what my skater will do, I use my NJS book to see what will get their levels. What can we do to help change what is happening? Who should we write to help voice our opinions? Thank you.

Dear Sonia

I have read your report and could not agree more with your proposals. The NJS is a disaster and as a coach currently teaching National competitors it is extremely difficult and frustrating to teach things that you fundamentally do not agree with. I always prided myself on being honest with my students but this ridiculous system makes it impossible. The quality of just pure skating is gone. At competitions or seminars when the coaches get together the talk is always the same,

"we are not teaching skating we are purely working out the math in order to have our skaters be competitive, however the problem is THEY CAN'T SKATE because we no longer teach skating but rather tricks. Thank God I am near the end of my career because I would not start out as a young coach with this insanity.

If I can be of any help do not hesitate to contact me. Many coaches do not agree with the NJS, unfortunately they are afraid to speak out due to repercussions on their students. However I do think most of them would support constructive changes and your work certainly represents that factor.

Yours truly

Brilliant "Open Letter to Cinquanta". One can only hope that it is read and taken to heart by people who have the power to save skating. You are so correct in asserting that sport is fundamentally entertainment. Skating has the potential to be fabulous entertainment on many levels, because it has the artistic and musical appeal that other sports lack. But as with any entertainment medium, it must have "stars". No stars - no TV contracts. I can tell you that CoP is not creating "stars". I include here a quote from Cinquanta circa 1998 that exemplifies much of the problem with the philosophy of the ISU:

"With sport, you cannot promise to the market - you cannot produce something because you are unable to guarantee that what you produce next year, the next cyclist, the next runner, the next skater is not all the time an Eric Heiden or a Boitano. Mercedes knows it can produce next year a better car. I cannot know that next year I will have a better Michelle Kwan."

That quote is almost 10 years old, but it should have been a red flag. He doesn't get it. Of course the ISU can't promise a better Michelle Kwan. That's not the point. Anyone who understands sport knows that the goal isn't to create better Michelle Kwans - it is to create new stars who are unique in their own way, and who take their place among the greats of the sport. Great skaters aren't replaced, rather new skaters join their ranks.

The new system is not producing these skaters and time is running out as you so eloquently pointed out. It is the job of the ISU to quit micro-managing skaters' programs with this silly point system. Skating doesn't lack talent, it lacks a system that allows skaters to find their own greatness. That's a fundamental truth about skating that Cinquanta doesn't get.

CoP produces cookie-cutter programs, unintelligible scores and champions that fewer people are willing to pay to see. It has become a complete mess. Those who defend the system say it creates and rewards the complete skater, and the skaters today are far superior to their predecessors. In response to that I would say, which program would you pay to see, John Curry's 1976 Olympic performance or Plushenko's 2006 effort? Not a difficult choice is it? The sad thing is that it's not Plushenko's fault. The system robbed him of what should have been a great moment. He received more points than God, but the

programs were unworthy of his talent.

I recently watched the US nationals on television, and though it took place very close to my home, I didn't consider attending live. And I really hate seeing someone like Lori Nichol forced to compromise her talent.

Cinquanta doesn't need a better Michelle Kwan, he needs the Mao Asadas and the Johnny Weirs to fulfill their potential. When that happens, the sport will be fine. The problem is something needs to change very soon or a whole generation will be lost, and the next might not come along. Keep up the good work; your efforts are appreciated.

HI Sonia...I LOVED hearing from you and you made my day. I LAUGHED MY HEAD OFF OVER THE THOUGHT OF SOME CRAZY ENTERTAINMENT DURING BREAKS AT COMPETITIONS. What is happening with our sport? I am hearing the same thoughts as you are when I am out and about.

MANY COACHES talk about the new judging system and what it is doing to our sport and what can be done about it. While we are all trying to make it work, and be positive, it is very hard to do. Lets hope that the ISU loses enough money on their events to reevaluate their mess.

Dear Sonia

As always, your article is a masterpiece. In fact, I think, it is the best you have written in recent years because it drives home clearly how the ISU (Cinquanta) has ruined figure skating. Surely the most cogent argument you advance is how figure skating is attracting so little money in terms of TV contracts compared with what it achieved previously. Once the ISU's pocket is hit to the detriment of Members surely people will wake up and listen to the good sense you have preached for many years?

Your article argues your case for saving figure skating from the brink of extinction so logically and clearly that I fail to understand how the powers that be cannot understand what they have done to the sport. If your article does not bring people to their senses nothing will and only divine intervention can save our former beautiful sport.

Thanks! The bar has NOT been raised. The only improvement I really see is that the footwork has gotten more interesting. Now, more than ever, we still have skaters who can't do jumps cleanly but they do them anyhow for the points. I don't want to see these "blade in the head" moves anymore. I want to see beautiful body line, sustained landing edges, elegant spin positions, and confident carriage. I don't think this is too much to ask. If we could do it back in the 70's, then we can do it now.

Thanks for sending this. Boy, do I have a lot to say about this new system.

Keep fighting, Sonia. You have lots of us behind you!

Dear Sonia,

Normally, I would just read and agree with you, but thought I would write a short note telling you how much I agree with your observation about the 'dying of figure skating'. You could not be more right. I have agreed with you since the beginning and am so glad that you have spoken out against the new judging system and the lack of correction when it comes to problems with judging.

I must admit, I have little interest in watching competitive skating since the new system came in and I really miss the 6.0 system as I truly felt that when we judged what we saw we 'told' the skaters what we wanted and did not want, but they most often chose to ignore us. When judging was honest and open, the best skater(s) always came out on top.

I do hope that Octavio might one day soon, listen to you and reconsider his 'pet project - the new judging system' and that the ISU will either do away with it or revamp it as you have suggested.

Thank you for being the spokesperson for all of us who wanted to say something, but either have not the ability, credibility or courage to speak the right words. Good luck and please do not give up.

Sincerely,

Thank you for your wonderful article. You hit the nail on the head. I have been watching figuring skating for many, many years (I am 58 yrs old) and the last 2 seasons have not been enjoyable to watch. I no longer make sure I am home when skating is on TV because its just not interesting to watch anymore. Everything looks the same. It really is a shame. Hopefully they will do something to bring back all the beauty, joy and passion that use to exist on the ice. This is really a sad reality to a sport that once was the sport of all sports at the winter Olympics. Thanks again for a wonderful article.

To be honest I am VERY distressed with the state of Ice Skating. Even some of the people who were in favour of the new system now KNOW how bad it is!!! Its all so sad. I watch skating and I think I know something about the sport and its totally impossible to score a skater until the point totals show up on the screen. How can the public possibly follow a competition?? You were so right from the VERY beginning about this disaster from "Il Duce" Cinquanta....he will certainly go down in skating history as THE biggest disaster of all Oh well, what can one do? We seem stuck with him for a while longer. Let's hope that sooner or later the common sense will win .People who are in charge in ISU wanted to do better with the judging system . But with their improvements they went too far into the wrong directions. Unfortunately we ,coaches, have to play their games now, otherwise we put skaters under danger.

So I am happy there are still people who have the power and strength to attempt to turn into proper direction.

Dear Sonja,

here are some concerns I have for the sport of skating.

Judges are not allowed to think, too much power is given to the controller & specialists who aren't nearly as qualified as judges with decades of experience, proper assessment of the competitors requires that a judge with years of training COMPARE skaters performances, and the list goes on supporting the fact this is the worst system possible for producing a fair result. And the secret aspect of the judging in my mind is one of the biggest failings of ANY judging system.

Accountability is a must, and the skaters must be allowed to see it openly!

At the risk of flogging a dead horse, there was nothing WRONG with the old system - it's the corruption of the ISU and a small minority of judges and/or federations that has destroyed the reputation of this sport.

Some lay part of the blame on "coaches and sportsmen who actively supported the new system". Well, what else are the skaters going to say?

That the NJS is rotten to the core? Not out loud they won't! You well know what happens to any individual who goes against the directives or agenda of the ISU. Any skater, coach or federation who openly argues against the NJS will likely see his/her future results plummet.

I'll wish for the miracle of a fair outcome with the abominable NJS.

The competitors who have prepared for so many years deserve nothing less!

Again, thank you for sharing this with me. I have thoroughly enjoyed all the

articles you have distributed.

Very best regards.

The more I observe this NJS the more it looks like an uncontrolled chaos.

1. In many events the same skaters get different levels for the same elements from different technical specialists. Very often this costs SEVERAL PLACES in the final result!

In the former "bad times" you had to fight against those who tried to get 5 judges for a "block judging" in order to change the results of one place. In present "good times" one just needs to convince one person in order to turn results from feet on head.

Or if the technical specialist is not good enough (for this job) or he has his own opinion different from the others, he will produce very different results.

And the skaters' performances may not have much to do with these "results".

2. Judges have NO RESPONSIBILITY for a placement they create with their marks.

They just have no idea what their marks finally produce.

The main task of the judges should be: to compare the performances and to make a final statement who is the best, second best, and the last.

This is the fair judging!

Nowadays the judges do not (and cannot) compare anything. The final placement comes from nobody knows which manipulations, BUT MUST NOT NECESSARELY BE THE CORRECT PLACEMENT, based on the professional knowledge of experts, called judges!

Because nobody keeps any responsibility for this placement!

3. The Base Value of the elements is actually taken from the air.

So, if you slightly change a value of ANY element (performed today), you change the final placement essentially.

This means that such values have more influence on the results than the skaters' performances.

If nowadays (20 years after the first quadruple jump was executed) a skater without a Quad and a 3A (and with 4 mistakes in the program) can beat a skater (of the same World Top Level), who performed successfully these and other elements, then we cannot talk anymore about a sport development.

If such a good skater as Sandhu gets for his personal worst performance (short program in Canada and China) the same component marks as for his best performance (free program in China), then what these component marks should mean at all?

A question after question and a chaos after chaos. And this happens at Grand Prix events with the World best skaters (easy to judge). But what is going to happen at local competitions in the countries?

All the coaches and skaters are trying now to develop the elements and skating skills. And this is a great and interesting work. But in case of such a chaos judging all efforts will be just killed and skaters will retire.

If this happens within next three years, whose responsibility will it be? Cinquanta's or Le Gougne's? I agree 100% that Le Gougne made THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION in the development of this system. Because she must take the full and personal responsibility for her judging in Salt Lake. She must be banned from our sport forever.

I agree with you. We still have the same judges in the NJS that were in our 6.0 system. Nothing has changed and the gossip and talks continue. I really miss the 6.0 system and - in particular - in ice dancing - I miss the creativity and choreography because everyone is

too worried about putting their legs in the correct places to get the right levels etc. It is killing the sport already!

Sonia,

Again I believe you have hit the nail on the head. Why aren't you the President of the ISU, because I believe you could bring the beauty of Figure Skating back.

The beauty and grace of Figure Skating is gone and unless things are changed I don't believe the new generation of fans will ever enjoy Figure Skating as it was intended to be. Yagudin's *Winter* program just brought me to tears as did the *Man in the Iron Mask*. Kwan's programs all of them brought me to tears, are they all gone and never to be enjoyed again? There are many many more that I can't think of this morning but I remember loving to watch from Pro's down to the younger skaters but now we are lucky to get any skating on the tube. I wish I had DVD's of all the old programs so I could sit and watch.

Keep up the good work and I am still pulling for Figure Skating to return, but under Speedy's eye I doubt it.

Dear Ms. Bianchetti,

Your sentiments toward the world of figure skating are precise and painfully correct. I thank you for your words and continued dedication, with regard, to a sport that has captured my adoration and devotion for many years.

On several occasions I too have emailed the ISU. My opinions and concerns were not acknowledged. Hopefully yours will have an impact. Please know that I support your position completely. You are able to convey directly to those of influence, within the realm of skating, what many feel. Your voice speaks for the figure skating world.

Bravo.

Dear Mrs. Bianchetti Garbato,

Thank you, thank you for the wonderful open letter to Ottavio Cinquanta. As someone who's followed figure skating since I was old enough to reach a TV set, and who's written about the sport for skating magazines for about 20 years, I've been mourning the slow death figure skating over the years. But it's not slow any longer. The new scoring system may well be the death knell for the figure skating. You expressed all my concerns -- and those of all my skating friends -- so well, that there's no need for me to comment. I'd just like to know what if anything we can do to help, other than forward this to as many people as possible.

Because of personal reasons I've not been as active in skating recently as I used to, and don't have as much time to write. But I love skating with all my heart and I'm a journalist by profession. If there's anything I can do to help save the sport and promote your message, I will. Thanks again for your contribution to the sport and courage in speaking out.

Sincerely

Your letter has reached an international audience. I'm in CA, USA and I read it Sunday morning. People are emailing each other all over the world.

You are a bold and direct lady who is right to the point, with solid facts and indisputable observations.

Whether your letter has any effect or not will remain to be seen. What matters is that you cared enough to do what you did.

Dear Sonia,

Your letter to Ottavio Cinquanta has been circulating around and managed to reach me, so I believe there is hope in getting this message widely circulated. You have hit the nail on the head, and I am so happy to see someone finally trying to do something about it. You are correct in calling situations like these, "emergencies". I believe you will succeed in getting your message to the right people, but we can only pray that Mr. Cinquanta has the guts to make such a drastic change after the ISU has invested so much in this disastrous system. I wish you the best of luck, and you have my full support.
Regards.

Dear Mrs. Bianchetti, as parents of a skater, we just want to thank you so very much for what the letter was saying. It is very hard for us parents to say anything, and to have someone like you describe in detail what we (most of us) are thinking is just beyond unbelievable. We just adore and love our skating and will forever but we also believe that it needs a little change as well... Grazie Mille dal nostro cuore....

Sonia , I feel skating has lost its appeal and audience for all the reasons you listed and because the few people at the top of our sport are so stressed that they are (more often than not) injured. There is no real future for them after retirement from competition because shows are few and ticket prices are ridiculous. You're right. Most people wouldn't know a quad if it landed on them. The elegance of figure skating has been destroyed by the very organization that exists to promote and protect them. Rinks are now kept open by hockey rentals and television is fed up with the corrupt officials.

What a shame for all of you people who contributed so much to make skating what it once was.

Regards

Sonia, I COULDN'T AGREE WITH YOU MORE.

I just hope all this discussion leads to some change and result that will bring more people back into the sport.

The cost of skating at a high level is more than it costs to learn flying a

747. That along with the demands of jumps and other tricks to win competitions has changed the sport from one of beauty to one of circus.

I don't even know why they bother with musical programs. If these jumps are so important, why not have a jump competition and let those who want to do them compete in a separate event. Blood on the ice for sure.

Take care and keep it up.

I have just read your letter. Bravo! As a 72 year old, long-time fan of figure skating I can only hope and pray that Mr. Cinquanta wakes up before it is too late. It is terribly sad to watch what is happening to this beautiful sport and to see the physical harm that COP is causing. I hate to think that the marvellous young skaters coming up at this time will never have the chance to blossom and grow as artists. Worse yet, how many more will suffer severe injuries due to these insane rules?

Please keep fighting this battle for all of us who believe as you do but have no bully pulpit to speak from.

Thank you.

We agree wholeheartedly with you about the standard of skating now being too heavy in emphasis on the technical. Bring back the beauty, the Nancy Kerrigans and the Victor Petrenkos, with their expressive programmes and classical styles. Stephane Lambiel is my favourite skater of the moment - when he skates in exhibitions and is allowed to inject passion into music of his own choosing, the way he floats around the rink singing to himself is inspirational. THAT is what skating should be. You know what, I hate to say this, but the competitions of the past couple of years HAVE become boring, the skaters do everything the same. You are absolutely right.

Figure skating has gone too far forward, it is over-stretched. There was a time when there were arguments as to whether it was a sport or an art form.....nowadays, that argument no longer exists.

I sincerely hope that the ISU listen to you. If you ever want the opinion of the enthusiast on the street, the people who want the sport to stay alive and are prepared to back you every step of the way, you know where we are and how to reach us. We're behind you.

Yours sincerely,

What ID..... are running the skating world today? Do they want a bunch of cripples-Why are the coaches not standing up for what is right and allowing this to happen? If everyone objected and produced skating programs sensibly then what could the ISU and the judges do? They would have to clean it up and start again and allow experienced coaches make the rules. People with extensive knowledge of physiology and about the effects these requirements have on the

body of what is required in competition today. It is too much! It is not progress it is destructive! Spirals look like stretching exercises - holding the leg at different angles without any imaginative arm positions? Or contorted positions with sometimes agonizing expressions on the skater's faces. Whoever makes these stupid rules should also have a vast knowledge of all the other aspects of skating included within the program requirements, including not only jump and spin technique but musicality and interpretation, expression, style and originality with good taste....so many Christmas tree look alike costumes!!! You can't always see the body of decorations especially in the ice dancing. Let's have people with some integrity and common sense too to tell everyone across the planet about what they should and should not do!

Dear Sonia,

I agree with you in different points, in particular with the dance's events. With the new system, the judge cannot appreciate the program of the skater. Today the program is a technical program of which the elements are inside and all the programs of the skater are the same. The beauty of the ice is finished. I think that our ISU President had seen the difficulties and I heard many judges and Referees thinking the same. I hope that Ottavio CINQUANTA will accept your feeling and the sky will be again blue for you.

GO GET HIM, SONIA!!!!!!!!!!!! BRAVISSIMO!!!! Your letter was ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS!!! You really torpedoed him! I think Cinquanta's problem is that he just doesn't give a damn. He likes being in a position of power and authority but he doesn't know enough about the sport to be able to enable a positive change. It would be like putting me, a skater, in charge of a swimming federation. What good could I possibly do a swimming federation when I know nothing about the rules and regulations of the sport? I just don't understand why they don't break out the individual sports and let each be in charge of its own federation. It doesn't make any sense to me whatsoever. I will be curious to see what, if any, response he makes to your letter. I'm not holding my breath!

Please do keep me informed on Cinquanta's response. Every paragraph in your letter really hit the nail on the head. It was brilliant!

My best.

Dear Ms. Bianchetti,

First of all, let me say "grazie" for all the years of dedicated service you have given to Figure Skating. The sport owes you a great thank you, and we as followers of the sport, have noticed your dedication through the years.

A friend of mine made me aware of your recent "open letter" to Mr. Cinquanta. Reading this letter was like someone had taken my very thoughts and expressed them into words on paper. Every point you made was not only well made, but so very, very true. I have followed this sport since the late 70s, and I have even attended 12 World Championships, the last was in Vancouver in 2001. I have however, as you, grown very disappointed over the recent years with the degradation of quality in this sport. It seems to have lost its sparkle in so many ways. It's very sad indeed. This is mainly why I have not attended any events in several years (especially the last few years), as there truly hasn't been enough to stimulate my interest. It really is a shame because I have enjoyed some absolutely thrilling moments in this sport (as I'm sure you have as well) throughout the years.

Unfortunately, Ms. Bianchetti, although I find your efforts noble with regard to your note to Mr. Cinquanta, I'm afraid that the end result will be negative. My observations of Mr. Cinquanta have seemingly been ones of inaction and indifference, and I somehow think that your wonderful letter will fall upon deaf ears. Nevertheless, I applaud your effort and it does make me feel good to know that someone so revered in skating such as yourself, has the same feelings and thoughts as I do.

Thank you for standing up for our sport, and I wish you "buona fortuna" in the future. In a few weeks I will be returning to your lovely country for a vacation, and I am looking forward to it very much.

Again, mille grazie.

Sincerely,

Dear Sonia,

I just finished reading your letter to OC. It was fantastic. You stated all of the problems and had some logical corrections. However, I do not think that the ISU hierarchy will admit to making mistakes or errors. For Ottavio to concede that the IJS had problems would be admitting he was wrong. That would not be the message to send to the IOC or to skating in general. The media would have a field day with it. Anyway, it was a great letter. Also, I do not think that the USFSA would be too enthusiastic in supporting it. There are too many high-ranking people who have their own personal agendas with present or future positions in the ISU.

Sonia,

Let me say a few things. I think the new marking system is a disaster. Granted, the old 6.0 system IS history now, but could the ISU not learn from its mistakes, abandon the COP entirely, and go back to a somewhat modified 6.0 system? Just because we have COP now doesn't mean we are forced to stay with it and work to fix it. After all, you could say the same thing about the 6.0 system. If you didn't like it, you could have said 10 years ago "let's work to change it, since we're stuck

with it." That didn't happen - it was thrown out and we are now "stuck" with COP. So why not throw THAT out and go on to something else (or back to 6.0)? To me, COP is going to kill skating for television. Casual viewers do not understand it, having been indoctrinated with 6.0 since the first international broadcast of skating on Wide World of Sports (ABC-TV) in 1963. There is no "perfect mark" to strive for. An element in a program that one Technician calls a level 4 is only called a level 3 by the next Technician at the next competition. How is that fair to the competitor?

I love that the sport has progressed - in singles and pairs. The COP System is killing ice dancing faster than the other disciplines. There are requirements for elements that will not be found on the ballroom floor ("dance spins", "rotational lifts", etc). With the best ice dancers, ice dance LOOKED like dance! Now, they ALL look like pairs programs without the throws and side-by-side jumps! The allowable music is, in most cases, nothing that would pass for "danceable" any more. And telling the ice dancers that if, in a lift, the lady can touch her head to her skate blade this is a "higher degree of difficulty" only makes every dance team strive to have the female partners contort themselves like pretzels. It doesn't matter if it is pleasant to look at, or if it even fits the music - you HAVE to attain these positions for higher difficulty marks/levels.

Some people I know who are avid ballroom dancers caught a telecast of a skating event this past season where portions of compulsory dance were showed briefly. They emailed me later to say that the compulsory dance is the ONLY part of ice dance that actually looked like "dance" on ice! To them, the free dance and pairs free were virtually interchangeable.

Allowing costumes to get out of control has made every competition look like a Las Vegas Revue. It was not that many years ago that there were 'new' rules about the modesty of costumes, and even a requirement that ladies wear a skirt. Now you see a bunch of rags and sequins with a few feathers thrown in. Why does everyone have to look so garish? It detracts from the program, for me, in many cases (if not all).

Yes, yes, yes!!! As a former skating school director, I would make your letter and "Cracked Ice" required reading for my coaches. The spectators ultimately drive the success or failure of any sport and ours are flying out of the arenas. I wish you much success in your writing and look forward to reading more.

Sincerely,

Hi Sonia,

Just wanted to lend my support to your letter. I couldn't agree with you more. I hope that more people stand up until the system is changed. Too bad there couldn't be a skater's strike??

Keep up the crusade & let's hope something gets done!

Dear Sonia,

Hear, hear! This sounds exactly like what I said to you during the competition in Warsaw last month! Remember my comment about how (in Pairs) the man never gets into a truly correct position in the death spiral? And how we used to see "snow" on his partner's hair *after* the death spiral? I haven't seen that in so long, I can not remember when I last saw it.

As a former ice dance competitor, I have bemoaned the fact that for years, the free "dance" is no longer a dance at all, but a show piece - a "mini pairs program", if you will. My coaches used to tell me, when we were watching a competition, to plug our ears so we could not hear the music, and then watch the ice dancers. The trick was to be able to identify what style of dance they were performing, without the music to guide you. Now, there are NO dance rhythms exhibited in ANY one's free dance! They are all hot on the trail of higher "levels of difficulty". What would be a perfectly acceptable lift, pleasing to the eye and appropriate to the music, has now become a contortion of body positions, with the goal of attaining a higher degree of difficulty, and nothing more.

I agree with you completely that there are fewer and fewer programs worth watching, and more and more falls.

I agree with you completely about the artistry, creativity, and beauty of the sport flying out the window. The entire driving force behind choreography today is "what can we do to achieve a higher level?".

As far as your comment about the jumps not being up to standards set in previous years, let me say this. Now that certain combinations have the same base value as a quad, skaters who can't land a quad now realize they no longer need to work on it - all they have to do is add a combination of the same base value, and do it well. This will give them the same points as a quad - unless the other skater's quad is shaky or not landed cleanly. In which case, the quad's GOE will go down, while the clean combo will get more points! So much for pushing the sport to higher levels of athleticism...

And, as far as the new judging/scoring system is concerned (I am back to dance now), why do we NEVER see any "Costume & Prop Violations"? If you saw what I saw in Warsaw, most of the dresses in the dance event looked like Las Vegas show girl costumes - not appropriate at all! The only thing missing were the headdresses. Whatever happened to "modest" and "dignified"? Most of the dresses looked like they only bought enough material for half a dress (either the top half or the front half) - the rest was marabou, feathers, fringe, and nude material.

Love.

Dear Sonia,

We all know how political the skating world is, and even more tragically, how repressive. It is precisely for this reason that your

courage is especially appreciated In addition to all the wonderful points you made in your open letter, let me add my other major gripe with the NJS. For all practical purposes, there is no mark now rewarding artistry. All top skaters get component marks in the same range. So one may get a 7.1 and another a 7.3 for transitions, for instance. But what difference will that 0.2 point make when a single missed jump combination can cost you a whopping 14 points? With the 6.0 system the two aspects of our sports were balanced. Even with a missed jump or two you could still get a high artistic mark that counted for half the score. Now those rare, few skaters who actually exhibit true hints of artistry can never be rewarded.

But I'm preaching to the converted here. Thanks again, and keep fighting the good fight. If there's some way you could keep me up to date with future activities of interest, I'd be most grateful.

All the best.

Dear Sonia,

I am a senior citizen who visits the..... Training Center every day. I see my skaters often hurt and if not, they are more discouraged, every day. Smiles have turned to frowns..... Joy of accomplishment to frustration.

Thank you for writing this wonderful article on the need to change the judging system. I always thought it was devised with "paranoia" of the judges at the forefront, since the uproar at Salt Lake city. Maybe not, but I think the judges got caught, beginning with France...and they seem to want to punish the skaters rather than accept responsibility..... Hmmmm.... Must be worldwide politics again.

BRAVO

Blessings from .

Dear Sonia,

I agree, 100%. There are many, many knowledgeable individuals (some former lower-level competitors, such as myself) who have been in and around the sport for decades, and think it is transparent, what is happening. Unfortunately, people like myself have no voice, and no power to do anything. And, unfortunately, many of the Member Federations are afraid to "rock the boat". They cow tow to whatever Ottavio wants (demands), and are all afraid to speak up or voice their own opinions

There is a saying in corporate America, "if I want your opinion, I'll give it to you". Meaning, "I don't want to hear from you, unless you are going to tell me what I have told you to tell me". That fits the ISU perfectly.

The coaches, on the other hand, have nothing to lose, The ISU cannot sanction them and prohibit them from coaching, or from attending a competition or press conference with their pupil, can they? If the coaches all band together and say something strong, such as what Denkova and Staviskiyy said a couple of years ago, perhaps it might finally hit home.

But, on the other hand, I tend to think it might cause only a small ripple in the lake. The bigger wave will be caused by television revenue, or lack thereof. With the major USA networks shying away from the bidding (and only ESPN in the picture right now), they can name their price - if they are even interested, because, with them, it is all about ratings.

**And witness the empty arenas, too
Hope to hear from you soon.**

Hello Sonia,

Your letter was right on. I could not agree more. I am afraid that even former skaters and judges are also losing interest in our sport. I am sorry to say I do not enjoy watching all the contortions the skaters must produce to receive marks. It leaves little or no time to interpret music. It certainly cannot qualify as an "ART FORM" anymore. Thank you for keeping me up to date. I wish you great success.

Hi Sonia,

I doubt too that Cinquanta will admit his error. He's probably still blaming the problem in Salt lake City. But if that were the real cause, the drop in interest would have levelled off rapidly. It's still dropping. If you want my guess there are 3 serious problems:

1) the new scoring system doesn't generate excitement. There is nothing in the new system which has the audience impact of a 6.0!

2) the character of the programs has changed for the worse. Skating is athletic artistry. I would venture a guess that most people enjoyed the artistry more than the athletics for most skaters -- but they really enjoyed seeing both together. Falls tend to be viewed with the same bad feeling in the audience as would a stage actor who forgot their lines. Why would the audience want to feel bad?

3) some top skaters stayed amateur too long, new talent is important. Both the ISU and the Pros would have benefited had Michelle and Irina gone Pro 4 or 5 years sooner. The shows need new talent too. An audience doesn't want to see variations on the same style year after year. A fresh look is welcomed!

I know you and Sally are still listened too, don't give up!

Regards.

Dear Sonia

We are torn about the new system. We are trying to teach the skating our way regardless of the new system (a lot of basic techniques to build on).

I think the coaches and skaters should unify and write a petition with concrete solutions and than if it doesn't work go on strike. It should be done at worlds so it has a international impact. We can't be worried

about burning the city to protect it from enemies

Sonia,

I agree and love your article, I only hope that someone will listen to what you are saying. I feel like the passion has left figure skating and this new system is really injuring our skaters to the point of cutting their career short. Sasha Cohen did say it was a gift but since being back in the states with all the appearances she has made I don't think I have heard her once say it was a gift. Please continue to push for the sport because if the ISU president can't see that the ratings are dropping he truly does have blinders on and he must think he is the god of all god's.

Dear Sonia:

Young skaters trying triple jumps who fail to complete the required rotation and land short of the requirement use their free legs to pull the jump out, often sustaining injuries to knees, hips and other joints which only manifest themselves later in their careers or adulthood. Growth plates which have not yet closed are often damaged, causing pain and heartache.

Thank you again for rallying against this system which rewards not good skating, but tricks. Perhaps we should ask the skaters to "roll over" on the ice, beg, sit-up, and finally, play dead!

Many coaches and judges here have been brainwashed by officialdom that the greatest thing since sliced bread is the IJS system. Bah, humbug

With kindest regards.

Hi Sonia, what do you think about rules for spins in men's competitions? It looks like everyone pretends blind when almost every men skater repeat same spins three times in SP and four times in LP. That is NOT right! Why no one is changing that.???

Why spin-elements are not treated the same as jump-elements. Skaters are not allowed to repeat the same jump why not to do the same with spins?

Did you note, the beautiful camel spin is almost gone from men's competition. It's wrong! There are almost no upright spins (like layback, half- bent) .

I understand requirement for foot change or same position.

But I have just an idea, it's not a statement.

Men can do three DIFFERENT spins in SP program and four in LP, (same rule applies to jumps already) so skaters can show more athletics. The skater who can do camel spin and sit spin should get more marks then skaters who can do only two same sit spins. This is the point I am trying to bring up. Please help NJS be fairer and more interesting for people to watch.

I can just say for men's SP required spins could be:

- 1. Camel spin**
- 2. Sit spin**
- 3. Combo spins.**

For LP:

- 1. Upright spin**
- 2. Camel spin**
- 3. Sit spin**
- 3. Combo spin.**

Of course skaters can do different difficulty on each spin and be creative to get higher value.

At this point in men's competitions, camel spin and upright spin have almost disappeared. Last year I saw only a few camel spins at Euros, and almost none at Worlds. That is not right.

Please help to save some beautiful elements in men's skating from the system which is killing it.

What do you think about it?

Thanks

Hi Sonia,

I am in total agreement with you, and something has to be done. From cookie cutter programs to ugly spins and not to mention back injuries from Bielmans. It is not appealing even to a 30 year veteran of the sport. Thank you for your insight and for standing up for a sport that is definitely lacking.

Sonia

I received your open letter and I completely approve it. My suggestion to start the changes

is : ask the interested persons, coaches, judges, etc to prepare written suggestions for the changes or improvements or little relaxations of the restrictions that made all the programs similar, mediocre, lacking creativity, boring and compulsory (both short and long).

But you understand that the politicians (whether from the real politics or from sport or any other human activity) will use all the power to keep the input they brought to the process, as this is their input, etc. etc. Does not matter for them whether the changes are good or not.

As the history shows , all the changes are mostly done by the "revolutions". I am sure there is a strong political opposition, who can make the democratic changes, if they will be brave. Are they brave enough?

The Federations and the officials may be the real power, but I do not see who or which Federation can be the leader.

Well I am not so pessimistic, as I sound .

Thank you for continuing to fight for the rebuilt of the skating popularity and trying to bring it to the right pass.

Great news Sonia. I don't think that OC will ever agree that "his system" is not perfect, but maybe there can be some pressure on him to make some changes.

But who will have the brain to make all these changes before it is too late. I hear from the Swedish coaches that the spins are really so bad now among the young skaters as they never practice basic positions any longer. They start changing positions and edges long before they can do an upright spin properly.

Will be interesting to see whether anybody will have the courage to do anything within the ISU

Dear Sonia,

As to the open letter to Mr. Ottavio Cinquanta: I quite agree with you and it is good that someone has the courage to say it aloud. I know there are more people than just you and me, who think the same way. At the Finnish national championships in December the audience was complaining about the judging system: it took too long to get the points after a skater's performance, and many of spectators did not believe that judges really had time to see and mark everything they were supposed to do.

As to the performances I am really sad that skaters do the same kind of movements just to gather points, the creativity dies that way and everyone executes the same kind of spirals, spins etc. as you said. But the worst part in my opinion is ice dancing, because free dance is not any more dancing, as you said. It is not aesthetic any more, and if I had the power I'd turn the wheel a bit backwards: ice dance should be dance, proper steps, dance holds and positions, no ugly positions or lifts, even the outfits would need some guidance. Now many of the skaters seem to appear in an exhibition rather than in a championship. I may be old fashioned, but this is how I feel.

Even at the international championships I do not feel it is right that a skater has to trust on a chance that he/she gets the right points from 9 judges out of 12. If I think it viciously; the best skater could simply be found out with a die. But to be honest, how can we ever separate honest judges from dishonest?

All the best.

Dear Sonia,

My name is....., I'm from Mexico so I don't speak English very good, I hope you understand anything. Here it comes: first of all, I am a figure skating fan, and I must admit I was very impressed when I read about your recent article for Ottavio Cinquanta, the article is the HUGE true about what figure skating is suffering and fighting, I'm totally agree with every single word you have written! I admire the way you wrote it and to be honest now I'm really interested to write to the ISU of this disease which it's killing us.

Aw God, how I miss that beautiful performances such as Johnny Weir's "Swan" which I think it's one of that programs you see and will be with

you forever! As you do, I want it back. Thanks for inspire me to fight against something I don't agree.

Sincerely yours.

Once again, we're on the same sheet of music. Why do all the idiots end up in charge? There are more of us than of them, yet they always end up running everything. It makes me sick. I hope Cinquanta is furious. He won't step down so I'm very much enjoying you being the pain in his butt!!!!!! Keep up the good work! I passed your letter along to a lot of the coaches I know in the area and they all loved it. So many other judges agree with you--that's why I can't figure why the idiots are in charge.

**I do appreciate you keeping me informed of any developments.
My best.**

Hi,

Thanks for sending the article to Cinquanta. I hate to say it but you are dealing with a power head who has blind eyes and deaf ears. I hope that he will take your letter to heart but I don't see that happening. I am so worried about our sport too! I just watch the European Championships and I was once again appalled with the judging for ice dancing. It looks like the judges have already figured out how to manipulate the COP system. I have said this before I wish you would run for ISU president!

Originally written in Italian

Hello Sonia

I have some questions for you. I hope you can understand my Italian.

Six questions:

1) What do you think of the New Judging System?

In my opinion nothing has changed . On the contrary they can do what they want even better than before with the second mark (I am also a Technical Controller). When the NJS was presented at the Neuchatel Trophy I was the only one who thought that nothing would have changed, and now I think it has changed to the worse.

2) In Ice Dancing

I have never been a dance fan. In the years between 1980 and 1992 I used to watch the long program because there was class, creativity and originality.

Now it has become only vulgar both in costumes and lifts..... no originality, no choreography or music research; for me it is no longer ice dance (it should be called Danse de Salon sur glace).

3) Ladies

Only jumps.... The class of Peggy Fleming, Karen Kadevy, Michelle Kwan, Sacha Cohen, Lu Chen or even other skaters who have never been among the best 15 at Worlds or the Europeans does not exist any longer. My favourite was Katarina Witt who was not the best from a technical point of view, but she had a charisma that nobody has transmitted during competitions after her.

4) Men

There have been some great skaters such as John Curry, Robin Cousins, Toller Cranston, Brian Orser, Brian Boitano, Vlarimir Cotin, Alexey Yagudin, Kurt Browning and now Stephane Lambiel.

5) Pairs

The pairs are becoming the most interesting competition. In 1994 and at the Olympic Games in Hamar, Ekaterina Gordeeva and Sergei Grinkov had everything; class, purity in skating and technique. I have never seen again anything like this in any discipline of this sport.

6) Synchro

From 2000 to 2005 there has been an interesting evolution both in the quality of skating ,the choreography and the originality of the programs. Since two years they are only performing elements Level 4.

In my opinion we are going towards a sport based only on technique and attempts to get levels, The programs are all the same now. It is absolutely necessary to change many things and quickly. In the name of the sport, Artistic Skating, in Italian, there is first ART and then the rest; same in French.... I say this because I myself practised figure skating and classic ballet of more than 17 years. I collected videos , DVD and skating magazines on figure skating for more than 40 years

I write you this because I would like to live again the great emotion that figure skating has given all of us many years ago.

Un Cordiale Saluto
