

Both Ms Knox-Collins and Ms Derby points out that the international judges would not taint their reputations by fiddling with the results of a competition in Singapore. Exclaims Ms Knox-Collins: "We only had about 27 competitors that year!" The lead judge at the 2002 Singapore Nationals was from Canada, had judged at the Canadian Nationals that January and was on his way to the World Championships in Nagano in March that year. "We were lucky to have judges with such experience. It was ridiculous for anyone to think they would risk their good names and standings with the International Skating Union," Ms Knox-Collins states firmly.

For the uninitiated, the International Skating Union (ISU) sets the rules for the highest levels of skating—the Olympics, the World Championships, the ISU Grand Prix circuit as well as the Junior Worlds and Junior Grand Prix events. All countries belonging to the ISU are obliged to follow its rules for competitive levels in Senior, Junior and Novice. Using the ISU regulations as a foundation, the National federations develop a local framework for lower level skating. (SISA doesn't belong to the ISU yet because it lacks an Olympic size skating rink, which is a prerequisite for membership.)

A great figure skater can make a programme look like a spontaneous creation of performance art, but in fact she or he is following a highly structured composition, consisting of pre-planned jumps, spins and steps. At its most basic level, skating requires rock-solid mental concentration and physical strength, if the skaters are to going to meet the requirement regulations.

Singapore always has been careful to bring in judges accredited by the International Skating Union through their respective national skating federations. For the first two Championships in 2002 and 2003, judges came from Skate Canada and Ice Skating Australia. In 2004, judges came from the Korea Skating Union and from Skate Canada. This year, the Japan Skating Federation gave permission for Hideo Sugita, one of its most senior judges, to officiate at the Singapore Nationals.

Judging is not an exact science, and judges do make mistakes, Ms Derby says. There is little time to make the call, so errors can happen. Sometimes, it is a simple mathematical mistake where the deduction is subtracted incorrectly. Sometimes, if a judge is using a computerized program to input their marks, they type in the wrong number.

Sometimes, there is an actual error in judging. For example in pairs skating, a judge may miss the fact that one of the skaters did only a double jump while his or her partner did a triple. Sometimes, the judge's position on the panel makes it difficult to see whether a jump was under-rotated or two-footed.

Ms Derby speaks from hard-earned personal experience. She is a former pairs skater from Canada, with the scars from skating mishaps to prove it. Over a 20-year period, she earned her judging stripes at Skate Canada where she judged as many as 20 low-level competitions a year, before moving up the ranks. Ms Derby been judging internationally for five years and has been on SISA's executive committee since 2003. On behalf of Skate Canada, she judged at the International Skating Union's Junior Grand Prix event in China and she most recently judged at the Canadian Senior National Championships in London, Ontario.

"the calibre of skating seen at the 4th National Figure Skating Championships..."

