

“Alright ladies, we’ve had a very good practice ice this afternoon.”,my skating coach Jamy told our team in the locker room after we had completed our first practice ice at our sectional championships in Nashville, TN. All of the sections of the program have definitely improved since the critique and our last competition in Boston. For practice tonight, we are only going to run the program twice so that you are well rested and fresh for the competition tomorrow. We need every single one of you to be ready to sell it to the judges and the audience!”As I was dripping with sweat while attempting put on my jacket, I wasn’t sure if it was the cold draft of the rink or my nerves kicking in, but I felt shaken to the core for this competition and I sensed the same feeling throughout the rest of my team that night.

This was a very special team from the start because we were the underdogs who were not expected to place very high at competitions since a majority of our team have been on the ice less than two years and had never skated on a synchronized figure skating team before this year, safe to say we were pretty nervous. Considering I was a veteran on the team, I was terrified beyond belief because not only did I want to skate to my best ability, but I wanted my teammates to have their opportunity to shine and fall in love with this sport just like I did when I was in their position. This was also the season that I learned to acquire leadership on and off the ice to shape the person I am today.

My leadership came into play spontaneously during our last practice before competing. We arrived at the rink early to warm up our muscles and get our heart rates going. Even off the ice, well-conditioned teams are easy to spot as their bodies matched

flawlessly with the music and choreography of graceful and perfectly in synch programs. After warming-up stretching our spirals and spread eagles for flexibility, our coach discussed anything unclear about our program; like what step we do after an intersection, block steps or transitions before heading to the locker room to put our skates on.

During this time, my stomach became a butterfly pavilion filled with nerves, excitement, and anxiety as we lined up at the doors. Part of the beauty of competition is that nervous energy that athletes harness. Before getting on the ice, my friend, Jamie, and I looked at each other and she said “After all those months of practicing,” and she began to shake since this was her first skating competition. I gave her a hug and said to her “You are going to kill this program and you are so much better than when you started. We, as a team, are ready.” She felt much better before we lined up for our warm-up block.

After completing our first run through, we had about thirty-seconds to skate over to our coach to discuss what went well and what we needed fix for the second run-through. The announcer spoke into the microphone stating that our music was starting in ten-seconds. Before we knew it, it was time for run through number two. The second time was ten times better than the first run-through because we all skated with more energy, power and confidence as if we were competing at that moment. Even though we had twenty minutes left in our practice time, our coach was ecstatic about how great we looked and how hard we worked that she told us to exit the ice so that we could head back to the hotel for dinner and team bonding. It felt great to see our coach so happy and our teammates feeling pumped for the competition.

Now competition was just around the corner. After a fun team dinner and bonding activities, the moving stream of teams, coaches, parents, and spectators crammed into the rink seating and claimed a section to watch some of the best teams in the nation and the world skate their short programs. My heart was beating with excitement and anticipation like the energizer bunny. Generally, synchronized skating competitions are very jam-packed with multiple events in three days and about five hundred or more skaters matching from top to bottom that makes the arena look like a giant pool of multiple rainbows. Even to a competitor such as me, being a part of this extremely loud, chaotic and fun environment can be thrilling and chilling at the same time.

Once the music started to play, the entire rink became silent and their programs looked magical. Every formation was flawlessly in synch with tons of emotion throughout all of the whole programs. With thirty-two pairs of blades on the ice, it was amazing that everyone can stay together on the same foot without hearing scratching toe picks. When a difficult maneuver was successfully executed, the crowd went wild. Almost every skater, including me, envies the talent of any skater that demonstrates grace and athleticism.

As the next morning suddenly approached, competition day had finally arrived. For us, that meant that it was crunch time to get our hair, make-up and minds competition ready. To put it in simple terms, everything matches on everyone on the ice. Once we had arrived, it felt like both an episode of both *Dance Moms* and *Toddlers & Tiaras* with all of the helicopter moms flying all over.

As we were walking in I started to breath quickly, until Madison, one of our newest and youngest members, suddenly stopped in the middle of the lobby shaking like she just saw a ghost. I walked over to ask if she was ok or if she needed me to go get someone. Still shaking, she looked at me and blurted out, “I don’t think I’m cut out for this, I’m not any good with or without practice and I’m just going to let everyone down!” As I was processing what she said, I remember thinking and feeling the exact same way before my first competition, so I did the same thing that another older team member did me. I told her that being nervous is very normal and that she has come very far and will only continue to get better. She took a deep breath and felt much better.

After completing the same pre-competition warm-ups and stretches that we did during practice ice, it was that time to head to our locker room to get skates on. As we try to unravel our nerves before skating, we participated in some locker room karaoke, which shook off all my nerves.

After our team huddle, the monitor came and got us, and we were ready to rock and roll. Our coach high fived and hugged us for encouragement and wished us good luck. My mother can tell you that as spectator, it is a lot of fun and low stress to watch other teams, but when your child is about to compete, your heart is beating so loud that you cannot hear yourself think.

Now it was go time. Our team name was announced over the loud speakers and we stepped out on the clean and shiny ice as if we were glamorous super models, our thoughts and worries drained away as we floated down the ice in our warm-up block and into our starting positions.

Once the music started, we swapped our nerves with smiles and skated our hearts out. Before we knew it, the program was over and a burst of applause filled the arena. We exited the ice happy after a great skate. Our coach teared up as she told us how proud she was of how we skated and that it doesn't matter how we place in the end. Next stop was waiting for the results.

Afterwards, our parents showered us with hugs and compliments. Thirty minutes later, our coach came back with her jaw dropped and eyes wide open, and whispered "We medaled!" We all looked at her because we couldn't tell if she was serious or not. "WE MEDALED GIRLS!" she practically shouted, and it was now our turn to shower each other with hugs. In the mist of the celebration, Madison and Jamie tackled me to the ground and both screamed that I gave them the confidence to compete. It warmed my heart to hear that, but I told them that they were part of this accomplishment.

Being at this competition with this particular group of girls taught me that leadership and confidence can occur at the most spontaneous of moments without thinking too hard. This experience has also inspired me to my leadership off the ice as an officer in my alumni chapter and in my growing professional career.