

Canadians in Germany
The Adventure of the International Adult Figure Skating Competition
By Maureen Bennie

Last month, teammate Shig Taya and myself travelled to [Oberstdorf, Germany](#) to compete for the first time at the International Adult Figure Skating Competition. What an experience! There were 400 skaters between the ages of 28 and 78 from 29 countries. There was a wide range of levels and ability exhibited as well as many unique performances. Because of the wide representation of cultures – interpretation, choice of music, costumes, and artistry were both interesting and varied. Each performance was a gem and had something memorable or entertaining.

The village of Oberstdorf was a magical setting for this international event. Nestled in the Bavarian Alps 2 hours southwest of Munich, this quaint little town was miles away from the hustle bustle of city life, yet the whole world was there. The cobble-stoned streets were dotted with bakeries, pastry shops, butchers, cafes, and specialty stores offering many delights. When the clang of cowbells rang through the streets, you had to make way for the cows to come home. The lovely old church opened its yard on Saturday mornings for the local market with stalls of honey, strawberries from Lake Constance, and cheese from one of the neighbouring farms.

Most of the village was pedestrian zone only so you rarely heard the sound of cars. The ice rink, built in the 1950's, had the Nebelhorn Mountain as its backdrop and the rush of the river in front of it. It was an idyllic spot to practice and compete at.

The Canadians were welcomed on Saturday night at the annual dinner organized by veteran ice dancer Diana Barkley. Diana has been a long time competitor at this competition and also sits on the adult working group. She was a most gracious hostess, making everyone feel so welcomed. The dinner gave all the Canadians a chance to meet each other, hear where you were from, and learn what event they were skating in. The dinner introduced us to fellow Canadian skaters we had not met before.

Sunday was the opening ceremonies where all skaters gathered on the ice and huddled with their respective countries, although that did not last long as skaters were moving about greeting their friends from other countries. At the arena, everyone sought out a place with their country's flag to sit in cheering sections; but again, that was never in stone because once you made friends with someone from another country, you would be sitting with them. It was the true spirit of camaraderie with no borders.

The ice surface was the best I have ever skated on. The arenas were naturally lit, the ice was grey not bright white without hockey lines, and the rink was warm. It was the first time I felt I was not spending my entire practice time trying to keep limber or stay warm. Every practice was limited to 18 skaters and you were grouped according to your category to keep the practice safe for everyone.

Each evening at 6 pm, skaters gathered in the Ballet Room to draw their start numbers for the competition the following day. This was always great fun to see who got to go first and last in each group. It was a chance to meet your fellow competitors and feel a little more at ease about the next day.

This was the first year this competition offered live streaming which made it exciting for those at home to be able to watch and cheer from afar. It also gave competitors a chance to review their performances right away or post them for friends and family.

In some ways, this event did not feel like a competition because you really felt like everyone was pulling for you. The Kiss and Cry was often filled with a pile of skaters you had just met a day or two ago, but were there to support you when those marks came in. We laughed, chatted, and hugged each other on that well-worn couch.

The highlight at the end of each day was the Victory Ceremony. Every skater was recognized and given a medal and certificate of participation. No one was considered more worthy of recognition than another person. This is the true spirit of adult recreational skating because every placement in any given year depends on the people who are competing and everyone's effort has value. Adults make great sacrifices to skate, trying to balance work, family, and studies.

The week of competition ended on Saturday night with a grand banquet at [Oberstdorf House](#). There was a wonderful buffet, live band and lots of dancing. I felt like I was 20 years old again, out there on the dance floor working up a sweat.

What was so valuable about this experience was the preparation leading up to it with my coach, Monika Bafia, who had to re-do both of my programs to meet the international requirements. There were many days I did not think I would be ready in time for the competition, but Monika was there every step of the way encouraging me. She instilled confidence and gave me the skills to be able to prepare and practice on my own since she was not able to come to the event. It was her hard work and dedication that helped me to do as well as I did.

Competing at the [International Adult Figure Skating Competition](#) was not about getting to the podium, but about attaining a personal goal. Meeting different skaters from many walks of life broadened my scope of the world. It was fascinating learning about the experiences of those from other countries. My circle of friends grew considerably in just one week. I loved speaking German again and even though I made many mistakes, I felt proud when I was understood or could contribute to a conversation.

Canadians were wonderful ambassadors abroad and supported all competitors. Our group of 23 earned 16 medals in all – eight gold medals, five silver medals, and three bronze medals. Being part of this group made me feel proud to represent Olympia Skating Club. What an opportunity to have had this memorable experience!

I encourage all adult skaters to compete at this fine, world-class event. Next year's event is June 6 – 11, 2016. Every new skater is welcomed and there is always someone who is happy to show you the ropes. With so many skaters returning year after year, if you do go more than once it will

feel like a reunion. You can make the experience your own with additional coaching and training camps, practices, or just go to compete a program you have been working on. The choice is yours – everyone is there to support you.