

LEADER-POST

Speed skating fun and inexpensive

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The other day I came across two related stories in the Leader-Post (Sept. 17): "Weighty Matters" in Viewpoints, which talked about overweight children, and "Costs may be keeping children from playing" on Page C11, which talked about the price of hockey getting out of hand.

Maybe it's time parents consider alternative winter sports like speed skating. Don't get me wrong: I played hockey competitively for over 40 years and still miss it, but I can't say enough good things about speed skating. Here are just a few.

First off, it costs a fraction of the price of hockey, both for registration and equipment. A child can easily be outfitted for \$200 or less and you rent the speed skates from the Regina Speed Skating Club (RSSC) for \$75 per year. The club even offers a free learn-to-skate program.

Second, nobody sits on the bench. Just like hockey the parents have stopwatches but not to monitor if their child is getting their fair share of ice time. We use them to see how fast the kids are skating. At practice the kids never sit down.

Third, no irate parents, no fights, and nobody yelling at the referees. Everyone is friendly and helpful. The kids are smiling and having fun all the time. When a skater falls everyone in the crowd cheers the child on to finish the race.

Fourth, excellent coaching and great opportunities for the kids. The RSSC has sent three skaters to each of the last two Winter Olympics, including silver-medallist Justin Warsylewicz. There are currently nine skaters from Regina training at the Olympic Oval in Calgary. How many kids from Regina have gone on to the NHL in the past eight years? Did you know that over 45 per cent of all the medals Canada won in the last two Winter Olympics came for speed skating?

Finally anyone can do it. My son started at age six and I started at age 49. Not only can I go out and skate three nights a week with my son, we even compete against each other. How good is that?!

Mickey Kupchyk,

Regina