

Skating through Life

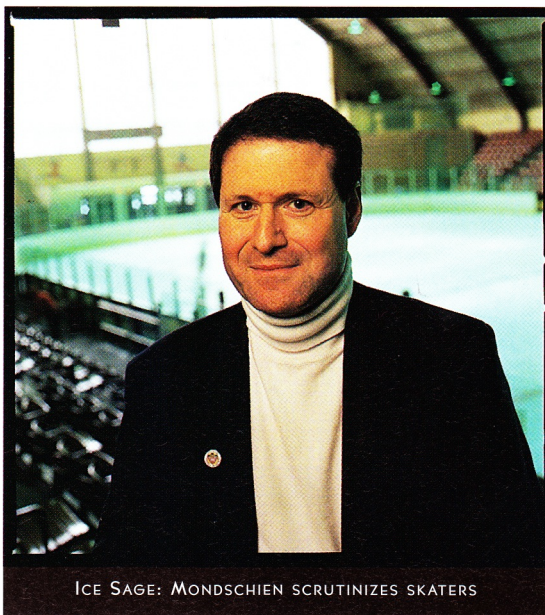
WHEN LARRY MONDSCHIEN ISN'T TACKLING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES FOR J & J, HE VOLUNTEERS AS A TOP U.S. SKATING OFFICIAL.

The scandal over the bribing of a French figure-skating judge in the 2002 Winter Olympics pairs competition dominated world headlines and raised the question, Who judges the judges? “Not a week went by when I didn’t have to address the scandal in some way,” says Larry Mondschien (RC’80, SCILS’85, GSNB’88), who was in the audience and just as surprised as everyone else at the outcome. “The TV networks and newspapers wanted to know what would happen if a U.S. judge were found to be displaying unethical conduct.” His answer was simple: They’d be banned for life.

As the volunteer chair of the judges committee of the U.S. Figure Skating Association (USFSA), the national governing body for the sport, Mondschien gets to attend most major U.S. and international figure-skating competitions. While Mondschien’s 100-member USFSA committee had no jurisdiction over the Olympics in Salt Lake City—that fell to the International Skating Union—it is responsible for testing, evaluating, and appointing 1,100 officials to events that range from local basic skills competitions to the U.S. championships.

“I caught the skating bug at age five when my parents started bringing me along on family skating outings,” says Mondschien, 45, who is the manager of training and

development in the environmental affairs office of Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick. “I was one of those kids who was chaperoned by their mothers to rinks throughout New Jersey, went to summer skating camps, and skated six days a



ICE SAGE: MONDSCHIEN SCRUTINIZES SKATERS

week for years,” says the East Brunswick native, who now lives with his wife, Ellen, and their three-year-old son, Jonathan, in East Windsor.

At age 19, Mondschien became a gold medalist in figures and free skating, the sport’s equivalent of a black belt in karate. As a member of the Essex Skating Club of New Jersey in 1981, Mondschien received his first appointment as a skating judge. “At the club’s annual show, I skated in an Alf costume to entertain kids,” recalls Mondschien. “My mother teased me that she had spent all this time and money on me—

only to see me end up as Alf.”

Over the next 11 years, he worked his way through seven levels to become a national judge. “Skating is both a sport and an art form, and you have to have a passion for it,” he says. “At times you need to be at the rink by 6 a.m. and be willing to stand and freeze for three hours.” Another requirement for judges, he points out, is knowing when and how to provide constructive criticism. “The right words provide comfort and help a skater improve,” he says. “But at the same time, you shouldn’t be coaching.”

Mondschien insists that he’s definitely gotten more out of skating than skating has gotten out of him. “I made some unbelievable friendships over the last 35 years; nothing beats the feeling when parents come up to you and thank you for helping their child realize their dream,” he says.

“Becoming a gold medalist required motivation, commitment, and focus, so when I needed those qualities to earn my doctorate [in communication, information, and library studies], I was really prepared. Many of the people I serve with used the discipline it takes to skate to reach the top of their fields. We know the tremendous high you can get from landing a single axel or simply completing a routine, and we realize that every skater’s Olympics is something different.” —B.G. □