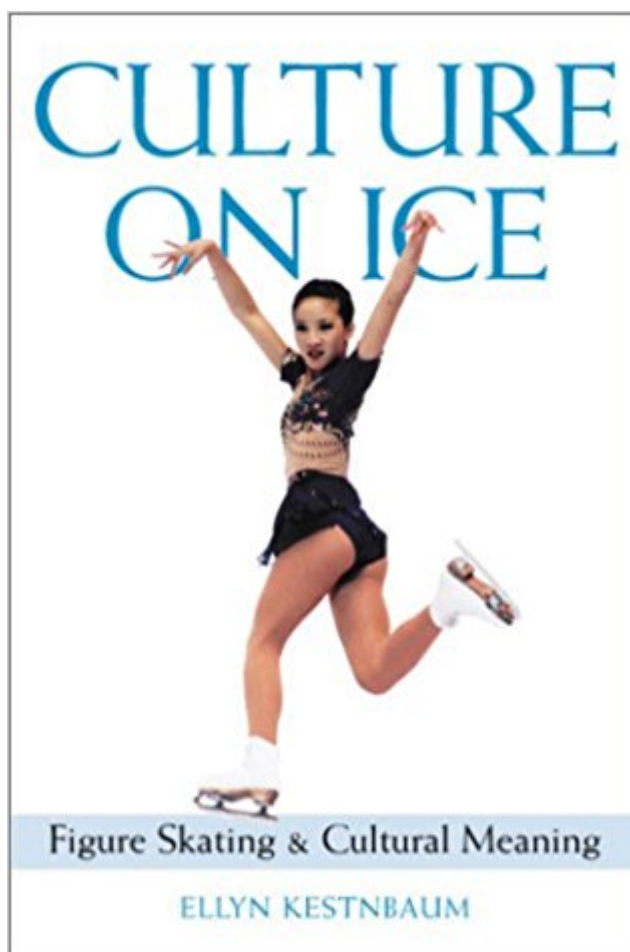


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Culture On Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning



Synopsis

Figure skating is one of the most popular spectator sports in the U.S., yet it eludes definitive categorization. In this engaging new book, Ellyn Kestnbaum examines figure skating from multiple perspectives: as sport, as performance, and even as spectacle, guiding the reader through both the technical aspects of skating and the sometimes convoluted rules of figure skating competition. By careful readings of skating events at the 1994 and 1998 Olympic Games, she argues that figure skating is a language, one whose meaning is inflected by the culture at large. In particular, she looks at the ways in which race, social class and gender all disrupt, subvert or reinforce the practices of figure skating, and examines the influence of the media in shaping perceptions of the sport. As a skater, skating fan and scholar, Kestnbaum brings a unique point of view to this study, providing not only a history of the skating world but also a feeling for what it is like to be on the ice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Culture on Ice provides a thorough perspective of the popular dancing and yet sports activity that is a favorite of both spectators and participants. This book chronicles this form of skating so that readers will be proud of the input of Nordic, Canadian and English youths and adults for well over 4,000 years.”
—Bernadine Jennings, *Attitude*, *The Dancer*, *cs Magazine*

"A brilliant exploration of the fascinating world of figure skating. It includes a detailed history of the sport from its earliest beginnings and delves into its many facets. A superb and thoughtful work."

(Eugene Turner, figure skating champion)"Kestnbaum's writing is lucid and often elegant, the material artfully arranged. Truly impressive." (Helena Michie, Professor of English, Rice University)

Culture on Ice is the first skating book I have bought in more than two years. It is also the first skating book where I actually learned something in every chapter and started to think about skating in ways that hadn't occurred to me. Even though it's an "academic" book, its contents and message appeal to skating fans universally. The first two chapters are heavy on theory and may present some difficulty for those unfamiliar with academic theories of meaning, but they're worth sloughing through. (I think you could even get away with skipping them if you really can't get through the language.) Chapter three onward should be relatively smooth sailing for any confirmed skating fan with the caveats that the language is academic and the sentences are long. The research is meticulous, and the chapter notes are full of exciting hidden gems of amazing detail. The technical appendix and suggestions for further reading alone would be worth the cover price for anyone looking to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the sport. Culture on Ice is successful as a work of theory, a work of history, and an appreciation of all who contribute to figure skating. Kudos to Ellyn Kestnbaum for taking figure skating beyond coffee-table-book status and establishing a framework for future critical analysis of the sport.

An adequate and fair history of the art of figure skating from its origins to the present. One aspect I found troubling was the book's commitment to viewing the art through the eyes of feminist "gender identity" theory. I'm not sure what an introduction to post modernist feminism contributes to a book about figure skating. Another shortcoming is the author's occasional fade into modern academic jargon that borders on gibberish. Consider the following gem of a sentence from page 259: "The conflicting codes of both "feminine" objectification and "masculine" agency in the person of the same skater provide a potentially empowering tension in symbolic identification with a position that is neither purely powerless nor purely powerful, blurring the either/or dichotomy of a structuralist reading into an androgenous both/and." What is missing here is basic writing skill. I really bought this book for the picture of Michelle Kwan on the cover, Still I learned a fair amount about the art of figure skating from reading it.

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