

2007 US Figure Skating Adult National Championships
Bensenville, IL
April 11 – 14, 2007
Terryl Lee Allen reporting

Albuquerque Figure Skating Club (AFSC) has its first National Champion in Jennifer Dellinger! Jennifer finished second in her qualifying round and went on to win the Bronze Ladies II Free Skate National title. Her win was convincing with five 1st place ordinals, one 2nd place ordinal, and one 3rd place ordinal. Way to go Jennifer. Congratulations to Jennifer and her coach, Kevin Franchini.

My favorite part of Jennifer's win was during the tension filled moments waiting for the final results to be posted. As usual most of the skaters were crammed up against the results wall like subway commuters in a Tokyo commuter train. Jennifer and her supporters held back from the press. The poor woman posting the final results barely got out with her life as skaters quickly started shrieking and announcing their placements. Then one lone voice in the pack asked, "Who is Jennifer Dellinger?" About then Jennifer finally got close enough to see that she was the winner. That's who Jennifer Dellinger is, the Champion!

I was so happy for Jennifer and Kevin I think I cried more than anyone. There were lots of pictures, jumping up and down, congratulations, hugs, and a fitting awards ceremony with medals and a special engraved silver plate just for Jen. Jennifer said she didn't know if she was happier for herself or for Kevin. I understood completely.

Have I mentioned I love this event? Have I made note that every Nationals I have been to, six and counting, has been totally unique? All this is still proving to be true.

Jim and I flew into Chicago on a beautiful Sunday evening and drove half an hour to Bensenville where the competition was held. We checked into our hotel, which was a short 2 miles from the rink. Of course I had to immediately investigate how to get from the hotel to the rink, the rink to the practice rink, and scout out the nearest good-looking restaurants, coffee spots. All was very convenient and very close. The competition arena, Edge II, had two sheets of ice. The practice rink, Edge I, with one ice surface,

was a short walk from Edge II. There was a grocery store with Starbucks Coffee, a fantastic Italian restaurant, and an even better Tai restaurant all within about 7 minutes of my hotel and the rinks. Perfect!

Jennifer and her husband, Aaron, arrived Monday night. Jennifer and I had a Tuesday morning practice before Kevin arrived that evening. I skated as well as could be expected, all things considered, so I was happy. Jennifer had a great practice. She was awesome, skating with great speed and confidence. Jennifer came to this year's Nationals with every intension of doing her best to enjoy every minute of this event. This practice turned out to be her very favorite because she was able to relax and skate just like at home and because she was able to catch snippets of many of the other skaters programs. There was a grand variety of music and choreography to make the snippets truly worth watching. All week Jennifer watched for the distinguishing moves other skates presented in their programs. Usually these highlights came in the form of unique spin positions and sometimes in footwork or choreography. Not only did Jennifer enjoy watching the skaters, she also let them know how much she appreciated their skills and accomplishments. There is that unique spirit of Adult Nationals shining through yet again. After practice Jennifer, Aaron, Jim, and I had a lovely afternoon at the Art Institute of Chicago including a magnificent lunch at a German restaurant located close to the Art Institute.

Wednesday started off with a big surprise... 3" of wet heavy SNOW! Where did that come from? Out of town volunteers trying to get to the rink to help with the first official day of competition got lost due to the heavy snow totally covering the street signs making them unreadable. Skaters trying to fly in to Chicago were hit with delays. In the end all problems were solved and everyone got where they needed to go without missing anything important.

I had my official warm-up at 7:25am and my qualifying round at 9:40am. My competition skate was OK. I finished in 12th place. I had no plans to make Final Round this year. I know what it takes to make Final Round. I knew going in I did not have it this year. I just couldn't train as I needed after being off the ice for two and a half

months, having knee surgery, adjusting to new boots, and dealing with a serious lack of balance due to complications associated with general anesthesia. I could not have had a more supportive, wonderful group of fellow skaters, teammates, friends, and my husband to get me through my skate. Thank you to everyone, especially you, Jennifer, with your kind words right before I took the ice. It would have been much, much more difficult without each and every one of you.

Jennifer skated her qualifying round later that day and, as you know, finished second. Her camel gave her a little bit of guff as that spin is wont to do, especially in competition, but all else was stellar.

Marcelino made it to Chicago very late Wednesday night after a horrendous nightmare of travel. He was one of those skaters caught in snow delays. He arrived almost 12 hours later than scheduled. On Thursday mid-morning I bumped into him unplanned at the rink and gave him the "Nationals 101" on what to do, where to go, what was where, who was who, like the "Cookie Man" who brings tubs of homemade cookies for the skaters (Girl cookies are chocolate chip without nuts, Boy cookies are chocolate chip with nuts), and good luck remembering it all! We ended up out to lunch at that great Tai restaurant, Nathan's Noodles. Because of a time crunch with planning and scheduling Jim ended up not being able to come to lunch with us so he got really good take-out instead.

Thursday all the AFSC team members had practice ice. Marcelino was first up. He was happy that he was not towering over every guy on the ice. In fact most of the men were tall. They must have had some sort of secret meeting before practice to discuss their collective practice uniform, black pants and black long sleeve shirts. The one exception to the dress code came from the single female on the ice. The only break in all that black was a tiny, petite, lone young lady in icy blue. Her name was Stephanie Cook and she went on to become the Master Ladies Champion later in the week. Marcelino looked great during practice. He was relaxed and skated very well. Jennifer had another strong practice. She was looking like she was at this event with a mission to complete.

Friday was Jennifer's Final Round. As you know, she had an excellent skate and brought home the National title. Jennifer was able to keep her nerves in check, skate with even better speed and confidence than in her qualifying round. Even a bobble on her camel spin combination did not keep her from distinguishing herself from the rest of the field. Very well done, a very well deserved win for Jennifer.

Marcelino had his second practice session on Friday. Once again it was the "Men in Black" plus Stephanie in fuchsia. Again, Marcelino had an excellent practice.

That evening the skaters with spouses (sans coach) decided it was a fitting time to see "Blades of Glory". We all agreed it was probably the worst movie we had ever seen despite finding it hilarious. After the movie we gathered at yet another excellent Asian restaurant for more excellent food and a great bit of chitchat.

Saturday was the final day of this event with Marcelino's competitive event at noon. Jennifer and Aaron were able to come to the rink and wish Marcelino good luck after his official warm-up, but couldn't stay to see him compete. As Marcelino was coming off the ice after his warm-up the guy right behind him said "Wow! I am not the tallest one out here!" Marcelino and fellow skater went back to back to prove the truth of that statement. After a good long look Kevin announced, "Nope, you're still the tallest. You have hair."

Let it be known Marcelino had only been in ONE competition before skating at Nationals and that was TWO years before Nationals. Despite this Marcelino had a great skate in his Final Round. He skated clean with only a minor bobble on his Flip landing. This was the first time he had done the Flip in competition and had only added the jump to his program the week before. Marcelino finished 7th with one 2nd place ordinal and a 5th place ordinal. The Bronze Men's IV group was a tough group and Marcelino did more than hold his own. He came away from this event with quite a bit of experience and clear goals for his coming year. Kudos to Marcelino for his first, most well done, Nationals.

For me this year was about recovery, participation, and unexpected events. Earlier in the week I was asked, quite out of the blue, if I would like to be a USFSA Adult Committee member. I accepted almost at once. I am now part of the opinion and decision group directing where adult skating may, or may not, be heading. If you have opinions or concerns about the USFSA adult test structure and competition structure TALK TO ME! I am able to take your issues to the USFSA Adult Committee. If you don't speak to me you will have no voice in the directions adult skating may take. For the Minutes of the USFSA Adult Committee meeting held at Nationals go to the "Adult Skating" page on the AFSC web site (www.abqfsc.org).

As a USFSA Adult Skating Ambassador (ASA) I was also asked to be part of the "Press Team" covering the Championship events on Saturday afternoon and evening. My job was to be the backstage photographer during the Men's and Ladies Championship Gold and Championship Masters Free Skate events as well as take Podium pictures of the Champions. What an experience this job turned out to be. I had never done anything like this before so it was a huge learning experience. 99.8% of the skaters in the Championship rounds were gracious, accommodating, and kind people. I enjoyed being the backstage photographer very much and hope I will have the opportunity to do this again. The photos I took are up on the USFSA website under "Results and Photos", backstage photos, pages 5 and 6, for Adult Nationals.

It was great for me to have Jennifer and Marcelino along as teammates this year. I can't think of people more positive and kind to cheer on and cheer me on. They are great friends and represented AFSC extremely well. Jim and Aaron are the best husbands Jennifer and I could hope for when it comes to support, encouragement, and above all, incredible tolerance for all things skating ad nauseam.

I have come back to Albuquerque motivated to be competitive next year if my knee allows for this. I hope it does because Jennifer stole my thunder with her championship win! Good for her and more motivation for me. If my knee ends up bringing my ability to be competitive to a halt, I have found other ways to stay involved in adult skating that are very rewarding.

Jennifer, Marcelino, and I all have plans to head for the 2008 Adult Nationals in Lake Placid. Lake Placid is a magical place of beauty, skating history, and the home of the 1932 and 1980 Olympics. Nothing beats competing in the 1980 Olympic arena! We are also hoping to increase the AFSC Adult National Team to 5 or 6 skaters. This is a very exciting prospect and I look forward to another fantastic National competition for AFSC.