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News

Rippon says Toronto's the ticket

Skater feels comfortable with new coach north of the border

By Lynn Rutherford, special to icenetwork.com

(01/22/2009) - Training at Toronto's Cricket Skating & Curling Club under Brian Orser is doing **Adam Rippon** a world of good.

As he tells it, he's fit, rested and ready to compete here in Cleveland, with re-tooled programs and a whole new mindset.

"[The club] has such a positive atmosphere," the 19-year-old said after this morning's practice. "I've got a big support team behind me."

Support was something the skater found lacking in Nikolai Morozov's camp in Hackensack, N.J.

The sought-after coach and choreographer had so many pupils -- including 2007 ladies world champion **Miki Ando**, Japanese men's champion **Nobunari Oda** and former ladies world medalist **Fumie Suguri** -- the place felt a bit like a factory. After a fifth-place finish at **Cup of Russia** in November, Rippon packed his bags.

"Nikolai has a lot of different skaters, and he really didn't have enough time for me," he said. "He wanted me to skate by myself, and then the week before an event, he'd come and take a look."

In fairness, Morozov -- who created Olympic-winning programs for **Alexei Yagudin** and Shizuka Arakawa -- took the skater, who placed sixth at the 2007 U.S. juniors, to the 2008 world junior title in a span of little more than a year.

Still, according to Rippon, he often had to take matters into his own hands.

"When Nikolai didn't really have enough time, I just kind of put my programs together myself this season," he said. "I used bits and pieces of last season's programs. When I got to Toronto, David [Wilson] just said, 'Lets take a look at things; let's make sure everything fits and you're comfortable.'"

Rippon has returned to his short from last season, set to Bach's "Toccatina and Fugue in D minor," and is sticking with a medley including "Send in the Clowns" for his long. Wilson, famous for his work with world champion **Jeffrey Buttle** and many other top skaters, smoothed off the rough edges.

"He really helps me and kind of challenges me," Rippon said. "I felt really down after leaving Nikolai, and he's helped turn my mind around. He helped me understand the music a little more by creating a story. That can help anybody interpret music."

Rippon, whose triple Axel is his weakest jump, is also in the right place for help with that all-important element. In his competitive heyday in the 1980s, Orser was known as "Mr. Triple Axel" and was widely credited with making the maneuver standard fare among senior men.

"He's been really helpful," Rippon said. "At first, it was a little odd. Every [Axel] I would do, he'd analyze and watch on video. It's still a new jump for me, but I feel more comfortable with it."

Orser also coaches **Yu-Na Kim**, and she and Rippon skate two sessions a day together. The two-time Olympic silver medalist is not in Cleveland this week; he's fulfilling a commitment to take a group of his adult students to Ottawa's Rideau Canal Skateway.



(Sarah S. Brannen)

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Orser's stead.

Since the Scranton-born Rippon's family home is six hours driving distance from Toronto, he's bunking with a skating family and already feels like part of the brood. There are four children, all active in sports -- a horse rider, a hockey player and two figure skaters.

"My mom calls the lady I'm staying with my surrogate Canadian mother," he said. "She's just an incredible woman, and her husband is so nice. Plus, all of the older members of the club have kind of adopted me."

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