

2011 Jimmy Disbrow Award Winner

To: Jimmy Disbrow Award Committee

From: Merry Neitlich, John Nicks, Jan Serafine, John Baldwin, Megan Faulkner, Andrew Gonzales, and Lisa Pereslete

Re: The Jimmy Disbrow Award

As I read the description about Jimmy's zest for life and how he always created smiles and enthusiasm wherever he went I couldn't help but think of my coach and choreographer, Phillip Mills. Phillip is an internationally renowned choreographer and coach to over 17 world champion competitors, 4 Olympic competitors as well as 17 U.S. National Champions. He has choreographed programs for the likes of Michelle Kwan, Sasha Cohen, Ashley Wagner and John Baldwin and Rena Inoue.

But that is not the reason I feel compelled to nominate Phillip. You would have to come to the Aliso Viejo Ice Palace in California to get to know the real Phillip Mills. You know, the one who arrives at the rink every morning at 5:00 AM with the smile radiating on his face. Phillip is the coach that puts as much energy and warmth into his coaching for his pre-preliminary skaters as he does his elite competitors. He greets every skater on the rink by name every day. He has nicknames for most of his students which he uses to lighten the mood and call them to lessons. Some of these names include the Countess and the Contessa. Me? He calls me the Grand Dam – for age-obvious reasons!

Every student Phillip works with cannot wait for their lessons with him. His enthusiasm is contagious – the parents all love him too. Phillip encourages every student to the max but is not overly solicitous. He draws on his deep love of the sport and his unending adage that every student can "get it." He knows when to tease in a loving way and when to be tough. Mostly though, he is a beam of encouraging light that shines mightily on every one of his students in the rink.

Phillip can be traveling the globe with his elite skaters at competitions but the instant his feet hit the ground back home he is back at the rink ready with that warmth and support for each of his students.

Several months ago one of our Novice men skaters accidentally bumped into a small girl knocking her down and falling on her. Ouch! This young girl was not one of Phillip's students but that didn't stop him from sitting with her for 45-minutes performing first aid on her potentially broken arm. Mostly though he smiled at her, soothed her and calmed her down. Phillip has chosen to stay on top of his first aid training and lends it whenever it may be needed – anywhere, anytime.

A little over 26 years ago Phillip was a professional dancer. He has a most unorthodox history transitioning into a professional skating choreographer. He literally taught himself to skate over a period of time during the same timeframe that he was choreographing programs for high-level skaters. (He thought it might speed up the process if he skated on the ice with his students!) He is an accomplished skater and has some of the smoothest moves in the building!

Phillip continues to give back to figure skating as a faculty member for Team USA Camps, USFS Coaches College, and numerous USFS Judges Schools. His constant devotion to our sport to help take it and his students to the next level is commendable. His warmth, compassion and love of coaching personify the essence of Jimmy Disbrow.

It is with great enthusiasm and confidence that I nominate Phillip Mills for this prestigious award.