

A Father's Example



Last week, I was struck by the brilliance of American speedskater Apollo Ohno's daring tactics and last-minute heroics at the Winter Olympics' short-track speed skating events. I was even more in awe of NBC's "human interest" story on Apollo and his father. It went something like this:

Apollo was raised by his single father Yuki in Seattle. As a young speedskater, he excelled in his sport despite skipping out on training from time-to-time without the knowledge of his father. He and his father lived the crazy life of a skating family, so similar to that of many swimming families - up in the morning for practices, entire weekends spent at meets, much of the family time devoted to the sport. Apollo eventually became an elite athlete by 1998, but finished dead last at the Olympic Trials. "He could tell that I didn't give my best effort, that I gave up, and it crushed him," says a more mature Apollo now. When they returned home, Yuki took him to a remote oceanside cabin and **DROPPED HIM OFF**, saying "you need to decide what you want to do with your life." Heavy stuff for a teenager! Young Apollo sat in that cabin and thought, and finally **EIGHT DAYS LATER**, called his father and said, "this is what I want to do, I want to skate." Ohno has since become one of the most decorated Winter Olympians in history, by his own admission largely due to the path he has chosen since that day.

Hearing that story, part of me thinks Yuki must have been crazy to drop his son off and not go check on him for eight days. The lesson here is not in the details, but that Apollo's father asked him to make a commitment. After his son's last-place finish, it would have been easy for him to say, "You've reached a high level, and you did your best," even when it clearly wasn't the case. Instead, he asked his son to make a commitment, and backed it up with an equal commitment on his part. What a terrific example to sports parents everywhere who might struggle to get up early to drive their kids to morning practice, or who question whether their child needs to attend **ANOTHER** competition. Maybe the kid will become an Olympian, maybe he won't. But by encouraging

him to make and keep a commitment and making the same one yourself, you are teaching your child a valuable lifelong lesson that won't be undone.