

2008 World Junior Championships - 1st
 2008 U.S. Figure Skating Championships, Junior - 1st
 2007 Junior Grand Prix Final - 1st
 2007 Junior Grand Prix (Bulgaria) - 2nd
 2007 Junior Grand Prix (Romania) - 1st
 2007 State Farm U.S. Championships, Junior - 6th
 2007 Eastern Sectional, Junior - 1st

2007 South Atlantic Regional, Junior - 1st
 2006 State Farm U.S. Championships, Junior - 11th
 2006 Eastern Sectional, Junior - 3rd
 2005 Junior Grand Prix (Croatia) - 6th
 2005 Triglav Trophy, Junior - 1st
 2005 State Farm U.S. Championships, Novice - 2nd
 2005 Eastern Sectional, Novice - 1st

2005 South Atlantic Regional, Novice - 4th
 2004 U.S. Junior Championships, Intermediate - 6th
 2004 South Atlantic Regional, Intermediate - 4th
 2003 U.S. Junior Championships, Juvenile - 7th
 2003 South Atlantic Regional, Juvenile - 4th

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

RIPPON MAKING MOST OF CAREER CHANGES

BY AMY ROSEWATER

So much in skating comes down to timing, whether it's how you prepare for the take-off of a jump or whether you are getting just the right footwork sequence in order.

In the case of a young skater named Adam Rippon, it's all been about timing.

At the end of the 2006-07 season, Rippon really didn't know where his skating career was heading. He had spent the previous seven years training with Yelena Sergeeva and had been scattering his practices around five different rinks in Philadelphia.

Although he was considered a promising skater, having finished second at the U.S. Championships in 2005 in the novice division, he hadn't seemed able to reach the same success at the junior level. In 2006, he placed 11th at the U.S. Championships and was sixth in 2007. Afterward, he split from his coach.

In search of a new direction, Rippon found himself driving a couple hours from his home in Clarks Summit, Pa., to train in Hackensack, N.J. There, he skated a handful of sessions on his own when someone asked him where his coach was.

"I explained that I was working all alone," said Rippon, now

18. "Thirty minutes later, someone said there was a coach who was interested in talking to me. It turned out to be Nikoli Morozov."

Talk about timing.

Morozov has emerged as one of the top coaches and choreographers in the world, having guided Canadian ice dancers Shae-Lynn Bourne and Viktor Kraatz to a World title in 2003 and coached the likes of Olympic gold medalist Shizuka Arakawa, World champion Miki Ando and World silver medalist Daisuke Takahashi.

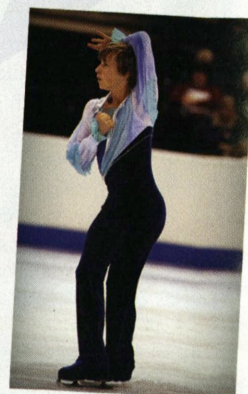
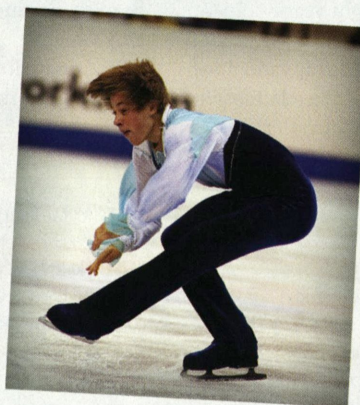
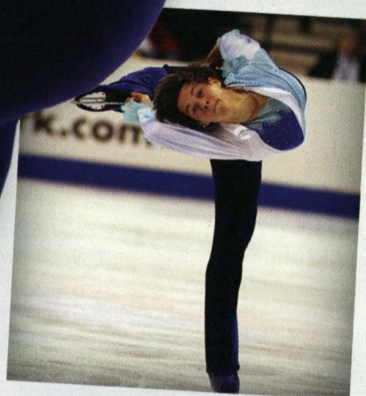
So Rippon was understandably impressed when a coach of Morozov's stature took notice.

"I knew that I wasn't a horrible skater but when I look at it in hindsight, I still am amazed," Rippon said.

Rippon called meeting Morozov a "life-defining moment."

Here's why: In one year's time, the partnership of Rippon and Morozov has not only succeeded, it has flourished. Rippon won nearly every event he entered, beginning with the Liberty Summer Competition in Philadelphia last July and ending with the World Junior crown in March.

In between, Rippon captured the ISU Junior Grand Prix title and became the U.S. junior champion. The only blemish on his otherwise perfect record was a silver-medal performance at the Junior Grand Prix in Bulgaria.



"I think it has been a match made in heaven," said Craig Maurizi, director of figure skating at Hackensack, of Rippon working with Morozov. "Nikoli just turned on a light switch inside of him."

What also made a huge difference for Rippon has been training at one facility every day. Rippon, who was born in Scranton, Pa., (yes, he's a big fan of NBC's "The Office," which takes place there) had been making two-hour commutes to rinks in the Philadelphia area. So when he looked for a new training home, he figured, why not try going two hours in a new direction?

The move meant he would be living on his own for the first time. In previous years, he had lived with his former coach or another family to help with the commute. But when he relocated to Hackensack, he was in an apartment for the first time. Making the adjustment to adulthood hasn't been so tough, however.

"I'm an old pro," Rippon said. "I'm the oldest (of six children), and ever since I was 7 or 8, I did my own laundry and I can even cook a bit."

He hasn't been able to take much advantage of living close to New York City, since most of his time is spent at the rink or traveling abroad for competitions. He also is trying to graduate high school. He was home-schooled but now is finishing his senior year by taking online courses.

Of course, the main reason he is in Hackensack is for the skating. The primary benefit of being there is that he has been surrounded by some of the best skaters in the world, such as Ando and Takahashi. When Rippon first arrived, he wasn't so sure he belonged on their practice sessions. Soon, however, he found that he had every right to share their ice.

"We call those sessions our elite sessions, and Adam is elite," said Maurizi, who has worked with many elite skaters in his career, including 1998 Olympic champion Tara Lipinski.

"It's a really inspiring rink to be at," Rippon said. "I would watch Miki and Daisuke before they went to Worlds in Tokyo in 2007, and I would see how they would train. I knew I would have to work even harder because they were already successful."

Off the ice, the skaters began to socialize



Adam Rippon won the U.S. junior and World Junior titles last season.

as well. Rippon, who moved into an apartment about a 20-minute walk from the rink, is living with three other skaters. Many other skaters who train at Hackensack live on the same street.

When Morozov created Takahashi's dynamic short program to a techno version of "Swan Lake," he suggested that the Japanese skater take hip-hop dance lessons in Manhattan. Soon, Rippon and other skaters were joining him.

"It's been a great stress reliever from skating," Rippon said.

What the classes have also done is help Rippon understand body movement better. Since working with Morozov, who is noted for his clever footwork, Rippon said he has improved his skating style and his understanding of choreography.

"He's really helped me figure out how my body works," Rippon said. "Before I was working with Nikoli, I didn't realize how important it was to skate to the music. Before, it was nice to watch, but not really inspiring to watch."

"That's why I really admire Michelle Kwan a lot. She could skate to any music and people would get goose bumps. She would skate louder than her music."

His short program was to music by Bach, and his free skate was to Beethoven. He has not yet selected music for the 2008-09 season, but he and Morozov have already started crafting new step sequences. They have tested some with various CDs that Morozov has brought to the rink.

"The steps are the easy part," Rippon said. "The hard part is getting the emotion and body movement together to create a picture on the ice. Making the footwork look easy is hard."

"Even when Nikoli is half doing the steps, he's still 100 percent into the emotion."

Interestingly, Rippon got his start in skating because his mother is a dancer and gymnastics choreographer. She took him to the rink when he was about 7 when she was trying to craft a skating routine for the sister of one of her gymnasts. Rippon didn't take to skating at first, but she persisted, and by the time he was 10, he began to take lessons.

Now, skating is an integral part of his life.

In addition to working with Rippon on his choreography, Morozov also helped transform Rippon into a more consistent skater. One exercise that Morozov tried with Rippon happened on a Saturday. Typically, Rippon has the weekends off, but when Morozov called him to a Saturday practice, Rippon couldn't say no.

"All of a sudden, he looks at the clock and says, 'OK, it's 12 o'clock right now, and at 12:06, I want you to do your long program,'" Morozov said. "When I was done, he said, 'OK, let's do it again.' It's like unexpected pressure, but it really worked."

Now that Rippon has bolstered his confidence and improved his artistic style, he is concentrating on increasing the technical difficulty of his jumps. He knows that since he is making the transition to the senior level, triple Axels, triple-triples and perhaps a quad will be necessary in order to compete against the likes of Takahashi, Nobunari Oda (who recently relocated to Hackensack to work with Morozov), World champion Jeff Buttle, Brian Joubert, and the top Americans, Evan Lysacek and Johnny Weir.

Rippon said he's hoping to include one or two triple Axels in his free skate at the beginning of the season and possibly add a quad toward the end. The first competition he plans to do will be a small event at Hackensack in August.

"Of course, I'm a little bit nervous," Rippon said. "But I'm more excited because I feel like I'm ready. I really feel like I can go and skate my best and be one of them."

And he hopes his timing will be just right. ■

