



Adult Beginner to Champion: Taylor Unger's Inspiring Skate Story

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
April 1 2024 2:26 PM

TROY - Troy's Taylor Unger is a story that would inspire any skater - young or old.

The 31-year-old skating star didn't begin her quest on ice until she was age 27. Over the course of those four years, she has developed into a high-level competitive skater.

Recently she finished seventh overall in the 2024 Midwestern Adult Sectional FS Championships in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Her qualifying event was the Championship Adult Silver Women's Free Skate competition. She also captured two achievement awards.

Taylor grew up often watching figure skating with her mother on television and fell in love with the sport. Some of her heroes back in that time were famed skaters Tara Lipinski and Johnny Weir.

Four years ago, she decided to pursue her long-time dream to take up figure skating. Unfortunately right after she started, COVID-19 happened and it slowed her down for a brief period, but it did not stop her. Since COVID-19 diminished, Taylor has been on fire with her development in the competitive circles of figure skating.

Taylor's coach Bailey Manuel of Springfield has also been a key figure in her development as a skater, along with several other area skaters. Manuel has become a huge name as a coach, much like her competitive days as a skater.

Taylor's husband, Dr. Drew Unger, an optometrist, and the Unger family, own Unger Eye Care in Troy and Edwardsville. Taylor said her husband's family and her mother and father have also been extremely supportive of her skating quest. Dr. Thomas Unger and Dr. Alice Unger are the other two in the Unger practice with Dr. Drew Unger.

Believe it or not, Taylor said she wasn't overly athletic while attending Triad High School, although she laughed, "I was always very flexible."

The Troy skating sensation said her beginning was fairly simple: "I started following skaters on social media and I thought I would try to learn a bit of skills," she said. "I thought I didn't want to miss out on this opportunity in my life. I really loved watching skating.

"I loved the athleticism and the technicality of skating and how exact and under control you need to be on the ice. I also loved how your personality ties into the musicality and interpretation of a piece. I signed up for my first adult classes in January 2020, then COVID shut down classes and I didn't skate for about three months."

A Ukraine hockey player started Taylor's conversion to skating at the McKendree Metro Rec Plex and eventually, she found her well-known coach and the R.P. Lumber Center Ice Rink. She said she absolutely loves the new skate facility in Edwardsville and is part of a group that is learning skills there with the River's Edge Figure Skating Club. Taylor also coaches with the club at R.P. Lumber Center Ice Rink. She hopes when she stops her competitive skating career, she will become a top-level coach. Taylor is extremely patient and cheerful with the young skaters and it is obvious to any outside observer they all thrive on her guidance.

She said she hated every single second when she was shut down from training for three months during COVID-19.

"My skates were sitting in a room and I kept staring at them," she said. "I wanted so much to get back on the ice. I was ecstatic when they started group classes again."

Taylor said she was practicing on Christmas Eve in 2020 at a rink and her coach sent her a text message and asked if she had ever thought about competing. One thing led to another and Taylor did her first competition in 2021 with a mask during COVID-19.

"This was really brand new to me and I didn't know adults at my level could compete, but I did my first competition in April 2021. My first competition was as an adult beginner."

Taylor continued to escalate up the competitive levels and now stands in the Adult Silver category. She is working on Adult Gold tests and hopes to pass upward to that category this year. She also sincerely wants to qualify for nationals.

Today, Taylor trains six days a week and also participates in weekly ballet sessions as part of her training with time on the ice. Before she arrives at the R.P. Lumber Center

Ice Rink, she spends 30 minutes stretching with a cup of coffee at home and also incorporates some yoga moves, so that when she arrives she can immediately hit the ice.

Taylor said her accomplishments come simply from a feat of determination and a kind of mania over skating, with excellent coaching and a very supportive family for her dream.

The 31-year-old Troy skater is a definite inspiration to all those she competes with, coaches, and everyone around her. With her determination and commitment to excellence, anything is possible for Taylor Unger in the future on the ice and beyond.

(Photos at Silver Women's Free Skate Championships are courtesy of M. Felty Photography.)