Fitz-Steven’s *Description of London*, published in 1180, in which the following words occur:—

“ When the great fenne or moore (which watereth the walls of the citie on the North side) is frozen, many young men play on the yce . . . asome tye bones to their feete and under their heeles, and shoving themselves with a little picked staffe do slide as swiftlie as a birde flyeth in the aire or an arrow out of a cross-bow.”

At what period the use of metal runners was introduced is unknown, but it was possibly not long after the introduction into northern Europe, in the 3rd century after Christ, of the art of working in iron. By the time of Charles II. skating had become popular, with the aristocracy as well as with the people, as is proved by entries in the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn.

Skating does not appear to have been known in America before its colonization by Europeans, though bone slides were used to a limited extent by certain Eskimo tribes.

The modern skate is in the form of a steel blade mounted upon a wood or metal base. In the old-fashioned skate the wooden base was strapped to the boot and kept firm by low spikes or screws that entered the sole. The next step in development was the “ club-skate,” originally Canadian, a patent appliance adjusted by damps to fit the sole. There are several varieties of club-skates still popular. They have a broad blade with slightly curved edge, and are more suitable for figure-skating than for speed. The best skaters now use skates fixed permanently to special skating-boots.

As in ancient times, skating is most practised by the Scandi­navians, Finns, Dutch and British, to whom in modern days have been added the Germans, Swiss, Austrians, and especially the Canadians and Americans. All these nations have central organizations which control skating, the British, founded in 1879, being the National Skating Association. The American, founded in 1884, is also called the National, Skating Association, and generally co-operates with the Canadian Amatour Skating Association, founded in 1888.

*Speed Skating.—*Of the earliest skating races no records have been kept. That racing was a popular pastime in Holland two centuries and longer ago is proved by the numerous paintings of the time depicting racing scenes. In England the first skating match recorded was that in which Youngs of Mepal beat Thomson of Wimblingdon, both men of the Fens, in the year 1814. The Fen country has remained the chief English home of skating, owing to the abundance of ice in that district, and most British champions have been Fensmen, notably the Smarts of Wclney. In January 1823 the *Sporting Magazine* recorded the first amateur match, which was between teams of six gentlemen from March and Chatteris, Mr Drake of Chatteris finishing first. In the same year a match took place for a silver bowl on the Maze Lake, Hertfordshire, over a course 5 m. long, the winner being Mr Blenkinsop. Racing, more or less intermittent, continued annually, the Fen skaters generally triumphing. In 1854 appeared the celebrated William (“ Turkey ”) Smart, who, after defeating Larmen Register in that year, remained champion for more than a decade. His nephew George (“ Fish” ) Smart won the championship in 1878 and held it until 1889, only to relinquish it to his younger brother James. The first amateur championship of England was held in 1880 at Hendon, and was won by Mr F. Norman, a Fen skater.

Owing to the great area of Canada and the northern United States, and the long and cold winter, the sport of skating is indulged in to a greater extent in North America than anywhere else, and local matches have been held for years in many places. Owing to the reputation of Charles June, who was considered to be the best American skater from 1838 for many years, his place of residence, Newburgh, N.Y., on the Hudson river, became the headquarters of American speed skating. This city also is the birthplace of the Donoghue family, who may be called the Smarts of America. The most noted members of this family were Mr T. Donoghue and his two sons, Tim and J. F. Donoghue, each in his day the fastest skater in the world, Joseph Donoghue winning every event at the international championship meeting at Amsterdam in 1891. There is practically no professional skating in America.

Skating received a great impetus during the last decade of the 19th century, profiting both by the growing devotion of athletics and by increased facilities of communication, which led to inter­national competitions and the institutions of skating clubs in Switzerland and elsewhere, especially those of Davos, St Moritz and Grindelwald, where ice is available every winter. Although skating instruments are so simple, the evolution of the skate has advanced considerably, contributing to marked improvement in the skater’s skill. In speed-skating an epoch was marked, first, by the almost universal adoption of the Norwegian type of racing skate; and, secondly, by the institution in 1892, at an inter­national congress held in Holland, of annual races for the cham­pionships of Europe and of the world.

The Norwegian skate, introduced and perfected (1887-1902) by Axel Paulsen and Harald Ηagen, is constructed with a view to lightness, strength, and diminution of friction. The blade, of specially hardened steel, is set in a hollow horizontal tube of aluminium, and connected by similar vertical tubes with foot­plates riveted to a closely-fitting boot with thin leather sole. It is 16-17¾ in. long and ⅜-2 millimetres thick *(i.e.* ∙019-∙078 in.), the average employed for hard ice being ¾ mm., often thinner towards the heel. This thickness is suitable for hard ice, but for softer ice 1/16 or 3/32 in. is preferable. The blade is flat on the ice throughout, except for an inch in front; this flatness distributes the weight, and with the extreme thinness of blade reduces friction to a minimum. The edges are right-angled and sharp.

The skater’s style has been modified. The blade, when planted on the ice with weight upon it, describes a nearly straight line, the last few feet only curving slightly outwards as the skate leaves the ice. Hence the stroke of the best modern skaters is almost, if not entirely, on the inside edge, a gain in directness and speed, the outside edge being used for curves only. The length of stroke has tended to diminish. Contrasted with the 12-18 yards’ stroke attributed to the old English champion, W. “Turkey” Smart, which was partly on the outside edge, the modern racing stroke rarely exceeds 10 yds., and is usually nearer 6 or 7. Particular instances vary with conditions of ice, &c., but at St Petersburg, in 1896, Eden’s stroke in the 10,000 metre race averaged about 7½ yds., that of P. Oestlund at Davos, in 1900, the same (for one lap, 8 yds.). J. F. Donoghue’s stride in 1891 was computed at about 6 yds. The general effect has been vastly increased speed, and a conjoint cause is the stricter training under­gone before important races.

The races held annually since 1892-1893 for the championships of Europe and of the world, under the auspices of the International Skating Union, have assembled representatives from the skating countries of Europe and from America.

The races are four in number, over distances of 500, 1500, 5000 and 10,000 metres, and to obtain the title of champion a skater must win three races and finish in the fourth. In addition, each country, when possible, holds its own championship races.

In England races are still skated, with rare exceptions, on straight courses, with a sharp turn round a post or barrel, the distance prescribed for N.S.A. championships being 1½ m. with three turns. The Continental and international system involves a course with straight sides and curved ends of such a radius that no slackening of speed is necessary. In both instances the competitors race two at a time on a double track, and the time test is used. Each skater must keep his own course, to prevent either from using the other as pace­maker or wind-shield. The international regulations (*Eiswettlauf-Ordnung)* prescribe that, if a single track be used, the hindmost skater must keep at a minimum distance of 5 metres from the other, on pain of disqualification. The advantage of inner curve on a Continental course is given alternately, and a space left open between the tracks at one point for the skaters to cross.

The curves are skated with a step-over-step action, and the direc­tion is always from right to left. Hence, on entering the curve the right foot is brought across in front and set down on the inside edge, the left passing behind on the outside edge, and being in its turn set down on an outside edge in front. The strokes thus form a series of tangents to the curve, and are little shorter than in the straight. With a radius of 25 and 30 metres, as at Davos, the curves can be skated with safety at full speed.

The following are the amateur speed records at the principal distances :

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Distance. | m. s. | Name. | Nationality. |
| 500 metres (546 yds.) 1,000 (1093 yds.)  1,500 (1639 yds.)  5,000 ,, (3 m. 188 yds.)  10,000 ,, (6 m. 376 yds.) | 44 4/5  1 34  2 22 3/5  8 37 3/5  17 50 3/5 | R. Gundersen P. Oestlund P. Oestlund J. Eden  P. Oestlund | Norway  Holland  Norway |