



# Alumni Corner: Byron Darden

By Erique L'Heureux



Byron Darden is a former Club skater and coach, who has transitioned his coaching from skaters to C-Suite-level executives and other high-potential leaders at Fortune 500 companies. He also works within those companies to bring about long-lasting, organizational change that every employee can get on board with. In short, Byron is a people person. The CHIPS newsletter staff was lucky enough to catch up with Byron, and hear about how he got to where he is today.

Byron was originally inspired to skate after seeing his first rendition of Ice Capades. From that moment on, Byron, a natural performer, wanted to be a principal skater in the show. He would go on to achieve that goal, and setting his sights even higher, he secretly aspired to be an Olympic-level coach.

As a young man, Byron worked with Harry Bennett, who himself had been a skater in Ice Capades. Then he moved to Colorado Springs, CO and was coached by Christine Krall & Jack Raffloer. While Christine was instructing Byron on free skating and figures, she was also instructing Byron on the methodology behind her coaching and exactly why they learned things the way they did. This laid the groundwork for Byron's eventual start as a coach. While he never reached super star heights in his solo-skating career, aside from his 1998 Pairs champion win with partner Beth Duxbury at The 1998 American Open Professional Figure Skating Championships, he did achieve his goal of skating in Ice Capades as a principal performer.

After Byron left Ice Capades, he moved to Massachusetts and began coaching on the South Shore at the Pilgrim Skating Club. It wasn't long before a former World Ice Dance competitor turned coach from The Skating Club of Boston, Sydney Foster Arnold, asked Byron to come to Pembroke, MA and work on choreography with her skaters. A few years later he started at the Club, Byron had his defining moment as a skating coach. A Club member, Shepherd Clark, approached Byron and told him about his goal of making the U.S. Olympic team and asked if Byron would help him get there. As a part of Clark's coaching team, Byron helped him reach Nationals in Philadelphia, followed by Clark being chosen as a member of the the U.S. Olympic team. By helping Clark reach his goal, Byron had also reached his goal of becoming an Olympic-level coach, even if he hadn't quite realized it yet. His achievement finally sunk in after he ended up on the mailing list for an Olympic coaching magazine. He even called the magazine's headquarters to make sure they had the right guy. "That's how I found out," he said.

When he was not on the ice, Byron was a performer on the stage as well. An actor since his first school play in the second grade, Byron started focusing on his acting after high school. His father was a drummer and jazz musician turned Federal Prosecutor, so a career in the arts seemed natural to him as well as his stint as a U.S. Figure Skating Judge. His first break came by accident, when he went to an audition purely to support a friend. His friend begged and pleaded the naturally-confident Byron to perform a tap dance number alongside them on the stage. Having never had any experience tap dancing, Byron followed his mother's sage advice: "Fake it 'til you make it!" His impromptu audition was good enough to land him a role as Richie Walters in A Chorus Line. His performance in that was then good enough to catch the attention of former New York actress, Jane Staab, Director of the Wheelock Family Theater and a big name in the theater community. Byron was still reluctant to put himself out there in the acting world, but Staab wouldn't take no for an answer. Her overwhelming support of Byron's talent was enough to encourage him to take an audition for her performance of Fiddler on the Roof. He was cast and once again exceeded his own expectations. For his efforts Byron was praised in the review of the show and received his Actor's Equity Card.