

# Ask the Expert:

## Pro Motion Pole Harness Expert Nick Perna

<http://icemom.net/2010/04/ask-the-expert-pro-motion-pole-harness-expert-nick-perna.html>



**Note from Ice Mom:** Master PSA rated and World and National USFS coach Nick Perna is my guest expert today. He has trained many high-level figure skaters like Olympic Gold Medalists Sarah Hughes and Evan Lysacek using the [Pro Motion Pole Harness](#). ([Click here to read the article about Sarah Hughes on the pole harness.](#)) Nick is also one of the instructors with Audrey Weisiger’s Grassroots to Champions figure skating seminars. ([Click here to read more about the Grassroots to Champions seminars and find the 2010 seminar schedule.](#))

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Hello. My name is Nick Perna and I am a PSA Master Rated instructor and a US Figure Skating National and World Team Coach. I have been teaching skating for almost thirty years.

I am a former pairs skater who has carved out a niche in the sport with a unique training device...the [Pro-Motion Hand-held Jump Harness](#) – which has earned me the moniker, “The Fishing Pole Guy.” In fact, I have been using the pole harness so often, for so long, that almost everyone in the skating industry thinks that I AM THE INVENTOR OF IT!

The truth is...I did NOT invent the “pole harness.” That, in itself, is an interesting story.

I used to teach Axels to little kids by using their sweatshirts as a sort of “harness.” I would pull the back of the shirt above their head and use it to, essentially, “lift them up by the scruff of the neck.” This allowed them to complete the rotation for an Axel easily and with less chance of injury. They also found it quite fun!

After doing this for some time, I got the idea to design and make a “hand-held” harness that looked like an adjustable vest, attached to a cable, that swiveled around on the end of a suitcase handle!

Now, (here comes the incredible part)...I had just started to construct a prototype of this “hand-held harness” in my basement workshop when I took a break and went upstairs to get the mail and eat lunch. When I opened up the mailbox, there was an issue of *Skating* magazine. I started to flip through the magazine and there, right in front of me, was an advertisement for a HAND-HELD HARNESS!!

I stood there in total amazement...it had already been invented!

The inventor was a Canadian, male coach, by the name of Jan Glerup.

I immediately thought, “Well, I might as well just go ahead and buy one of these!”

I purchased one right away, and used it in the rink on many different “guinea pig.”

The athletes that initially wore it told me that they felt like a fish, a dog or a puppet!

It took quite some time to figure out how to track the skater correctly and to time the jumps properly, but it most certainly DID WORK and the students benefited from it greatly.

I have been using the pole harness now for over twenty years(!) and have worked closely with the inventor on many cosmetic changes, safety modifications, and specialized handling issues to improve the use of this teaching tool.

I have had the privilege of coaching many of the top skaters in the world while they were on the pole harness including Sasha Cohen, (she even included me in her book!) [Sarah Hughes](#), Emily Hughes, Michael Weiss (he was one of the first “guinea pigs”!) Evan Lysacek, Johnny Weir, Elena and Anton (the first to do throw quad Salchows and throw quad loops on the pole!) Kyoko Ina and John Zimmerman and many, many others!

In fact, one of my colleagues recently pointed out to me that there was probably no other single piece of equipment in ALL OF SPORTS that has been used to help train as many champions as the original pole harness that I have! Pretty cool, huh?



Now, one of the advantages that the pole has over a traditional “track harness” system is that the skater can skate across the entire rink and use their own preferred set-up, or even their program entrance, for the jump they are working on. They are not “tied-down” to doing the jump “on a line” at one end of the rink. They can also skate full-out and enter the jump with as much speed as they need or want. Another advantage is that the pole harness does NOT allow a coach to lift a student and basically HANG them up in the air like you sometimes see people doing with the track system. There is no “artificial” feeling of being hoisted up into the air by the coach, as the pole does not allow for this. The skater truly feels what it is like to execute the jump on their own.

The pole harness is, most definitely, a wonderful tool to help aid the advancement of the student who is learning difficult jumps. It is NOT a “crutch” when used properly by an experienced coach. This includes knowing WHEN to put the student on the pole and when NOT to...based on their individual jump mechanics and mental preparation.

An important point I need to add here, is that the pole harness is quite difficult for most small, female coaches to use. You do not have to be a bodybuilder to use it, but it does take some upper body strength to do properly. People always find it amazing when they first see me using the pole with skaters that are taller and bigger than I am. They can’t believe that I can actually “lift” them up like that. Well...the answer is...it’s all an illusion! I’m really NOT lifting them up very much at all! I’m simply working with their own jump timing to “ASSIST” them with the height.

All in all, it is a wonderful invention that has contributed greatly to the progression of figure skating around the world.

-Nick Perna

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**Note from Ice Mom:**

Nick Perna will answer your questions, but, like many of us, he works during the day. Please be patient. He will respond to your questions in the evening.

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**First question from a reader:**

**Bethan:** *When is a good time to start using them [harnesses] (i.e. an adult who is scared of loop), can small adults use them or are they too heavy? Thanks.*

**Nick Perna:** The “ideal” time to start using the pole harness on a student is when the skater has learned the basic fundamentals of a jump and is having some difficulty in actually attempting it...i.e. they are scared, need a bit more height, are having trouble supporting themselves on the landing, or need some mental confidence.

Adults can most certainly be put on the pole, but if they are particularly large in size (height OR weight!) then it is usually not very effective.

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***Do you have a question for World- and National-level coach Nick Perna about the pole harness? About jumping? This is a great opportunity to ask questions of someone who really knows his stuff. Please write your questions in the comments!***

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