

LAURA STAMM INTERNATIONAL POWER SKATING SYSTEM

March/April, 2010

MY APPROACH TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Hockey is one of the most complex sports imaginable because it involves so many different skills, including **MOVING FORWARD AND BACKWARD ON A SLIPPERY SURFACE**. Today's elite players move almost as fast backward (and with as much agility) as they move forward. At the highest levels the game is played at astronomical speeds; players are masters of balance, agility, and maneuverability (BAM), all while balancing on a platform far thinner than a tightrope. It's obvious that little can be accomplished in today's hockey if players can't move FAST! From stop to go, from slow to fast, while cornering, turning, transitioning; when fore-checking or when back-checking, even when shooting (i.e., on the fly).

In light of the demands for speed and agility in today's hockey, I often wonder why coaches seem to minimize the importance of skating skills at the developmental levels. Skating - past, present, and future - is **SKILL NUMBER ONE!**

Many coaches and hockey instructors focus their training sessions almost exclusively on stickhandling, shooting, passing, etc. Why don't they incorporate correct skating techniques into their sessions? It doesn't make sense (to me) to focus on what to do with the hands and arms but to ignore what to do with the skates and legs. ***It is a truism that hockey players can't make great skating moves if their skates and legs don't know what to do.***

Too often I watch youngsters practice stickhandling down the ice (but skating incorrectly or inefficiently). These players may not be able to achieve their full hockey potential if their skating technique is not corrected at the developmental levels. Over the years, thousands of pro players have said to me: **"Why didn't I have the benefit of your instruction when I was a kid? How much better could I have been?"**

THE LEARNING PROGRESSION

We tend to forget that skating motions are almost the opposite of our natural movement motions (walking/running). This is probably why athletes who excel in other sports feel like ducks out of water when on the ice. It is also why hockey skating moves must be taught in a sequential, organized, step by step, bio-mechanically correct manner. This step-by-step teaching method is called Integrative Learning.

While some educators and coaches advocate "whole to part learning" (learning all the skills together) I do not. While I cannot state that I am absolutely correct, I must go by my years of teaching experience, which has taught me that most people absorb and apply information more effectively when the approach is "one step at a time". It usually is a huge (and maybe unsuccessful) effort to get all the parts to work together properly when taught **all at once**.

In my Power Skating System we follow the Integrative Learning approach. We teach each skating move one step at a time, in a logical, sequential, progression. We then incorporate all the steps into the whole (maneuver). *Note: Some maneuvers involve many, many steps!* Because we use the Integrative Learning Method, we intentionally remove the pucks (a major distraction) in the initial learning process. However, our students ALWAYS carry their hockey sticks because the sticks are an extension of the players' arms and bodies. We stress how to carry the sticks correctly for each particular maneuver, and as players get better at a maneuver, we have them try it with pucks. Initially their skating blows up. So we take the pucks away, try it again without pucks, then re-introduce pucks and try it again. Over and over, as necessary.

The progression I follow is to:

1. EXECUTE CORRECTLY. 2. CORRECTLY AND POWERFULLY. 3. CORRECTLY, POWERFULLY, & QUICKLY. 4. CORRECTLY, POWERFULLY, AND QUICKLY WITH THE PUCK, 5. CORRECTLY, POWERFULLY, QUICKLY, WITH THE PUCK, and IN GAME SITUATIONS! (Not an easy task!)

While attempting to accomplish all of this we try to keep the learning process fun, so when skating fast or when skating with the pucks we will let players mess things up. However we constantly remind them to (try to) focus on their skating. Techniques will blow up *many* times before permanent improvement takes place. This is a major challenge, but it's part of the process. Ultimately it's a challenge that *can* be met.

We know that there are naturally gifted skaters, just as there are naturally gifted stickhandlers, shooters, players! How did/do they become great players without instruction? How did/do they learn? What is their special gift/genius? Who knows? The thing to keep in mind is that naturally gifted skaters (players) are in the minority! Most must be taught **how** to execute correctly, powerfully, quickly, and then with a puck.

OVERSPEED SKATING

Since it's important to develop quickness at the early ages, "Overspeed Skating" should be an integral aspect of hockey training. Overspeed Skating requires players to use leg speeds that force them to go out of control. Eventually players adjust to the new level of speed, which makes them faster. Then the speed level is "kicked up" again, forcing players to adjust to a new and higher level of speed. It's an important and fun aspect of training. But even here correct technique should be emphasized. If youngsters keep going fast incorrectly, and falling a lot, without having an established and comprehensive mechanism for improving their techniques, will they be able to reach their goal of going **really fast**?

DRYLAND TRAINING FOR QUICKNESS

Much quickness training can be done off the ice; this will leave more ice time to spend on technique training. Some drills that can be done off-ice to train for quickness on-ice are sprint (and interval) running, lunges, Russian box jumps, speed chutes, and slideboards. Many sporting activities help develop quickness too, and at the same time kids can have fun and diversify their coordination skills. Basketball, soccer, lacrosse, sprint cycling, and track, are a few.

Jack Blatherwick, world renowned expert in the field of off-ice training, says:

"The process of becoming a complete hockey player is a multi-edged sword. Without proper technique, no amount of off-ice training will help a player optimize his or her skating. On the other hand, without a good physiological base of strength, explosiveness, and muscular endurance (in a good skating position) skating instruction will have less effect."

"If an athlete cannot get down on one leg to a good squat position, cannot explode from there, or cannot repeat it over and over without fatigue compromising the position – that athlete will never benefit (as much as possible) from skating instruction."

"However, without good skating fundamentals, no amount of strength and power will allow players to reach their optimal skating speed."



Aimee Rupp, Laura Stamm power skating student, playing for *Shattuck-St. Mary's* at 2010 US Nationals

Players need time away from the rink in the off-season to rest (physically and mentally) and to avoid burn-out. Pros always take time off in the summer to rest their bodies and minds from the long, grueling seasons that they endure. Kids should participate in varied fun sports and activities - these will keep their minds and bodies sharp, develop multiple motor skills, and strengthen multiple muscle groups.

We **strongly** advocate participation in at least one or two skill training programs (**at least one for skating and one for stickhandling**). The newly developed skills will provide players with improved performance and added confidence as they enter the **new** hockey season.

For information on all 2010 Laura Stamm Power Skating Clinics, go to www.laurastamm.com and www.laurastamm.net. For more information on the important topic covered in this tip, read LAURA STAMM'S POWER SKATING, FOURTH EDITION. The book and accompanying DVD are available online at both websites.

Skate Great Hockey!

Laura Stamm

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PS: The May/June internet tip will detail some of the Integrative Drills that we use in our Power Skating System.