

PREFACE

History and Legacy of the Laura Stamm International Power Skating System

When I was a youngster, there was no organized hockey for girls. I played on the ponds with my brothers and their friends. Ultimately, I became a competitive figure skater, then a figure skating coach. I taught at the ice rink where the New York Rangers held their daily practices. Loving hockey as I did, I spent many hours watching their practices.

The Rangers ran hockey schools at this rink each summer. In 1971, Rod Gilbert and Brad Park, the hockey school directors, asked me to teach "power skating" at the hockey school. Although I knew very little about power skating, or about technique training methods for hockey skating, I jumped at the chance. I never realized that this would be the start of the Laura Stamm International Power Skating System.

Back then, very little was known about the science (biomechanics) of hockey skating or about the importance of skating technique. Before I started to teach, I was handed a one-page document titled "Power Skating". This document included some drills such as stops and starts; skate to the blue line and back; skate forward, turn around, and skate backward, hurrying back to the starting point; and skate the circles. Nothing on the sheet of paper addressed *how* to teach players to skate correctly.

The hockey school had three groups of players. The youngest player was about eight, and the oldest was about eighteen. I watched, stunned, as these boys raced around the ice, legs churning, going nowhere fast. It was instantly apparent to me that these players needed to learn *how* to skate! I stashed the sheet of paper and started experimenting. My brain reeled with ideas - ideas derived from a lifetime of studying skating and watching hockey players skate. I knew immediately that I was doing the thing in life that I was meant to do.

In the summer of 1973 Bill Torrey, GM of the New York Islanders, phoned and asked me if I could teach a promising rookie by the name of Bob Nystrom. Bob supposedly had a lot of promise, but to make the team, he had to increase his speed. After watching him, I thought that by improving his skating technique, he could definitely become faster.

In those days, professional hockey players did not use female instructors. So to spare Bob any embarrassment, we kept our training sessions private. We worked together from 6 - 7am., five days a week, for eight weeks. Bob didn't miss a day.

After being a questionable rookie, Bob wound up with a fourteen year career in the NHL. In 1980, when the Islanders beat the Flyers in overtime in game 6 to win their first Stanley Cup, it was Bob who scored the winning goal --A crowning achievement!

In 1995, the Islanders retired Bob's Number (23). In 1991, the team inaugurated the Bob Nystrom Award, which is given to the Islander who best exemplifies leadership, hustle, and dedication.

Bob's words of praise helped to launch my career. After wanting to keep our sessions secret, Bob subsequently told the world, "without Laura, I wouldn't have made it to the NHL!" This led to jobs with several NHL and WHA teams, including the Rangers, Devils, Kings and Whalers. Well known graduates include Luc Robitaille, Steve Duchesne, Kevin Dineen, Doug Brown, Rob Niedermayer, Scott Niedermayer, Brendan Morrison, Ted Drury, Matt Carle, Brian Rafalski, and many others.

Radio and TV features followed. Then, in 1974, I was hired to teach at a summer hockey school in British Columbia. I established the school's power skating program, and I taught it for 18 summers. During that time, thousands of aspiring hockey players came through the program.

As time went on, hockey associations around the US, Canada, and Europe, hired me to teach their hockey players. Eventually, I focused on running my own power skating programs, and I developed training courses for instructors who wanted to teach my power skating system. To this day, Laura Stamm power skating programs are taught only by instructors who go through rigorous training to become certified Laura Stamm Instructors.

I didn't know it when I first started teaching, but I was teaching the European method of skating without ever having seen European hockey. What started as bits and pieces eventually developed into a true system. After all these years, this system is still the model by which all other power skating programs are measured.

My philosophy of teaching remains the backbone of my system. Each skating maneuver is taught by first breaking it down into its many parts. As the parts become integrated, we add more elements and complexity to the skill. The goal is for students to master each maneuver so that they will skate correctly, powerfully, and quickly -- with and without the puck -- in game situations. My program syllabus is structured much like a pyramid. Students first establish a strong foundation, and the training includes ever increasing subtleties as players reach the top.

Hockey skating has come so far in these 40 years. The game is played at lightning speeds. Players circle and weave, give and go. Defenders rush as if they were forwards, and forwards go back to cover for the rushing defenders. Players who can't keep up have little chance of making it at the highest levels. And every hockey school, almost every rink, offers some form of power skating instruction.

I'm teaching my second, even third, generation of players. I still can hardly believe that I jump-started the careers of hundreds -- maybe thousands -- of pro players, spawned the development of an entire industry, and was the model for and often the teacher of an entire generation of power skating instructors who follow in my footsteps.

Over the past few years, I have started to reflect on my life's work. I look back on some of the things I accomplished:

- I invented many terms that are now commonly used by most of the hockey community;

 - C-cuts, V-diamond, pivot-push-pivot-return, X-push, toe flick.

- I received testimonials from numerous players and coaches in the NHL and elsewhere

- I taught and mentored many successful hockey and figure skating instructors. Some started their own organizations after learning from me or after teaching for my organization.

- I pioneered work in the field of power skating instruction. Many instructors could not have had a career in this field had it not been for my pioneering work.

- I wrote many articles addressing hockey issues, such as violence, hazing, spring tryouts, and proper training.

- I taught many coaches who tell me they still use my power skating system with their youth players today -- years after they took my program or learned from me while assisting me on the ice.

- I taught numerous individuals who became fabulous skaters at every level -- NHL, minor league, college, and recreational players (and instructors too).

- I often volunteered my services in order to help players who otherwise could not have afforded to play hockey or to improve their skating.

As skill levels continue to increase, hockey becomes more and more exciting. I feel very fortunate to have been there early on, to have catalyzed the sport's development, and in the process to have influenced so many lives.

Skate Great Hockey!

Laura Stamm