

Forward Starting

Hockey is a very fast game with many changes of directions. A game can be won or lost in fractions of a second. Players must master the ability to stop and start in order to adjust to the flow of the game. If a player cannot start out quickly, he /she will be behind the play and will not have success racing to loose pucks. During a game, a player will be confronted with the situation of having to start from a stationary position. This situation may happen during a face off alignment, confrontation in front of the net or getting up off the ice after receiving a good body check etc. To be effective a player does not require great speed but instead great quickness. This skating ability requires a player to reach top speed in only three or four strides. Players such as Paul Kariya, Joe Sakic and Pavel Bure have a great gift of being able to perform lightning quick starts. They are in full speed within two or three strides. By developing great quickness through proper starting techniques a player can lower the amount of time needed to reach his / her top speed. Explosive starts require quick choppy type strides which are followed by powerful, rapid and long leg drives.

The ability to start effectively requires three skating components:

- Quickness – often we hear the term “quick feet”... to rapidly turn the legs over.
- Power – when skating the majority of a player’s power comes from his /her thighs i.e quads . It is a force exerted by the legs and body weight against the inside edges of the skates. If a player does not feel a strain on the quads, he / she are not pushing hard enough.
- Proper distribution of body weight - while initiating the first few strides it’s important for a skater to project their body weight forward... keep the head up... lead with the chest... and throw his /her weight outward.

There are three basic forward starts such as the T –start, V – start and Crossover start.

The T – start is basically used to teach beginners... drive leg is positioned at 90 degrees to the desired direction of travel and the start is initiated by a thrust of the driving leg i.e. inside edge. When teaching this start to tyke and novice players, I emphasize "getting a good push on the inside edge". I usually ask the group how many pushes will I need to go from one end of the ice to the other. I can usually glide from end to end with a maximum of two pushes. I remember one kid answering my question... saying ten pushes!

The V – start developed its name from the positioning of the skates. The heels form a “V” position and the body weight is placed on the inside edges of the skates. If a beginner player is on the flats rather than the inside edges his / her pushing ability will be hindered. It is important for a player to keep the knees bent and not get too far up on the toes because it will cause poor balance. A player needs to keep his / her weight on the balls of the feet. It’s important to keep the head and chin up and lead out with the chest not the head... to leap outward.

The first three or four strides are short and choppy powerful strides without gliding. It is a vigorous extension of the hip, knee, ankle and toe. It is a pushing back motion and as the number of strides increase a player will make longer strides pushing more to the side i.e. lateral thrusting motion rather than back. When starting, do not have two hands on the stick because this will slow the start. As well, players will often swing their arms side to side rather than front to back which will also decrease quickness off the start.

The cross over start is often used following a two foot hockey stop. It is named as such because one leg is picked up and crossed over the other leg. A player is sideways to the direction he /she wishes to go. The skates are slightly closer together than in the basic hockey stance. Skates are parallel to the desired direction of travel, head and shoulders are turned and body leans in the desired direction. As a player starts to shift his / her body weight when beginning the crossover, the bulk of pressure will fall on the outside edge of the support leg.

After crossing over the outside skate is placed at 90 degrees to the desired direction. When properly done, this start requires a player to use a single crossing action with an opening of the hip, creating a V – start look and feel. As always, it’s important to keep the head up, watch that the shoulders do not drop side to side but rather stay level during the crossover start and the stick is used to lead into the direction of travel rather than drag behind the body.

Forward starting drills which can be used to enhance quickness include: duck walk, three stick drill, falling stick, sideways walking, haul your partner, and coaches command drill etc.

Food for Thought:

In conclusion, Peter Twist “Strength and Conditioning Coach” for the Vancouver Canucks expressed the following views:



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“Although Pavel Bure obviously has good speed, he is not the fastest hockey player I’ve coached. I’ve coached college athletes who are faster. I can say this with confidence, pointing to the definitions of speed and quickness... Quickness is the first step explosion from a stationary position.... Hockey is a game of one-on-one battles and races for loose pucks... The “Russian Rocket’s” explosiveness is fueled by quickness. His quickness is so great that he can be at top speed in just two or three strides. Other players may be faster but they take the whole length of the ice before they reach their top speed... Pavel wins races for loose pucks not because of his speed but because of his incredible quickness – that first step explosiveness... He does not have the best top speed but he reaches top speed first... Pavel is at his top speed while others are still just initiating movement.”

Yours in Hockey,
Coach Rex