

## Forward Striding

In today's game of hockey, especially at the NHL level, speed is everything. Several Saturday's ago on Hockey Night in Canada host Ron Maclean interviewed Jay Caulfield, who had worked with Mario Lemieux in the off season. Jay expressed the view that today's players are focusing on "core training" i.e. ab strength, quad strength etc. Why? To prevent injuries and enhance game performance... because the key to success in today's game is power and quickness. The definition of speed is power-times-quickness. Power (quads / thighs)-times-quickness (movement of the feet) equals speed. It's important to have lightning quick starts and to get from "A" to "B" on the ice as quickly and efficiently as possible especially when chasing for loose pucks!

Forward skating is the basis for almost all skill development in hockey. Start, stride (i.e. full extension), glide, recovery, and proper arm swing are the basic components of forward skating. If these basic components are the same for every skater, why can't everyone skate like Paul Kariya? The problem is learning and properly applying these components of forward skating. Technically all strides are the same. However the difference is the length of the glide i.e. how long a player spends gliding before the next skate takes to the ice. Many players move their feet with rapid speed but forget to apply effective force. While a player needs rapid leg movement to gain speed, he or she must learn to use the skate blade edges, their legs and body weight properly and forcefully.

The following analysis of forward skating will describe many of the teaching points as well as several of the on ice drills which I incorporate into my power skating instruction.

The start - a player's first two strides is a pushing back motion, knees over the ankles over the toes, greater knee bend, forward lean of the trunk ( requires strong abs ), lead with the chest, and head is up. A good drill to practice proper starting is the "v – start stick switch".

The stride (i.e. full extension) - a player's next three to four strides require greater push on the inside edges with a full extension of the hip, knee, ankle, and toe locked... resulting in wider / longer strides i.e. full extension... now a lateral thrust to the side... returning the skate blade to the ice quickly i.e. quick feet... stride/push edge to glide edge ... i.e. "stride and glide". If there's good power exhibited, a player will hear his / her skates cutting the ice i.e. push legs hard resulting in full speed within three or four strides and using ankle flex i.e. ankle is turned in more to maximize leg extension. Often players substitute bending too much from the waist not the knees... Always bend the knees! When teaching power skating, I see too many beginner players attempting to skate like they walk... it's so important to bend the knees! All great skaters in the NHL have tremendous knee bend. It's important to keep the skate edge in contact with the ice as long as possible and finishing each stride by pushing from the hip through the knee to the ankle. A good drill to practice striding is the "striding with two hands on the stick".

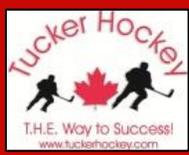
The glide – the glide part of skating is often very short. A player is gliding not pushing and recovering with the opposite skate i.e. bringing the drive leg back under the body. During the glide portion, the skate blade of the support leg is mainly on the flat of the blade. A good drill to practice gliding is the "one legged glide".

The recovery - a good recovery consists of bringing the drive leg back under the body close to the glide leg, the next leg performs a long stride and transfers/shifts body weight onto the new glide leg...smooth / flowing motion, and the thigh muscles should feel strain at each push. Recovery requires a circular motion... skate low to the ice passing under the center of gravity and shoulders perpendicular. A good drill to practice proper recovery is the "tap the glide skate with the returning drive skate".

The arm swing - players should not pitch fork the stick or pass arms across the mid-point of their body, rather the left arm back / left leg forward, right arm forward / right leg back motion should be used. If a player is skating too close behind he or she may get an elbow in the face... trademarks of Mr. Elbow i.e. Gordie Howe and Mark Messier's game. A player should keep one hand on the stick i.e. top hand on the stick shaft when skating without the puck and understandable place two hands on the stick when receiving a pass or when stickhandling or taking a shot. A good drill to practice arm swing is the "railroad drill".

### Food for Thought:

Frank Mahovlich and Paul Coffey, great skaters of the past and Mario Lemieux , a great skater today ... all played the game with a certain ease and grace because they displayed great forward skating technique. It often appeared these superstars were not skating very hard... but deceptively they moved quite fast... while conserving a great deal of energy... i.e. striding and gliding. When a player is not a good skater, he or she is constantly focused on trying to keep up with the play. When a player is a great skater, he or she



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does not have to think about their skating while playing the game. As a result, the elite hockey players can channel their thoughts and energy into excelling at other parts of the game - i.e. making great plays and scoring the "highlight reel goals"!

Yours in Hockey,  
Coach Rex