



Proper Knee Bend

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In last edition, I wrote about the proper stick length for a player and briefly mentioned the following: A shorter stick forces a player to bend his/her knees..."all great skaters have tremendous knee bend" when they are skating. Proper knee bend results in knee over the ankle over the toe....forcing the butt to be lower to the ice. For this week's edition, I wish to expand on the above thoughts.

It's of paramount importance for beginning hockey player to learn to skate properly. For aspiring "elite" hockey players, it's equally important to hone one's skating skills if he/she wishes to advance to the next level of play. But simply putting in more ice time will not help if all that a player is doing is continuing with bad habits. What a player needs is a skating road map/ direction to help him/her improve one step at a time towards the ultimate goal of becoming a better skater.

Many young minor hockey players, who are beginning to learn to skate, often try to skate like they walk with regards to how they bend their knees. This lack of proper knee bend results in a very short choppy stride. When a player has good knee bend - the basic components of forward skating i.e. stride, glide and recovery - are more technically sound. In order to maintain good speed and momentum, it's very important to keep the glide knee well bent throughout the stride. Good knee bend will also improve/tighten a player's crossovers and turns i.e. enabling him/her to change direction on a dime.

While observing Dave King's Summit Hockey School in July (I always collect a couple new drills when watching one of Dave's practices) I overheard him talking to a group of Peewee players about the importance of skating. Dave mentioned to the players that all great skaters in the NHL have "tremendous knee bend". Dave mentioned Geoff Sanderson has one of the best skaters on his team i.e. Columbus Blue Jackets. When I think about a few of the great skaters in the NHL today, Paul Kariya, Joe Sakic, Sergei Federov, Pavel Bure and Peter Bondra come to mind. During the forthcoming hockey season, make a mental note to watch closely, the above mentioned players and other great skaters in the NHL and I will guarantee you all the best skaters have tremendous knee bend.

A really good skating drill to help hockey players, especially young minor hockey players improve their balance, edge control and practice "good knee bend" is the soccer ball drill. Players learn to push a soccer ball around the ice with just their hockey gloves... No kicking the ball, no carrying the ball, and no body checking. If a player bends from the waist, he/she will not move well with the soccer ball and will probably suffer from a stiff back and will show very little knee bend and poor balance /edge control. In order to perform the drill effectively, it's important to keep the head up, keep the butt down, and really bend the knees. Players can perform this drill alone, in pairs or in groups i.e. A vs. B etc.

In conclusion, if a player aspires to be a great skater he /she must have tremendous knee bend. Proper knee bend is a very important component of skating.

Yours in Hockey,
Coach Rex.