

# Coaching Articles

## Balance and Edge Control

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Balance and edge control is the foundation of skating. In order to become a strong skater, a player needs tremendous balance and edge control. Without strong balance and edge control, a player will not perform well ...many of the essential skating skills such as starting, striding, crossovers, tight turns and pivots. An illustration to skating is that of building a house. For example, if an individual plans to build a house he /she needs a strong building foundation i.e. a basement ...a strong skating foundation requires great balance and edge control..

Balance is the proper distribution of body weight over the skates. When a player has mastered it, he /she will enjoy greater maneuverability and speed.... otherwise until he /she does.... control and speed will be limited and other players may easily knock this player down. When a player masters good balance, it will provide the means to withstand crunching body checks and speedy turns as well as sudden stops and changes of direction. Balance is mainly controlled by upper body positioning and by weight distribution over the skates. Proper development and use of the back muscles is essential. While the legs are the driving force and are used for power and motion, the importance of the back muscles is to keep the upper body still or balanced above the moving skates.

For example, if a player uses too much upper body lean i.e. common mistake of dropping the inside shoulder into the circle when making a tight turn, he or she will fall down. When skating a curve, always remember to keep the shoulders level.

Balance on Two Skates - this skating skill is important when a player is gliding i.e. reading the play or when waiting for a pass. It is also important when checking or being checked by the opposition. Before introducing the art of checking, coaches must have players functionally master the basics of skating i.e. balance, edge control, stops and starts, turns and pivots, and agility. The majority of mistakes made when checking an opponent results from incorrect body position on the skates which is directly associated to skating skill.

Balance on One Skate - this skating skill should be mastered when skating both forward and backwards.

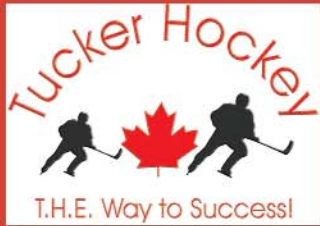
A player can never tell when he will be confronted with a body check while on only one skate.. an example is a player being hit when in the progress of making a forward crossover.

Balance on the Inside Edges – mainly used for starting and striding...even with a minimal use of the inside edges it will provide greater stability than using the flats of the blades. The more a player digs into the ice his/ her inside edges and bend's the knees, the more traction is available and the more difficult it is to get knocked down. Goalies spend the majority of their time standing on their inside edges. When guarding the net, good balance on the inside edges and the proper knowledge of how to use them in a game is essential.

Balance on the Outside Edges – mainly used for turning and stopping... balancing on the outside edge is more difficult for beginners than balancing on either the flat or the inside edge. For example in order to perform a forward crossover properly its important to cross over from the thighs not the ankles. Its imperative to obtain a full extension.... step...crossover...under push....when crossing over i.e. right foot over left foot...to acquire a proper leg extension and to avoid loss of power a player must feel the outside edge of his / her left skate cutting the ice.

To improve balance and edge control of especially young players, various exercises can be performed during warm ups and practices on the ice. These warm up exercises can include: balance on the flat of the blades i.e.

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two skates, balance on the flat of the blade i.e. one skate, balance on the inside edge i.e. one skate, and balance on the outside edge i.e. one skate. Specific drills include knee raises, hip openers, cranston sits, groin stretches, forward swizzles, leg lifts, toe touching,, squats, jumps, hops, and shoot the duck etc are effective power skating drills to enhance balance and edge control.

When skating it is very important to “feel your edges”. Many pro players have confirmed what most knowledgeable power skating instructor already now...players often do not truly understand the importance of skating until their playing days are over...make sure it doesn't happen to you!! The player who appreciates and develops proper skating mechanics ( including strong balance and edge control ) conserves energy and improves his skating effectiveness and longevity in the game. A prime example is Paul Coffey, who played in the NHL for 20 years. During the twilight of his career, Paul was quoted as saying “ It's important to keep trying to consistently improve”. “Athletes should always be in a stage of improvement and be willingly trying to get better”. I think I'm still there. I know I'm still there”.

Yours in Hockey,

Coach Rex

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