



Balance and Edge Control

By Rex Tucker

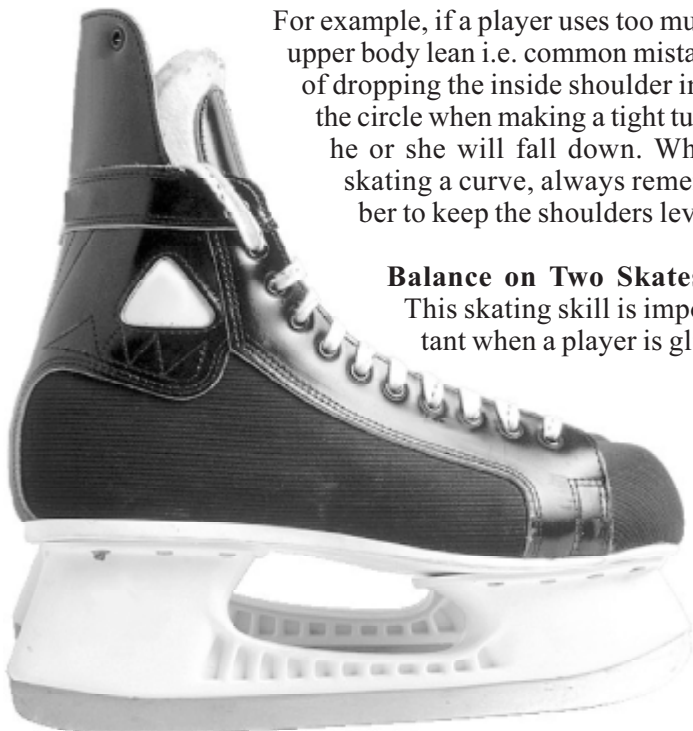
Balance and edge control are the foundation of skating. In order to become a strong skater, a player requires tremendous balance and edge control. Many of the essential skating skills such as starting, striding, crossovers, tight turns and pivots will not be performed well by a player without strong balance and edge control. An illustration to skating is that of building a house. For example, if an individual plans to build a house he /she requires a strong building foundation – i.e. concrete, 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 balance, they will enjoy greater maneuverability and speed – and until they do the aspects of control and speed will be limited and other players may easily knock them 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 glid-



ing 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 with his/ her inside edges and bends 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. It's imperative to obtain a full extension – step... crossover... under push... when crossing over (eg. 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. 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, leg lifts, toe touching, squats, jumps, hops, shoot the duck, forward and backward C – cuts (inside and outsides edges),

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and forward and backward swizzles 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 instructors already know – players often do not truly understand the importance of skating until their playing days are over or they get cut from a team. **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 good example of this was Hockey Hall of Fame Inductee, Paul Coffey, who played in the NHL for over 20 years and one of the best skaters to ever lace on the blades. During the prime of his career, Paul was quoted as saying “Athletes should always be in a stage of improvement and be willingly trying to get better... and I think I'm still there.”.

An example in hockey today is Sidney Crosby, a rising Superstar. Sidney, who is only 18 years of age, has a very promising career in the NHL. Sidney is a great skater – with excellent balance and edge control skills. As a result, he is a very strong on his skater and hard to knock off the puck for a player under six feet tall. However Sidney realizes that there are many aspects of his game he needs to improve upon if he is to excel at the NHL level.

**“No man knows
what he can do
until he tries”**

–Publilius Syrus