



Take Your Skating to Another Level – Incorporate More “S.A.M.”! S.A.M – Stability, Agility and Mobility

By Rex Tucker

Skating is the most important hockey skill. With the new rules implemented by the NHL, and now adopted by Hockey Canada. Supreme skating in the “new game” is indeed of paramount importance for a player’s future success.

Stability

Stability is the first stage required for a player to become a great skater. Stability requires a strong base of edge control and balance. The skills of skating, passing, puck control and shooting originates from a good hockey stance. Players need to be steady and secure on their skates.

Winning 1 on 1 battles in a game such as in the corners, in front of the net and within the short game require players to be strong on their skates especially for players who advance to the peewee (checking age) level and above.

Players, who want to be strong on their skates, need to continue to practice forward and backward edge control (inside and outside) as well as balancing

drills without and with the puck to ensure stability on their skates. It’s truly amazing how many minor hockey players are weak on their outside edges!

Several NHL players who have great stability on their skates include Jaromir Jagr, Jarome Iginla and Todd Bertuzzi.

Agility

Players who have agility are nimble and move quickly in a game. They are always active around the play and the puck.

Agile players have great dexterity to cover a short distance very quickly and make quick skating decisions from A to B, B to C, etc. without thinking. They rely on instincts and their mind is very in tune with their skates. Great foot speed and a strong forward/backward stride are characteristics of their game.

Excellent skating skills produce confidence which generates instinctive abilities on the ice. Dave King, former Calgary Flames coach, often stated that he didn’t want thinking players on his teams but instinctive players. If a player

is not instinctive, than he or she is behind in his or her decision making.

Skating drills such as the cross drill, wave drill, 6 and 12 o’clock drill etc. will enhance agility.

NHL players such as Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby, and Pavel Datsyuk showcase great agility on a nightly basis. The center position and penalty killers are characteristically strong in the skating agility part of the game.

Mobility

Players with great mobility circulate well in a game. They display a wide range of movement and can change direction very easily such as forwards to backwards as well as backwards to forwards. They can turn on a dime and change direction with ease. Defensemen have the best mobility.

Skating drills such as pivoting around gloves and pylons will assist players to improve their change of direction – forwards to backwards and backwards to forwards without stopping.

Two NHL players who are extremely mobile are Nicklas Lidstrom, and Wade Redden. Yes, they are defensemen!

Final Comments

Skating is the most important hockey skill. If a player works on his or her stability, agility and mobility, he/she will play more instinctively.

He/she will experience greater success because he/she does not have to think about his or her skating in a game – it happens naturally. A player can focus on other things such as making great plays and scoring goals!

