



Why Balanced Skating?

By Rex Tucker

Skating is to hockey as running is to soccer. Skating is the foundation upon which all other skills are built and as such is the most important skill in ice hockey. The level of performance attained by a player in passing, shooting, checking and puck control is directly related to skating ability. The time spent improving your skating is a worthwhile investment due to the carry-over value in all other aspects of the game.

There are very few players in the game even at the professional level that do not have a weak and strong side. Or I guess I should say feel one side is a little stronger than the other. At the minor hockey level, this is a very common issue and in many cases a major problem. Too many players will gravitate to their strong side when practicing or playing a game. Players will stop, start, turn, crossover and pivots often only to one way. Often this will limit their skating agility and mobility, scoring chances, playmaking, checking, and overall offensive and defensive positioning.

This observation was truly brought to light in the last issue of Hockey Zones by Buddy Gale's letter to the editor. I totally agree with you Buddy that the majority of players in the system have a strong-side and weak-side with their skating. The strong side it seems most often is the stick side, and they develop and then use that strong side for the big majority of their on-ice time.

When a player develops into a balanced skater, he or she is confident in all aspects of their skating game. Often in a game when a player uses

only the strong side for example glide turning or crossovers, they turn their back to the play and the puck. This is a cardinal sin of hockey! The player for a few moments is not facing the play and this poor choice may cause a defensive breakdown or even a goal against.

For example, some minor hockey defenseman will play only on one side of the ice because their backward to forward pivot is so weak! They are really flat footed and often look like a pylon if they are playing on the wrong side for them/their weak side... the opposing forward will skate by them with the puck.

If a player can improve his or her overall skating game, it will improve their confidence, decision making and overall performance on the ice. Being more efficient in one's skating will enhance their other technical skills as well as offensive and defensive parts of their game. It will take seconds off their ability to do things on the ice.

By enrolling in a good power skating program, a developing player will discover their strong and weaker sides. It provides a positive learning environment to practice correctly various aspects of their skating skills. Over the course of time, they can reduce the handicap of not using their weak side in a game or using it but being slow / awkward and being very inefficient.

The better a player skates the more opportunities and success he or she will have playing the game. Sidney Crosby is a prime example of one of the game's best players because he is a great skater – a balanced skater.