



## Tucker Tips

Skating is the most important hockey skill. Below are some skating tips from Coach Rex to help players improve their skating ability and take their game to the next level.

- **Proper Stick Length** - as a general rule, the length of a hockey stick - when a player places the tip of his or her stick on the ice - should be between the sternum / above the armpits and definitely below the chin of the player. A shorter stick will force the player to sit more while skating i.e. create a deeper knee bend which will result in longer and better skating strides.
- **Hockey Stance** - every sport has an athletic stance. In hockey, it's called the "Ready Position". A player's head is up; knees bent i.e. hiding the toes, skates hip width apart, toes pointed forward, two hands on the stick and the stick on the ice. The player is in a sit position - ready to receive a pass, give a pass or shoot. The basic hockey stance is used for skating, passing, puck control and shooting. Note: Sidney Crosby has one of the best hockey stances in the game today! Watch him and take note.
- **Proper Ankle Flex** - for the forward stride, a player's leg extension is from the hip, knee, and ankle to the full blade on the ice. Players will often place tape or skate laces around the ankles. Not a good idea. It's a bad habit! It can restrict the ankle flex. The skates need to support the feet, not act as a cast and inhibit good movement. A player will then get proper edging on the ice and a full forward stride. To ensure proper ankle flex, the top three eyelets are tight and nothing else around a player's ankles.
- **Good Knee Bend** - besides keeping the head up, the most important thing a player must do when skating is to bend his or her knees. Good knee bend - knees hide the toes - improve a player's overall balance and overall skating ability.
- **Balance & 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, turns and stopping will not be performed as well if a player doesn't have strong balance and edge control. Mastery of the inside, outside edges and balance on the flat of the blade is critical to good skating.
- **Strong Outside Edges** - the weakest edge in skating is the outside. Balancing on the outside edge is more difficult for players than balancing on either the flat of the blade or the inside edge. The outside edge is so important for good tight turns, forward crossovers, backward crossovers and even forward two foot stopping. Often players will progress through the ranks of the minor hockey system to Bantam or Midget levels and still have a weak outside edge because minor coaches do not emphasize and spend enough time on this.
- **Lateral Movement** - are the skating skills by which a player moves sideways (laterally) to the left or to the right, in a straight line using one's legs and feet while the upper body stays square to the front. This is the weakest skating skill in hockey because most hockey coaches do not teach the skill but focus mainly on forward and to a lesser degree on backward skating. Therefore, players do not have an opportunity to practice good lateral movement. Lateral movement is critical for players especially defensemen. Lateral skating drills create a strong foundation of skating - edges, and balance, leading to forward and backward crossovers as well as agility and mobility skating.
- **Sculling** - a forward edge control technique which will improve the effectiveness of a player's gliding skills in a game. It is almost effortless skating. Paul Coffey was probably the best ever at sculling. The ability to keep both blades on the ice and push on the inside edges with most of the body weight on the heels is a very effective skating technique. Many players especially Sidney Crosby can maintain speed and great stability on their skates while sculling. Crosby will often protect the puck and create scoring opportunities by maintaining his skating speed by sculling on his outside skate and going around an opponent, who is an inferior skater.