

Backward Skating



Backward skating is probably one of the most difficult skills to learn, yet is one of the areas that we tend to work on the least. It is important that all players, not just defensemen, learn how to skate backward, pivot from backward to forward and forward to backward, crossover backward and start and stop backward. Forwards as well as defensemen will utilize these skills in games and practices so that they never have to take their eyes off of the puck. Turning away from the puck, even for a split second, can mean being caught out of position resulting in a lost scoring chance on offense, or worse yet, a goal against.

Backward Starting

The ability to start backward hinges on the ability get on the outside edge of the inside skate blade to cross under the outside skate. To accelerate backwards, players need to be able to crossover (or cross under) while moving backward with a combination of quick feet and long, powerful strides. Starting backward sometimes begins from a standstill, but more often than not, from a pivot where a player is moving forward, pivots facing the play and begins moving backward. In either event, the technique is virtually the same.

Good kneebend is required for balance and power with feet situated about “shoulders-width” apart

The first push comes from the inside edge of the outside (or back skate) and is a c-cut pushing out and back off of the inside edge of the toe of the blade.

Meanwhile, the inside foot should cross back under the outside foot with the push coming off of the outside edge of the toe.

The more knee bend and the longer the push (to full extension of the leg), the more power will be derived. It is also essential to flex the ankle to push off of the toe to generate power on the push.

Ideally a player should begin into c-cut straight-line backward skating from this first “crossunder” step (but depending on the power and speed derived at this point – a player may need to do more “crossunders” to increase speed)

Backward Stride

Backward skating is very similar to forward skating in that there is a push or stride, a glide (while preparing to take the next stride), and a return (positioning to take the next stride). It is often difficult to master in terms of maintaining balance while generating a powerful push. Players often tend to bend forward at the waist, putting their weight too far out in front of them. As they push or stride, their feet move backward and their upper body moves forward. Developing proper weight transfer and rhythm takes plenty of practice.

Upper body should be upright with the back straight and the head up. Good knee bend is required with the body posture similar to sitting on a stool.

Players tend to keep a very wide base to help maintain their balance resulting in very short strides. Have your players work on bringing their feet all of the way underneath them (almost touching

them together) to begin their stride.

To begin the push or stride, players should load up their weight over the pushing foot, turning the toe in with the ankle bent inward to get on the inside edge. The push is out to the side and back. As the skater pushes out to the side the weight is shifted back onto the glide foot.

To generate power the skater needs to utilize the leg (beginning with good knee bend) and at mid-stride the leg should be straightened out to the side before returning back underneath the body.

Power is also generated by the flex in the ankle during the push. The skater should push off the inside edge of the ball of the foot and actually hear a “rip” sound as the blade cuts into the ice as they flex their ankle.

The weight is shifted back onto the glide leg and it is important that good body posture is maintained through the full stride with the weight shifting back so players do not lean forward and get onto the toes of their skates.

Once the skate is returned completely under the body, the stride begins with the other leg.

Developing rhythmic arm movement is also important (as it is in running) with the arms moving up

and back in conjunction with each stride.

Backward Stopping

There are two methods of stopping backward, the two-foot backward snowplow stop and a one-foot backward stop. Both methods are effective and can be used, depending on the situation. Much of the time, players who are moving backward tend to pivot and transition into forward skating rather than coming to a dead stop, but there are situations where players need to stop and make a quick start forward.

Two-foot backward snowplow

This is a very effective method of stopping and it puts the player in excellent position to start forward. The skater should draw the heels of his skates together so his feet are inside the width of his shoulders, bending his ankles to get on the inside edge of the skate blade. The weight should be on the middle of the skate blade and the upper body is leaning slightly forward with knees bent for balance and stability and to be prepared for a quick start from that position. The most common errors in this type of stop are that players tend to keep their feet too far apart and their legs straight.

One-foot backward stop

Also an effective method of stopping although it is not as conducive to quick forward starting. In this method, the player stops on one foot, drawing it back in behind the other skate so the feet are aligned in a t-position with the front foot point forward and the back foot pointing to the side. The weight is on the middle of the blade of the back skate with the ankle bent inward to get on the inside edge. From this position, a skater can start quickly to the side (to which the back foot is pointing).