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# FORWARD STRIDE

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*It's often said "you can't skate – you can't play". Obviously, it is one of the most important skills to spend time developing. The more efficient and technically sound a player skates, the better chance he has of developing other skills related to it such as handling the puck and checking.*

*If you wanted to select a "poster boy" for skating technique, you need to look no further than Paul Coffey of the Philadelphia Flyers, currently in his eighteenth NHL season and still skating like it was his third. His technique is virtually flawless – an excellent combination of power, speed and efficiency.*

*Now that's not to say that every player is going to be able to skate like Paul Coffey. Every player has a different skating style. As coaches we need to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in their skating technique and work to develop the strengths and eliminate the problem areas. The following are areas to examine in your players that have an affect on their forward skating stride.*

## **BODY POSTURE**

Knee bend is critical – for balance and for creating power which translates into speed. The closer a player can get to bending his knees to 90 degrees, the better. It is almost impossible to achieve – but needs to be worked at endlessly- and takes time to develop the leg strength to be able to maintain it. The upper body should be bent slightly forward with the chest and head up. Often players think they are bending their knees, while in fact they are bending at the waist and their legs are relatively straight.

## **STICK POSITIONING**

How a player holds his stick has a tremendous affect on his balance and rhythm. The only time players need two hands on their stick is when they are battling for the puck, are expecting a pass, or are carrying the puck and are being confronted by a defender or about to make a play with it. The point is, you can skate faster and more efficiently with only one hand on the stick, whether you are carrying the puck or not. The stick should be in one hand and always on the ice out in front of the skates, moving up and back with each stride, not side to side.

## **RHYTHM AND ARM MOVEMENT**

The upper body needs to work in sync with the lower body. Arms should be close to the sides, slightly bent and move forward and backward with each stride – whichever leg a player strides with, that arm should be moving forward as the player strides back – much in the same fashion your arms move while running – creating a rhythm. If players have two hands on their stick, they tend to move their arms side to side, which they also then tend to do with one hand on their stick resulting in their arms moving

across their bodies negatively affecting their balance and rhythm and their stride. A good point of emphasis is to watch a players stick blade – it should be on the ice, moving up and back with each stride – not side to side- and the bottom of the blade should stay on the ice.

*Forward skating can be broken down into three phases or steps, the stride, glide and return, with all three playing a very important role in creating power and speed.*

## **STRIDE**

The stride or "push" is where the power comes from. In striding, the foot is turned out to the side, gripping the ice with the inside edge of the skate blade, powering the body forward from the push. The push or stride is a diagonal movement – back and to the side – not straight back. The stride should start from a good knee bend position and at the end of the stride the leg should be completely straight with the knee "locked". Power comes not only from the movement of the leg, but also from a push created while flexing or "snapping the ankle". The end of the push is off of the toe of the skate blade and you should hear a "ripping" sound as the toe of the blade leaves the ice.

## **GLIDE**

The non-pushing leg is the glide leg – as you stride off of your right leg, you glide on your left – while recovering to position your body to stride with your left and glide on your right. This is the leg that needs to be bent as close as possible to 90 degrees. The more knee bend on the glide leg, the longer and more powerful the stride or push can be. On the glide, a player must make sure to be moving in a straight line up the ice. With the push or stride actually

being diagonal, a player must control the body to move straight up the ice and not side to side. At the end of the stride, the weight is shifted or loaded up onto the glide leg in preparation for the next stride.

## **RETURN**

As the weight shifts onto the glide leg at the end of the stride – the pushing leg must now return or recover into position for the next push – it becomes the glide leg as the other leg begins its stride. It is important that the return from the end of the stride is in a straight line back underneath the body to proper position. Oftentimes, because of the side to side movement of the upper body – the lower body is moved side to side – resulting in a "looping" of the skate on the return – which takes more time – the shortest distance between two points being a straight line- and negatively affects balance. On the return, the skate should be kept close to the ice – not kicked up behind – often, players who bend at the waist and lean too far forward have a problem with kicking their skates up behind them at the end of the stride. This results in a loss of efficiency and players tend to get tired quicker during a shift.



*At all levels, whether it's the most inexperienced mite or an NHL player, skating deficiencies can be identified and worked on to be corrected. Obviously, the more experienced a skater becomes and style becomes habit – the harder it is going to be to correct. No matter how much it is pointed out and worked on, once a player gets into competition, he will revert back to what he knows best. Proper skating technique should be taught and focused on right from the get-go and needs to be reinforced and developed on an ongoing basis. Every skater has their own style – but it can be tweaked and refined to make them more efficient.*

## **WHAT TO WATCH FOR & HOW TO CORRECT IT**

**WATCH FOR . . . Skating with legs far apart – not returning skates properly under body – wide base makes skater feel stable.**

**HOW TO CORRECT IT . . .** Have players skate at half to  $\frac{3}{4}$  speed around the ice for several laps – at the end of each stride have them bring their skate back underneath their body and touch the other skate before taking the next stride – good warm-up skating drill.

**WATCH FOR . . . Insufficient knee bend**

**HOW TO CORRECT IT . . .** Skating drills that require that they touch one knee to the ice – forcing them to maintain balance while moving – also one legged pushing while gliding on the other – if they don't bend their knees they will have no pushing power.

**WATCH FOR . . . Bending too far forward at the waist**

**HOW TO CORRECT IT . . .** Often, skaters who bend too far forward at the waist also do not have enough knee bend – drills involving knee touching to the ice are useful here – if they lean too far forward with their weight too far out in front of them – they will fall forward – makes them keep their back more upright – head and chest up.

**WATCH FOR . . . High leg kick or “looping” on the return**

**HOW TO CORRECT IT . . .** Check out the upper body movement – these players usually have a lot of side to side movement causing them to be out of control in the return phase – have players skate at half speed and at the end of each stride – make them keep the toe of the skate on the ice and drag it back to touch the other skate before the next stride.