

# IMPROVING

# QUICKNESSES

*As much as hockey is a speed game, it is also a game of quickness. Players need to be able to skate and handle the puck at top speed as the play moves up and down the ice. Getting to top speed is half the battle. Often times, the player who wins the race for the first fifteen feet ends up winning the race the length of the ice, provided his top end speed is equal to that of the opponent. Hockey is also a game of short races to the puck, to an offensive opening or to a defensive position in the offensive or defensive zones of the rink. The player who gets there first usually gets the puck or gets an opportunity to make a good offensive or defensive play.*

*Quickness counts. Players that have good quickness are valuable members of penalty killing or power play units where the majority of the play is in one end of the ice and top end speed is not a factor. Teams that have good quickness usually have the puck in their possession more than their share of the time by winning races to the puck when it is up for grabs.*

*Improving foot speed and agility along with leg strength and power will certainly help to improve quickness and can be worked on off of the ice. These improvements will only prove fruitful if a player has the proper on-ice technique.*

The **forward start or v-start** is used when a player is at a standstill or moving forward slowly and needs to accelerate.

- Upper body should be slightly forward with the chest over the knees and toes.
- Elbows should be tight to sides, arms driving forward and backward, not side to side.
- Knee bend for balance and power is crucial. Knee bend as close as possible to 90 degrees translates into better technique and more power.
- The feet should be about shoulder width apart and must be in a v position for the skate blades to grip the ice properly.
- The player must be able to get up on the toes of the skate blades (about 2-3 inches of blade) to be able to “grip” the ice with the inside edge of the toe for the first three steps.
- The **longer** the steps the better. At a minimum, a player should be achieving full extension on each push, in effect, jumping from step to step.
- The first three steps are critical. At this point the player should be at 75% of top speed and in full stride.

The **crossover start** is used when stopping and changing direction and is effected greatly by a players ability to maintain proper technique in stopping.

- Feet should be about shoulder width apart with knees bent as close to 90 degrees as possible.
- First step is off of inside edge of back foot, which crosses over the front skate. Full extension of the lead leg should be achieved on this crossover (should be as long as

possible) with landing on inside edge of the toe of the skate.

- The next push is off of the outside edge of the lead skate as the weight is shifted from the back to lead foot on the crossover.
- Upper body and shoulders are rotated in the forward direction on the crossover and player is now facing forward and should be on the toes of the inside edges of the skates for the next two steps as in the forward start.
- By fourth step, player should be in full stride.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

- Inability to maintain knee bend—hinders balance and reduces power
- Too much skate blade on ice (not up on toes)—gliding reduces quickness
- Slipping due to inability to “grip” ice with inside edge of toe of skate blade
- Short choppy steps—not full extension—less than maximum power

## ON-ICE TRAINING

While we can work on foot quickness, agility and leg strength off of the ice, there are certain areas that need to be attended to on-ice. Maintaining balance and agility while moving your feet quickly on skates is quite different than in workout shoes during dryland training. To help improve the footwork of your players, you can incorporate the following into your warm-ups.

**Side-hopping** - Stepping across, one foot over the other, moving sideways. It is important that the skate that remains on the ice “rolls over” from inside edge to outside edge as the weight is shifted during the crossover. Less experienced players tend not to roll the ankle, but turn the foot as they are not comfortable on the outside edges.

**Kariocha** - Similar to side hopping, only alternating, one step in front, and the next behind.

**Quick-feet Crossovers** - While skating along one side of the rink, have your players alternately cross over three steps to the left and three to the right, moving their feet quickly. They can coast during the resting phase as they complete the lap around the ice.

**Short-burst Directional Changes** - (only to be done after players are warm and have stretched) As players are skating quarter to half speed around the ice, a sharp whistle indicates that they stop, do a good crossover start and sprint until they hear a soft whistle (about 3-5 seconds) at which time they slow down to quarter or half speed. This drill can

also be done using tight turns. Make sure players work on stopping or turning in both directions, to the left and to the right.

**Pivot and Accelerate** - Players skate backward at quarter to half speed, on sharp whistle pivot and accelerate forward (3-5 seconds) until soft whistle directs them to turn backwards and slow down. Make sure that they are pivoting both to the left and to the right.

Be creative, there are an infinite number of drills that can be utilized in a practice to improve the overall quickness of your team. Some drills are competitive or confrontational in nature such as a short race. Incorporate a reward at the end (a puck and a shot on goal) that will get your players to work harder. The important thing to remember as a coach when trying to improve quickness is to make sure your players are well-rested between reps. The rep should last about 5-10 seconds and the resting period should be at least a minute. Some of our favorites are as follows:

### **Without pucks**

**Short Sprints** - Divide your players into four or five groups (use lines together, all defensemen together, or by position, i.e., all left wings, all centers - this also can give you a better feel for who are your quickest players at each position) spread out across the goal line. On your whistle have them race past where you are standing, and then coast the rest of the way to the other end of the rink. You dictate the length of the race. Examples are two reps to the hash marks, two to the top of the circles, two to the blue line, two to the red line and then work your way back to the shortest.

**Out and Backs** - Spread your players out along the boards on one side of the rink divided into three groups, goal line to blue line, neutral zone and blue line to goal line. Position yourself on the goal line at one end of the rink in line with the face-off dots (end, neutral zone, neutral zone, end). On your whistle, group one moves quickly from the boards to the imaginary line, stops and moves quickly back to the boards, three times. After each group has completed three reps, move to the other side of the ice for reps from that side.

### **With Pucks**

**Straight-away Race** - Depending on your numbers, can be done from both sides of the ice simultaneously, or from one end. Make sure that players have adequate rest between reps.

Start players side by side about 10 feet apart (if done out of one end, have them start at the corners of the crease on the goal line). Place a puck anywhere up-ice in front of them (vary it - could be 10 feet - could be 50 feet). On the whistle, players race to the puck, winner gets a shot on the goalie at the other end. You can have the "loser" drop out of the drill at a certain point or allow him to try to check the puck carrier (if you want to work on puck protection). Variations of starts can be used as follows; forward, crossover, on knees, on stomach, on back, backwards etc.

**Reaction Race** - Same format, only have players move forward to a designated spot, backward toward you while always facing up-ice. At some point you pass a puck up between them, forcing them to stop and start up-ice for possession of the puck.

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