

Inline skating can be excellent training

Over the past several years, both ice hockey and inline skating have enjoyed exceptional growth in terms of numbers of participants, and each sport has been instrumental in the growth of the other during that time. Many people “hit the streets” first (literally) on inline skates and once they get accustomed to the balance and control required, they become smitten with the speed at which they can move. The natural progression is to “take to the ice” where there is less friction, more speed, and ironically, less danger of injury. On the other hand, there are many people who move the other way, starting out on the ice and crossing over to inline skating from there. Moving from the ice to the street and the street to the ice can have many benefits for participants in both sports – with very few drawbacks.

BALANCE, CONTROL AND TECHNIQUE

There are some differences in balance points with the different skates. On ice skates, the blade of the skate is “rockered”, with only about two inches of the skate blade in contact with the ice at any given time. This contact point changes as players move, from the middle of the blade while gliding or while stopping, to the back part of the blade while turning, to the toe of the blade at the end of the stride. On inline skates, you can adjust the wheels to get this “rockered” effect – but usually all four wheels are in contact with the surface at the same time. Because of this, you have a little better balance and the difference will be very noticeable when switching over to the ice again.

The mechanics and technique of the stride are virtually identical. Therefore the body positioning is also very much the same, with good knee bend essential to good balance and a good stride. The upper body should be upright, leaning slightly forward with head and chest up. You can never have too much knee bend. A good long stride is a direct result

of the amount of knee bend of the glide (non-pushing) leg. Poor knee bend results in short strides, limiting power and ultimately, speed. The push or stride should be diagonal, to the side and back, with the final push off of the inside of the toe.

Inexperienced skaters, both ice and inline, tend to skate with their feet too far apart. The wide base helps them to feel they have better balance and control. In this regard, it benefits them initially. But if not corrected, will hurt them in the long run by causing them to have a short stride. By bringing their feet closer together at the end of a stride, they will gain an extra few inches of stride, and ultimately more power and speed.

STOPPING IS A PROBLEM

On the ice, stopping is always the most difficult thing to learn. Unfortunately, the ice is the only place you can practice it. Stopping on inline skates not only does not help you in stopping on the ice – **it actually hurts your development on the ice.**

To stop on inline skates you need to use the brake on the heel of the boot, or you can drag the back foot, or you can turn or cut sharply to reduce your speed. Most people do the latter, and when they get on ice skates, they take those bad habits with them. The result is, rather than shaving the ice with the edge of the skate blade, you cut into the ice like you would when turning with the weight toward the back of the skate blade. When stopping on the ice, the weight should be over the middle of the skate blades, using that part of the blade to shave the ice to stop. Shifting the weight too far forward or too far backward negatively affects balance and control. It requires a great deal of time, patience and work to correct these bad habits.

SAFETY IS AN ISSUE

The ice is cold and hard, the boards are solid and hard and the other hockey players can be solid depending on their size and

strength on their skates. However, when compared with the pitfalls that you can encounter on inline skates, they are pretty easy to take.

Make sure that you are adequately protected when inline skating. A helmet is **essential** as are elbow pads and shin pads. Another area to be very aware of is wrist protection. Wear hockey gloves or wrist guards. The ground is hard and not slippery. When you hit, you hit hard. If you are lucky enough to get your hands up in front of you – they take the force of the fall so make sure that they are protected.

The terrain is very different than an ice surface. Roads, sidewalks and parking lots are uneven, have cracks and holes and can be littered with branches and debris. It doesn't take much to stop your wheels from moving and a three inch twig can down you in a fraction of a second. Be alert and aware and keep your eyes on your patch.

Obviously, you also need to be aware of cars. Keep in mind that many drivers have no idea what it is like to inline skate and how difficult it is to stop. Keep your distance and play it very cautiously.

