



Hockey Talk, continued

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Q&A with the Blackhawks Director of Hockey Operations



Q: Why is skating and individual skills so important early in the season, and why do the Blackhawks emphasize it?

A: Skating and puck skills are the foundational skills of hockey. As a club, we always focus on developing these skills first, before moving on to team play. It's analogous to a building a house – investing time and energy on a strong, solid foundation will ensure the windows and doors will hang properly.

Consider how solid skating is core to execution. When your player's team is working on a break-out, defensive players need to pivot smoothly from back to forward to go back on the puck. The wingers and center need to stride smoothly and efficiently back into the defensive zone. Defensemen need to accelerate through cross-overs while handling the puck, or reverse the puck with a clean hockey stop and accelerate through a quick start. Wingers need to pivot explosively, facing the puck and present a pass target to the defensemen, while the center has to accelerate through cross-overs to provide a center passing lane. Passes need to be crisp and accurate, and all the players need to have their head up to avoid getting drilled by the other team's forecheckers. Players can learn the positional elements of a breakout pretty simply (as in player A goes here, player B skates to this spot, etc...). But the quality of that breakout is directly dependent on the quality of the players foundational skills. If the skating is choppy and inefficient, the breakout can't be anything but choppy and inefficient. If the passing is fuzzy and inaccurate, the breakout can't be anything but fuzzy and inaccurate. So, getting back to the building analogy, we believe that it's critical to invest the time building the foundational hockey skills before trying to spend too much time piecing together a polished team tactic, or system.

Our power skating approach is based on a series of over 60 fundamental techniques that progress from the simplest techniques to build agility and balance on skates, to more sophisticated techniques designed to develop explosive strength and control on skate edges. These techniques were put together with the help of Cathy Andrade, our club power skating instructor. Practices throughout the season at all levels will feature these techniques taught by our coaches and Cathy, and it's not unusual to see a practice with 30-40 minutes of power skate instruction.

The other key feature of our power skate program is a very frequently overlooked aspect to teaching skating, and that's the willingness to stop a skating drill to correct improper form. Our coaches will actually stop a drill immediately and make the necessary corrections. This is a critical teaching step, because skate basics are purely muscle memory - incorrect form allowed to happen over and over again reinforces incorrect technique and builds incorrect muscle memory that will take longer to correct later in a child's hockey career.

Attention to skating fundamentals can look tedious and time consuming at a practice, but again, I refer to the building analogy. A skilled builder will constantly tinker with the process of building a foundation until it's of sufficient quality to support an elegant and complex building.

One Timers



- The Annual Blackhawks **Poinsettia Sale Fundraiser** has begun! This is a major club-wide fundraiser to support our scholarship program and buy equipment. This fundraiser also offers individual players the chance to earn additional funds to offset their individual expenses this season. Check with your team manager for details ...
- Our **PWAA team** went 3-0 in CAHA weekend #1...
- In September our **Bantam AA's** traveled to Michigan to compete in the Belle Tire Back To School Classic. Our boys made it to the semi-finals before losing to the eventual champions from Farmington Hills and overall went 2-1-1 in the tournament.
- The **Norcal season** is underway! Our club is fielding a mite team, 2 B teams, and 4 A teams...
- Our Squirt B, Peewee B, Peewee A and Bantam A teams are signed up to participate in the Pacific District US Regional **Silver Stick Tournament** in San Jose over Thanksgiving weekend....

Dr. Ron's Dining Digs



In SF playing the Sabercats? Try **Super Duper Burgers**. Within walking distance, it's located a block away from the rink at 783 Mission. Try the Super Burger with cheese and bacon and garlic fries. Don't fear the line, it moves fast. Order at the counter and everything is made fresh. Juicy burgers, homemade pickles, and tasty shakes. A perfect post game meal. FIVE Stars.

