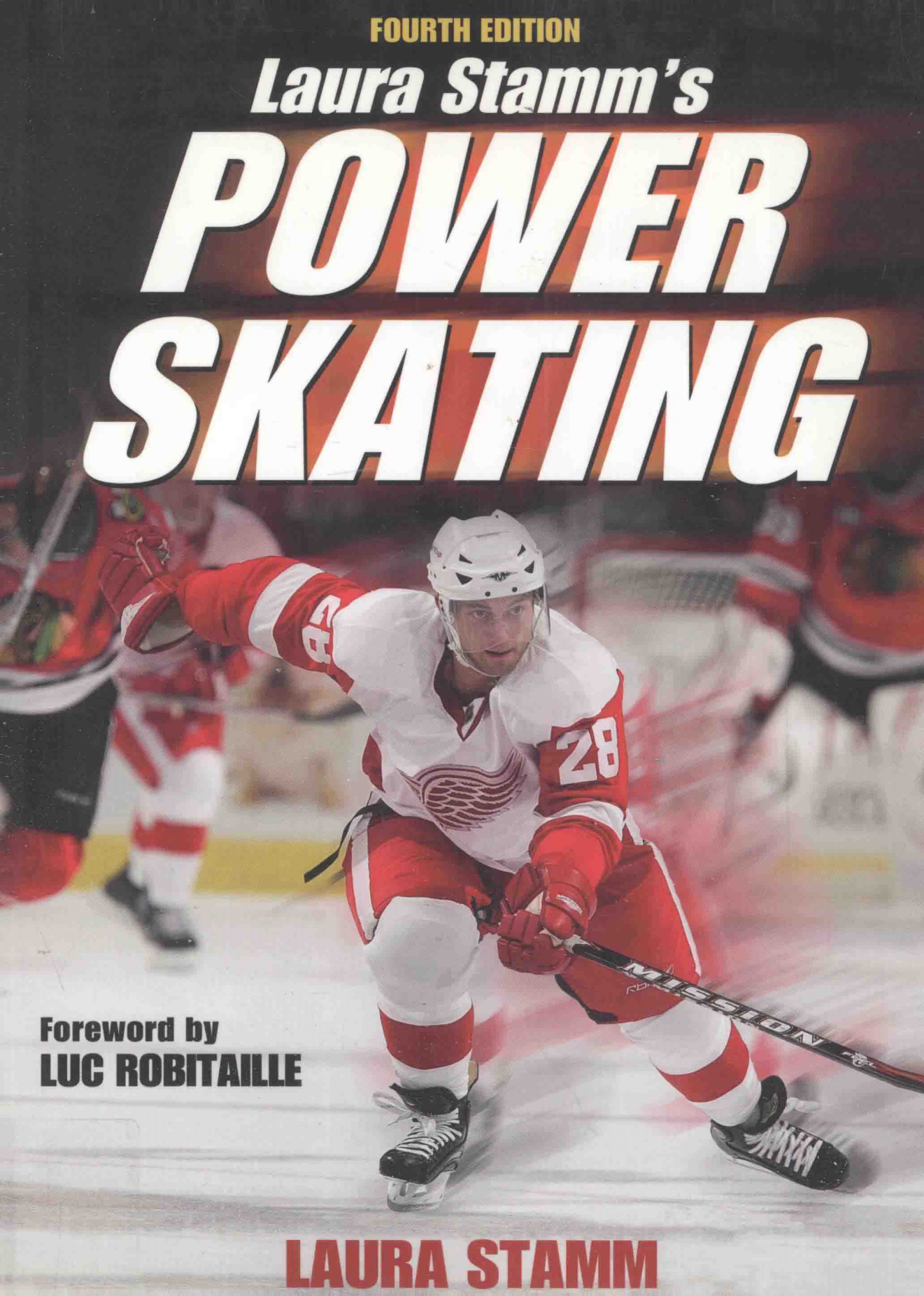
FOURTH EDITION

Laura Stamm's POWER SKATING



Foreword by
LUC ROBITAILLE

LAURA STAMM

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Laura Stamm's POWER SKATING

Laura Stamm

Human Kinetics

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To my beloved family, always and still the inspiration and cornerstone of my life. To my beautiful grandchildren, our next generation. To the memory of my parents, by whose example I learned to reach for the sky.

To my extended family—hockey players, big and small, pro and peewee; parents; and coaches whom I've taught over these 38 years. You trusted that my programs would help you and your players to skate great hockey.

To the sport of ice hockey. It has enriched my life beyond measure. There is nothing else I could have done in life with such love, passion, and dedication.

To those whose lives I have touched in the teaching process. Please know that you have touched my life in return.

Just as I learned that there is no difference between teaching and learning, I also learned that there is no difference between giving and receiving.

To all Laura Stamm instructors. You underwent extensive and rigorous training to become certified to teach my power skating system. You now carry on the tradition. You have enhanced my system and have spread it around the world. You ensure that it will continue into the future.

To the hundreds of hockey players, coaches, and enthusiasts from around the world who submitted testimonials on my behalf upon my nomination for induction into the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame. And with very special recognition to Stan Fischler and Lori Fremaint, who spearheaded the nomination process.

To all of you. You helped me fulfill dreams beyond imagination.

Foreword

I met Laura Stamm in 1985. The Los Angeles Kings had hired Laura to be a power skating coach for a few of their prospects. I was one of the fortunate ones to be part of that group. I clearly remember the week I spent with Laura. She taught me technical ways to improve and make me a better skater. Most important, she didn't try to change my style. I can honestly say that the one week I spent with Laura, as well as the follow-through I had with her, changed my career.

As important as speed was to get into the NHL back in 1985, today's game is much faster and quicker. In those days it was the key to success, and it is even more so now. While I only spent one week with Laura, I have kept up the exercises throughout my career.

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to play hockey and anyone who wants to get to a loose puck quicker than his opponent to score goals and help the team win. This book will also help players to improve their game and get to a level they thought they would never reach.

Read this book, carry it with you, and always go back to it throughout your career. It could make the difference between having a good career and a great career.

Luc Robitaille
NHL Hall of Famer

Preface

HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE LAURA STAMM INTERNATIONAL POWER SKATING SYSTEM

When I was a youngster, there was no organized hockey for girls. I played on the ponds with my brothers and their friends. Ultimately, I became a competitive figure skater, then a figure skating coach. I taught at the ice rink where the New York Rangers held their daily practices. Loving hockey as I did, I spent many hours watching their practices.

The Rangers ran hockey schools at this rink each summer. In 1971, Rod Gilbert and Brad Park, the hockey school directors, asked me to teach "power skating" at the hockey school. Although I knew very little about power skating or about technique training methods for hockey skating, I jumped at the chance. At the time, I didn't realize that this would be the start of the Laura Stamm International Power Skating System.

Back then, very little was known about the science (biomechanics) of hockey skating or about the importance of skating technique. Before I started to teach, I was handed a one-page document titled "Power Skating." This document included some drills such as stops and starts; skate to the blue line and back; skate forward, turn around, and skate backward, hurrying back to the starting point; and skate the circles. Nothing on the sheet of paper addressed *how* to teach players to skate correctly.

The hockey school had three groups of players. The youngest player was about 8, and the oldest was about 18. I watched, stunned, as these boys raced around the ice, legs churning, going nowhere fast. It was instantly apparent to me that these players needed to learn *how* to skate! I stashed the sheet of paper and started experimenting. My brain reeled with ideas—ideas derived from a lifetime of studying skating and watching hockey players skate. I knew immediately that I was doing the thing in life that I was meant to do.

In the summer of 1973, Bill Torrey, general manager of the New York Islanders, phoned and asked me if I could teach a promising rookie named Bob Nystrom. Bob supposedly had a lot of promise, but to make the team, he had to increase his speed. After watching him, I thought that by improving his skating technique, he could definitely become faster.

In those days, professional hockey players did not use female instructors. So to spare Bob any embarrassment, we kept our training sessions private. We worked together from 6 to 7 a.m., 5 days a week, for 8 weeks. Bob didn't miss a day.

After being a questionable rookie, Bob wound up with a 14-year career in the NHL. In 1980, when the Islanders beat the Flyers in overtime in game 6 to win

their first Stanley Cup, it was Bob who scored the winning goal—a crowning achievement!

In 1995, the Islanders retired Bob's number (23). In 1991, the team inaugurated the Bob Nystrom Award, which is given to the Islander who best exemplifies leadership, hustle, and dedication.

Bob's words of praise helped to launch my career. After initially wanting to keep our sessions secret, Bob subsequently told the world, "Without Laura, I wouldn't have made it to the NHL!" This led to jobs with several NHL and WHA teams, including the Rangers, Devils, Kings, and Whalers. Well-known graduates include Luc Robitaille, Steve Duchesne, Kevin Dineen, Doug Brown, Rob Niedermayer, Scott Niedermayer, Brendan Morrison, Ted Drury, Matt Carle, Brian Rafalski, and many others.

Radio and TV features followed. Then, in 1974, I was hired to teach at a summer hockey school in British Columbia. I established the school's power skating program, and I taught it for 18 summers. During that time, thousands of aspiring hockey players came through the program, and many went on to have long and successful careers in the NHL.

As time went on, hockey associations around the United States, Canada, and Europe hired me to teach their hockey players. Eventually, I focused on running my own power skating programs, and I developed training courses for instructors who wanted to teach my power skating system. To this day, Laura Stamm power skating programs are taught only by instructors who go through rigorous training to become certified Laura Stamm instructors.

I didn't know it when I first started teaching, but I was teaching the European method of skating without ever having seen European hockey. What started as bits and pieces eventually developed into a true system. After all these years, this system is still the model by which all other power skating programs are measured.

My philosophy of teaching remains the backbone of my system. Each skating maneuver is taught by first breaking it down into its many parts. As the parts become integrated, we add more elements and complexity to the skill. The goal is for students to master each maneuver so that they will skate correctly, powerfully, and quickly—with and without the puck—in game situations. My program syllabus is structured much like a pyramid. Students first establish a strong foundation, and the training includes ever increasing subtleties as players reach the top.

Hockey skating has come so far in these 40 years. The game is played at lightning speeds. Players circle and weave, give and go. Defenders rush as if they were forwards, and forwards go back to cover for the rushing defenders. Players who can't keep up have little chance of making it at the highest levels. And every hockey school, almost every rink, offers some form of power skating instruction.

I'm teaching my second, even third, generation of players. I still can hardly believe that I jump-started the careers of hundreds—maybe thousands—of pro players, spawned the development of an entire industry, and was the model for and often the teacher of an entire generation of power skating instructors who have followed in my footsteps.

Over the past few years, I have started to reflect on my life's work. I look back on some of the things I accomplished:

- I invented many terms that are now commonly used by most of the hockey community: *C-cuts, V-diamond, pivot-push-pivot-return, X-push, toe flick.*
- I received testimonials from numerous players and coaches in the NHL and elsewhere.
- I taught and mentored many successful hockey and figure skating instructors. Some started their own organizations after learning from me or after teaching for my organization.
- I pioneered work in the field of power skating instruction. Many instructors could not have had a career in this field had it not been for my pioneering work.
- I wrote many articles addressing hockey issues, such as violence, hazing, spring tryouts, and proper training.
- I taught many coaches who tell me that they still use my power skating system with their youth players today—years after they took my program or learned from me while assisting me on the ice.
- I taught numerous individuals who became fabulous skaters at every level—NHL, minor league, college, and recreational players (and instructors too).
- I often volunteered my services in order to help players who otherwise could not have afforded to play hockey or to pay to improve their skating.

As skill levels continue to increase, hockey becomes more and more exciting. I feel very fortunate to have been there early on, to have catalyzed the sport's development, and in the process to have influenced so many lives.
Skate great hockey!

Acknowledgments

This book has just one author, but it could not have been written without the help of many. I express deep thanks and gratitude to all those who helped me make this book a reality:

NHL players Doug Brown and Greg Brown, for your fabulous skating and unending support.

NHL player Brian Rafalski, for being the featured player on the cover of this book.

The other hockey players who graciously contributed time, energy, and skating ability: Gordon Campbell, Erik Kallio, Mark Pecchia, Louis Santini, and Richard Stamm.

Marshall Rule, for your expertise, knowledge, and lifelong friendship. You have been my mentor since even before the beginning of my career. Our intellectual battles continue to further my education in skating.

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Luc Robitaille, for writing the foreword to this book. Thank you for your kind words and continuing support.

In Memoriam: The late and great Herb Brooks, for whom I had the honor of working when he coached the New York Rangers, and from whom I learned so much.

Introduction

Wayne Gretzky once said, "If you can't skate, you can't play our sport; skating is an art." Yes, skating is an art. Ice hockey is also an art—a complicated art that is made up of many skills. Skating is the most fundamental and important skill. What Gretzky meant is that if you can't perform every hockey skating maneuver with speed, agility, power, quickness, and efficiency, you won't make it to the highest levels of hockey. Today's NHL stars fly down the ice at speeds unheard of even 10 years ago. Those players who are agile and *fast* dominate the game.

Hockey starts with the skates and legs. If players can't get from point A to point B instantaneously and efficiently, nothing else will work!

Skating techniques are based on scientific principles—force generation, circle physics, center of gravity, acceleration, momentum, and inertia. Many players don't realize that perfecting their skating technique is a long-term process. It takes years to become a great skater, just as it takes years to become a great player. Without dedication and lots of hard work in *every* aspect of the sport, it is almost impossible to get to the big leagues.

Jack Blatherwick, a colleague of mine and one of the most knowledgeable people in the field of biomechanics and conditioning, says the following: "Even with all the training devices available in hockey today, skating technique is still the single most important element. Kids need to be taught correct skating technique from the get-go so that by the time they are in their teens they will be able to skate without having to think about it." Training considerations for different age groups are discussed in more detail in the upcoming section.

Coaches like players who have fast feet. Fast feet are important because hockey is a sprint sport. But fast feet do not necessarily result in going fast. Because speed is a measure of distance traveled in time (miles per hour, feet per second), every time players move their feet (stride), they should cover significant distances. Some players move their feet fast but have improper and incomplete leg drive. These players may look fast, but they end up going nowhere fast. The goal is to move efficiently fast.

To help players achieve efficiently fast movement with correct technique, the most effective teaching method is one that has a systematic and integrative approach. Like all skill development, the teaching of skating technique should be structured like a pyramid—in other words, players first need to build a strong foundation. More advanced and intricate techniques are incorporated as players mature and as their abilities improve. The process that I adhere to is as follows:

First, teach players to skate correctly.

Then teach them to skate correctly and powerfully.

Then teach them to skate correctly, powerfully, and explosively.

Then teach them to skate correctly, powerfully, explosively, and quickly.

Finally, teach them to skate correctly, powerfully, explosively, and quickly—with the puck, under lots of pressure and in game situations.

The *last* element of skill development is speed. No one can learn a new skill or skating maneuver going fast. It's too much for the brain and body to accommodate. Players must learn to skate *correctly* before worrying about skating powerfully, explosively, or quickly—no matter how long it takes. And, when performing powerfully, explosively, and quickly, doing so *correctly* is still the number one priority. This combination is what makes efficiently fast skating so difficult.

My teaching methodology uses the senses (feeling, acting [doing], seeing [visualizing], and thinking [decision making] = FAST) in a process that involves multiple building blocks. This process takes time, patience, experimentation, and years of practice.

HOCKEY TRAINING FOR VARIOUS AGE GROUPS

When teaching and coaching, you must be aware of the needs of the age group and level of skaters you are working with. Young athletes have specific needs, and premature or overly intense athletic training can be harmful. Hockey programs for youngsters are often too intense—competitions are too numerous, seasons are too long, and the emphasis on winning is too great. Young children are pushed by parents and coaches to choose and specialize in hockey long before they are mature enough to do so.

Up to the age of 8, children should enjoy a variety of fun and stimulating activities. They should engage in many different movement activities; children in this age group need to develop a broad base of movement skills. Dancing, tumbling, and jumping are excellent activities. These youngsters have very short attention spans, so instruction should be unstructured and fun. Teaching should be short and simple; the best teaching strategy is to use "show and tell" methods. Structured practices provide no long-term advantages for children in this age group.

Intensive training and competition at too early an age will inhibit the development of balance, agility, and coordination. They also prevent youngsters from learning other sports and developing the varied motor skills necessary for maximum athletic performance in later years.

Between the ages of 8 and 10, children's postural and balance skills mature and become more automatic. These children are able to master some of the basic movements needed for organized sports; however, they still have short attention spans, and it is difficult for them to make the rapid decisions that are involved in complex sports. These children should participate in several sports in order to develop balance, agility, and coordination. Sports such as hockey, soccer, and basketball—as well as martial arts, swimming, tee ball, and lacrosse—are excellent choices if approached in a fun and balanced way. In hockey for this age group, fundamental skating skills can be introduced and practiced, but practices must be fun.

From ages 10 to 12 (prepubescence), children show great improvement in coordination, motor skills, and decision-making capabilities. In hockey, skating skills must now be strongly emphasized; skating techniques should continue to be emphasized and built on in the ensuing years. Players in this age group are now ready for some endurance and quickness training. They should engage in activities and drills that incorporate core strength, quickness, coordination, body awareness, balance, and rhythm. Fun and variety are still important, so these kids should be encouraged to participate in multiple sports.

From ages 13 to 16, athletes are able to incorporate complex skills, and they can integrate large amounts of information. They can focus appropriately, and their decision-making capabilities improve dramatically. These young people are ready to specialize in their sport of choice and to practice with true dedication and intensity. This is also the time of the adolescent growth spurt, which is the period of greatest and most obvious change in a young person's life.

Skill Training

Skating is an extremely complicated activity, and hockey is an extremely complicated sport. Skating moves are not natural to the human body; in fact, they're often the opposite of natural. Skating moves are numerous, intricate, and interdependent. Each hockey maneuver consists of many parts. Each part must be learned separately and then integrated into the whole move. Proper technique training is essential for players to become fast, powerful, explosive, quick, and efficient skaters.

As previously mentioned, I believe in the pyramid method—that is, building a strong foundation and working up from there to integrate and refine each part into the whole. When teaching young skaters, we have them learn the skill without the puck first. Once the skill can be performed correctly, we add the puck. As players mature, we focus on developing power, explosiveness, and quickness. Finally, we focus on applying the skill under pressure and in game situations. At the end of each practice, players should be allowed to skate fast and have fun without worrying about correct technique.

Skill (technique) training programs for young hockey players—and for beginning players of all ages—should include simple skating fundamentals done at a comfortable level. The focus should be on helping players develop comprehension, smoothness, and efficiency.

For players age 11 and up, skating technique must be combined with power, explosiveness, and quickness. Training should include some interval training (work–rest training). Whether workouts are for sprinting, strength training, agility, skating, or athletic attributes—such as balance, rhythm, and coordination—the workouts should include some interval training.

Long, slow training (without quickness training) has been shown to teach muscles to perform slowly. Therefore, slow-moving activities such as jogging, without some interval training, will not train quickness.

Note: Long-distance running needs to be carefully monitored. If young people overdo it or if they perform this type of running on hard or uneven surfaces, this can result in growth plate injuries, especially during the adolescent growth spurt.

Work (i.e., sprint) periods for all young players, including adolescents, should be short (a maximum of 15 seconds) in order to avoid the accumulation of lactic acid. Enough rest time for full recovery must be included between each work (sprint) period.

While players are still learning skating techniques, quickness training should be done mostly off the ice. This helps ensure that the quickness training does not interfere with skill development. Coaches must remember that developing players cannot learn, perform properly, or perform effectively when they're fatigued. These players need a healthy mix of work time and rest time. Exhaustion prohibits skill development. *Proper execution* is the key to learning any skill (only perfect practice makes perfect).

Strength Training

With prepubescent children, any strength training that is done should involve submaximal resistance, such as one's own body weight, light dumbbells, or medicine balls. Whole-body activities are the most important and beneficial, especially for improving core strength.

For skating, developing players should work on two-leg and one-leg strength training. When players strengthen their legs at a young age, this increases their chances of learning to skate correctly. Skating ability and leg strength (especially single-leg strength) are synergistic, so they should be developed at the same age. But the training should be fun.

Modifying Training During the Adolescent Growth Spurt

During the adolescent growth spurt (AGS), kids often lose coordination and skill. Core strength, postural stability, concentration, technique, explosive power, and foot speed are all affected. The AGS has a negative (but temporary) impact on the learning process in general.

During growth cycles, kids don't have the biological base of one-leg strength or muscular endurance that is required for getting into a good skating position. On-ice practices should focus on skill and technique rather than on power. Off-ice work should include two-leg and one-leg exercises for coordination, balance, and agility. Exercises that help improve core strength and postural stability are critical. Heavy strength and power workouts should be postponed until the muscles are stronger.

During puberty, players' training should include speed, quickness, and explosive power as part of all workouts.

On-ice work to improve skating. Players should continue to work on developing sound skating fundamentals. Skating technique should be incorporated into all practices.

Off-ice work to improve skating. Players should work on two-leg and one-leg postural stability. Players should do exercises for foot speed and explosive

jumping (power) from a position of good knee bend with the shoulders and head up.

When this combination of training is used, players are being prepared to reach their skating potential.

The three to four years just after puberty are the most critical for developing foot speed and explosive power. However, players must continue training for technique, power, quickness, and foot speed during and after the AGS; many players lose these qualities during their periods of rapid growth. Patterns are fairly well defined by puberty. But if players have a solid base of skating mechanics and quick feet, the elements of explosiveness, quickness, and efficiency can be improved after puberty and for several years beyond.

Competition is an important part of a young person's development. Hockey is one of the great competitive sports. It can be an excellent training ground for teaching youngsters how to compete successfully in life's many competitive and challenging situations. However, the value of hockey depends on how it is conducted. Parents and coaches have a critical role in ensuring that development occurs in an intelligent, well-structured, and well-thought-out process. This process should teach positive life lessons, maximize each player's inherent potential, and provide a positive learning experience as the players mature.

COACHING GUIDELINES

For youngsters, skating is not the most exciting part of hockey. Kids want to play the game, not practice skating. The challenge for a coach or power skating instructor is to teach the skating mechanics in a way that makes them well understood, easy to remember, and fun to practice. Once players realize that their game is improving because their skating is improving, they become willing students. As players get more ice time—and as they get some experience playing on the power play or when the team is shorthanded—the connection between skating ability and ice time becomes obvious. Here are some ideas for keeping skill training effective and fun for young players:

- When possible, explain your plans for the practice session before going on the ice. Ice time has a way of flying by. If players know your plans beforehand, they will be ready to work immediately.
- Establish an effective talk–skating ratio. Alternate short and frequent explanations with longer periods of skating.
- Remember that although each player's skating style is unique, certain skating principles are universal and must be adhered to. Make sure you teach and reinforce these principles.
- Don't expect instant success. It takes many years to become a finished skater.
- Keep youngsters skating as much as possible—they tend to get restless easily. Organize the ice with this in mind. Skate the entire length of the ice when the group is small, but skate from sideboard to sideboard when

the group is large. Use small-group stations when applicable. Try to sense when the group is becoming restless, and change the activity before you lose the group.

- Don't allow players to skate sloppily. Make them concentrate on skating correctly. Stop them if the skating disintegrates into sloppiness. Let them know that your goal is to take them out of their comfort zones.
- Finish practices with fun and high-quality skating. Even stops and starts can be fun if players are working on improvement instead of just on conditioning!

Suggestions for Incorporating Skating Technique Into Practices

Teach the fundamentals of skating technique early in the season.

- First month: Spend one-half of each practice teaching skating fundamentals. These should include forward stride, backward stride, crossovers, starts, turns, transition, and so on.
- Second month: Spend one-fourth of each practice reviewing at least one or two of the fundamentals.
- Third month: Spend one-fourth of each practice reviewing at least one or two of the fundamentals while using pucks.
- After the third month: Spend a few minutes of each practice working on skating technique, and keep reminding players of correct technique when they have the puck, even in scrimmages.

Note: Remind players to skate correctly during all practices (and eventually in games).

Suggestions for Incorporating Skating Moves Into Scrimmages

Create scrimmages or games that have skating technique as the focus. Specific skating maneuvers can be enhanced in these scrimmages by establishing rules such as the following:

- Player with the puck must take four or five forward strides before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must take four or five backward strides before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must do two or three forward or backward crossovers before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must do one or two pivots (tight turns) before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must transition (from forward to backward or from backward to forward) one or two times before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must spin around (360 degrees) one or two times before passing or shooting.

- Player (with or without the puck) must accelerate from slow to fast each time he enters the offensive zone.
- Player (with or without the puck) must start from a complete stop—using toe starts—before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must do two or three stops and starts before passing or shooting.
- Player with the puck must make at least two lateral moves before passing or shooting.
- Players must practice the give-and-go two or three times before shooting.
- Player with the puck must go through an obstacle course before passing or shooting.

You can also make up more rules—or let the kids make them up. This kind of creativity is what young players thrive on.

Suggestions for Incorporating Races Into Practices

Use races and prizes to stimulate the competitive spirit. But keep in mind that races are only helpful with players who have reached a certain skill level; races can be detrimental when players are just learning new skills. Players caught in the frenzy of trying to win will by necessity ignore technique. Races can include forward skating, backward skating, cornering, turning, agility maneuvers, and so on.

Suggestions for Monitoring Improvement

Time your players and keep a record of their progress on different skating maneuvers. This should include the following:

- Straight skating—forward and backward
- Explosive acceleration from a complete stop
- Stops and starts
- Lateral mobility (this can be done using two skaters—one as a forward and the other as a defender)
- Turns, transition, 360s, and so on
- Obstacle courses (these should include several different skating maneuvers and agility moves)

Points to Remember

- A coach or instructor should develop a philosophy of teaching and should adhere to it.
- Affection and discipline are not mutually exclusive.
- Teaching can sometimes be like pulling teeth, but insistence on high standards pays off. Whenever possible, learning should be fun, but sometimes players must be made to learn in spite of themselves.
- Inventiveness, creativity, and analytic thinking should be valued and encouraged. Screaming coaches stifle creativity and build pressure. Wayne

Gretzky was not the product of intimidation—he was given the freedom to feel, act, see, and think (FAST), as well as to create and make many mistakes along the way.

- Practice does not make perfect. Only *perfect* practice makes perfect. Therefore, coaches should encourage their players to practice perfectly.
- Coaches must commit to the long term. Eventually, the techniques will click and the players will skate great hockey!

FORMAT OF THE BOOK

Each chapter of this book is divided into two sections. The first section includes a detailed explanation of the skating maneuver being discussed. The second section includes drills that can be used to practice that maneuver.

The drills progress from the simplest to the most difficult. The book indicates which drills are appropriate for young and learning players and which are appropriate for more advanced and elite-level players. The skill levels for the drills are defined as follows:

Basic: These drills are geared to a range of players whose ability and background are fairly basic. This means they probably have been playing for only a year or two. Players in house leagues and youth competitive leagues as well as learning adults would fit into this category. The skating maneuvers covered are fundamental and very important to the proper development of hockey players. Pucks are used, but on a limited basis, because students need to focus on their skating skills without the added distraction of pucks and the complicated skills of puck control.

Intermediate: These drills are geared to players with more experience. Students may or may not have taken Laura Stamm power skating programs in the past, but they have more hockey experience than players at the basic level. The drills include intermediate skating maneuvers and a faster pace. Pucks are also included more often.

Advanced: These drills are geared to players with extensive experience and strong skating skills (high-level players). The drills include advanced skating maneuvers and a rapid pace. Pucks are used in combination with all skating maneuvers and drills.

The drills in this book can be combined. Here are some examples:

- Combine turn drills with knee-drop drills.
- Combine crossover drills with pivots.
- Use obstacle courses.
- Use a stopwatch to time players.

Drills alone do not make an accomplished athlete. The goal is to learn proper technique and to use drills designed for practicing and enhancing that technique. The purpose of this book is to help players and coaches achieve this goal.