



Yzerman: Strong and consistent skater.

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Analyzing some great skaters

By Robby Glantz

From time to time I like to discuss the skating strengths of current NHL players. We do this to give you a different perspective while watching these players perform, one that will help you improve your own skating by better understanding what makes these players move so fluidly on the ice.

Joey Juneau

Blinding speed is what comes to mind when you think of the young star of the Washington Capitals. However, he has the turning and stop-on-a-dime ability to go along with his speed, and that keeps opponents back on their heels. What to look for: Juneau has such an impressive kneebend. His knees are bent at the perfect 90° angle in all the maneuvers he performs in a game. Focus on his ability to keep his body position low and his weight centered directly over his skates. In the forward stride, he has the great ability to thrust his entire edge against the ice, rolling from the back of the blade to the front, to attain his explosive speed.

Sergei Makarov

Had Makarov played in the NHL during his prime he would definitely have been considered one of the league's all-time greats. But even today, his excellent skating and play-making skills are quite evident as he continues to be a leader on the Dallas Stars. What to look for: Makarov is a smaller player who uses his size to his advantage. He has a tremendously low center of gravity and superb balance, which makes him difficult to knock off of his feet. Notice how Makarov skates with a bowlegged style. Keeping the knees turned outward is vital for being able to push your legs in the proper direction when skating. Also, he keeps a very wide base when making lateral (side-to-side) moves, which keeps defenseman guessing as to which direction he will be going.

Mike Modano

Modano is the marquee attraction for the Dallas Stars. He is one of those players who plays the game and skates so smoothly that he appears to be moving effortlessly. However, it is excellent technique and

fundamentals, combined with hard work, that are behind his great skills. What to look for: Modano is a taller player who uses his long stride to full advantage. By fully extending his leg on every stride, he is able to cover more distance and gain speed without having to use as many pushes as the average player. Modano also has a great ability to explode wide on an opponent because of his excellent crossover technique. Notice how he remains square to the ice with his upper body even (keeping his inside shoulder up) while on an extreme angle with his lower body. This balance is what gives him the ability to perform such fast crossovers.

Luc Robitaille

So his straight-ahead speed is not that of a Paul Coffey. How is it, then, that Robitaille can constantly beat defenseman to the spot, putting himself in position to score? For starters, Luc has great balance and knee bend. And rather than going to the front of the net and standing on the flats of his skates, Luc always attempts to plant himself squarely and powerfully over his edges. He uses his edges masterfully (at the proper 45° angle) to grip the ice, and he is very tough to move.

One of the most underrated aspects of Luc's game is also his work in the corners and along the boards. The next time you watch a Rangers game, focus on how Luc gets lower than the checker when scrapping for the puck. Try and see how he uses his edges when he is battling along the boards, rolling them deeply into the ice in order to ward off the defender and still make a play. And Luc uses his outside edges as well as anyone in the league; he can turn very quickly and has the ability to stop on a dime.

Jaromir Jagr

The great Czech winger for the Pittsburgh Penguins is what I would describe as deceptively fast. He doesn't have to move his legs 1000 miles per hour to generate speed. Instead, he uses full extension on every stride and seems never to waste a push. Also, for a big player, Jagr is tremendously sturdy and has super balance. He accomplishes this by using proper techniques that most big players seem unwilling to attempt. That is, he keeps excellent knee bend throughout the game so he can best utilize his strong legs and, in turn, lower his center of gravity.

If you think back to Pittsburgh's last Stanley Cup run, you undoubtedly remember some of Jagr's dazzling plays and moves. In analyzing slow-motion videotape of Jagr, it's amazing to see the strength of his ankles and how effectively he uses edges by putting all his body weight over them—driving around defenders and making them look as if they're standing still.

Steve Yzerman

Yzerman, like Robitaille, is also so consistent and strong over his skates that we tend to take his exceptional skills for granted. Yzerman can turn a defenseman inside out, perhaps better than anyone in the league. Whereas most players feel more comfortable going to their backhand, Yzerman is extremely strong at making his "skating" moves to the forehand. He has the great ability to make a tight turn on an extreme outside edge (halfway to the ice) and come out of it without losing any speed by crossing over and springing forward onto the inside edge of his toes. He gets that extra burst of acceleration, and manages to control the puck as well.

Yzerman also has the ability to shoot hard and accurately while going full speed. He keeps excellent body control, and uses his edges to drive off of, and then to land on during the follow-through—which is perfect shooting technique.

Hopefully, these illustrations of the skills of some of the NHL's superstars will help you understand that you don't have to be the fastest player on your team to be an effective player. Likewise, while having flat-out speed is important, and certainly one of our goals, you don't have to be the fastest skater to be the best "power skater."

Work hard on all aspects of your skating because each one is vital to the game. But don't be surprised when you hear people calling the local talk shows and saying things like, "Sure he scores a lot of points, but he doesn't skate very fast."

I'll tell you this much—I'd sure like to skate as "slow" as these guys!

Robby Glantz, power skating coach for the Los Angeles Kings, Swedish Champions Malmö, and the German National Team, conducts skating programs throughout North America and Europe.