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## A tug of war with the ice

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By Robby Glantz

In last month's column we discussed ways of improving your forward crossunder technique. This month, we will focus on how to improve the backward crossunder. It should be no surprise that many of the same common mistakes I see in forward crossunder technique are repeated with the backward version of this skating staple.

First of all, I find that many players have a tremendous fear of the backward crossunder, and that it can be especially intimidating to novice players. In fact, the backward crossunder—at least in theory—should be easier in many ways than its forward counterpart. And the reason is that in the backward maneuver, we get to land with two feet on the ice—with both skates on inside edges—whereas in the forward crossunder we are almost always on only one foot, and the inside foot is on the much more difficult outside edge.

### Get a wide base

Another problem I see with students at all levels undertaking this maneuver comes from the inside, crossing-under leg. Quite often, it does not get the drive or power necessary to pick up speed because the reach inward with this leg is too narrow. In other words, you need to have a wide base to start from.

To do so, make an attempt to pull this inside leg to full extension under the body, and then, when you return it to the middle, try to stretch it as far as you can (even outside your shoulder width) so that it can pull or tug more ice. By doing so, you will immediately pick up more speed and power.

Lastly, we need to discuss the dreaded counter-clockwise crossunders (right-under-left crossunders). For most of us this is the weaker side when it comes to backward crossunders. One reason this side is often not as strong is that it is vital to put your body weight towards the outside leg, and in this case it should be centered over the left leg—which is usually the weaker leg. The only way to improve this is to work harder on it; not to ignore because it is more difficult.

### Backward crossunder

*Key Points:* It all starts with knee-bend. Keep the butt down, so that it is parallel to the ice, by bending at the knees with the back straight (feel like you are sitting on a stool). You should make one push at a time with all your body weight centered over each push, while making sure that your inside shoulder and ear do not dip into the middle (they should remain parallel to the ice).

The outside leg pushes a half-moon cut into the ice to full extension, going up and out, while never leaving the ice surface. The inside leg pulls hard under the body also to full extension, finishing on the outside edge with a crunch of the toe (your legs should form the letter "y"). You should then step out as wide as you can with that inside leg so that you have the ability to pull that leg under the body again—pulling against the ice—to gain more speed.

*Skating Imagery:* Remember, just as we discussed last month with the forward maneuver, you must visualize this more as a cross-*under* rather than as a crossover because the outside skate remains on the ice at all times with the inside leg constantly pulling under. At no time in this maneuver should the outside leg (inside edge) leave the ice to crossover. Instead, the outside foot remains on the ice performing a half-moon cut, while the inside leg pulls under.

I like to have my students make believe they are playing tug-of-war with their inside leg. In other words, try to pull against as much ice as possible until you have fully stretched the inside leg, in effect, “tugging” against the ice.

Finally, remember to bend your knees so they are about two inches over the toes of your skates. This will allow you to stretch your legs to the maximum, and it will give you the balance and control you are searching for.

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