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Correcting common errors

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By Robby Glantz

With our Summer Power Skating Schools having come and gone, just as we did last year at this time, my Instructors and I have tried to reconstruct for you three of the most common mistakes our students made (with respect to their overall skating techniques) at our camps. In last year's column on this same subject, I discussed poor kneebend, stick control and shoddy edgework, this year we will focus on: The fear of falling down, skating with the head down, and poor equipment. Correcting one or all of these common errors will immediately improve your skating ability.

The fear factor

In our opening speech to all the participants at a camp, we always explain to them that is okay to fall down. (Fortunately, we have plenty of equipment on which usually absorbs the brunt of the fall). We have to learn to push ourselves past where we feel comfortable if we are going to achieve the improvement we desire. Additionally we point out that players at all levels make mistakes and fall down; this how they improve and eventually become stars.

The best example of this is, that as Power Skating Coach for the Los Angeles Kings, I had the great fortune of watching Wayne Gretzky in practice, where, guess what, he falls down and makes mistakes. The reason? He is never afraid to try new things and to push himself beyond his comfort zone. This is just another of the many reasons for his greatness.

To overcome the fear factor, bend your knees deeply so they are covering — or about 2" out in front of — the toes of your skates This will lessen the impact of your falls as compared to when you fall from a straight up position. Loosen the top two iylids of your skates as well, or even take the top lace out, this will automatically let you roll your edges more which will give you far more edge maneuverability and turning ability.

Finally, when you fall, be sure to pop up as quick as you can so that you are right back in the play and your opponent does not feel he has an advantage over you.

Keep your head up

It's almost a cliché that hockey should be played and skated with your head up. It becomes even more frustrating when we see players at all levels skating around with their heads down. This bad habit not only makes it impossible to see the play around you, but from a pure skating standpoint, it also takes away from your balance because of poor body posture.

To improve in this area, in every drill concentrate on keeping your eyes affixed on some sort of target (i.e. a glass divider, scoreboard, clock, etc.), so that you train yourself to keep your head up. When you have the puck, for example, do not be afraid to lose it. Practice going as long as you can without looking down until you finally do lose the puck and keep doing it again and again until you are able to maintain control for longer periods of time.

Poor equipment

I always feel awkward discussing this subject, because as we all know hockey is an extremely expensive sport. With that well in mind, I still would be remiss if I did not mention the most important equipment of

all...the Skates!. Parents, please make every effort to purchase the top-of-the-line skates, even if it means spending a few more bucks. The cheaper versions break down much too easily in the ankle-to-heel region and end up doing so much damage to a young skater's confidence and overall skating ability because they have nothing under them for support.

Also, please do not buy skates that are too big; they really should fit correctly and snugly from the day you buy them. You will be happy you made the investment, because your young player will reward you with more self confidence and better skating.

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