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The snow cone drill

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By Robby Glantz

Working with professional players is always a challenging and rewarding experience. However, in many ways it is the same as working with youth hockey players. The fundamentals we teach for how to skate faster are the same at all skill levels—even for those in the professional ranks. Believe it or not, most of the pros I have worked with do not know why they are such gifted skaters, and, in turn, have an incredible desire to learn the fundamentals so they can get even faster.

In December, with the Los Angeles Kings at home for most of the month, I had the opportunity to work quite a bit with most of the players on their skating. I also worked recently with the great NHL forward Kirk Muller, during his unfortunate situation with the New York Islanders. The following is a synopsis of one of the drills which I use with pro and youth players alike—over and over—to improve the forward stride. With repetitious practice, this exercise will really help you with your skating technique.

The Snow-Cone Drill

Also called “Scrape the Toe, Slam the Heels,” the Snow-Cone drill is an excellent exercise for the forward stride and is one that should be repeated at the start of every practice. Repetition, combined with proper technique, is the key to improving in any sport—and especially in skating. This drill gets its name because you should scrape so much ice with the toe of your skate that it creates what looks like a snow-cone under your body (your feet act as the cone because they come together in the middle).

Some of the fundamentals which are targeted by this drill include: helping you to bend the knees more; giving you a better understanding of bodyweight transfer; teaching how to get to full extension, and keeping your feet low to the ice.

To perform the drill, bend the knees so they are 2” out over the toes of your skates. Start at a slow pace and as you improve do it faster and faster. Begin the drill in the start position, with your heels in and touching, and your toes out, forming what looks like an arrow-tip (we call this the “Arrow Position”). Use 100% of your bodyweight, centered over an inside edge, to thrust your pushing foot out to the side to full extension; the other foot is gliding perpendicular to the pushing foot (also to the side), but your hips must remain straight with the direction you are traveling. When you get to full extension, scrape only the toe (last 1”-2”) of your skate all the way back under your body.

Be sure to only drag the toe of your skate in the drill as that is where the last push in the forward stride comes from. Scrape the ice with your toe (keep your knee turned outward) all the way back in under your body until you are able to literally click your heels in the middle. If you are unable to scrape ice because your knee and/or toe are turned downward, then you are performing the drill improperly, and are most likely also finishing your push incorrectly when skating.

Make sure to hit your heels together in the middle, in the arrow position, with only one skate on the ice, then transfer all your bodyweight to the next push and repeat the drill with the other leg. Continue doing the drill around the ice, and add more tempo as it becomes more comfortable to you.

Only an exercise

In a game situation, you obviously do not skate around the ice scraping your toes and slamming your heels: this is only an exercise. So why do it in practice? First off, while you do not drag your toe when skating full speed, the toe of the skate should and must stay extremely low to the ice (about a half-inch above). Secondly, while you shouldn't hit your heels in a game, they *should* return under your body to where they almost touch so you are able to get all your bodyweight on each push.

Thus, the drill reminds you, among other things, to keep your feet low and how to improve your weight transfer. In essence, it is an excellent, slow, and exaggerated simulation of what the forward stride should look like.

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