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Identify the best, Part II

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By Robby Glantz

As I discussed in this column last month the best all-around skating forwards in the NHL are not necessarily the fastest ones. Also, I defined the "best all-around skater" as the player who has the ability to not only get where they are going in a hurry, but also to be able to stop on a dime, change directions, perform turning maneuvers, maintain speed with the puck, etc.

I talked about some of the NHL forwards (in alphabetical order, from Bondra to Lemieux) who fall in the category of best all-around skaters, and a few of my tips on what makes them so good and how their excellent skating can help yours if you focus on their tendencies and skills. This month, I will look at the rest of that list, from Lindros to Zhamnov.

Eric Lindros. The first word that comes to mind when speaking of Lindros, of course, is power. He is like a steamroller once he gets going, and while his overall pure speed is not great (it would improve if he bent his knees more), his balance and size more than makes up for it. Check out how wide he spreads his feet when standing in front of the net, which makes him nearly impossible to move.

Mark Messier. I always use Messier as my example of how to keep the upper body still and let the legs do the work, notice how his head and shoulders stay still, and how his arm-swing extends fully to the front (rather than side to side), when he is skating the forward stride. He also makes great use of his outside edges, especially when he bulls to the net. Watch how he gets that inside foot (outside edge) in front of the defender while pushing with the outside leg (inside edge) so he can keep him on his back.

Mike Modano. He is silky smooth on his skates, with no wasted motions. He simply makes it look effortless. His crossunder turns are arguably the best in the game. Focus on how he drives his inside leg (outside edge) hard under his body while keeping his shoulders square with the ice, as he breaks out of his own zone. This allows him to accelerate out of his turns.

Alexander Mogilny. He has an unbelievably strong lower body and his pure speed is underrated because many of goals come from right in front of the net, where his strength over his edges is superb. Notice how much power and speed he gets in the forward stride by centering all of his bodyweight over each push and how his legs extend fully to the side.

Jeremy Roenick. Every picture you will ever see of Roenick, he will be in a perfect skating position. Technically, he has no weaknesses. He finishes every push to full extension, getting the maximum from each stride. Notice how he explodes out of his own zone and how low he remains to the ice; almost always with one hand on the stick (even with the puck), fully extending his arms to the front, which allows him to get better extension from his legs.

Joe Sakic. He has an unbelievable ability to change directions, stop and start, and accelerate laterally with the puck. He seems to have no weak side when it comes to stopping. Notice, however, that even though it seems as if he is stopping on a dime, in fact, he actually slides first and then comes to a stop. (Note: thinking of the hockey stop as a "hockey slide" will really help you, especially when you are working on improving the weaker side).

Teemu Selanne. He is so smooth and effortless that he seems to just glide past defenders, but he might be the most explosive player in the league at exploiting even the slightest opening on the ice. He is able to do this by maintaining an excellent knee bend (even in the third period while other players are tiring and straightening up). He also uses the entire length of his blade to thrust from, giving him more power and speed.

Steve Yzerman. Yzerman can turn a defenseman inside out perhaps better than anyone in the league. He is so strong at making his moves to the forehand, while most players feel more comfortable going to their backhand. He has the great ability to make a tight turn on an extreme outside edge (halfway to the ice) and come out of that turn without losing any speed by crossing over and springing forward onto the inside edge of his toes for that extra burst of acceleration. And all this while controlling the puck.

Alexei Zhamnov. Zhamnov can go wide on nearly anybody in the league, but what makes him most dangerous is his ability to bust wide and then tight turn back away from the defenseman (a vintage Gretzky move) to set up a teammate streaking towards the net. Notice how he can get a powerful shot off even while he is skating away from the net (on his off wing) because he maintains a low center of gravity and drives his weight down and into the shot, rather than lifting up.

Speed isn't everything

Hopefully, this brief illustration of the skills of some of the NHL's superstars will help you to realize that you do not have to be the fastest player on your team to be the most effective skater or player. And in turn, while having flat-out speed is very important, and certainly one of the major aspects of my teaching, you do not have to be the fastest skater to be the best "power skater." Work hard on *all* facets of your skating, as each one is vital in our sport.

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