

Learning to drive -- with Dave King

By James Baxter

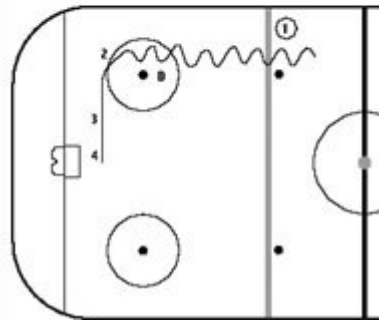
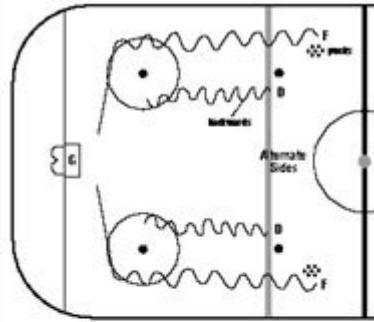


Figure 1 (top)
Figure 2 (bottom)

All hockey fans marvel when a player “turns on the jets” and goes around a defenseman for a shot on goal.

It is the combination of speed and strength that impresses fans and inspires players. It looks tough.

But the undisputed champions of the drive are Mark Messier, Brendan Shanahan, Theo Fleury and, until injuries took their toll on his legs, Cam Neely. It helps that they are big, strong and are experienced at protecting the puck, but Dave King, former coach of the Calgary Flames and Canada’s Olympic Team, insists that any player can do this. It is simply a matter, he believes, of these NHLers having practiced the move enough to have confidence that they can draw on it when they want to go for the net.

“There really isn’t anything special about going to the net effectively,” says King in an on-ice lecture to coaches which was filmed for the Center for Hockey Excellence at the Hockey Hall of Fame. “It is simply a matter of skating hard and, when the advantage is gained on the defenseman, turning in on the net.”

Anderson the prototype

King and his National Team coaches, knowing they would have to out skate the Europeans on the larger Olympic ice surfaces, studied many of the NHL’s stars prior to the 1992 Olympics. They settled on former Oilers star Glenn Anderson as the prototypical power-skating forward.

"We spent hours watching tape on Glenn Anderson, and we asked ourselves, how can we get more players to use drive skating to get to the net?" King said. "We realized that most players didn't use it because most had never learned how."

King breaks down the move into five components (fig. 1).

1. Skate hard with the puck in the neutral zone to build up as much speed as possible, all the while closing the distance between the forward and the retreating defenseman.
2. As the forward gets shoulder-to-shoulder with the defenseman, he should lean forward, take two or three more hard strides and begin to drive for the net.
3. While crossing over toward the net, protect the puck from the defenseman while cutting behind him.
4. With feet spread wide, glide on the skate closest to the blueline while pumping with the other foot ("scooting," King calls it) out in front of the net.
5. Shoot on net.

Six drill progression

As is often the case with developmental programs such as Canada's Olympic squad, King developed a six-drill progression to demonstrate the move, isolate the skills needed, and develop the confidence to use it during games.

"A great deal depends on the player being able to keep his inside shoulder up," says King, referring to the bend in the waist that allows the player to carve a turn in the ice with a solid edge. "The other main factor is that he must be able to protect the puck."

It is worth noting that nowhere did King mention that a player needs to be fast. It certainly doesn't hurt, but the drive is truly a timing, balance and puck-handling move.

DRILL 1

Starting at the far blueline, skate with the puck into the defensive zone, cut around the face off circle and move across the front of the net for a shot. After a while, begin to work against a defenseman, but with only limited resistance. The player should get the feel of the turn.

DRILL 2

Players should skate around the outside of the face-off circle, crossing over, and hold puck as far away from the face-off dot as possible while still maintaining control. Both directions. Try to keep both hands on the stick, although is not essential. Some players are very effective at protecting the puck with one hand on the stick and the other warding off the opponent's stick check.

DRILL 3

Same as Drill 2, only add one or two players to the middle of the circle trying to lightly swat at the circling player's stick. This simulates the moment when the beaten de-fenseman will bring his stick across the forward's body in an attempt to knock the puck free.

DRILL 4

Two players, shoulder-to-shoulder, skate in around face-off circle. The outside player tries to protect the puck from the inside player. This is the move that one must make if the defenseman manages to get turned around and tries to run the forward into the corner.

DRILL 5

"The Scoot." This move simulates the move a player makes move out in front of the net without crossing over. With feet spread wide and the inside shoulder turned upward, the forward glides on his inside skate while making four or five hard pushes with his outside, drive leg. This allows him balance and a wide stance to ward off defensemen.

DRILL 6 (fig. 2)

Full-length 1-on-1 drill. The forward starts with the puck on the wing, and the defenseman starts backward from the face-off dot above the blueline on the same side. The forward moves down at full speed and turns in toward the net at first opportunity. If the defenseman gives too much ground, the forward can stop quickly and cut in front of the defenseman. If there is a coach on the ice, he/she can help at first by yelling when the winger gets position.

—James Baxter