

Specific Skating Training – Is Your Plan Specific Enough?

By Susan Ellis

For most of you in North America, your season of competition is finished, you will take a bit of a break from skating and training, and then get started training for next season.

What you do in your summer training should be based on your evaluation of last year's performance and your goals for the upcoming season. (See Post Season Evaluation – April 2004 and Strategy for Success – April 2005)

The type and amount of training you do will be dependent on your age, training history, time and personal commitment.

For younger athletes (@12 and under), a simple general fitness program or involvement in another aerobic sport such as soccer, lacrosse, cross country and track running, cycling, etc. are good enough, but is better if combined with one or two sessions of more specific training (i.e.: inline skating, skating imitations, slide board) and an introduction to general strength training).

As the athlete matures (@12-17), training should become more specific, laying the foundation for the more specific qualities needed to be a top level speed skater – strength, endurance, lactic capacity and power, but can still include other sports as a method of cross training.

At the top of the training ladder (+17), not only should the training be specific to skating, but be aimed at improving specific qualities within the various energy systems, and specific in terms of strength training.

Talking to a friend last week, she told me that her team was very, very strong in the weight room, but that strength didn't seem to translate into specific strength on ice. While traditional strength training methods such as squats, ham curls, calf raises, Olympic lifts can make an athlete strong and give them a good base for strength and power, it is a general type of strength. Very specific strength and power work for skating is needed to take these qualities to the next level to ensure maximum potential strength and power is achieved on ice.

Skating imitations have long been used to increase specific strength and endurance in the skating muscles (hips, glutes, hams, quads, calves). Skaters are now using Techni-Cords™, belts, and turn cables to provide more specific resistance training. Techni-Cords™ are more specific in that they can be used either with or without a partner, can be used for both straights and corners, and the tension is adjustable for the weight and strength of the athlete. The amount and type of this specific strength training is dependent on the training history of the athlete. First the athletes should learn to do the exercises, whether doing un-resisted imitations or resisted training, with the best possible technique. Doing them incorrectly will create bad habits that will transfer onto

the ice. Once the correct technique is established, the athlete can then start to increase the duration and/or the intensity of the imitations.

Inline skating is very specific in that the same muscle groups are used as ice. There is debate however on the inline vs ice technique, so you need to make a choice when doing inline whether to use inline technique or ice technique. Many great ice skaters, especially from the US, have come from the inline world and have successfully converted to ice technique.

Slide boards, once a staple training method for speed skaters, are still OK, but there are many technical compromises in the timing and in the recovery phase that are made in using them. Use it sparingly and with caution to technique.

Jump training is essential to improving max power. Jump training can be used in tandem with weight training (complex training), as plyometric training (short reps of explosive power jumps), or more for endurance (longer reps, less explosive). Specific resisted jump training can be done on the Techni-Cords™ and don't require a partner (more on this in next month's tip).

Jump training can be done both on ice and off ice, but again, how you do them counts. Sloppy jumps produce sloppy technique, but good jumps can really add to efficiency as a result of technical improvements in position and timing, as well as specific power on ice. Different types of jumps can target different muscle groups and can be used to develop either general power or very specific skating power. I have seen many very good jumps programs that can totally exhaust an athlete and definitely help improve general power, but lacked specific skating power.

So, while it's good to have a plan that addresses specific skating strength, power, and endurance, make sure it really targets exactly what you want it to.

Next month's tip will include specific resisted and un-resisted imitations and jumps for skaters.