Corners – Working the Right Hip on the Lay In

By Susan Ellis

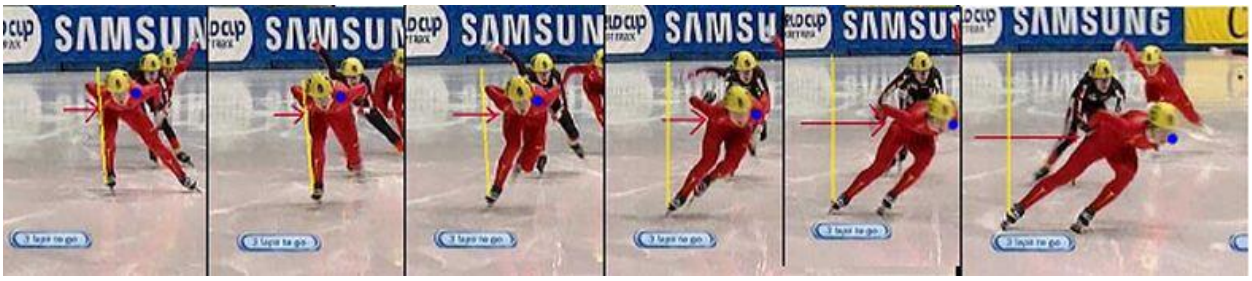
If you haven't read the article on Moving Hips In to Push – February 2008, you should do so before reading this article as it will give you more insight into how to make your hips work for you. You should also read The Corner Lay In – December 2004.

Way back in the old days (ya, when I was skating) there was a widely used term called 'hip in' to the corner. What it meant was you were supposed to bend your body in the shape of a banana and throw your left hip in to the corner. But nowadays 'hip in' has a totally different meaning. Yes, your hips still move in to the corner but it is done through pressing through your right hip and bringing your shoulders across with your body.

Pressing through the right hip, right from lay in, through left leg push and right cross, and through right leg push creates a better lean angle and puts more pressure in to the ice, giving not only more speed, but more hang time on the blade and more stability.

As always, any technical execution starts from a great position. That is: belly and chest close to thigh and butt tucked under you. Your right shoulder pocket shoulder be directly in line with your right hip, knee and ankle.

Pressing the right hip in starts as soon as the left skate has finished its push and left the ice, so the body starts to lean right away. You want it to be a gradual lean and not an immediate extreme lean so don't be in a hurry to press in too hard right away. Scrunching or tightening up the muscles around the right hip as well as crunching and pressing down and in with the lower and mid ab muscles helps to get your hip pressing in and forward. Remember, your weight must not only press in, but must press forward at the same time to get the forward momentum and acceleration of weight in to the corner.



Your chest must stay down while you recover the left leg to the back and load your right leg pressing your right hip in. Look at the pictures above to see how Meng Wang's chest never rises throughout the sequence of motion. Many skaters lose speed and power here because they allow the right leg to straighten, and/or lift their chest. This will cause the left leg to land too early and compromise the lean. As you press in on the right hip, your left leg must recover to the back and then both your right knee and left knee press forward at the same time. Keeping your left knee below your right knee during the first part of the recovery will help in keeping your right hip down and pressing in (look how

low Wang's left knee is in the 2nd photo from the left). Your left knee should not pass your right knee until your right ankle is fully bent and your weight has come forward to the ball of the foot.

Keep your thighs close together during the first part of the lean until you have reached the fully loaded position, i.e.: knees pass close together and not apart (see 3rd photo from left).

Once both knees have come together, and you have fully loaded your push to the ball of the foot, you start the push with your right, continuing to drive your right hip in and forward. At the same time drive your left knee up to your chest and hold it there until your left skate reaches the ice. Don't reach down to the ice with your skate, rather hold your knee up to your chest and let the ice come to you. This combination of driving through the right hip and holding your left knee up to your chest helps delay the set down of the left and increase the lean angle on both skates. Look at the huge lean angle Wang gets by delaying the set down of her left skate. It is the lean angle developed on the right skate lay in which leads to the lean angle on the left skate that puts maximum pressure in to the ice. You can push as hard as you want, but without the lean angle, you simply won't go as fast. (By the way, this video is taken from Wang's 500m world record race of 43.2.)

Note: As you push with the right don't try to keep the pressure on the ball of the foot. Because of the trajectory of the corner, you must let the pressure move back on the blade to mid-blade as you extend the push. If you try to keep the pressure on the ball through the push your blade will slip out. Note that this applies only to the right leg corner push. On all other pushes, at maximum speeds, the weight comes to the ball and pushes through the ball. (Skating at slower speeds is a different beast which we'll talk about some other time.)

Bringing the left side of the chest across to land inside the left thigh helps to keep your weight moving forward through the corner and prevents you from rocking back to your heels. Some skaters try to get their chest in to the corner but forget to bring their right hip with them, leaving the butt stuck out. Remember, hip and chest come across at the same time.