

Starting the Season Off Right

By Susan Ellis

Ahhhh! The summer has passed and for many clubs who are not fortunate enough to have summer ice it's time to get the blades out again.

The beginning of the season is a crucial time for setting the technique for the season. Many clubs have the idea that early season is a time to grind out an enormous volume of laps going slow, with the primary technical focus on being low.

'Slow' is OK for this time of year, but 'low' and 'slow' don't normally mix well when the goal is also technique. If you are skating in a low position at speeds below 70% you will not be simulating the technique you want at higher speeds for racing. Yes, you will be training the muscles to sustain a low position for a long period of time, but when you think about what actually unfolds in a race, you are never in the absolute low position unless the speeds are greater than at least 70%. If you are, you are accumulating lactic acid for no good reason. This is one of the reasons you will see long track 500m skaters very low, while 10,000m skaters are very high. In short track, the skaters are never in their absolute low position unless the speeds are high. The first laps in longer races tend to be slow and the skaters are in a high position, and as the speed increases they get lower.

The timing of the push (see *Delaying the Push – March 2003*) is crucial to power. Low, slow will promote two footing and compromise effective weight transfer because the legs do not have time to complete the extension on the pushing leg before you need to put the other foot down. Timing is severely compromised and therefore power. A slightly higher position allows the legs time to complete the movement because they don't have as far to move. Stand up and extend your leg to the side, then repeat in a low position and you will understand what I mean.

Two suggestions here –

- It is OK to skate 'slow' but raise your position up a bit.

OR

- It is OK to skate low, but up the speed to +70% and reduce the number of laps per interval. You can still do a high volume, just in shorter duration.

Thus: Higher speed (+70%) = lower position – less than 110 degree angle between thigh and shin

Slower speed (-70%) = higher position – more than 110 degree angle between thigh and shin

Whether you are skating in the high or the low position, always remember to bend the ankle. It is one of the most important keys to power!