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Power Plus Hockey Skating Inc.

Fast Starts - A Powerhouse, If Done Right

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To be the best player you can be, you need all the tools: tight turns, instant stops, the power to outstride the competition—and fast starts. The fast start (V-start) is one of the most popular starts in hockey. You don't use it all the time, but it's the start to use **whenever you want to get from 0 - 60 mph fast**. For example, when you stop on one foot going backwards, then sprint forward to the puck—that needs a fast start. When you're transitioning—say, coming through a turn, then sprinting up the ice—the fast start is what gets you to maximum speed in minimum time.

There are some variations in technique, but basically, the fast start is a controlled fall. Open up your striding foot so you're on the inside of the blade, lean your body forward at a 45 degree angle, and snap off the ball of your takeoff foot. The farther the lean, the farther the fall, and the longer the stride. You may only get one step in your new direction, then be stopping or transitioning to react to the game, so it's important to make that first one a good quick step.

Different people teach the fast start differently, but all the top professionals in power skating agree on two basic things: **use the inside of the blade**, and **push only with the ball of the foot**, not the whole blade.

As far back as 2003, at the International Hockey Skating Symposium, I saw the who's who of power skating unanimously come out in favour of using the ball of the foot (i.e. partial blade contact) for fast starts. Pros that teach ball-of-the-foot fast starts include Sean Skinner, Steffany Hanlen (Quantum Speed), Don Adams, Barb Aidelbaum, Steve Serdachny, and Wendy Marco. Canpower (Skate Canada's Power Skating Program) also teaches ball-of-the-foot technique for fast starts.

Why is using only the ball of the foot so much better than using the whole blade? It's the physics. For one thing, when you concentrate your body weight on a smaller area of the blade, it pushes you deeper into the ice, giving a **better grip and better rebound**. Try this experiment: push the whole flat length of a bread knife into a loaf of bread. Now push in just the tip of the knife. As you can see, the smaller the contact area, the easier it is to get penetration. It's the same on the ice. Using your body weight to dig a small area of your blade into the ice will give you a better grip and a more solid platform to

rebound off of than using the whole blade. Pushing or hammering the ice with a full blade just doesn't dig as deep or give you the best forward spring you can get.

If you watch World Juniors (my favourite thing to do during Christmas Break!), you'll see that the best players are using the inside edge ball of the foot for the fast start—the speed is amazing. And the Oilers' young lineup is exciting to watch with their quickness. Every shift, you see those fast starts off the ball of the foot. It takes work, but it's one thing that separates the good from the great.

It's interesting that **defensemen** are ramping up their fast-start speed too. Whether it's backing up to the wall and sprinting to the net, or backing up to the net and sprinting to the wall—defensemen are starting off the ball of the foot, and they're getting to the puck faster. Quickness, quick steps, are so important to the penalty kill.

One other place I'm seeing a superior fast start pay off is when players hit the ice. Some guys jump the boards to get out there. If you have a good fast start, with control coming down on the ball of the foot, you can come over the boards, land on the ball of the foot and be taking off in whatever direction you want to go. Fast.

The secret to teaching a good fast start is knowing how to get players to **open up (turn out) their feet** so they can hit the inside edge on just the ball of the foot. The human body has dominant sides, and flexibility can be dominant on one side as well. Fast-start training often begins with work on flexibility to open up the player's hips, so they can execute a step on the inside edge ball of the foot. Proper training develops the player's flexibility and technique so they can easily execute the fast start off either foot.

You don't have to be in the classic V position, either. If I'm coming out of a tight turn, I might not have the V-position but if I can contact the ice with the inside edge of the ball of the foot, I can sprint out of that turn. This is why **I rarely train fast starts from a stationary traditional V-position**—in the game, we're not normally at a complete standstill. So after proper technique has been trained, training on the fast starts can be incorporated in all stopping and starting drills and players can add sprints following any transition.

It used to be that players could take several steps to get to full speed. Now coaches expect a player to be at full speed within 2 steps, maybe even one step. And if the play changes, the player needs to be stopping or turning in a new direction then sprinting again. That's the nature of this great game—**quick bursts of speed**. If done correctly, with only a small portion of the inside of the blade contacting the ice, a fast start can get you to full speed in 2 steps taken without glide.

The fast start is a key tool for any player. If you can't do it well, you get beaten to the puck. But if you have a superior fast start and get there first, the puck is yours.

And that's what hockey is all about.