

Improving the Crossover Step in Hockey

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The crossover step in hockey is an important component of skating for any hockey player at any level. It is a movement that is necessary for turning, stopping, and changing direction. It is a technique that is also used when players are turning up the ice to start offensive breakouts. Many times I have heard players refer to “blasting off” when referring to the crossover. Since it is such an important aspect of the game, I felt it was important to develop some progressions and strategies to help us improve in this area.

In hockey, the ability to accelerate is something every player should look to improve. The first 2-3 steps are more important than the ability to skate at top speed- which rarely happens in a hockey game. As a result, we have always done acceleration drills where we emphasized the first 2-3 steps instead of running longer sprints. Drills such as Lean Fall Runs, ball drops, and push up starts to sprints, have always been part of our linear speed program and will continue to be. Since hockey is a multi-directional sport, we’ve always done acceleration drills to improve both linear and lateral speed. For our lateral speed progressions, we have always done drills where we push off the outside of our foot to create enough force to push off the ground and go in the other direction. Drills such as 1-knee side starts, shuffles, 1-2 cuts, and pro-agility drills have always been part of our lateral speed program. Now, since I have been observing our guys and their frequent use of the crossover in games and practices, I have changed my thought process. I now think it would be more beneficial to incorporate crossover movements into our lateral speed program. As a result, we are now incorporating a crossover step to the beginning of our sprints on lateral movement/speed days.

From a coaching and technical aspect and what’s important to note is that when crossing over is taught on the ice, one of the most important aspects is the ability to shift your weight and lean in the direction you want to go. In our acceleration drills, this is very similar to the lean fall and run where we coach our athletes to be tall, lean, fall, and run straight. I’ve noticed that the further our players lean, the better the drill is for them. In our crossover acceleration drills, we are incorporating a body lean to the side that we want to go. For example, if we want to go left, we will have them lean to the left and actually shift their weight to the outside of their left foot. When they reach the point where if they fall anymore, then they may fall to the ground, we will then cross the right foot over the left and push off of the right foot. Here is the progression we will now use on our lateral speed days in our off-season program:

Phase 1- Tall Lean Fall Crossover Run- Again, like the linear Lean Fall Run, we will lean almost to the point where the athlete will fall down and then they crossover and push of the foot crossing over to help us get into our sprint. We will do 3 crossovers each leg. The emphasis is getting a hard push, then 3 hard steps, and then coasting.

Phase 2- 1- Leg Lean Fall Crossover and Run- This is the same as the lean-fall-run except for now being on 1-leg in a hockey stance.

Phase 3- Lateral Crossover Ball Drops- These are different from the linear ball drops because we are actually getting the person who is dropping the ball to drop it when the running athlete starts to lean. What we find is that the ball drop helps the athlete crossover a little quicker.

We also incorporate the crossover to other aspects of our program. We will do crossover lateral sled marches. We will start these early in the off-season program with athletes who are training with me in the off-season or who have access to a sled at home. The emphasis is on the lean and the crossover.

Another aspect where we incorporate the crossover step is in our conditioning program. When we are running 150-yard and 300-yard shuttles, we will instruct our players to crossover when we break down at the lines when we change direction.

Honestly, if I had never started skating with our injured players during the last few seasons, I may have never known how important the ability to crossover is in skating. There is hundreds of drills on-ice that are used to promote better technique when it comes to crossing over. When I realized how important it actually is, then I decided that we may have to incorporate some drills to help improve this part of skating and being a better hockey player.