



## Proper Knee Bend

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**By Rex Tucker**

When teaching power skating, I stress “first” the following two key components – keep your head up and bend your knees. Proper knee bend is a critical component of skating. All the great players have tremendous knee bend when they are skating. Proper knee bend results in knee over the ankle over the toe, forcing the butt to be lower to the ice. A prime example was Paul Coffey, one of the best skaters ever to lace up the blades! Many young minor hockey players, who are beginning to learn to skate, often try to skate like they walk with regards to how they bend their knees. This lack of proper knee bend results in a very short choppy stride. All strides should be long strides!

It's of paramount importance for beginning hockey player to learn to skate properly. For aspiring “elite” hockey players, it's equally important to hone one's skating skills if he/she wishes to advance to the next level of play and excel. But simply putting in more ice time will not help if all that a player is doing is continuing with bad habits. What a player needs is a skating road map/direction to help him/her improve one step at a time towards the ultimate goal of becoming a better skater.

When a player has good knee bend – the basic components of forward skating i.e. stride, glide and recovery – are more technically sound. In order to maintain good speed and momentum, it is very important to keep the glide knee well bent throughout the stride. Good knee bend will also improve/tighten a player's crossovers and turns enabling him/her to change direction on a dime.

When conducting power skating programs, I have consistently discovered that more than half the group skate with sticks too long. I firmly believe

the following:

A shorter stick (definitely below the chin) forces a player to bend his/her knees more... bend from the knees not the waist when skating. All great skaters have tremendous knee bend.

Several Summers ago, I observed Dave King teaching a group of PeeWee players at his Summit Hockey School. He was coaching the Columbus Blue Jackets at the time. (I always collect a couple new drills when watching one of Coach King's practices) Coach King was stressing to the group about the importance of skating. Coach King emphasized to the players that all great skaters in the NHL have “tremendous knee bend”. Dave mentioned Geoff Sanderson has one of the best skaters on his team (Columbus Blue Jackets).

When I think about a few of the great skaters, who played in the NHL last season, Joe Sakic, Sergei Federov, Mike Modano, and Kris Draper come to mind. When watching elite players, make a mental note of the great knee bend in their stride – they are bending from the

knees not the waist. I will guarantee you... all of the best skaters have “tremendous knee bend”.

A really good skating drill to help hockey players especially young minor hockey players improve their balance, edge control and practice “good knee bend” is the soccer ball drill. Players learn to push a soccer ball around the ice with just their hockey gloves – no kicking the ball, no carrying the ball, and no body checking. If a player bends from the waist, he/she will not move well with the soccer ball and will probably suffer from a stiff back, will show very little knee bend and poor balance/edge control.

In order to perform the drill with effectiveness, it is important to keep the head up, keep the butt down, and really bend the knees. Players can perform this drill alone, in pairs or in groups i.e A vs B etc.

In conclusion, if a hockey player aspires to be a great skater he /she must have tremendous knee bend. Proper knee bend is a very important and critical component of skating.



**Q: Do you know why the player illustrated to the left will never be a great Hockey Player?**

**A: If you answered “no knee bend” You scored a goal! Great job!**