Mastering Proper Backward Skating Techniques
Not Just For Defensemen

By Robby Glantz

A common myth in hockey is that only defensemen need to be strong backward skaters. While it is true that defensemen will spend much of the game skating backwards, it is still vital that forwards make every attempt to master backward skating techniques.

The speed of the game is such that forwards are required to make quick changes of direction, as well as controlled backward-to-forward moves necessary to stay involved in the play. Plus, when a defenseman gets caught up ice, the team depends on the forward to get back and cover for them, making it very important that they can skate proficiently backward as well.

The Basic Skills
The skating fundamentals needed to be a better skater when going forward, such as deep knee bend, body weight centered over the skates, 100 percent power on each push, etc., are the same when going backward.

When picking up speed while going backward in a straight line, coaches like to see players use backward crossovers to help accelerate and generate maximum power right out of the gate. Once a player gets moving however, we like to see him use the backward stride, which will give him better balance and less side-to-side movement ... plus, when used as a defenseman, it forces the forward to make the first move.

This technique is often called a C-Cut or Half-Moon Cut ... with the optimal word being “cut,” as a player needs to cut through the ice, up and out to the side to generate speed (it looks like a “C” or “Half-Moon” in the ice).
The following is a checklist to improve the backward skating stride (C-Cuts) and backward crossovers. These techniques should be practiced while going from goal line to goal line (understanding that in a game a player will almost never go from one end to the other backwards, however it gives players plenty of room to practice the technique).

**Key Points:**
- Bend your knees deeply so that they are covering your toes.
- Your back is straight, head is up and eyes are forward.
- Start each push from directly under your body.
- Pivot the heel of the pushing foot up and outward so that it is perpendicular to your glide foot (forming an upside down letter “L”).

There are three main parts to the Backward Stride:

- **The Push:** Pushing one foot at a time and getting all your body weight on each thrust, drive the pushing foot full extension up and out to the side...cutting a “C” or “Half-Moon” into the ice.

- **The Glide:** While the pushing skate is extending, the other skate should stay under the body, gliding straight back to cover distance and to gain speed.

- **The Recovery:** Then, return the pushing foot back to the middle, under your body and repeat the exact maneuver with the other foot (do not swivel your hips like you are dancing. Maintain as direct a line as possible).

**Skating Imagery for the Backward Stride:**
When skating backward your body posture and positioning are extremely important. You should feel like you are sitting on a stool with your backside almost parallel to the ice, keeping your back straight and your weight centered directly over the middle of your skates. Positioning your upper body and chest too far forward when going backward will put too much weight to the front part of the skate and definitely take away from your balance, speed and power.
Backward Lateral Crossovers

Key Points:
• Maintain excellent knee bend, so that your backside is almost parallel to the ice while keeping your back straight. Not enough knee bend will take away from your ability to get to full extension, and dramatically take away from your speed and power.
• You should make one push at a time using all your body weight centered over each push.

There are three main parts to the Backward Lateral Crossover:

• The Push: The outside leg pushes a “C-Cut” into the ice to full extension (see explanation in backward stride).

• The Pull: The inside leg pulls hard under the body also to full extension, finishing on the outside edge with a flick of the toe (your legs should form the letter “X”).

• The Recovery: The crossunder leg then recovers and steps out wide to an inside edge. This leads to better balance as well as covering greater distance laterally ... Repeat the maneuver the other way until you have enough speed to move into the backward C-Cuts.

Skating Imagery for Backward Lateral Crossover:
Try to picture this maneuver more as a crossunder rather than as a crossover, by keeping both skates on the ice (not kicking over with the
outside leg), with that inside leg pulling under to gain speed.

I like to have my students make believe they are playing “tug-of-war” with their inside leg. In other words, try to pull against the ice as much as possible until you have fully stretched the inside leg, in effect, “tugging” against the ice.

Try these tips in practice or during public skating to improve your backward skating.

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