

LEG SQUAT VARIATIONS FOR STRONGER HOCKEY LEGS



Training leg strength for youth athletes can be very simple and can be done right at the rink. By practicing these squat variations, you can develop your players to have strong legs without even lifting a weight! Here is the Day 1 progression we use to build youth leg strength. Remember, each variation is more demanding than the one before it, so players should be competent with one before progressing to the next.

Goblet Squat: A bilateral (two-legged) squat is a fundamental human movement and important for athletic development. This is the only bilateral squat in our progression, and serves to teach the general squatting motion in a movement that is not as proprioceptively demanding as the unilateral progressions. In a goblet squat, we are looking for appropriate hinging at the hips and knees allowing for the athletes butt to sit well behind the heels. Think sitting down into a chair. Heels should push through the floor throughout the movement, and knees should stay out as wide as the feet (keep knees from winking in towards each other). Depth will vary, but

generally 90 degrees is the goal.

Split Squat: To set this up, take a big step forward and freeze. Keeping your feet in place, bend both legs so your back knee touches the ground. To stand up, push a flat front foot into the ground and let the back leg help to raise you back to the top. When standing at the top, keep your back foot on the ground and keep your heel high (don't let it collapse to the middle, stay on the ball of your foot). In order to progress on from this, you should be able to do the movement without jerking motions and with your upper body staying tall throughout the motion like you are riding up and down in an elevator.

Reverse Lunge: A reverse lunge is a more dynamic version of the split squat. It's the exact same movement, except it involves stepping back and going down to touch the back knee, then standing up and bringing the feet back together in the same fluid motion. This is a more demanding form of the split squat because of the additional hip strength it takes for the front leg to control the step back and pull the body forward again.

Slide Reverse Lunge: The same exact movement as a reverse lunge, but performed with a furniture slide or Frisbee under the foot going back. This is more demanding and closer to a true single leg movement because the slide doesn't allow you to help at all with the back foot. It can't help you push forward to bring your feet together, so you are relying solely on the hip and front leg to stand up and pull forward.

Rear Foot Elevated Squat: Now we get even closer to a true single leg movement by elevating the back foot on a bench or box and standing on the front foot. Bending the front leg, reach the back knee towards the ground until the front thigh is parallel to the ground. At the bottom, your front shin should be vertical and not angled too far forward. Push with a flat front foot until you rise back up to the starting position.

This variation allows for the greatest external load, so we really get some huge strength gains out of this movement. The nice part is, since it is a single leg movement, we can use less weight than if we were squatting on 2 legs. This makes the movement safer and more functional.

Single Leg Squat: You can increase single leg strength by, well, squatting on one leg. This is a true 3 dimensional exercise because, even though you are only moving up and down, your hips have to work to keep your body from rotation or flexing side to side. To perform a single leg squat, stand on one leg and lower yourself to a depth you are able to do well (you can mark that depth by reaching your butt back to a bench, couch, etc). Keep your chest up, weight spread evenly over your foot and your heel pressed through the floor.

For more variations or advice on developing your players off the ice, drop me a line at bsipotz@advantagestrength.com. I'm happy to help! Train smart, everyone.

Darryl Nelson and Brian Sipotz are regarded as top experts in the field of strength and conditioning for ice hockey performance. Darryl has been the head strength and conditioning coach for USA Hockey's National Team Development Program since 2000 and also serves as the director of performance for Advantage Strength and Conditioning in Ann Arbor. Brian played seven years of professional ice hockey and is the founder and strength coach of Advantage Strength and Conditioning. Darryl and Brian are also the cofounders of www.hockeystrengthandconditioning.com.

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