

Practicing Stickhandling Skills Off-Ice, a Necessity for On-Ice Success.

– Bjorn Kinding USA Hockey Dec. 2003

Humans are made to walk and run, not to skate and stickhandle. Our bodies are sophisticated machines, with hundreds of movable parts (limbs) propelled by thousands of small hydraulics (muscles) and connected through a complex network of electric wire (nerves). Millions of years of evolution have helped us to master walking and running, but not skating and stickhandling.

The evolution has also made our movements with the arms synchronized with the movements of our legs. Once a useful function, when hunting down and sticking a spear into a mammoth, but a very dysfunctional feature when driving hard to the net, trying to make a pull-in move and take a wrist shot at the same time. The hands are not trained to work in a separate rhythm from the feet.

Pinocchio Effect

This hampering phenomena is sometimes referred to as the “Pinocchio Effect.”

To understand how the “Pinocchio Effect” influences our skill execution, try the following experiment.

Lift your right foot and move it clockwise in a circular motion. Continue this motion, and simultaneously with your right hand “write” the figure six in the air. What happened to your leg?

Just like Pinocchio, our arms and hands are linked together, and just like Pinocchio needed lots of training to become a good boy, we need lots of training to become good hockey players. What took nature millions of years to create has to be reprogrammed through targeted training.

Off-Ice Training

One would think that the best place for this training must be on the ice. After all, that’s where the game is played and the skills have to be executed. The problem with the ice is that it is too easy to cheat.

For example, if you are skating at 20 mph and suddenly stop skating, you will continue to glide at 20 mph. But, if you could run at 20 mph and suddenly stopped running... that would not be too much fun, would it?

Hockey players can plant their feet and glide to execute a move or take a shot, while off-ice athletes, such as basketball players, have to synchronize their feet with the speed and their hands to the bounce of the ball. That’s why basket ball players acquire extraordinary coordination and learn to better separate the arms motions from the leg motions, a skill most hockey players never develop to its full potential.

Only the very best, like Mike Modano and Sergei Fedorov, have developed his ability. They can make advanced moves as they are skating in full speed and shoot in the middle of a stride. One thing is certain; they did not learn this on the ice.

Stickhandling

If you spend 10-15 minutes, two or three times a week doing some of these drills, you will notice a significant improvement.

If you vary the weight and size of the ball (use a bocce ball, steel ball, wood ball, baseball, etc.), you will improve even more.

Golf balls are extremely helpful. The use of golf balls increases difficulty – the golf ball bounces off the blade much quicker, so your hands have to move faster. Essentially, using a golf ball is overspeed training for your hands. You will develop both quick hands and “soft hands.”

A puck on a slippery surface is also a good variation and of course, whenever possible, tryout the new skill on ice.

Tips

- Wear your gloves – it will get you used to them
- It’s not “Practice Makes Perfect”, it’s “Perfect Practice Makes Perfect”. Start slow, get your form correct, then start to increase speed. Always try to get faster.
- Keep your head up
- Challenge yourself: Go beyond what you are comfortable with (your comfort zone). Reach further and faster... work to improve not just to get it over with.

Stickhandling Drill Index

- taken in part from USA Hockey’s website and Cullen Stickhandling

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Stickhandling Drills Explained

Soft Touch

Stationary Quick Stick

Want soft, quick touches

Focus on: Soft Hands

 Quick Touches

 Control using hands and wrists with little or no arm movement

 Cup Blade

Cup ball on both Forehand and Backhand sides of blade

Around the Body

Soft Touches around front of body

Start on Right side of body, stick handle in an arc around front of body to the Left side of body, then back again to Right (or Forehand side to Backhand side etc.)

Stickhandling

Hands should be kept free and away from body

Tight and Away

Working on: Hand Slide
Quick Soft Touches
Toe and Heel of Blade

Soft touches in a large arc Away from the body,

The hands are close together and you are stickhandling with the heel of the stick

When the arc is completed, pull the ball in Tight, close to the feet

The bottom hand slides down the shaft and you are stickhandling with the toe of the stick

Soft touches in a Tight arc close to the body in the opposite direction of the large Away arc.

When the Tight arc is completed move the ball back out to the large arc, sliding the bottom hand back up the shaft.

Perform drill in both directions

360° Stickhandling

Hands and Feet

Working on: Quick Soft Touches
Hands and Wrist Action
Quick Feet

Same as Soft Touch only add in running in place at high speed

Keep head up and Knees high

Hands and Feet in Motion

Working on: Quick Soft Touches
Head Up
Good Body Posture

Same as Hands and Feet, only now moving

Chest up

Knees bent

Single Leg Hop

Hop on one leg around the room while stickhandling

Quick hands and feet

Head up

Good Body Posture

Alternate legs

Blinders

Goggles (designed for Basketball) – lower half blocked off so can't see down
(Glove in mouth also works)

Working on: Touch and Feel in Hands

Sense of Stick Position

Heads Up Play

Should be able to feel the difference between the ball on the heel vs. toe of blade

Stickhandling

PVC Pipe (or TP Tubes)

Working on: Top Hand Control
Top Hand Strength
Loose Bottom Hand

6" piece of 1 1/2" dia. PVC pipe slid over shaft of stick and held by bottom hand

Isolates control to the top hand

Hold PVC Pipe with fingers only.

Toilet Paper tubes work better for teaching grip tension on lower hand

Obstacle Course

Working on: Quick Hands
Agility
Creativity

Stickhandle – In, around, over & under a variety of objects

Quick Stick (Quick hands) *see diagrams in next section*

Variations:

Straddle Middle

Forehand Side

Backhand Side

Working on: Hand Speed
Wrist Action
Cupped Blade

10 Pucks in a single row – one foot apart

(You may want to mark on the garage floor where they go, so you don't waste time setting up.)

Stickhandle through as fast as possible

Roll Wrist to cup puck

Emphasize Light touches of ball

Emphasize Short Dribble

10 Times through

Expansion of Reach

Stickhandle in front of you – then extend way out – back in front – way out – back in front

Extend as wide as possible

20 Times extend to forehand side.

20 Times extend to backhand side, releasing bottom hand

Hand Slide wide

Working on: Loose bottom hand
Hand Slide
Expansion of Reach

Exaggerated Expansion of Reach – side to side

When ball is extended at maximum distance, the hands are together

As ball is pulled in front of the body, the hands are slid apart

Then back together again when maximum reach is attained again on the other side

Cupping (Pull-in Move)

Ball pushed forward with the heel of the stick to the front of the body, while the hands are slid together

Stickhandling

Stop ball with forehand toe of blade
Pull ball straight back tight into body
15 Times

Yo-Yo (Variation of Cupping)

Working on: Hand Slide
Toe and Heel of Blade
Expansion of Reach

Ball pushed forward with the heel of the stick to the front of the body, while the hands are slid together

Stop ball with forehand toe of blade
Pull ball straight back tight into body
Same process repeated out to forehand side of body
Continue making L shape pattern
In tight, hands are wide

Give, Take Away, Go to Backhand

Push puck out, cup back (as in cupping), then reach across to backhand (releasing bottom hand)
10 Times

Figure 8's see diagrams in next section

Working on: Bottom Hand Slide
Expansion of Reach
Cupped Blade
Pulling puck diagonally across the front of the body
The wider the obstacles, the more difficult the exercise
Cup the blade
Use both the heel and toe of the stick blade

Variations

Figure 8's (with 8 on its side):

Standing in Front of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise

Starting Clockwise:

Standing on Left Side of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise

Starting Clockwise

Standing on Right Side of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise

Starting Clockwise

Figure 8's (with 8 Upright):

Standing in Front of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise

Starting Clockwise

Standing on Left Side of 8

Starting Counter-Clockwise

Starting Clockwise

Standing on Right Side of 8

Starting Counter-Clockwise

Starting Clockwise

Stickhandling

Thru Body

Working on: Trunk Rotation
Reach Behind Body

Slide ball from front to back along side of body

Hands should slide together to maximize the reach behind

Bring ball back to the front of body by coming through the legs

Alternate between forehand and backhand sides of the body

Wide Movement (Wide Dribble Drill) *see diagrams in next section*

Working on: Expansion of Reach
Quick Hands
Hands Away from Body

Stagger 7 Pucks in two rows

(You may want to mark on the garage floor where they go, so you don't waste time setting up.)

Walk thru the middle of the two rows, extending the ball to both sides

Top hand extended in front and away from body to maximize reach (applies to both the forehand side and backhand side)

(Option: end with a couple of Quick Stick moves)

10 Times through

Push-Pull

Working on: Push with Heel of Blade
Pull with Toe of Blade
Top Hand Control

Set up similar to Quick Stick, with pucks slightly further apart

Walking Pull Move

Top hand wrist roll controls the action, the bottom hand remains loose and is used as a guide

Backhand Toe Drag (Advanced - Variation of Push-Pull)

Push ball wide to backhand

Stop momentum using forehand

Quickly switch back to the backhand side of blade

Cup puck on backhand

Pull puck across body with backhand toe of blade

Advantage is that puck can be pulled back across the front of the body, while being kept closer to feet

Stick Flip

Working on: Soft Touch
Blade Face Control
Cupped Blade

Lay extra stick on ground

Feet straddling stick on ground

Carry the ball from one side of the stick to the other using the forehand side of the blade going in one direction and the backhand side of the blade coming back in the other direction.

Light Touch

Ability to rotate sticks blade face to cup the puck

Stickhandling

Stick Flip Side

Variation of Stick Flip
Feet perpendicular to stick on ground
Stick handle on forehand side of body

Stick Flip Around

4 sticks on ground pointing away from body (in center) at 45° to the front left and right and the back left and right
Stick Flip in an arc over all 4 sticks from forehand side to backhand side and then along same arc back to forehand

Hockey

Hand/Eye/Stick Coordination skills
Bounce tennis ball off of blade of stick
Keep hands in position that you would use for stickhandling on the ice. Don't Cheat! The farther down the shaft you slide your hand, the easier the drill becomes
Advanced: Alternate contact between backhand side and forehand side of blade

Group Hockey

Toe Tap

Working on: Foot Quickness
Agility
Multi-Tasking
Place a soccer ball between the feet
Alternately touch the top of a soccer ball with the left foot then right foot as fast as possible, while stickhandling in front of body

Soccer Ball Pass

Working on: Multi-Tasking
Dexterity
Body Control
Kick soccer ball to partner while each player stickhandles individually

Balance Board

(2) 2' pieces of 2x4 one on top of the other to form a cross
Working on: Coordination
Dexterity
Core Balance
Stickhandle around body.

Stickhandling

Stick Handling Diagrams

Quick Stick

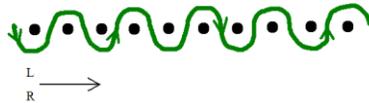
Straddle Middle



Left side of Pucks



Right side of Pucks



Wide Movement

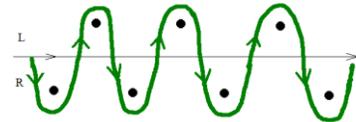


Figure 8's (with 8 on its side):

Standing in Front of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise



Starting Clockwise:



Standing on Left Side of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise



Starting Clockwise



Standing on Right Side of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise



Starting Clockwise



Stickhandling

Figure 8's (with 8 Upright):

Standing in Front of 8:

Starting Counter-Clockwise



L R

Starting Clockwise



L R

Standing on Left Side of 8

Starting Counter-Clockwise



L R

Starting Clockwise



L R

Standing on Right Side of 8

Starting Counter-Clockwise



L R

Starting Clockwise



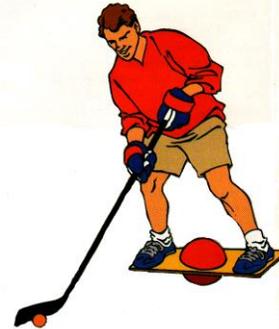
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Balance Board

Stick handle while keeping your balance.

Stick handle in the middle, wide to forehand, wide to backhand, figure eights, toe drags to backhand pulls.

Have a partner throw a ball to a player on the balance board. The player catches and places the ball on the ground, stick handles and then flips the ball back to the partner.



USA Hockey

PVC Pipe

Cut a piece of PVC pipe about 6" long and slide it down over your stick.

Hold the PVC pipe with your bottom hand.

This drill will force you to control the stick with your top hand, and will prevent you from gripping the stick too tight with your bottom hand.



USA Hockey

360° Stickhandling

Move the puck back and forth on all sides of the body

Advanced: Combine this drill with jumping and/or sliding.



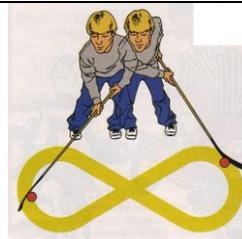
USA Hockey

Stickhandling

Figure 8

Keep the ball at the heel and move it in a figure 8 pattern.

Advanced: Do the figure 8 on all four sides of the body, as described in “360° Stickhandling.”



USA Hockey

Pull-in Move

Turn the blade so the toe is pointing down by rotating the top hand only. The lower hand has a loose grip so the shaft rotates in the hand. As you pull in the stick with your top hand, the lower hand slides down the shaft and steers the motion. Stop the puck at the heel of the stick.



USA Hockey

Cullen Stick Handling Circuit

1. Expansion of Reach

20 Times extend to forehand side.

20 Times extend to backhand side, release bottom hand

*extend as wide as possible

*stickhandle in front or you – then extend way out – back in front – way out – back in front

*Do 20 times each way

2. Cupping

15 Times

*On forehand side, push puck way out and then cup over and quickly pull back (get some distance.)

3. Give, Take Away, Go to Backhand

10 Times

*push puck out, cup back (as in #2), then reach across to backhand (release bottom hand)

4. Figure 8's

10 Times each way

*pucks can be to the sides or straight in front of you.

5. Wide Movement

10 Times through

*Use 7 pucks

*Go down the middle, extend to both sides

6. Quick Stick

10 Times through

*10 pucks in a straight line, pucks one foot apart

*Stickhandle through as fast as possible

** When you have completed these six stations, you have completed the circuit once.