

The History of Laura Stamm International Power Skating System

When I was a youngster there was no organized hockey for girls. I played on the ponds with my brothers and their friends. Ultimately I became a competitive figure skater, then a figure skating coach. I taught at the ice rink then used by the New York Rangers as their practice facility. Loving hockey as I did, I spent many hours watching the Rangers' practices. In 1971 Rod Gilbert and Brad Park asked me to teach "power skating" at their summer hockey school. I jumped at the chance, never realizing that this was to be the start of the Laura Stamm International Power Skating System.

Very little was known then about the science (biomechanics) of hockey skating or of the importance of skating technique. When I started to teach I was handed one sheet of paper, called "Power Skating". Following were several drills, such as stops and starts, skate to the blue line and back, skate forward, turn around, skate backward and hurry on back to the starting point, skate the circles, etc. Nothing on the sheet of paper addressed how to teach players to skate correctly.

That day I taught three groups. The youngest player was about eight, the oldest about eighteen. I watched, stunned, as these boys raced around the ice, legs churning ineffectively. Immediately, it was apparent to me that these players needed to learn how to skate! I "stashed" the sheet of paper and started experimenting. My brain reeled with ideas - ideas derived from a lifetime of studying skating and watching hockey players skate. I knew right then that I was doing the thing in life that I was meant to do.

Just before the summer of 1973 Bill Torrey, the New York Islanders GM, phoned me. He asked if I could teach a promising rookie by the name of Bob Nystrom. Bob had a lot of promise, but to make the Islanders roster he was told he had to increase his speed. After watching him I felt that by improving his skating technique he could definitely be faster.

In those days professional hockey players did not have female instructors. To spare Bob any embarrassment, we kept our training sessions to ourselves. We worked from 6 - 7am, five days a week, for eight weeks. Bob didn't miss a day. Bob wound up playing 14 years in the NHL. When the Islanders beat the Flyers in overtime in game 6 to win their first Stanley Cup in 1980, it was Bob who scored the winning goal. In 1995 the Islanders retired his Number (23). In 1991 the team inaugurated the Bob Nystrom Award, "to the Islander who best exemplifies leadership, hustle and dedication." Bob's words of praise helped to launch my career. After wanting to keep our sessions secret, it was he who told the world that "without Laura, I wouldn't have made it to the NHL!" This led to jobs with several NHL and WHA teams, including the Rangers, Devils, Kings and Whalers. Well known graduates include Luc Robitaille, Steve Duchesne, Kevin Dineen, Doug Brown, Rob and Scott Niedermayer, Brendan Morrison, and many others.

Radio and TV features followed. In 1974 I was hired to teach at a summer hockey school in British Columbia. As time went on I was hired by hockey associations around the US, Canada, and Europe, to teach their hockey players. Eventually I focused on running my own power skating clinics and schools and developed training courses for instructors who wanted to join my organization. To this day, my programs are taught only by certified Laura Stamm Instructors.

I didn't know it when I first started teaching, but I was teaching the "European" method of skating without ever having seen European hockey. What started as bits and pieces eventually developed into a true system which after all these years is still the model by which all other power skating programs are measured. My philosophy of teaching remains the backbone of my System where each skating maneuver is taught by breaking it down into parts. As the parts become integrated we add more elements and complexity to the skill. The goal is for students to master each maneuver so that in game situations they will skate correctly, powerfully and quickly, with and without the puck. My program syllabus is structured much like a pyramid - it focuses on establishing a strong foundation, with ever increasing subtleties as one nears the top.

Hockey skating has come a long way in these 30 years. Players circle and weave, give and go. Defenders rush as if they were forwards, forwards play back to cover for the rushing defenders. Players who can't keep up have little chance of making it at the highest levels. Every hockey school, almost every rink, offers some form of power skating instruction. I'm teaching my second, even third-generation of players. I can hardly believe that I jump-started the careers of hundreds, maybe thousands of pro players, spawned the development of an entire industry, and was the model for and often the teacher of an entire generation of power skating instructors who follow in my footsteps.

As skill levels continue to increase, hockey will become even more exciting. I feel very fortunate to have been there early on, to have catalyzed the sport's development, and in the process to have influenced so many lives.

Skate Great Hockey!
Laura Stamm

copyright, September, 2003