More than ever, skating speed and agility are vital to the success of NHL players. Which partly explains why Laura Stamm has been the Dean of Power Skating instruction for more than four decades. Stamm has been responsible for the success of more NHL stars than anyone else in her field.

In a recent interview, Stamm touches on several topics:

* CHANGE IN SKATING IN PAST 40 YEARS:

It wasn’t very artistic back then. It was more laborious. Players weren’t trained for the kind of speed they are trained for today. Defenseman stayed back (except for the rare Bobby Orr-type). The other players skated straight up and down their wings. That was basically the game – checking, dumping the puck, - dump and chase. It wasn’t a finesse game like it is today. The speed today is incredible. It seems to get faster by the day, not even month. The players now train year round, and almost daily. The emphasis on skill is huge. If you’re not fast and you don’t have skill, you’re not going to make it to the NHL.

* EQUIPMENT CHANGES:

Of course the equipment is better, but it’s more the players than the equipment. You could put one of today’s players in an old pair of skates and they’d still be able to do phenomenal things. The skates don’t make the player – the player makes the skates. The same is for equipment – give a great tennis player a junkie racket - he or she can still do amazing things with it.

* SKATING IN THE NHL:

Look at Alex Ovechkin or Pavel Datsyuk. They can do miraculous things and make incredible moves. There are other forwards who are also quick and fast. Chris Kreider, Brian Boyle, for example. Defensemen are also much more mobile – they move backward and laterally with amazing speed and agility.

There are so many types of movement in hockey. Lateral movement, backward movement, straight ahead movement, quick changes of direction - all of which make the game a marvel of movement. Imagine another sport where players have to move backward as quickly as they move forward. Today’s players move in all directions with amazing balance, agility, and speed.
BEST SKATERS:

Two players who stand out in my mind are two of my former students – Scott Niedermayer and Brian Rafalski. What stands out about them is that they were the models of efficient speed. When Niedermayer won the fastest skater award at the NHLskills competitions (1998, 2004) people said it didn’t even look like he was moving – this was because he was so efficient. Efficiency may be why Niedermayer (and others of his ilk) had such long careers. If you save 50 strides a game and put that over a period of 15 years, you’ve saved a lot of energy.

* EUROPEAN SKATERS:

I love watching the European skaters – they move so beautifully. The influx of European players has really changed the game. To me, Pavel Datsyuk is the epitome of what an NHL player should be.

* STANDOUT STUDENT:

I always say it was Luc Robitaille: They said he’d never make it because he couldn’t skate well enough. Robitaille, who despite his rap for not being a really fast skater, was hugely successful, and was elected into the NHL Hall of Fame. While I may not be able to turn a fair skater into a superstar skater, if I can give players a couple of extra steps, that’s a huge advantage for them. Luc still thanks me for all that I did for him. He’s somebody I’m really proud of, not only as a hockey player but also as a human being.
*FIRST PRO STUDENT:*

Bobby Nystrom was the first pro that I ever taught - when he was a rookie with the New York Islanders (1973). General Manager, Bill Torrey, heard about me and hired me work with Nystrom during the off-season.

At our introduction, I told Bobby, “don’t worry, I won’t tell anybody what we’re doing” Back then it was unheard of for a female to teach a male pro-athlete. We scheduled our training sessions early in the morning, five days a week, for six weeks. Bobby never missed a day. I kept my word and never said a word to anybody. He was the one who ended up telling the media that if it wasn’t for me, he would never have made it in the NHL. Immediately other teams started calling me and I started getting jobs with pro, college, and prep school teams, as well as with hockey schools throughout the U.S. and Canada. My career just exploded.

*MY START IN SKATING:*

Skating was a passion of mine since I was five-years-old. My favorite doll was a figure skating doll, which I still find amazing. As a family we used to skate on frozen lakes during our winter vacations. My parents surely couldn’t afford to take me to an ice rink. I didn’t even know what a rink was until I was a teenager. At that point I started training as a figure skater and speed skater. I played some hockey with my brothers, and later on, played hockey with my sons.

*TEACHING SKATING:*

In the early 70’s I taught figure skating at a rink that the NY Rangers as their practice facility. After practices the players would hang around the snack bar and I would talk to them. I’d ask them, “Why do you do this?” or “Why don’t you do that?” Rod Gilbert once jokingly answered, “Why don’t you mind your own business?” Then he recommended that I come out to his summer hockey school and see if I could help teach the kids how to skate better. I said I wouldn’t know what I was doing. He said I should come out anyway. From the very second I got on the ice at that hockey school. I knew that that’s what I wanted to do with my professional life. I didn’t have a clue what I was doing, but I loved it. I had an in-depth knowledge of skating and applied it to what I knew about hockey, and somehow it worked!!! Some future NHL players (Nick Fotiu, Brian Mullen, and Joey Mullen) attended that hockey school. They thanked me years later for helping them make it!

*SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT:*

At that time, there was no such thing as technique training for hockey players. Power skating meant racing down the ice and back, stops and starts, quick turns, etc. But my approach to teaching “power skating” was to improve performance by improving skating technique. That’s what made sense to me. Racing around the rink aimlessly didn’t. I learned as I went, I created techniques and drills from my knowledge of skating and the requirements of hockey. I asked my assistant instructors, who were active hockey players, why they did certain things. I agreed or disagreed. We had many discussions (agreements and disagreements) about skating technique for hockey. I literally made up a power skating system based on my knowledge of skating and hockey, combined with my background in biomechanics and physiology. I fell in love with my work. I always had (and still have) a tremendous amount of success with players on the ice. I’m not sure why, but I think it’s because they know how much I want them to succeed.
THE LSIPSS:

Ultimately, my one-person instructional program became a world-renowned power skating system – THE LAURA STAMM INTERNATIONAL POWER SKATING SYSTEM. Many former students became our instructors. Our programs are held all over the world. Our instructors are the finest!

Over the years I’ve been fortunate to be able to volunteer time to work with players and teams who could not have afforded to pay for our technique training programs.

OTHER FORMER STUDENTS WHO PLAYED/COACHED IN THE NHL, OR WHO ARE CURRENTLY PLAYING/COACHING IN THE NHL.

Robbie Ftorek, Brent Thompson, Davis Payne, Kevin Dineen, Peter Laviolette, Dave Capuano, Jack Capuano, Justin (JJ) Johnson, Matt Carle, Doug Brown, Greg Brown, Nate Thompson, Jeff Serowik, Bill Arnold, Brian Flynn, Kyle Palmiere, Dave Silk, Steve Duchesne,

ADVICE TO ASPIRING PLAYERS:

Hockey gets faster by the day. Skating is your “wheels”. As Wayne Gretzky said “If you can’t skate, you can’t play our sport. Skating is an art.”

For a detailed explanation of how to properly execute each hockey skating move, refer to LAURA STAMM’S POWER SKATING, fourth edition. Also check for an upcoming Laura Stamm Power Skating Clinic in your area.

SKATE GREAT HOCKEY!

Laura Stamm
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