

Skating: Ice vs. Roller

BY ERIK JACOBSON



"I stopped playing roller hockey because it was ruining my skating." —
What?

I've heard that so many times now I think I must've died and gone to prima donna heaven. Before you fall for that line please consider the following:

Joe and Brian Mullen grew up in Hell's Kitchen, New York with no ice. They both played on playgrounds and tennis courts wearing the old school quad roller skates. Yet through determination they both made it on to the collegiate squads of Boston College and the University of Wisconsin. Joe went on to play 17 seasons in the NHL and won 3 Stanley Cups, participated in 3 all star games, scored 40 or more goals in seven seasons and was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2000. He retired as the highest scoring US born player ever with 502 goals and 561 assists. Brian played 11 seasons and participated in one All Star game and won the Lester Patrick Award for service to American hockey. What if they'd believed some joker who told them that roller skates were ruining their stride?

Whether on inline or ice the mechanics of skating are the same. The stride starts with one leg pushing directly out from the centerline of the body and extends fully into a snapping motion performed by the foot, then is drawn directly back to the body's center line. To get more power sit deeply to enable the leg to extend out more and lengthen the stride.

This skating stride is an unusual kinetic motion for the body and with the exception of lateral lunges and inline skates it is very difficult if not impossible to duplicate. This is a quandary for hockey players who have the desire to train beyond what is usually very limited ice time. Previous generations simply got in the best shape possible for the season until they were able to hit the ice and then took it from there. But in the 80's a miracle happened: Rollerblade marketed a new fangled invention that put the axis of a rollerskates wheels the length of the foot, duplicating the feel of an ice

skate. Suddenly the whole world was a rink...

One of the main characteristics that makes an inline skate feel different is the rocker. An ice skate blade designed for hockey is not flat. There is a elliptical edge to it so that a player can pivot and maneuver. Speed skates that are designed for flat out speed are long and flat. This is great for skating in a straight line at superhuman speeds but is a real hindrance when it comes to the quick nimble turns demanded in hockey. It also effects the stride. When pushing off at the very end of a stride the rockered blade allows a fluid transition of power along the whole blade culminating in a powerful snap at the very end. With a flat blade this transition comes all at

once and can feel pretty darn awkward if you are used to a rocker.



There are several ways to achieve a rocker with your inlines. Many of the older skates allowed you to use a rocker spacer. These are oval plastic or metal spacers embedded in the chassis on each side of the wheel axles. By popping these out and rotating them you can lift the back and front wheels up a centimeter or so to achieve a rocker. Many players prefer to only lift the front wheel, some both the front and back. Only you can decide.

Many of the more recent chassis have a slight rocker built in, usually just a slight lift of the toe wheel. But many chassis are just straight out flat. The way around this is to vary your wheel sizes. The most common approach is to use three 76mm wheels along the rear wheels and one 72mm at the toe. For smaller feet try 72mm in back and 68mm at the toe.

The niftiest invention to come along in quite awhile is Bauer's Tuuk Rocker Chassis which lets you to customize your rocker in just about any way you want. It's ability to pivot on a central axis allows you to shift your weight from the back to the front of chassis in a wonderfully smooth motion. Invented by the mavericks at Smarthockey.com, this chassis is used by many NHL players intent on improving their stride.

Rockering your inline skate will minimize any wobbly feeling you may feel when readapting to ice because the radius of your blades will be similar. The only time this isn't true is if your a goalie and are used to your blades being flat on both court and ice surfaces. Where I live the ice and roller games are often on the same day. What a great thing it is to play roller, jump in the car and scramble to the ice arena for more of the best sport in the world. There are minor issues and slight differences of feel between roller and ice, but what it comes down to is Hockey is Hockey.