

Try Off-Ice Resistance Training for Stronger Skating

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by Brian Rozzi

With skating movements today becoming more creative and complicated, it is advisable to add off-ice resistance training to your skating program. Resistance training is done to strengthen your muscles and tendons (tendons attach the muscle to a bone) by using something that puts resistance against your muscles, such as a weight. Resistance training provides the foundation (strength) to your body that's necessary for your coaches to build upon.

Why is this necessary? To prevent injuries that could end your skating career, as well as to make those jumps and spins more achievable! The best way to avoid injuries is to condition the muscles that are most likely to be injured, using resistance training.

Skaters tend to use the same muscles over and over again. This results in some muscles getting stronger, while other less-used muscles take a back seat. Every muscle in the body has an opposite muscle. For example, your quadricep muscles (those on the front of your thigh) are used continuously when skating. The opposite muscles are the hamstrings (those on the back of the upper leg). When skating, your quadriceps become very strong, overpowering the hamstrings. You must keep a balance of strength between these muscles, or injury will result. The knee is usually the area that gets injured. The only way to prevent injury from occurring is to strengthen the hamstrings, so that they can withstand the power of the quadriceps.

So, how do you develop this strength so that you have a good foundation? What will it cost? With a few simple instructions, you can develop your own foundation with resistance training right at home.

Remember, anything can be used as resistance. You do not need expensive equipment to get great results! A pound of gold weighs the same as a pound of sand - your muscles will respond no matter which you use. Let's look at what you can do with things you may have lying around the house.

The first exercise is for your adductors, or inner thigh muscles. This is important because the opposite muscle of the inner thigh is the outer thigh, which happens to be very strong. The adductors are a group of muscles that you use to draw your legs in close together on the ice. These muscles play a major role in preventing injury by stabilizing the knee when you jump and land.

All that is needed for this exercise is a round ball about the size of a soccer ball. Sit down on a chair with the ball between your knees. Squeeze in gently with both legs until you feel the muscles of the inner thigh tense. Hold for two seconds, then release to starting position. Do that eight times. As time goes on, you can push a little harder. Be careful never to overdo it, because if you strain these muscles, you won't be skating for a while.

The next exercise requires a long sock or one leg of a pair of pantyhose, with no holes. Put about 1 pound of sand in and tie it shut. Tie it around one ankle. Stand straight up, 5 to 8 inches from a wall, and place your hands on the wall to keep your balance. Your feet should be about shoulder-width apart.

Now bend the knee of the leg with the weight on it, bringing the foot up toward your buttocks. Keep your foot in a normal, relaxed position. Bring your foot up so that the bottom of your leg is parallel to the floor - no higher (in other words, make an "L" shape with that leg). The front of the upper leg

that you're exercising should remain parallel to the wall. Hold the knee bent for two seconds, then return to the starting position.

Do this eight times on one leg, then move the weight to the other leg and repeat the exercise on that side. You should feel the tendons behind your knee tense, but you should not feel pain. If you do feel pain, remove some of the sand from the sock and try again. If you cannot do eight repetitions, start with a number you can do. From there, work up to eight repetitions.

Both of these exercises create the foundation of knee strength and injury prevention. They should be done two days per week, with three days between (for example, if you do them on Monday, wait until Thursday to do them again.) If you are skating the day that you are supposed to exercise, you should skate first, and then do your exercises.

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