

Training your upper body for hockey

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One very important component of a player's off-ice training is developing the power, strength and stability of their upper body. Hockey players need to develop the upper body to not only prevent injury, but to ensure their performance on the ice is not compromised by a weak or ineffective upper body structure.

However, training the upper body is also a common problem for many players, as there can be a significant amount of incorrect or misleading information on training techniques for this part of the body. In this article, we will discuss the role of upper body training for hockey players, some of the common misconceptions and errors players make in their training programs, and outline two exercises to help in an off-ice training program.

On the ice, the upper body is used to establish body positioning, create space, contain opponents, absorb high speed

impacts, manipulate the stick and indirectly, manipulate the puck. To operate in these conditions, a hockey player's upper body must work with the core and lower body to produce and direct force as a kinetic chain.

In order to perform these skills on the ice, the upper body must be able to move independent of the rest of the body, and the hockey player must develop balanced levels of strength and stability in the use of both left and right arms. The role of the core and lower body is to provide a stable base from which the upper body can work from. Traditionally, players have received upper body training that is founded in body building principles.

"Biceps, triceps, shoulders and crunches", "doing a little bench" and "working the chest and arms" are all common phrases and misconceptions that have penetrated the sport training environment. Training for hockey though, requires the athlete to look past these antiquated techniques and towards a training model that will help them on the ice. Don't isolate—integrate.

Off-ice training should contain exercises that integrate the muscles, ensuring not only the muscles within the upper body, but also the core and lower body musculature, are working together to produce efficient movements.

In order to coordinate the upper and lower body, hockey players must replicate positions they will find themselves in while on the ice as they train their upper body. For example, keeping the core and lower body stable while the upper body battles for positioning with opponents is a situation many players find themselves in on the ice.

Split Stance Single Arm Row

A great exercise to promote this stability and coordination is the Split Stance Single Arm Row. In this exercise, the athlete wraps tubing around a pole and holds both ends of the tubing in either hand. The athlete steps back with one leg, dropping down into a split stance position.

The tubing should be pulling the arms forwards, straight out from the body. Pull the shoulder blades together in the



Jim Reeves photo

upper back and keep the back straight by pushing the chest up and forwards.

To start the exercise, pull one arm in towards the body, aiming to have the hand finish against the mid to lower portion of the rib cage. Allow the arm to return to the start position, and then repeat with the other side. Perform eight to ten repetitions per arm, switching the position of the legs halfway through the set. Do not allow the back knee to touch the floor, and hold this split stance position throughout the exercise.

Stability Ball Kneeling Incline Push-up

Another upper body strength exercise designed to force the core to stabilize the body positioning is the Stability Ball Kneeling Incline Push-up. Set-up your body position for the exercise by rolling out on the stability ball to your upper thighs, supporting the weight of the upper body with your arms. Then, pull the knees up towards the chest so that the stability ball rolls underneath to the lower legs.

To perform the exercise, slowly roll forward on the stability ball, lowering the body down towards the floor. Try to get the nose as close to the floor as possible, pausing at the bottom position, before pushing the body back to the start position. Keep the back straight throughout the exercise, and keep the core muscles engaged to control the body's position over top of the hands. Again, perform eight to ten repetitions of this exercise as long as proper technique is maintained.

Perform both of the exercises outlined here for three sets apiece, two to three times a week. Be creative with both exercises to challenge the body. For example, in the row exercise, changing the angle of the tubing will force the body to adapt to different strength and balance demands. Having the tubing inclined, declined, or coming across the body more from the side will challenge a player's ability to perform the exercise.

With the incline push-up exercise, changing the width between the hands, the distance of the hands away from the ball or rolling the legs out and back in between push-up reps will change the demands of the exercise as well.



Jim Reeves photo

Rinkside[®]

January 21, 2006

Number 1
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OMHA Premier Partners

Rinkside is published eight times a year in **Ontario Hockey Now** by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association Inc., 25 Brodie Drive, Unit 3, Richmond Hill, Ontario, L4B 3K7.

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PRINTED IN CANADA

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