

8 Minutes of Edgework – A Must for Any Practice

All too often when kids youth teams hit the ice, the coaches line them up on the goal line and skate in them in straight line stops and starts without pucks for the first 15 minutes of practice. Why? We're guessing conditioning, maybe edgework? But we think the most coaches can be accomplishing by the aforementioned 15 minutes of hell is to make the players not like the game.

That kind of practice might have worked 15-20 years ago when coaches didn't know any better, and just as importantly, kids didn't have many choices. They had little else to do but play hockey. Today they have more things to do than they know what to do with, and if they don't enjoy hockey, they will quickly quit and take up something else. We hope that coaches aren't driving kids out of the game.

Conditioning can be handled in an up-tempo practice. Keep the kids moving, and moving at top speed in the drills and they will get all of the conditioning that they need, and enjoy doing it. Edgework is another thing. Not that they get much edgework in stops and starts anyway. But the game is not played in straight lines. It involves turns and stops and cuts and pivots and crossovers and crossunders, requiring getting on the outside edges of the skates and maintaining balance and control. The following is an exercise you can spend as little as 5 minutes a practice with your team on and you will see noticeable improvements in a very short time.

Have your players spread out around the ice in their own little space 12-15 feet away from the boards and away from anyone else on the ice. Have them drop their stick on the ice and it will be utilized as a marker around which each player will be skating the following drills:

Two-foot jump – Players stand to one side of the stick with feet shoulder width apart, knees bent and upper body upright. They jump as high as they can in the air and land on the other side of the stick, landing with knees bent, then load up and jump back. Have them jump over and back 10 times.

One-foot jump – Same as two-foot jump only player jumps from one foot, and lands on the same foot on the other side of the stick, then jumps back. Players work to jump back and forth 10 times without setting down the other foot. Do with both legs.

Inside-edge Figure 8 – Using the stick as a guide, players skate a tight figure 8 turning sharply to their left around one end of the stick on their right inside edge, stepping over the stick and turning sharply to their right on their left inside edge. Players should cut sharply, turning their upper body and shoulders, with good knee bend, and shouldn't put their other foot down until they have completed the turn around the stick. Repeat for 30 seconds.

Outside-edge Figure 8 – Repeat the pattern used for inside edges, only players skate on outside edges, turning sharply to their right on their right skate, stepping over the stick and sharply to the left on their left skate. Balance is a little tougher on the outside edges. Repeat for 30-45 seconds.

Both Skates Figure 8 – Repeat figure 8 pattern with both skates on the ice at the same time, inside skate leading the outside skate, and turning sharply around the ends, while jumping over the stick to get to the other side. Players should not crossover at all and shouldn't pick skate blades up off of the ice except for when jumping the stick. Repeat for 30-45 seconds.

Tight Circle Crossovers – Have players skate in as tight of a circle as possible around their stick crossing over continually, upper body rotated, good knee bend and ankle bend and good body posture and balance. Repeat for 30-45 seconds each way, to the left and to the right.

Tight Circle Crossunders – Repeat crossover drill, only backwards, with crossing under in a tight circle, both directions.

Transition Skating Circle – Skate forward up one side of the stick, pivot and crossunder backward back down the other side, open up from inside edge to inside edge to transition to forward and repeat (players are always facing the same direction when skating around the stick). Repeat for 30-45 seconds each way.

Quick Crossover Start, Hop and Stop – Players start about six to eight feet away from their stick and starting with skates parallel to the stick do three running crossovers toward the stick, hop over it and glide 4-6 feet and stop. Repeat back the other way, then back and forth for 30-45 seconds.

Forward Start, Pivot and Stop – Same formation as above only now players start in a good forward "v-start position" and do a quick running start to the stick, as they step over the stick, they pivot backwards, glide, and stop backward in a good position to start again. Repeat 30-45 seconds.