

# HOCKEY MASTERS



"We are what we repeatedly do...  
excellence, then,  
is not an act but a habit."  
-Aristotle

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## Tip of the Month -- MARCH 2004 -- PowerSkating

from [Carrie Keil](#) ([email Carrie](#))

### Increasing Knee Bend

Knee bend, or knee flexion, is probably the most important anatomical component of skating. While hip and ankle flexion certainly play a role, knee flexion is the secret to stability, stride length, and ultimately, speed.

Most players at any given level will bend their knees to some degree as it is almost impossible to skate with straight legs. The trick is to get players to skate with their knees at close to a 90 degree angle. (That means their legs should resemble the letter "L"! ) When players first try this they report that it feels "weird" or "wrong", and they will feel funny trying it because it feels "stupid". To help players get over this, I recommend the following sequence of drills:

1) While standing still, have the player place his/her feet about one foot apart. Then ask the player to roll his/her ankles onto their outside edges and let their knees bow outward as if riding a horse. Now have the player bend their knees maximally until their rear end is 1 or 2 inches from the ice. This is called a FULL SQUAT POSITION.

2) Now have the player glide from blue line to blue line in this full squat position. Try it several times forward and backward. (Players often find it easier to achieve the full squat backwards.) \*Watch out for players whose knees come together, this will make sitting all the way down impossible.

3) The final phase of this drill is called the SPIDER STRIDE. This is a rather advanced knee flexion drill that only players who are able to achieve the full squat will be able to perform. Have the player take a couple of strides just for a little speed, then go into the full squat position. While in this position, the player should FULLY EXTEND one leg and then return it to the squat position. During the extension phase, the BLADE of the extending foot MUST REMAIN ON THE ICE, and should remain on the ice while returning as well. The player should now repeat the full leg extension and recovery with the other leg. This should be repeated the length of the ice. This drill should also be performed backward. \*Watch for an inability to keep the blade on the ice as this means the player is attempting to push too far back.

Tell the player to push through the heel of the blade like a "shuffle" stride.

Once players have gone through this series of maximal knee flexion drills, the 90 degree angle knee bend won't seem like such a big deal anymore. Now the player will be more willing to practice skating down lower since it feels comfortable in comparison to the Spider Stride. It's hard to know what half full means if you've never experienced empty or full!

Good Luck!