

“Is It Really That Important to Warm-Up?”

By: Garrett J. Krug

One of the most neglected ingredients to many athletes' training program is proper warm-up prior to training whether before skating, off-ice training or competition. Many athletes don't even consider performing a warm-up beforehand or if they do it is generally done very poorly and more often than not, incorrectly. For example, skaters can be found warming-up without wearing shoes, the wrong kind of shoes such as flip-flops or unsupportive shoes, immediately stretching without any sort of prior warm-up or just simply poor execution of the warm-up exercises in general. All of these prevent the athlete from accomplishing the true importance of a warm-up, which must not be done just because you are told to; it has a purpose and multiple benefits such as:

- Increased core body temperature
- Increased muscle and connective tissue elasticity
- Improved movement patterns
- Increased proprioceptive awareness
- Strengthened stabilizers of joints and spine
- Increased dynamic flexibility
- Readied nervous system for athletic movements
- Prepared better, psychologically for activity

Besides the above benefits from a proper warm-up, the two most important benefits are lessening of chances for injury and maximized performance from a properly completed warm-up. Once completed, the body and mind are now primed to act within the necessary parameters required for the sport. Remember, one way to tell if you have done an adequate warm-up is that you will have a little perspiration, which means the body is truly warmed-up and ready for more strenuous activity.

When developing a warm-up program for an athlete, it is imperative it follow the needs of the sport as well as the athlete in regards to any possible areas of soreness and/or past injuries they may have or had in the past as well as any weakness in motor skills. The warm-up should utilize many varying dynamic exercises physically preparing the skater for the ice, be it practice or competition. As stated before, most athletes simply feel it is enough just to stretch before skating, which is known as static stretching. The problem with this is the athlete's body is not properly warmed-up to stretch creating a situation similar to placing a rubber band in the freezer for a couple minutes, then pulling it out and attempting to stretch it. It doesn't take much to hypothesize that the rubber band simply snaps under these conditions, which is the same thing that happens to an athlete's muscles when just stretching is performed without prior warm-up. However, it is appropriate to statically stretch following a training session, especially for any problematically tight muscles or muscular imbalances since the body is properly warmed-up at this point. Instead of utilizing static stretching, athletes should incorporate dynamic exercises into their initial warm-up; exercises that incorporate range of motion through movement. The reason for this is they better prepare the body for movement, increase flexibility, can be more specific to sport and can increase overall conditioning level.

A warm-up can be designed to last anywhere from five to thirty minutes depending on needs of the athlete, discipline, time available and reason for warming-up. Most warm-ups will generally last five to fifteen minutes before practice with the longer warm-ups being utilized at competitions. If you start warming-up consistently for two weeks before getting on the ice you will see a dramatic improvement in your ability to start the session since the readiness of your physical and mental states will be dramatically enhanced. This is especially true for those skaters that come to the rink before school who probably just rolled out bed with very little if any breakfast and expect to complete their skating skills. On the other hand, you have skaters who rush to skate after school, have been sitting in an uncomfortable school desk all day and now expect to move through a full range of motion on the ice without a proper warm-up. From these

few points, I hope everyone is now saying “point well taken” and are willing to start a proper warm-up before training.

One question, that I am sure many will ask is, “Is it really necessary for my little skater to warm-up who is only working on a toeloop jump and is just six years old?” The answer to that question is, yes, it is important for them to perform a dynamic warm-up as well. Why not, if they are capable of following directions. Number one; it creates a healthy habit that will become part of their daily routine once they reach the upper levels of their skating careers. Number two; it helps to improve movement patterns for the young athlete outside of the sport of figure skating. Due to the need for early specialization in our sport many athletes miss out on generalized movement patterns that will just further their athletic development as they start to learn more difficult technical skills on the ice. The final reason, is that, hopefully by starting a simple dynamic warm-up and seeing the advantages of it, the parent will be more willing to register the skater in a structured Strength Training Program once it becomes necessary for further athletic development in sport.

Because of all of these benefits, when you think about it, nobody really has an excuse not to warm-up prior to activity. Now the ultimate question is what type of exercises would be recommended for a competitive figure skater? While there are many more, these are just some the exercises utilized on a daily basis in our Strength Training Program for our athletes when they warm-up before starting their off-ice workout, on-ice practice or competition

Warm-Up Exercises:

Butt Kicks	Pistol Squat	Front Body Bridge
High Knees	Split Squat	Ab Bridge
Back Pedals	Soldier	Jump Jacks
Side Slides	Sumo Wrestler	Vertical Jumps
Grapevines	Knee Grab	Long Jump (double/single leg)
Side Steps	Leg Cross	Box Checkouts
Skips (distance/height)	Prone Scorpion	Jump Walk-Throughs
Lunge	Mountain Climbers	Jump Roping
Reverse Lunge	Frogs	Torso Rotation
Squat-Good Morning-Calf Raise	Supine Leg Raise	Opposite Knee-to-Elbow

By utilizing any of these exercises in a structured format every athlete is able to warm-up their body appropriately before practice or competition. However, it is essential that all of the exercises be done correctly and with substantial effort to achieve their maximum potential towards warming-up the athlete. Now is the time of the season to begin implementing a warm-up into your daily routine if you haven't already and with all of the benefits how could you not?