

# Introducing Young Athletes to Roller Skiing

## 9.1.1 Introduction to Roller Skiing

Young athletes are introduced to roller skiing for the purpose of improving their ski technique and developing basic roller-ski skills that they can build on in the future. When introducing this new activity you may wish to educate both the athlete and their parents on the principal objective at this stage and to explain to them that it should not be used as a “training method” before the athlete enters the Training to Train stage.

For those athletes that pursue excellence, roller skiing will become an essential, specific, all round training method, and skiers in the Training to Compete and Training to Win stages may use it for up to 50% of their off-season training. With good skills, these athletes can do strength, sprints, distance and technique work - all on their roller skis.

Understandably it takes practice for an athlete to achieve a good level of competency and there are progressive steps beginners should follow when they first start out in order to ensure their safety and long-term success with this activity. Following are guidelines to help your athletes get started the right way.

- Young athletes can be introduced to roller skis before the end of the Learning to Train stage.
- The activity should take place in group sessions under the supervision of a qualified coach.
- Initial roller ski sessions should be short in length (not more than 30-40 minutes) because beginners may develop shin pains the first few times they try it.
- A good introductory roller ski is a light “skating” ski
- Along with the mandatory helmet and a reflective vest, you may wish to encourage beginners to use elbow and knee pads. Train your athletes to put on their helmet before they put on their roller skis.
- Roller skiing should be introduced without poles.
- An empty paved parking lot is a good location for the first sessions. If that is not available, locate a stretch of smooth, paved flat road with as little traffic as possible.
- Initially the emphasis should be on the athlete establishing a personal comfort level. Begin with exercises that the athlete can handle. Simple agility courses can be set up to help the athlete develop skills that will provide them with a general sense of control, such as turning and stopping. The next step is to work on balance, rhythm and coordination - skills that provide the foundation for good technique.
- Before athletes move on to more advanced technique work they should be familiar with all of the roller ski speed-control techniques. They should also be able to demonstrate the following – the ability to double pole with their hips forward on pole plant, to step turn, to control their speed by having one ski on a slower surface, to stop by going off

the road surface, and to comfortably ski down moderate hills. It is important for the athlete to achieve a level of confidence where they can stand (put their full weight) on top of one ski.

- ❑ Once these basics have been established, the technique focus should be on Two Skate and One Skate - with and without poles. When learning skating technique on roller skis, the skier should focus on the same technique cues they would on snow - balance, weight shift, powerful push off and full extension. Use easy terrain with no hills so that the skiers will not have to push too hard and they can concentrate fully on their balance and technique.
- ❑ Encourage your athletes to focus on the proper execution of a technique, so that you are not correcting bad habits later.
- ❑ Consider using a bike to teach roller ski sessions. This allows you the flexibility needed to observe all of the skiers in your group.
- ❑ Encourage your club to purchase several pairs of roller skis specifically for the use of this age group (11-12 years). This will make it possible for all of the athletes in your group to try them out and learn some basic skills. It will also allow for some additional time for the athlete to determine whether or not they wish to make a commitment to the sport of cross-country skiing before their parents are asked to invest in roller skis and related equipment. When the athlete has advanced to the T2T stage and they want to use the club skis on a regular basis (two or more times a week over an extended period) they should purchase their own equipment.

As mentioned above, the recommended development stage for introducing roller skiing as a “training method” is Training to Train. Refer to the Competition Coach Introduction (CCI) - Training to Train (Dryland) Reference Material for more information.

#### **Control Tips for Roller Skiers**

- ❑ Control your speed in potentially dangerous areas, for example road intersections or areas with potholes.
- ❑ Stand up straight – the increased wind resistance will slow you down. Do this before you pick up too much speed.
- ❑ Begin with snowplowing – before you pick up too much speed.
- ❑ Place one ski on a slower surface (gravel or grass) at the side of the road.
- ❑ Take short, quick steps into the fall-line of the hill, thereby traversing the slope.
- ❑ When turning, look in the direction you want to go (where you want to end up), not where your skis are pointed.

## Roller Ski Tips for Your Athletes/Parents

- ❑ Lightweight roller skis are a must for young skiers. Heavy roller skis are too hard on the legs and can give an athlete back problems.
- ❑ When purchasing roller skis, first find out about the cost and availability of replacement parts for that particular model.
- ❑ Roller skis come in different speeds. It is important to ensure that the speed of the roller skis matches the terrain in which they will usually be used (ideally an athlete will use equipment that allows them to ski at a speed similar to that which they would on snow). Using lightening fast roller skis on easy terrain will do little to improve a skier's conditioning.
- ❑ Speed reducers are useful for slowing down on downhill slopes.
- ❑ The wheels of roller skis should be checked regularly for excessive wear on one side - for example uneven wear caused by snowplowing. Each session the roller skis should be alternated from one foot to the other to encourage even wearing of the wheels.
- ❑ Be careful of paint lines on the road when it rains. These can be very slippery, as can wet leaves in the autumn.
- ❑ Proper maintenance can greatly increase the effective life of roller skis. Following are some guidelines to help achieve this:
  - ✓ Tighten all nuts before starting the workout.
  - ✓ Take wrenches and other necessary tools on long roller ski sessions.
  - ✓ Check your wheels before and after each workout.
  - ✓ The wheels should be lubricated with a penetrating oil when they get wet.
  - ✓ Use a pocket size diamond file to keep the carbide tips or the ski poles sharp. Use it after each outing otherwise the tips will become too dull and will require a shop-based sharpening.
- ❑ Poles do not grip on the pavement as well as they do on snow, which can cause arm action to change. Special carbide pole tips help correct this problem, and so will skiing on new and warm road surfaces because they provide the best grip. Your athletes should ensure that the pole tip and handles are correctly aligned and sharp, and be careful to plant their pole so that the tip digs in properly. When they return to skiing on snow, they should be aware that they may have to adjust their pole action.
- ❑ Roller blading is not beneficial as an off-season activity for developing skills for cross-country skiing. Due to their high speed and maneuverability it is difficult to simulate proper cross-country ski technique on them. Moreover the use of this equipment can negatively affect an athlete's ski technique.

Roller skiing is a good way to enforce good technique habits. It is also a good way to acquire bad habits. It is CRITICAL for you to pay close attention, ongoing, to your athlete's technique when they are roller skiing.

### 8.1.1 Roller Ski Safety

Roller skiing is an integral part of the sport of cross-country skiing, providing one of the most enjoyable and highly specific forms of ski training that can be practised in the dry-land training season. Roller skiing is also a sporting activity that is characterized by important legal and safety issues:

- ❑ The effective practice of roller skiing requires extended stretches of relatively smooth pavement. There are few venues where such conditions have been created exclusively or primarily for the use of roller skiers. Therefore, most roller skiing takes place on public roads and highways. In some municipalities or provinces, this practice is limited or prohibited by legislation.
- ❑ Several factors contribute to the existence of a considerable risk of injury during roller skiing. These include the relative instability of roller ski wheels, the lack of brakes, a hard road surface, the exposure to motor vehicles travelling at relatively high speeds and the inexperience of either roller skiing participants or motor vehicle drivers in sharing the road.

Cross Country Canada exercises leadership in this area in the form of a policy document that serves to:

- ❑ help manage the risk to its membership;
- ❑ reduce the exposure of CCC, its member Divisions and registered clubs to legal liability for related accidents, as identified in CCC's insurance contract; and
- ❑ contribute to the adherence by roller skiers to prudent and responsible practices that will gain the respect of the Canadian public, thereby protecting the right to roller ski on public roads wherever such practices are permitted.

#### CCC Roller Skiing Policy

- ❑ **Aim.** The aim of this policy is to state the CCC approach to managing these issues and to establish guidelines for procedures to be followed by CCC members engaged in roller skiing.
- ❑ **Authority.** This policy is developed by the National Ski Team Committee (NSTC) and promulgated under the authority of the Board.
- ❑ **Definition.** For the purposes of this policy, roller skiing includes all dry-land training conducted on roller skis, roller blades (in-line skates) and scooters.

- ❑ **General Guidelines.** The following guidelines describe the procedures to be adopted by CCC members at all times when roller skiing:
  - ✓ Think safety first.
  - ✓ It is the responsibility of the individual to ensure that he/she possesses the skills to roller ski safely in the selected terrain. It is also the responsibility of the individual to ski in a safe, non-hazardous manner.
  - ✓ Choose terrain that matches ability. Avoid areas with steep downhill, stop signs at the bottom of hills, railroad crossings, potholes or other hazards.
  - ✓ Wear protective clothing. A hard-shell, regulation helmet (ANSI, CSA or Snell) is mandatory. Inexperienced roller skiers should also wear leather-palmed gloves, wrist guards, knee pads and elbow pads.
  - ✓ Ski under control. If in doubt, walk down steep hills or intentionally fall before reaching an unsafe speed.
  - ✓ Do not wear “iPods” or other electronic devices that will decrease your ability to hear and react to any situation that may occur.
  
- ❑ **Roller Skiing on Public Roads.** The following guidelines describe the procedures to be adopted by CCC members when roller skiing on roads that are also being used by automobile traffic:
  - ✓ If roller skiing must be conducted on public roads, select roads with minimal traffic. Roads with wide shoulders are preferable.
  - ✓ Refrain from roller skiing where the practice is prohibited by law. In such situations, work through your Club or Division to negotiate road closures for periods set aside for roller ski training.
  - ✓ Roller ski when traffic is light and visibility is good. Do not ski when visibility is poor.
  - ✓ Obey the rules of the road. Skiers must adhere to traffic signals and posted signs.
  - ✓ Where possible, conduct technique in areas with controlled vehicle access.
  - ✓ For time trials, competitions or similar events, on public roads where traffic is permitted during the event, put out large signs that say: “Caution – Roller Skiers Training. Drive Carefully” or similar warnings. If a large event is scheduled, it is desirable also to post marshals to warn motorists of the activity.
  - ✓ Wear clothing that is light or bright in colour, in order to be more visible to motorists. The use of fluorescent clothing or vests is endorsed as an extra step that should be considered.

- ✓ Roller ski only in a single file and on the right side of the road travelling with the traffic, like a bicycle, or as required by local regulations.
  - ✓ Scan the road for traffic and maintain situational awareness at all times, creating time to react to traffic as it approaches.
  - ✓ When being passed by a car, yield as much room as possible. If practising skating technique, switch to classic as a vehicle passes so as to take less room on the road.
  - ✓ Be polite to drivers. A good relationship and good reputation with those with whom roller skiers must share the road is an important element in ensuring safety and protecting the privilege to use roads and highways for this purpose.
- ❑ **Insurance Implications.** The adoption by CCC of this policy has important insurance implications. Lack of compliance with the guidelines contained in this policy on the part of CCC members engaged in roller skiing may result in a breach of the CCC insurance policy and liability coverage may be denied.

*Excerpts from NCCP CCI-L2D (Dryland) Reference Material, 2008*