

Using Strategy and Tactics Under the New Rules

By Susan Ellis

Note: The information in some tips may have changed since these articles were written as rules have changed over the years. Some have been updated and some have not. Please consult the ISU rules manual for the most current rules.

So by now most of you who skate short track will have experienced a competition under the new rules. I have received a lot of emails asking how to use the new rules to your advantage in blocking, passing and controlling races.

First, let me say that although I think the new rules are good in that they allow more freedom of movement on the track in both passing and blocking, in the end nothing can be really cut and dried in terms of how referees see the race. There will always be discretion and there is really no way to remove it from the sport. Referees have a very different perspective from the inside of the track than we do in the stands or in the coach's box. And although there is video review process at the upper levels of the sport, it is not normally used at the domestic level. And no, parents, you can't run up to the referee and ask him to review your own video that you recorded so please stop trying. Some calls they will get right and other calls they will get wrong, but they do the best they can.

PASSING ON THE INSIDE

Under the old rules the onus was on the passing skater to get by cleanly. This meant that if a skater passing on the inside came even with the person being passed, the person being passed could lean in on them and draw a disqualification (now called penalty). Now once a skater draws even on the straight (or even on the corner), both skaters must continue a course that avoids collision, so in other words, no more leaning in on the passer.

The advantage of this is that it allows more access to finish a pass and should create safer skating provided both parties follow the rules. Say, for instance, you are passing someone on the inside and draw even with them on the straight, then you both have equal access to the corner and neither skater should back down but should continue to skate hard through the corner avoiding contact. In this [video](#) the skater in black passing has drawn even but the skater in blue comes in on him very slightly on the entry and makes contact so it was the skater in blue who was penalized. Had the skater in blue not moved in on the skater in black and avoided the contact there would have been no penalty.

In this [video](#) the passing skater in white draws even but then backs down and tucks back in behind. He should have continued in to the corner because at that point he actually had right of way to the inside position. Again, it would have been up to the outside skater to avoid coming across and making contact.

In this [video](#) the skater in red is passing on the inside. The skater in blue makes room for him to pass but sets himself up for a brilliant retake on the exit by going deep in to

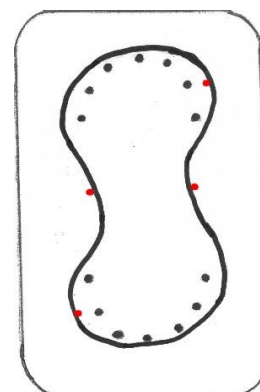
the entry and getting a slingshot effect coming out. A very good drill to learn to get the feel for this is called partner passing. You work with a partner and there is a pass every $\frac{1}{2}$ lap, so there is constant take and retake. Doing 3-5 intervals of 5 lappers makes a good mid-speed workout as well as learning good pass set up.

Passing a pack on the inside under the old rules was a risky move as any one of the skaters being passed could simply lean on you and draw a disqualification. Under the new rules this is a much safer move as all you need to do is draw even with a skater and stay there going in to the corner forcing them to take an outside path. You have then essentially stolen their spot. See in this [video](#) how the skater at the back in red calmly slips up the inside of the pack to draw even with the skater in second and steal her spot. Of course their counter move to this slip up the pack pass should be to accelerate hard on the outside to the front of the pack. Or the pass may have been prevented in the first place by doing more of a peanut track rather than following a straight line.

BLOCKING PASSES

Now that cross tracking is allowed, as long as there is no contact, skaters must learn how to effectively, yet safely, block passes. Of course the simple way to block an inside pass is to just skate very tight coming out of the corner.

While this might work OK for younger kids it becomes more difficult to hold the track as the speed increases and is a lot harder on the legs because the tighter the track, the more centrifugal force. One of the best tracks for preventing inside passes is called the peanut track.



Peanut Track

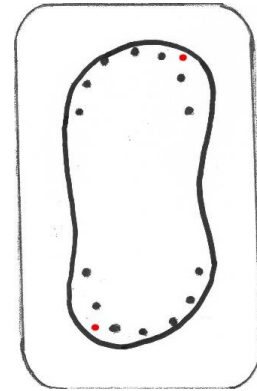
The peanut track brings you across the track to block an inside pass and then back out away from the first blocks to widen out your entry a bit for speed. How wide the exit is depends on if there is someone trying to pass you at blocks 5, 6, 7. Watch this [video](#) to see how the skater allows herself to come off the last two exit blocks a bit and then uses a good lean and hard right leg push to propel herself back across the track. In this [video](#) the lead skater blocks very well with a good right leg push to bring him back across in front of the other skater. Here is a peanut straight from a [front view](#). Watch how far the outside skater in this [video](#) comes across to block a pass attempt.

To counter a block on a peanut track you can set up a well-timed outside straightaway pass as seen [here](#) and again [here](#).

A good drill to learn the peanut track is to put a block at the entry about 2-3 feet to the outside of the second block which the skaters must go outside of. Place a block on each straightaway about $\frac{1}{2}$ way down and about one to two feet inside the line between last exit block and 1st entry block which the skaters must go inside. This is also a great drill for learning how to use edges better.

Another good track for blocking inside passing is the deep entry track. Entering deeper allows you to change the apex of the track to occur earlier before maximum speed is built in the corner and allows you to carry great speed out because of the slingshot effect and enormous pressure created by the deep entry.

Because you have made your apex earlier in the corner it is easier to come out narrower and do a peanut straight if necessary or to carry your speed out a little wider if no one is trying to pass on the exit. In this [video](#) all the skaters have done a very deep entry. Notice how far down the straight and off the first 3 blocks they are. The lead skater (Blue) senses a pass coming, moves across the track, which forces the second skater (Black/Red) farther to the inside, which essentially blocks the third skater (Red) from passing to first. Although Black/Red did make contact with Red, Red really had nowhere to go and tried to force his way up. Notice that Black/Red kept his left hand on his back the whole time and at no time tried to block, push or pull Red with his hand.



Deep Entry Track

The deep entry track is also good for shutting down pass set ups. In this move you shut down the other skaters' speed and/or path on the entry before they ever get a chance to build speed to come up the inside of you on the exit. In this [video](#) the skater in 3rd accelerates hard out of the corner to build speed to set up his pass, but the skater in 2nd goes extra deep and wide to effectively shut down the pass set up. The blocking move even forced the 3rd skater to go so wide on the entry that the 4th skater was able to sneak in to his spot. Notice as well that the skater in 2nd also blocks up the outside lane on the straight on the exit by drifting wide to prevent an outside pass on the exit.

In this [video](#) the skater in light blue forces the skater in dark blue both wider and deeper. In this move it is impossible to gauge just how deep and wide the blocking skater will take you so it makes the timing of the acceleration on the entry very difficult.

A good drill to learn how to do a deep track is to put a block in a triangle formation with blocks 2 and 3 as in the diagram. Look at this [video](#) again and notice how late each of the skaters is landing their right skate on the apex block.

One caution on the deep entry track is to be aware of skaters coming up the inside late in the straight or making a nifty little move [like this one](#).

One way to prevent passing in racing is to be unpredictable and constantly changing your track pattern. If you always skate the same track pattern lap after lap the skater behind you knows exactly what they will need to do to pass you. This doesn't mean the pattern needs to change every single lap from a wide wide track to a narrow narrow track to a wide narrow track, but small variances such as a little deeper this time, a little wider next time, more peanut from time to time. And never follow directly behind the skater in front of you. If there are skaters coming up both the inside and outside to pass

you will be stuck with nowhere to go and no chance of passing yourself until the other skaters have gone by because all paths are now blocked. Always give yourself an option of having room to move up either inside or outside by not following directly behind on the straights.

Being as far up in the pack as possible in races is important in being able to control your position and not risk getting blocked out. Unless you are head and shoulders above the ability of every other skater in the race you risk getting shut down by good blocking maneuvers that were not permitted in the past. It has opened the door to more tactical racing and more skaters moving to the front of the pack earlier. Too often I hear skaters say "But I had nowhere to pass". My question is "Why were you at the back of the pack with 5 to go in a 1500 in the first place?"

If you find yourself at the back for some reason then you need to either slip up the inside and steal a spot or two, or go outside either on the straight or the corner.

For more on strategy and tactics read this series of articles: (Keep in mind to apply the new rules though)

[Strategy and Tactics – Part 1 – Overview – December 2008](#)

[Strategy and Tactics – Part 2 – Controlling the Pace and Track – January 2009](#)

[Strategy and Tactics – Part 3 – The Moves and Counter Moves – February 2009](#)

Another effect of the new rules is that skaters no longer have to maintain a straight line to the finish line, meaning you are allowed to use a peanut type track on the finish straight as well to block. A good counter move to this though is to make the lead skater think you are going inside at the finish and then go outside.

TEAM SKATING

There is some confusion on 'team skating' as this term is no longer in the ISU book.

The old ISU rule read:

TEAM SKATING: Any action that in any way is beneficial to the result of another skater is considered team skating and all involved shall be disqualified.

A new ISU rule reads:

ASSISTANCE: Each Skater shall compete as an individual. Any assistance from other Skaters will be cause for sanctions of all Skaters involved.

In the past some countries have been accused of team skating when really all they were doing was skating smart. If the goal is to win the race, of course you should put yourself in a position to do that and that position is in the front of the pack. If 3 skaters from Skatikstan go to the front and skate defensive tracks are they really team skating or simply putting themselves in a position to win a medal?

However, if a skater deliberately loses a race so another skater can gain points, takes another skater out of the race in a deliberate attempt to prevent them from gaining points, or fails to try to win a race and participates simply in a blocking role for another skater, that would be considered 'assistance' and would be cause for penalties. I have seen skaters who could clearly win a race fake a fall to give another skater points, deliberately block one certain skater from moving up, intentionally take a skater down, and even overheard them chatting about their dubious tricks before a race. Assistance (team skating) is still, and always will be, a hard thing to call, but skaters beware; your actions on the ice will determine who you will be known as off the ice. Sport should be about respect and respect is gained by winning on your own merits.