

The Corner Arm Swing

By Susan Ellis

Whether it be on the corners or the straights the arms should always be synchronized with the legs to **maximize the power** the legs can deliver and to **maintain good balance**.

One of the most common mistakes many skaters make is to get into the habit of getting too comfortable with both hands on the back and never practicing good arms swings at lower speeds. Then, when it's time to go fast and really use the arms, they don't know how to move. While it's good to learn how to skate with both hands on the back, you must also learn how to use the arms properly.

A good arm swing is a **relaxed** one, where the arms swing loosely from the shoulder sockets and do not rotate the shoulders on the swing. To do this you must relax the entire upper back, shoulders and neck.

The arm swing must be synchronized with the legs. The basic rule is **opposites to opposites! When the left leg moves forward the right arm moves forward, when the right leg moves forward the left arm moves forward.**

- The arms should always swing loosely and with a **full extension to the back** and a **slight bend in the elbow on the forward** up swing.
- In the forward position the arm should be extended forward in a relaxed position with the upper arm passing close to the body and a slight bend at the elbow (around 120 degrees). The hand should be in line with the center line of the body, and should be relaxed with the thumb up and no higher than the nose.
- When the arm swings back it stays very close to the body, the elbow gradually straightens and the arm stops its back swing when the entire arm is about parallel to the ice. The hand stays relaxed and the **thumb is pointed down**.

The swing with the left arm on the **corner** is a little different than the straightaway swing.

- **The left arm** has an abbreviated arm swing compared to the right for a couple of reasons. One is to avoid creating momentum away from the corner by swinging too long, and another is to avoid the possibility of rotations caused by a long inside arm swing.
- **The upper arm** swings through a very short range of motion such that it never extends beyond the chest in the forward swing and above the back in the back swing. The upper arm and shoulder must stay relaxed and swing from the shoulder socket only to avoid rotations.
- **The lower part** of the arm bends at the elbow in the forward position to about 75-80 degrees. The thumb should be pointed up and the hand stops at about mid-chest. On the back swing the lower arm extends fully so the elbow is almost straight and the thumb is pointing down.

Synchronization on the corners:

Again, remember the basic rule – opposites to opposites! When the left leg is forward the right arm is forward, when the right leg is forward the left arm is forward.

- **Right Arm** – Start with the weight on the left leg as if you are starting a left leg push on the corner. Put your right arm forward and your left arm back as described above. As soon as you start to drop the knee before the left leg push the right arm starts to swing backward. It stays close to the body during the entire swing and moves at the same rate as the legs, such that when the left leg reaches full extension, the right arm also reaches full extension in back of you. Then as soon as the right knee starts to drop forward for the right leg push, the right arm starts its swing forward. The elbow starts to bend slightly on the upswing and finishes when the right leg finishes its extension. The thumb should still be pointed upward, the hand relaxed, and about the height of your nose.
- **Left Arm** – Start with the weight on the right skate in a crossover position (left leg is extended in back to the side). Put your left arm forward as described above. As soon as you start to drop the knee before the right leg push the left arm starts to swing backward. It stays close to the body during the entire swing and moves at the same rate as the legs, such that when the right leg reaches full extension, the left arm also reaches full extension in the back swing. Then as soon as the left knee starts to drop forward for the left leg push, the left arm starts its swing forward. The arm stays close to the body, bends at the elbow on the upswing and the thumb is pointing up and towards the chest.

Common errors:

Poor technique in the arm swing can be the root cause of many other technique errors. Some common errors include:

- Keeping the elbows bent during the entire swing. Can cause stiff shoulders resulting in tightness in the back which will result in tightness in the hips, which will shorten the push.
- Keeping the arms stiff during the entire swing. No elbow bend. Will cause the shoulder stiffness, again shortened push, pushing upward.
- Swinging across the body. Can cause shoulder rotations, make weight transfer difficult, landing on the inside edge, premature pushing.
- Not enough arm swing. What the legs do the arms do and vice versa. If the arm swing is meek and mild, so will be the push.
- Cupping hands. (Palm down on the front swing and up on the back swing). May cause some shoulder tightness on the back swing taking away from the full power of the swing.
- Stiff hands. Stiff hands will cause the swing to be abrupt and cause tension in the shoulders.

A good way to practice the arm swing is to do it off ice, in stationary positions first to learn the pattern of the arm swing, then in movement to learn the synchronization.