

Strategy and Tactics – Part 3 – The Moves and Counter Moves

By Susan Ellis

This is the third in the Strategy and Tactics series. If you have not yet read Strategy and Tactics – Part 1 – Overview – December 2008 and Strategy and Tactics – Part 2 – Controlling the Pace and Track – January 2009, I suggest you do so now before continuing this article.

In short track it is not always the fastest skaters who win the race. Often the skater who outsmarts his opponent is the victor, even if they aren't the fastest. I've seen many races where the fastest skater has been caught behind someone they "should beat" but can't get around them. That's why strategy and tactics are so important! And that's what makes short track so much fun and so exciting!

In this article we will look at some of the moves and the counter moves such as passing, blocking, and pace changes that allow skaters to either move up in the pack or prevent people from moving ahead of you.

Inside Passing

The Moves

To move around in the pack you must perfect your pass set up and you must know which pass will work best on different skaters and in different situations. There are many, many different types of passes. The most common one we learn when we are younger is the inside on the straight. It might work well for a while, but when you come across a skater who can exit very tight at higher speeds or block you coming down the straight, then you need to find another way around.

To set up the basic inside pass at high speed you need to **enter in to the corner wider** than the skater ahead of you and accelerate your speed by **taking an extra cross over in**. You then come back in behind the skater at the apex block and wait for the opening as they exit. Timing is critical so you don't ride up on the skater too early.

[Tremblay aerial inside pass](#)

[Roberge aerial inside pass](#)

The next two clips are classic slingshot passes. They are called slingshots because the speed build up in the set-up of these passes gives a huge boost in speed to execute the pass. Notice the deep, wide set ups, and the two crossovers in, not one cross in.

[Ahn slingshot inside](#)

[Lee slingshot inside](#)

The Counter Moves

To protect your position in the pack you must skate a track that makes it harder for the skater behind you to either set up their pass, or skate a track that will block their pass attempt.

There are a few ways to counter an inside pass. One is by simply skating a very tight track the whole time. There are some problems with this however. 1) It is very hard to skate this track at absolute maximum speed without drifting wide on the exit. 2) It is very hard on the legs because of the extra centrifugal force from the narrow corner. 3) A smart skater will say enough of that and just go outside. The narrow track should only be used to block on a last ditch effort, keeping your speed as high as possible, and hoping the skater behind doesn't go for the outside.

Another way to protect your spot in the pack from an inside pass is to block up the exit on the inside so the person behind has no room to pass. Notice here how the skater in 2nd exits to the inside shoulder of the skater ahead to prevent giving the 3rd skater room to pass.

[Blocking inside on exit](#)

You can also counter the inside pass by “shutting the door” on the person trying to pass. In other words, you come across the track towards the inside to block their path. You need to be VERY careful in doing this not to hit them or significantly interfere with their rhythm or you might get called for cross tracking!

[Shut the door](#)

Skating a ‘peanut’ track makes it harder for someone behind you to plan an inside pass. The peanut shape allows you come off the blocks a bit wider to gain speed on the exit, swing back towards the inside to block up the inside lane, and then swing back out towards the boards again to gain speed on the entry. Again be careful of cross tracking!

[Peanut track](#)

One way to counter the ‘shut the door’ and the ‘peanut’ is the quick outside straightaway pass. Just when the skater starts to come back inside you pass them on the outside. To do this you will need to accelerate hard out of the corner to get your speed.

[Quick outside straight](#)

In this race the Canadian skater (dark suit) has spent two laps being ‘peanut tracked’ by the skater in red. Although it is early in the race she moves to the front with an outside straightaway pass to control the lead position.

[Roberge outside to front](#)

She does this because she knows if she gets caught behind the two skaters in red one will take an inside track and the other will take an outside track to block her even more. Call it team skating if you like, but in reality you NEVER follow the same track as the person in front anyway, so why should it be different for these skaters? Simply, it's called protecting your position!

Probably the best way to prevent a pass of any type is to block the pass set up. In this move you shut down the other skaters' speed or path on the entry before they ever get a chance 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 move in this video even forced the 3rd skater to go so wide on the entry that the 4th skater was able to sneak in to his spot.

[Block pass set up wide](#)

Outside Passing

The Moves

The outside pass is safer than passing inside as you don't risk running out of room on the straightaway, but it may also be more difficult to execute as you are generally going a longer distance. There are several places to pass outside: outside on the corner, outside on the entry, outside on the straight. Again, which one you use may depend on the pace, the number of people you are trying to pass, and the type of track they are skating.

As with the inside pass, a build-up of speed is necessary to execute the pass quickly so you are not forced to skate on the outside of the pack for several laps.

Watch how speed is again built on the entry using a wide, deep, and aggressive entry on this outside straightaway pass. The skater in 2nd starts to build speed going in to the corner, continues to build on the exit, and completes the pass before the entry.

[Outside straight](#)

In this video Ho Suk Lee builds speed for an entire lap using a wide track before decisively overtaking the other skater and creating an immediate gap.

[HS Lee outside](#)

The Counter Moves

'Deep tracking' is a way to effectively shut down both an inside and an outside pass set up.

The video below demonstrates how the skater in 2nd place uses a deep wide entry with a wide exit track leaving the skater in 3rd place with no room to pass, at least not on the straights. He is skating a wider track than the skater ahead, so the 1st skater is blocking the inside and the 2nd skater is blocking the outside.

[Block using wide track](#)

Here the 2nd skater is actually able to draw even with 1st skater, but the first skater counters with a very deep, very wide, very aggressive entry to force the 2nd skater to lose speed and go too wide to be able to complete the pass.

[Aggressive wide entry block](#)

When passing the pack on the outside you had better be prepared to go all the way to the front of the pack. Smart skaters will not willingly let you into their spot. Watch the Korean skater (medium blue) go all the way to the front. The skater in dark blue follows her up and tries to come into second spot but the skater in red is not about to let her in.

[Protecting spot](#)

The dark blue skater was forced to drop back in the pack. She tried the same move a bit later in the race but the leaders heard her coming and upped the pace on the exits, again foiling her attempt and keeping her outside for a couple of laps before she dropped back again.

Changing Pace

Changing your pace during a race makes it difficult for your competition to gauge their speed needed to pass.

There are several ways to change pace. One is to just gradually build up your speed so that each lap becomes a little faster. This is a very good strategy for those in great shape who can hang on to a fast pace in the last laps, and also a good way to burn off those in lesser shape.

Another way to change pace is called the 'Hammer Float'. In this tactic you increase the stride frequency and pace on each exit, and then go easier on the straight. One of the most brilliant Hammer Floats I've seen was the 500 Olympic men's final in Turin. Apolo Ohno opens the race hard for a lap and a half, then shuts down to a Hammer Float for a lap and a half, then turns on the jets for the last lap and a half. This clip starts about 15 seconds in to the race. You will see the Hammer Float from 15-24 seconds, then at 24 seconds he really hammers hard all the way. Look at the difference in the straightaways for the first 15-24, and then see the change at 24.

[Hammer Float 500](#)

The Hammer Float is also a good way to maintain your lead position while still keeping a bit of reserve for the end of the race.

Here is another Hammer Float example. Again look at the difference in pace from the straights to the corner exit.

[Lee hammer float](#)

It Ain't Over Till It's Over!!

Never give up and never give in! Here's why....

[Guilmette last corner inside](#)

[Goulet-Nadon last corner outside](#)

And now for the Grand Finale! I'm not recommending this one!!!!

[Wacky inside](#)

Wanna see that one in slo mo?

[Wacky inside slo mo](#)