

Start Position

By Susan Ellis

Setting the body up in the correct starting position is as important as what happens after the start. It is the starting position itself that sets up your body in an ideal position from which to accelerate forward with maximum speed and momentum. So, take the time to perfect your starting position before jumping in to the start movements. Go down in to the ready position SLOWLY to make sure you are going down properly. It's not a race to see who can get ready first! You do have to be a little careful not to go down too slowly and risk a false start or have the starter fire the gun when you are not set yet. You can determine the rhythm of the starter by going out a few races before yours and watching him/her.



The set up discussed here is for a right facing toe start. For a left facing toe start, the same technique applies, just switch legs. For most other types of starts the basic principles remain the same, but the set up changes slightly. For a parallel start, the only difference is that your weight is more centered and the front blade is parallel to the back blade. For a V start (long track), your weight is more centered and the front blade is flat on the ice rather than toe raised.

- Stand behind the line with your feet parallel to each other and 45 degrees to the line.
- Your hips are at a 45 degree angle to the start line (90 degrees to your back skate).
- Spread your feet so that the back foot is well inside the outside of your back hip.
- Tuck your butt and remember to keep it tucked all the way through the set up as you descend in to position.
- Rotate your front foot so it is pointed straight ahead. Note that your front foot and knee are now pointed straight ahead and they remain pointed straight ahead until the gun fires.
- **Keeping your front ankle angle at 90 degrees, and keeping the toe of the blade in the ice**, lift the heel of your front foot slightly off the ice so that your weight moves slightly forward and your front knee is located above your toe. Your front foot and leg now maintain this exact position until the gun fires. On your back foot, bend your ankle so your knee moves forward towards and slightly inside your toes so your shin bone is on a slant.
- Return to the standing position and repeat the same procedure as you just did, but add the following:
This time, as you bend your ankle, let your butt sink towards the ice and bring your upper body down at the same time and rate as you bend your ankle. In other words do not bend one before the other, or faster than the other. When your ankle stops bending, your upper body stops lowering as well. Draw a line from your back ankle to your knee. If you were to extend the line upward you would have a parallel line that runs from your back hip to your shoulder from a side view.

Your weight will have moved from the heel to the section between mid-blade and ball of foot and you should have slightly more weight in front than in back. Your weight stays there until the gun is fired.

- Set your front arm slightly ahead of you with the elbow just outside of your front knee and your elbow bent. Bring your forearm almost parallel to the start line, with your hand open, relaxed, and palm facing your body.
- Set your back arm slightly back with your elbow bent and the hand open and relaxed.
- Your eyes should be looking up the straightaway about 10m ahead of you, or at the first block in short track.

In your starting position you should feel that your back skate is gripping the ice along the entire blade, that you have slightly more weight on the front than in back, and that your back hip is tight underneath you and the muscles are ready to explode to project you forward.

You should practice your set up, and practice it, and practice it, until it is a habit to set up a good start. Just go to the line set up your position, back off the line, and then set up again. Keep repeating this without actually doing a start. Once the correct position is a habit, you can progress to doing starts.

Common mistakes in the start position:

- Upper body too low. Often slow to get body moving forward as you have to wait until you rise to a position that you can even start to move forward. Also may result in chest popping up too high. Leaves butt untucked so no pressure in to ice.
- No knee angle or ankle angle on back leg. No pressure in to ice on push.
- Back hip comes down over top of back skate rather than inside it. You are on the flat of the blade and the blade will slide out from under you as you load and push. Also puts more weight back than in front resulting in less forward momentum on initiation.
- Front heel is too low. Not enough grip with toe in to ice and toe slips out.
- Front heel is too high. Too much pressure and tension on front leg.
- Back skate not at 45 degrees to line. Skate slips when initiating load.
- Body rotated forward towards straightaway. Skate slips. Also takes away some of load from back hip.
- Upper body rotated (usually shoulder twisting toward ice). Takes away some load on back hip.
- Head down. Butt up.
- Arms too close to body. Takes away impetus of arms punching to create more momentum.
- Arms too far away from body. Creates rotations on start.
- Back knee cocked in too much. All the pressure is already on the ball with nowhere to go, thus losing forward momentum and spring. Also ankle collapsing.