An Essential Rollerski Workout for Beginners and Advanced Athletes
—by guest contributor Mike Mandli
For those of us who do not live next to a glacier or who do not have access to year round snow, the most viable option for taking your skiing to the next level is roller skiing. Running, biking, and swimming, are all viable ways to train for the season, but roller skiing is the most specific exercise for the sport we love. However, the equipment choices, the surfaces on which to roller ski, and the skill set required all need careful consideration.

First and foremost, you need a good bike helmet. Any road or mountain bike helmet will do, but do not roller ski without one. Beginners might want to consider elbow pads and knee pads, but they are not required.

Second, we need to have, preferably, a smooth asphalt surface on which to roller ski. Concrete does not work because it repels purchase of our pole tips. We generally use our regular ski poles with roller ski ferrules replacing the snow baskets. The carbide tips can be sharpened when they dull, and they provide a durable tip against the asphalt.

The key ingredient to specific cross country ski training, the roller ski, comes in many different brands with wheels designed for specific surfaces and techniques. Some roller skis even have brakes which can help if you are rolling in hilly terrain. New Moon Ski and Bike can help you select which roller ski and wheel type will work best for your goals and skill level. However, to get started, almost any kind of roller ski will give you a training and skill boost if you start in a conservative manner on flat or gradual terrain. Also, a lesson from a seasoned roller ski trainer will have you poling and gliding safely in no time.

My training on roller skis consists of endurance sessions, speed sessions, threshold sessions, technique sessions, agility sessions and strength sessions. Years of experience allow me to train in this complex protocol. For the beginner and someone with limited time to train, I suggest focusing on strength sessions and technique sessions for the greatest benefit. Finding an experienced roller skier to help you get started would be helpful, but you can easily teach yourself in the following manner.
Once you have your helmet, roller skis, poles and boots, find a school parking lot or an empty shopping center parking lot with some grass along the borders. A suburban black-top street would work as well. Put you roller skis on while standing on a soft grass surface. This aids balance and gives a feel for the skis. Walk around on the grass and practice weighting and unweighting the roller skis on one foot. You can do this without poles and then add the poles later. Look for your balance on one ski. Assume a double pole position and continue to weight and unweight the skis. This is all fairly safe on grassy soft ground. You are not trying to roll at this point.

Next, move to the side of the road or pavement and place the front of the roller ski on the asphalt with the back of the roller ski still in the grass. Make sure the transition between the asphalt and grass is smooth. With feet together like in double pole technique, swing your arms forward and backward in a relaxed double pole motion. Feel your body position and the pressure under your boots and onto the roller ski. You still are not rolling anywhere, just getting a feel for these machines on your feet.

At this point, I suggest turning parallel to the pavement and placing one roller ski in the grass first, and then placing the other rollerski fully on the pavement. Transfer weight from the roller ski on the grass to the roller ski on the pavement and back again. Get the feel of the roller ski on the pavement with a touch back down into the grass. Do this on both legs. We are still not rolling forward, but you might get a little movement forward without trying.

I always start roller skiing with a double pole. Once you have the feel for the roller ski and how it might react on the pavement, step both skis onto the flat asphalt in a dole pole position. Using a little flexion at the ankle and your double pole technique, plant your pole tips and apply pressure on the pavement with the poles in a very short stroke. Keep the power application light and tight for now. Feel the movement and how much energy you need to move forward in a double pole. Stay in a balanced double pole Double-poling.
position and roll out until the momentum stops on its own. Repeat.

Okay, now you can move with a double pole on flat or gradual uphill pavement. I prefer a gradual uphill because of the resistance and natural stopping of momentum. If you have to go back down to where you started the uphill, you can take your skis off and walk down. The other options are to walk back down in the grass on the side of the pavement or to snowplow. Yes, snow plow. You can slow down on roller skis the same way you do on snow skis with a snowplow.

Demonstrating the snow plow.

The Workout
If you classical ski (stride) or freestyle ski (skate) this basic double pole on roller skis is where you need to start if you are a beginner. For the more advanced roller skier with limited time, this double poling up a gradual hill is the bread and butter of a strength workout. If you have time for nothing else on roller skis, it is the single most important exercise to becoming a stronger and more efficient skater or strider whether you are a beginner or wave one skier. Do the following on roller skis and you can go to the next level.
On a gradual uphill that takes about 90 seconds to roller ski up perform the following repeats.

First, double pole crunch (not a full double pole - just the beginning locked and loaded upper body and abdominal crunch, about the first third of a double pole). This is not intended to be fast. Instead, it is a very deliberate engaging of the core to get movement up the hill.

Second, full double pole with the initial double pole crunch and a full follow through using the engaged core, lats, and weight of the upper body, finishing with a relaxed extension of the triceps.

Third, single stick (using only one pole on each side like in diagonal stride). This repeat is also about deliberate movement that engages the shoulder girdle, the core, the lats, with a final release at the triceps.

Do this series of three exercise anywhere from 3 sets progressing to 7 sets (9 to 21 gradual uphill repeats) during the late summer and fall at least once a week. This applies to beginners and advanced level roller skiers. If you invest in a pair of roller skis and do this workout, it will pay big dividends when the snow comes.

If you want a roller ski lesson, feel free to call New Moon Ski and Bike or contact me at 414-617-2656. We can get you to enjoy roller skiing in a very short time.
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