

# aLOOKatLEGS

by Jim McCrossin

## Looking To Put A Little More Jump Into Those Legs?

“Jump” in the game of hockey is an important physical attribute. A player with “jump” is quick on his feet, quick to accelerate and quick to move from an idle position to rapid acceleration. It is a very explosive movement that requires both strength and power. A player with “jump” feels strong and on top of his game. A player without “jump” feels sluggish and off his game. So, how do you get “jump”? As I have stressed before, there is no substitute for hard work. Supplements WILL NOT do it for you. So let's take a look at what WILL work.

To get “jump,” you must train your legs appropriately. “Jump” requires both strength and power. Strength exercises should be performed slowly and in a very controlled manner. Some of the best exercises include squats, lunges, and box step ups with weights. All of these exercises work not only the muscle that move the knee but also move the hip.

**Squats:** Quality...then quantity. If performed correctly, squats are one of the best exercises an athlete can do for lower extremity strength. Done

incorrectly, they can be one of the most dangerous. Many of our younger athletes are never taught how to squat correctly. This will lead to injury and poor athletic performance. The two main problems are excessive forward lean of the upper body and excessive forward movement of the knees. These errors in biomechanics can lead to lower back and knee injury. Prior to performing squats, have a trained professional demonstrate the correct technique and be sure that you are performing this lift in a biomechanically sound manner. Technique is critical, not the amount of weight you are lifting.

**Box Step Ups with Weight:** From a standing/upright position with dumbbells in each hand, step up on to a 16-18” high box or bench (the box or bench should put your knees at a 90-degree angle.) Step up 10 times with one leg, then 10 with the other. Remember to keep your back and shoulders squared.

**Lunges:** Lunges can be performed holding dumbbells or with a bar across your upper back. From a standing/upright position, step as far forward as possible with no forward lean of your upper body until your front knee is at a 90-degree angle. Then step back to the original position in one step. Perform this 10 times with one leg, then 10 with the other.

### Putting Power Into Your Legs

You've been told by your coach to improve the power in your lower body, your upper body, or perhaps both. What are you going to do and how are you going to do it? In our last segment, we discussed techniques for developing a solid foundation of strength. You **MUST** lay this foundation before anymore building takes place. Having done that, you are ready to move onto plyometrics.

**Plyometrics** - By now you have probably heard about them but what exactly are they? Hopping, skipping, jumping, tossing and throwing are all examples of activities, which when performed properly will help make you faster and more powerful. No matter how many times a week you practice, simply playing your





sport will not help you develop top speed and power. Speed and power are developed through very specific training. Before entering into a plyometric program you should have a very clear goal for each phase of your training.

For example: An athlete wishes to increase his vertical leap. First, a pre-test should be performed so we know exactly where our athlete is starting and establish an aggressive, yet realistic goal. Second, our athlete should participate in a training program\* for six-eight weeks. Finally, a post-test should be performed so we can determine whether or not our goal was met.

\*Training: When beginning a training program, your total time on plyometrics should be between 20-25 minutes. Be sure to allow for a proper warm up and cool down (skipping, light jogging and stretching). If after 2-3 weeks of training you feel that your workout has become easy, don't rush to add more exercises. Re-evaluate your performance of each exercise and be sure your form is perfect. A frequently asked training question is "should I be wearing a weight vest or holding weights when I perform these exercises?" Adding weights should be done with caution and is not advisable for someone who is just starting out in this type of training. A weight vest or bands should be added only after you have perfected each of the exercises prescribed for you. It is the quality of plyometric exercise that is important, not necessarily the quantity.

Creating a sport specific program requires a keen understanding of the functional mechanics of the sport you are playing. Have your coach, athletic trainer, or strength coach help you develop a program that best fits YOUR needs. Remember: When training, train for YOUR sport and not for the sport of the guy or girl who is training next to you.



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