



# SKATERS, PLAY HOCKEY!

by *PIERRE DE COUBERTIN*

This text is about ice-hockey. According to Coubertin, it is physical qualities which count in this sport rather than mental or moral qualities, the exact opposite of football. For him, ice-skating represents an excellent means of attaining bodily perfection, helped by the severe technical demands of the sport. Ice-hockey is the ideal sport to improve and stabilise technique for skaters. This is why Coubertin wants them to take up ice-hockey instead of skating round in circles, in order to improve their technique.

**I**f the music of Weber “invites one to waltz”, there is nothing better to invite one to skate than hockey. Many people probably think that to devote one’s energies to this game it is necessary to be part of a regular team, and if they have watched a match where play was fairly lively, they are left with the impression of a scrum in which it would be advisable not to get involved unless one is already an expert skater who is as at home on the ice as a cat walking across a roof. But if they try their hand, first alone and then with a partner, at an “embryonic” form of hockey, with a

genuine sense of enjoyment, an assurance and confidence will develop which will help them to improve at skating. There is something similar in the system proposed by Mr. de Coubertin which consists in fencing on horseback, practised according to certain basic rules, a valuable incentive in teaching horse-riding. Briefly then, hockey consists mainly of using a wooden stick to push a ball (or puck) in front of oneself by means of *dribbling*, and, from time to time, hitting it hard towards the goal to be reached. On the ice, a puck moves quickly ; it covers a considerable dis-

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## At the Sources of Olympism

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tance with even the slightest push. Consequently it provides an excellent way of improving one's speed, and, as it is in the interest of the player not to let go of the puck, he stays with it and gradually, unconsciously, increases his speed so that as his posture also improves, he can hit the puck harder and harder. But it is not enough simply to push it, one must steer it ; sometimes with the end of the stick, sometimes with the curved part which is in contact with the ice, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, he points this little object in the best direction to avoid an obstacle or to choose the shortest path. Now is the moment when a partner is needed. As soon as you start to get used to *dribbling*, find a friend who is also a beginner and who will endeavour to take the puck from you and start dribbling in the opposite direction. From that moment skating in a straight line is no longer adequate. At every moment you will need to make sudden turns, move the puck from one side to the other when it is about to be intercepted, and finally, rather than let it be taken from you, carefully aim the shot needed to send it flying towards the goal. Your opponent whom the puck has eluded, turns round and a race ensues between you to see who will reach the puck first and take possession of it.

All that happens on both skates, even the turns, and in the slightly hunched position which ice-hockey forces you to adopt. A short stick is to be recommended, not one with a long handle which enables the skater to stand up almost straight. The position of the hockey player is perfect from the point of view of stability ; he has his legs slightly apart, his skates level ; the stick which he holds with both hands is placed on the ice in front of him, resting on the curved part. He leans forward, and is thus well balanced on the three areas of contact he has with the ice. He can clearly see the whole area on which he is playing, and the obstacles which may crop up unexpectedly, but that is all he sees. The idea of "showing off" will no longer occur to him, and even if it did he could not put it into practice as he cannot make any movements with his upper body. There is something very special about this game in the way it has to be played, in that it makes physical distractions impossible and takes you over entirely. Consequently everything encourages you to go fast, and speed, let us not forget, is after all the essence of skating. How to skate fast, even on

bad ice, how to stop short, keep your balance, pirouette and jump : hockey teaches you all these things which you will not learn from skating on the outside edge and doing figures of eight. Are you aware that there are many figure skaters who lack stability, speed and stamina ? Not everyone can become a good figure skater. To succeed in this you need certain physical capabilities which most people often do not have. On the other hand, anyone who wants to can become the kind of skater we have just described ; he need only turn to hockey for help. And, I ask you, is that not better than turning circles aimlessly on a small rink, enviously watching other skaters performing elegant hieroglyphics and getting oneself stuck in a rut of mediocrity ? Any regular hockey player immediately has a certain silhouette which is unmistakable, he looks "solid." His pleasure is greater, too ; less dependent on the conditions of the rink, he fears no obstacle and willingly launches himself into the unknown... Skaters, play hockey !

*Olympic Review*, March 1909, pp. 45-47, in *Pierre de Coubertin, Selected Texts*, Weidmann ed. 1986.

