

# Townshend Hockey Skating Systems Newsletter

April 2011

## In The News:

Congratulations to Alex Doumeng, Alex Mills, Alex Berry, Lonnie Taylor, Shane Hearn and Drake Hart. These Hebron Academy and Townshend Hockey students were recently members of the Lewiston Area Midget Hockey Team that won the USA Hockey Tier II Midget Hockey National Championship on Sunday April, 3rd in Gates Mill, OH. We are fortunate to work with these kids throughout the school year as well as during the summer in our Junior Counselor program and are proud to see their hard work and dedication paying off. Great Job Guys!



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## Q & A With Graeme:



We sometimes get questions from skaters and parents about what Graeme does with the Leafs. We presented some of those questions to Graeme and here are the answers:

- Q. What is your official job title?  
A. I am the skating and skills coach for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

- Q. How did you become a skating and skills coach?  
A. I was formally trained by Paul Vincent (skating and skills coach for the Chicago Black Hawks) over a 6 year period, during my college years and my first few years of pro hockey over 20 years ago. Paul and I remained very close and when the San Jose Sharks were looking for a skating coach, Paul recommended me.  
Q. Why do pros need a skating coach?  
A. Most pros have different needs than young kids. I focus on tactical skating skills like transition

and defensive skills. In San Jose we were always one of the top teams in the league. As a result we were drafting late and because its hard to find complete players after the first 10 kids selected in the draft, many teams settle for kids who skate well but lack many important characteristics, like work ethic and toughness (things you need to win). So many teams end up with lots of great skaters who aren't tough enough to play. The Sharks draft on character first and if the player is a weak skater, they teach them how to skate.



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**“Practice until you get it right, then practice until you can’t get it wrong”**

We are always looking for future newsletter content. If you have something to share, please email it to us at:

[townshendhockey@yahoo.com](mailto:townshendhockey@yahoo.com)

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We are doing the same thing on Toronto. Every player released is released or cut from the team for one of 3 reasons; poor skating skills, lack of toughness and poor defensive skills. I have witnessed over 200 players being cut at their exit meetings and it is always one or all of the above mentioned reasons. Never is it stick handling or shooting skills, so Skating and defense remain the most important skills.

- Q. How many skating and skill coaches are there in the NHL?
- A. There are currently 4 full time.
- Q. What does a typical day at work look like?
- A. I start by working with our American League team the Toronto Marlies at 9am. I work with our players for 30 min then stay for practice and help out there until 10:30am. I then go next door to the Maple Leafs' rink and work practice from 11am-12pm. I spend 15-20 min working with certain players on various skills.

Some days it's with Phil Kessel, Nicholai Kulemin and Mikhail Grabovsky on shooting, other days it's Luke Schenn, Dion Phaneuf and Keith Aulie on defensive skating. So my day goes from 9am-12:30pm. Then I do private lessons on non game days teaching kids the same skills.

- Q. What is the best thing about your job?
- A. Working with the best players in the world and living a childhood dream if working with my Toronto Maple Leafs.
- Q. What is the most difficult thing about your job?
- A. Being away from my family is tough but other than that, absolutely nothing. I drive to work daily with a HUGE smile on my face.
- Q. Do you teach the same things to your younger students at camps and clinics that you teach to the pros?
- A. Yes exactly the same process depending on Skating needs. You would be amazed at how many pro prospects think they skate well only

to get cut because of it. I hear the same thing from parents and what They don't understand is that no matter how good the player seems to be, there is ALWAYS somebody way better. Behind the general Skating skills there lies the defensive (for forwards and defensemen) Skating tactics that will make or break you and most people think they know but find out too late that they don't. These are the skills we teach. The system was developed by Paul and me and is not being taught and tweaked and perfected anywhere else, I assure you.

- Q. How could you have benefited from a skating and skills coach when you played?
- A. I was lucky, I had Paul and he is why I played in the NHL. His Skating system allowed me to switch from forward to defense as a Sophomore in college to and become the top defenseman on my college team, all because I could skate. I continued my training throughout my entire 10 year career.

~ Graeme