

Kyle

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WeightWatchers' Contributor


# Sports Stack

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Last week for Walk-It  
Challenge training.  
5/14/2011 9:09:48 AM

[devjfl1](#) I've heard of a  
"shrinking violet", but a  
shrinking head???  
5/13/2011 10:04:17 PM

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## Ice Not Always An NHL Players' Friend

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Written by [kylestack](#) on 4/4/2011 12:52 PM

I've learned you don't have to play a sport to appreciate its physical rigors. Take ice hockey, for example. I haven't played a minute in my life, but a recent interview with New York Islanders strength and conditioning coach Jesse Demers made me aware of the physical stress hockey players encounter – not just by checking each other but from the unforgiving surface on which they skate.



Demers explained that uneven ice forces hockey players to use their hips to balance themselves, an overuse that much less prominent among other athletes. "Players are automatically at a disadvantage versus those in other sports because they are off-balance," Demers said, referring to the inconsistency in ice uniformity at NHL arenas.

While that point might seem obvious to those who've played hockey, I hadn't considered it. Players are often confronted with several variations of ice surfaces on a common road trip; the softer the ice, the harder it is for players to plant a foot when changing direction.

The physical stamina they require to move quickly on those ever-changing surfaces is quite demanding, according to Demers. That's why he focuses on endurance programs to ensure the Islanders can succeed on any type of surface. Demer has them perform all types of skating exercises in 30-to-50 second segments, followed by rest. By doing that, they can replicate the stops and starts experienced during game play. This allows for muscle memory to take over.

I don't feel embarrassed about my naivety of hockey's physical demands. I write about sports for a living, but it doesn't mean I know the ins and outs of every game, particularly the ones I haven't played. I'm appreciative that Demers made me aware of ice inconsistency and its role in players' physical wear-and-tear. It'll be on my mind the next time I flip the channel to an NHL broadcast.

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