

The PoweringAthletics Story

by Ron C. Bulloch
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It is often said that necessity is the mother of invention, and as a businessman with a predilection toward engineering, I could not agree more. However, as a husband and father, I would add that the dreams of our family often provide as much fodder for ingenuity as does need. The creative stimulus for the PowerSkater arose from the hopes and aspirations of a young boy to play the game of hockey; it was borne from my desire, and perhaps my need, to foster the dreams of my son, and to help turn those dreams into a reality.

What follows is much more than just another business success story: it is a story about encouraging our children to dream, no matter how lofty; it is a story about overcoming challenges and obstacles in pursuit of those dreams; and above all, it is a story of how persistence and hard work may allow those dreams to be achieved.

PoweringAthleticsTM had its beginning in an effort to help our son to learn proper skating technique for the "next level" of hockey skills. I am the inventor of the PowerSkaterTM, and owner of PoweringAthleticsTM. My belief is that skating is the fundamental skill requirement for hockey and that all other skills are built on that capability.

I was looking for a means of developing the motor skills and muscular strength needed to be a superior skater in an off ice environment, with particular emphasis on proper posture and technique. In-line skating mimics ice skating; but to be a good in-line skater also requires correct technique. Slide boards work well for strength and conditioning but offer little in teaching skating technique for they do not replicate the very same bio-mechanical movement of skating. I needed a way to over exaggerate skating mechanics in order to isolate specific movements. The result was the PowerSkaterTM, which was granted U.S. Letters Patent 6,042,511 in recognition of its unique functioning, and which has been recognized and adopted by personal trainers, players, and coaches, at the amateur and professional levels for its effectiveness.

I have been quizzed many times of how I came up with the PowerSkater. In order to explain how I thought up the concept, I must relate where the seed of the inspiration grew from. I have told this story many times in personal conversations with customers and friends. Every time I have repeated this story, people say "you should write it down and share it with others".

This story is dedicated to my family for without them and their support none of this would be possible. My wife, Cynde, is my best friend, soul mate, and business partner. She plays a significant role in this business and was a big part

of this story. We have a son involved in hockey and a daughter who is a dedicated Cheerleader in High School.

Winter sports are a traditional pastime in the great northern country of Canada, where the prolonged wintry climate is highly conducive to outdoor recreational activities. This is particularly true for ice skating; the gelid weather allows the many lakes, ponds and backyard rinks to stay frozen and usable for weeks and often months. The typical Canadian learns to skate on one of these outdoor surfaces as a preschooler, and then continues through their formative years participating in organized youth hockey or figure skating. In this regard, I was no different than many of my Canadian countrymen, having practically grown up on a pair of skates, trying on my first pair at the age of two, and continuing through my late teens playing in organized and competitive hockey leagues.

However, the popularity of hockey and figure skating in Canada is not solely explained by the climate. It is in fact, a distinct cultural phenomenon – especially with respect to hockey. Countless youth and adults look forward to the weekends, when they can don a pair of skates and freely glide across a freshly slicked surface of ice chasing a small rubber object. On a typical Saturday evening, millions of Canadian viewers tune into the television broadcast of “Hockey Night in Canada” to watch their favorite team or players and even more dramatically, the entire nation will grind to a virtual standstill when the Canadian national team plays in an international competition.

It would come as no surprise that people who are raised in Canada, where the opportunities to participate in the sport abound, develop a true passion for the game that seems to transcend racial, ethnic, and socio-economic barriers. Whether as a player or a spectator, this enthusiasm and zeal starts at an early age and continues through life. Again, I can attest personally to this fact, having spent most of my life in Canada.

On the other hand, I have always been puzzled to explain how someone who has never been exposed to the ardor and fervor of this milieu could develop an equally fanatical mind-set toward the sport of hockey. It is a particularly perplexing in the case of my son Cort, who developed his passion for hockey in the absence of having lived in such an environment and despite growing up in an area where the opportunities to participate were few and far between.

My wife and I moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana when Cort was just three years old. Fort Wayne is a Midwestern town of about 200,000 that is situated in the approximate middle of a triangle formed by Chicago to the west, Detroit to the east and Indianapolis to the south. Its climate is characterized by hot, humid summers and mild, cloudy winters, that seldom produce the prolonged bitter temperatures needed to skate safely on a pond. It is the second largest city in a State that is dominated by extensive participation and support for basketball and football, and to a lesser extent, baseball and soccer. Fort Wayne is not exactly a

hockey Mecca - when we moved here, there was just a single ice surface for youth hockey (a comparably sized Canadian city would likely have more than 20 surfaces).

I had always heard that every child in Indiana grows up with a basketball hoop in their backyard, and to my amazement, I found this to be not too far from the truth. In fact, organized basketball programs are available even for those in kindergarten. We lived in a bustling neighborhood, and I expected that when Cort grew older and developed a larger circle of Hoosier friends, he too would want a basketball goal installed in the driveway. Needless to say, I was taken by surprise when quite out of the blue, my five-year old son, who heretofore had expressed no interest whatsoever in any organized sport, approached me to ask if he could learn to skate and play hockey.

That fateful moment is indelibly etched in my memory largely because of the demonstrative feelings its image congers. Imagine: a timid lad standing meekly in front of his father; hands bashfully stuffed in pants pockets; staring upward with glassy puppy-dog eyes in a silent plea; expectantly awaiting; hopeful that his appeal would win the day. Imagine: the glimmering eyes and gleeful glow of excitement when father accedes to his wishes. It is simply a memory that no father should be without. On a more mundane note, the selection to play hockey represented Cort's earliest endeavor at making a commitment to proceed down one of life's avenues, when the path diverges – something we all must face as we mature as human beings.

As I look back on that moment, I have always wondered about the source of my son's motivation to play hockey. Cort, who is now nineteen, is still at a loss to explain it as well. Obviously, he was not influenced by his friends, most of whom were playing peewee basketball or T-ball when they were that age - it surely would have been easy to choose the path that allowed him to spend time with his buddies. And certainly, he was not influenced by his mother, who is a Nebraska native and a Cornhusker through and through - if anything, she would have encouraged him to play football. Perhaps he saw a televised NHL game, or through some means unbeknown to me, I subconsciously passed along my enthusiasm for the game of hockey via my actions or words. I do not really believe this to be true, but either way, the reasons for his interest and his commitment to play hockey remain a mystery.

At five years of age, Cort was totally unaware of the community resources available for skating or hockey in Fort Wayne. He just wanted to try and skate on the neighborhood pond. However, he was old enough to understand and he was certainly well aware that the temperature would have to turn quite cold in order for the pond to freeze so that it could be usable. Given the weather patterns of the area, I expected it would be some time before this occurred. But as fate would have it, he did not have to wait long, because a cold front moved in a few days later, from of all places Canada, and the pond was

frozen in seemingly no time flat. To this day, I have wondered whether Cort, in his effort to channel his enthusiasm to skate and vent his impatience for the temperature to dip, was secretly performing “Indian snow dances” in his bedroom at night in order to persuade the weather gods to cooperate.

Irrespective of the ultimate causal factor, the pond readily froze and at last, his opportunity came around. Unfortunately for me, I had a business trip planned for the week and would not be back until Friday night. So, he skated with his mother for about an hour each morning before going to school, until the weekend, when I finally had an opportunity to see him skate. On that cloudless morning, with the sun’s rays scattering a gleam from the surface of the pond, Cort sat down on the ice, and waited patiently while I carefully laced and tightened his skates, and then he took to gliding on the ice.

At the end of an hour, with Cort nearly exhausted, hypothermia perhaps looming, and his father fully expecting him to beg for the comfort of the indoors, he came to a stop in front of me, and in the most sincere, unassuming and genuine tone that one could possibly imagine, asked if I thought he was good enough skater to play hockey. I gazed at him intently and contemplated his question. Even taking into consideration that he had only been in skates for less than a week, I was not overly impressed by his aptitude on ice, but clearly his enthusiasm and resolve made up for what he lacked in ability and could not be ignored. But more importantly, it was the second time in as many weeks that I had seen that same look on his face, and I knew instantly that I could not dampen his spirit, nor deny him the opportunity. I promised to look into the local learn to skate and hockey programs. He beamed.

A week later, we enrolled Cort in the Learn-to-Skate program at the local ice rink. However, with 1100 members and the limited scheduling of a single ice surface, Cort was relegated to one hour of instruction per week in a group of about two hundred children. It had occurred to me that Cort’s interest in skating and hockey might merely be a passing fancy and I thought it entirely possible that the overcrowded conditions at the rink would effectively squelch whatever appeal hockey might hold for him. But once again, he did not allow his disappointment to decrease his enthusiasm and yearning to learn. He continued to participate in the Learn to Skate program throughout the year, supplementing this with time on the pond when weather permitted, and attending public skating sessions as schedules allowed.

My investigation into youth hockey yielded a rather bleak picture. The USA Hockey Initiation Program was the primary curriculum for children wanting to play the sport in Fort Wayne, and while it is an excellent program in its own regard, this program and the organized House League only afforded a single hour of playing time per week. And as it turned out, all the children passing through the Learn to Skate program fed into the Initiation Program; once again, during any given session, the ice surface was literally besieged with children, all

striving for attention, all wanting to gain some basic hockey skills. The volunteer instructors, through no fault of their own, struggled with the overwhelming numbers of kids.

On the other hand, as I researched the community resources, I discovered that Fort Wayne had an outstanding organization of travel teams, with a roster of exceptional coaches, and extensive practice and game schedules. About this same time, Cort also became aware of these travel teams after seeing several kids at the rink wearing colorful jerseys, which were patterned after the local professional hockey team, the Fort Wayne Komets of the IHL. After seeing one of the travel teams compete against a neighboring city team, Cort quickly set his sights on playing for this team, and promptly declared that his goal was to become a member of the Komet Squirt Travel Team.

However, there were two small problems that this resolute nine year-old did not fully appreciate: in order to play, he would have to try out, compete, and be selected from a large pool of his peers; and he was not aware of the extent to which his basic skating skills lagged behind those of these same peers. Cort's desire clearly outstripped his skating ability by several orders of magnitude, and he had a real dilemma – he desperately needed more ice time to improve his skating ability in order to make the Travel Team, yet the ice time was only available on the Travel Team to begin with.

There was only one thing that I could do to help him improve his skating technique, and that was to provide him with more ice time to practice. But the question was how? As it turns out, both Cort and his mother had suggested two years previously that I become involved in youth hockey teaching and coaching. It certainly made abundant sense: I grew up playing hockey in Manitoba, and loved the game; I was a strong skater and good with kids; and it would give me the opportunity to possibly spend more time with Cort. However, I was a VP of Sales and Marketing of a large International company and spent considerable amounts of time traveling. In addition, at the time I was certain of Cort's desire to play, but entirely unsure of his long-term commitment and of the flexibility of my hectic schedule – so I resisted the idea. But I was now at a juncture where I could resist no longer.

Skating is the foundation of hockey, and developing skating skills requires hours of instruction and actual practice on the ice in basic technique. The availability of ice time was clearly hampering Cort's ability to learn and improve, and while there was no perfect solution, there was at least one obvious way to alleviate the problem. If I volunteered as a House League coach and an instructor in the Initiation Program, Cort would be afforded the opportunity to skate whenever I was on the ice teaching. It would mean sacrificing at work, but it was an opportunity for my son, that given his drive to play and desire to succeed, I could simply not turn down. I knew that Cort's chances of making the Squirt Team were slim at best, because his skating ability was so weak. On the

other hand, I was not about to tell someone with such zeal and enthusiasm that he could not at least try. And so, Cort continued in the Initiation Program and together we practiced, while anxiously awaiting the Squirt team try-outs.

A few weeks later, as his mother and I stood from the sidelines observing the tryouts, watching the coaches put thirty-five to forty talented eight to ten year-olds through a series of drills, it was quite obvious to me that Cort was in the bottom third of the group in terms of ability, in spite of the fact that his effort was far superior to any other child. I recall his mother asking me how I truthfully thought he compared to the other kids, and respecting her request, I replied that no coach worth their salt would select him to the team. She was saddened by this frank assessment, but to be sure, so was I; for we both knew that our son would be greatly disappointed and disheartened. Only one prediction turned out to be correct: Cort was not selected to the Travel Team; but instead of being dismayed and discouraged, he was totally heart broken.

In spite of the fact that most adults are well aware that disappointment is a hard fact of life, it is difficult as a parent to watch your own flesh and blood deal with the heartache of rejection. The natural instinct is to try and make things immediately better for them – to coddle and protect them. That feeling was particularly acute and intense for his mother and I that day.

It is equally true that many adults respond to adversity by throwing their proverbial hands in the air and quitting - and if a mature adult is capable of responding in this way, then why not a child? I would not have been at all surprised if Cort had responded this way to the coach's rejection – he was simply that dejected. Amazingly, he responded in just the opposite fashion. By the time we arrived back home from the ice rink, he had tossed the negative feelings aside and was already looking forward to next year. Stepping from the vehicle, he announced that he wanted to make the team the following year, and he wanted my help to achieve this goal. To this day, I am extremely proud of the attitude he displayed in overcoming that hurdle.

Cort finished out the rest of the season in the Initiation Program and the House League. He also enrolled in the Figure Skating Program to gain additional ice time and practice skating. The season finished with him showing some modest improvement, but not sufficient, in my estimation for him to make the Travel Team. He grew quite teary-eyed when I shared this assessment with him, but once again, he did not buckle; he was going to make that team, and he knew he could do it with my help – he would do whatever it took.

Most coaches dream about having a team consisting of players with just this sort of drive and yearning to succeed. However, it is a sad fact that few players have this quality. Yet standing in front of me was one such player – someone with the heart of a lion and the stamina of a stallion - my very own son!

We gave some thought to sending Cort to hockey camps over the summer months, but in the end, we came to the conclusion, that the benefit from attending clinics with a student-teacher ratio of thirty to one would not be worth the time or expense. He needed to work on his technique, on balance and posture, in order to improve his skating, and not so much on puck-handling and strategy.

In the end, we decided that the best course of action was to take a break from hockey for the summer and to play some other sports that might provide some element of cross-training. Only one problem, Cort had no interest in any other sport but hockey; so we put our heads together and came up with a mild home-training program that could best be described as organized play, where he could work on some basic skills that would transfer to skating. Cort and I organized an off-ice conditioning plan that focused on balance, posture and strength. He put down his goals on paper, committed himself to surpassing those goals, and then set out to achieve all of those and more without any adult supervision. In fact, he was so motivated and driven to succeed, that there were times when he trained too intensely and I had to step in and restrict his exercise. At one point, he developed a sore heel from over exercising, and then broke into tears when the doctor ordered him to rest, because it would detract from his training and making the team.

In spite of good initial success with this self-designed program, something kept nagging at me. I was an accomplished skater, and could easily identify the problems in his technique: he leaned too far forward with his back bent; his knees were too close together; he pushed off at an odd angle causing him to be on his toes too early in the push. The dry land training was good, but not quite good enough to alter his mechanics without actually being on the ice and skating under the watchful eye of an instructor. I needed to do more for him.

And that is how the idea for the PowerSkater was born.

I have always been mechanically inclined and have a creative spirit, so I decided to put these abilities to the test by creating a device that would allow Cort to mimic the motion of skating without actually being on the ice. I began by first identifying the essential components of correct skating technique: chest and head up with your back straight and aligned with your center of gravity; legs pushing from the hips at a forty-five degree angle; and a ninety degree bend in the glide leg. That was the easy portion – I had been doing these things on skates all of my life.

The difficult part was coming up with a design that would simultaneously accomplish all of these things and force him into the correct biomechanics. It was certainly not an easy task, but the dreams of a ten year-old boy kept me focused and motivated. I eventually sketched a crude design and then set out to construct it. The initial device, a forerunner to the modern PowerSkater, was

constructed out of wood, old roller-blade wheels, and a set of dilapidated latex exercise resistance cords, all held together with hodgepodge of nuts and bolts. The finished product was a machine that was as rag-tag as anything I had ever seen. But it worked!

I set the machine in front of a mirror in order to provide Cort with real time feedback regarding posture. Cort then incorporated this makeshift rudimentary skating machine into his regular exercise regimen, spending twenty to thirty minutes on the machine every day doing repetitive skating motions. His improvement in skating posture and mechanics was dramatic, and his strength improved as well. But of course, the proof is always in the pudding. It remained to be seen if there would be any transfer over to the ice.

The registration form for the Squirt travel teams arrived in the mail in September, and provided registrants with two choices. Cort opted to try out for the elite Squirt Team, in spite of the fact that failure to make that team would result in him being forced back into the House League. When I challenged the wisdom of his decision, he replied that the summer training would be a waste if he did not make the elite squad. It was against my better judgment, but I acceded to his wish.

When Cort stepped on the ice for the Squirt Team try outs, the change in his skating ability was truly incredible. His posture, stride and balance had transformed to the point where it appeared as if he had been on skates all his life. And more remarkably, the parents even huddled several times during the try outs and were pointing at Cort during their discussions! It was clear from their actions that they too had taken notice of the change in his ability. After posting the team, one of the coaches approached me and remarked at Cort's improvement, suggesting that Cort must have virtually lived on the ice for the entire summer in order to improve that much. He appeared a little slack-jawed when I told him that he had not, but rather, had trained on a dry land skating machine.

Needless to say, Cort made the team, and reaped the benefits of all his hard work. And I reaped some benefits as well, seeing my son set such an example. The coach of the Squirt Team and several other individuals came to see the machine I had constructed, and were sufficiently impressed that they encouraged me to bring it to market so that other children could also benefit from it.

I applied for a patent on the Power Skater in 1996 and it was issued in 1998. The first units were built in our garage and marketed via the internet. To be honest, I was hoping to simply make a small number of units, help a few kids, and break even financially in the meantime. But I was unprepared for the response from the public. The first week that our web site was up and running, we received hundreds of hits and phone calls, including one from the Vancouver

Canuck strength & conditioning coach, Mr. Peter Twist. . He asked for information on the product and the methodology and history behind it. I knew who Pete was but I did not know him personally. Why would the NHL have an interest in a PowerSkater for these players were at the top of their game?

By this time I was President of two companies and did not have time to devote to a start up company. This task was left up to Cynde. She would tell me each day when I got home of the phone calls and daily activity. She would quite often repeat names of former or current professional players and coaches; having no idea of who they were. I couldn't believe the interest at the professional level.

I soon found out the value of the product from not only a skating technique point of view but also from the strength & conditioning aspect as well as for rehabilitation of players with ankle, knee, hip, and groin injuries. Pete evaluated a PowerSkater utilizing his training staff and various players from the Pros on down to the Junior level. He believed that our product was the best sport specific training device on the market for all skaters. Today Twist Conditioning is the exclusive distributor in Canada and Pete is one of our biggest supporters and Pete and the gang are good friends. Cort is a student of their training and attends their training camps on a regular basis.

Since that first week, our company has expanded from a "mom and pop" operation into a larger business that includes several other innovative training devices. Our core product is still the PowerSkater, of which over 3,400 have been sold, and at the time of this writing are being used by eight NHL teams, the Russian Hockey Federation, as well as several individual professional players, Major Junior, Junior A and University teams. It is also being used on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific Ocean! Most importantly, this product has found its way into the households of hundreds of families with stories just like our own, and this gives us a tremendous feeling of accomplishment.

We have also developed other products for the training and rehabilitation of athletes in a variety of sports. We recognize that sport specific training devices are a new and emerging product category in today's exercise and fitness industry. We have grown the business significantly and have adopted a mission to provide sport specific training products for athletes involved in a wide range of sports. Our products will "train movement, not muscles" to help athletes become bigger, stronger, and faster.

Our association with trainers within various sports led us to the realization that other standard training requirements could benefit from a creative review. Jump boxes have long been used as a staple for the well equipped training facility. Ramped boxes ("Russian boxes") for side angle jumps are a more recent development and are becoming a critical ingredient in developing training science of Plyometrics. With a little creativity, the development team combined

those requirements in the revolutionary **PowerPlyos** and added a vertical leaper training capability as an option. This combination trainer has the issue of U.S. letters patents pending. This diversification necessitated the company be re-identified more generally, and **PoweringAthleticsTM** was born.

We learned at the professional team and sports medicine level, the value of the PowerSkater for rehabilitation of injuries. This led us to the realization of the value of specific rehab needs. Recently we developed a training device suited to not only the serious athlete to enhance performance, but also the rehabilitation for the physical training professional. The **PowerWristor®** is designed to provide dynamic exercise and rehabilitative functions for the wrist, hand and forearm. This unique training system has been recognized by U.S. Letters Patent 4,822,027. An explosive hockey wrist shot, long arching basketball jump shot, a dramatic baseball curve or sinker and similar wrist/hand/forearm sports capabilities can now be developed.

Core strength is quickly becoming recognized as a source of many movements and is the foundation of ability to develop power in movement. The **PowerVertexTM** will be introduced into the market in 2005. The PowerVertex is a core training device and is appropriate for anyone from health & fitness to youth athletes to world class competitors across all sports.

My love is skating and hockey. I want to do more to assist all skaters and players, be it figure skating, speed skating, and in-line skating. Therefore our diversification has resulted in the development team looking at unique needs of the competitive skaters and the hockey goalie in particular. The soon to be available **PowerShuffleTM** recognizes the unique physical requirements of this key position with a move specific trainer. A **SpeedSkater** is under development as well, capitalizing on the PowerSkater patent along with many of its components.

I can honestly say that necessity is the mother of invention. The PowerSkater; this business; and many products are the result of a young boy's aspiration to play the game of hockey. We built a thriving and successful business from my need to foster my sons' dreams.

So you say "how is Cort doing today and how is his hockey going"?

Cort is now 19 and an excellent skater with a very powerful stride as well as speed. Cort continues to use the PowerSkater. He quickly recognized at an early age the value of off ice conditioning. Pre and post season conditioning has become part of his daily routine. He stands tall at 6' 1" and tips the scales at 207lbs. He is playing Junior "A" Hockey for the Notre Dame Hounds of Wilcox, Saskatchewan in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League (SJHL) in Western Canada. The 2006 – 2007 season will be his second year in the SJHL. He took his PowerSkater with him and has it set up in the Notre Dame training room.

He now utilizes the PowerPlyos, and PowerVertex along with the PowerSkater in his regular workout routines. He is a student of Twist Conditioning and believes very strongly in their methodology. He is as passionate about his off ice training as the sport itself.

Ultimately he wants to play NCAA somewhere and has no preference yet. He is in communication with several teams. We wish him the very best.

So you say “how is Cort doing today and how is his hockey going”?

Cort is now 22 and an excellent skater with a very powerful stride as well as speed. Cort continues to use the PowerSkater. He quickly recognized at an early age the value of off ice conditioning. Pre and post season conditioning has become part of his daily routine. He stands tall at 6’ 1” and tips the scales at 215lbs. He began his Junior career playing Junior “A” Hockey for the Notre Dame Hounds of Wilcox, Saskatchewan in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League (SJHL) in Western Canada. He spent two seasons in the SJHL before attending college. Cort plays for the Iowa State Cyclones Div 1 hockey team in Ames, Iowa. He was appointed Assistant Captain as a freshman and is majoring in finance.

He has taken his PowerSkater with him to every team he has played for and the Notre Dame Hounds as well as the Iowa State Cyclones have units in their training rooms,

He now utilizes the PowerPlyos, PlayBack, SkinnerShooter, and PowerVertex along with the PowerSkater in his regular workout routines. He is still a student of Twist Conditioning training and believes very strongly in their methodology. He is as passionate about his off ice training as the sport itself.

He enjoys the game and the life lessons he has experienced. We wish him the very best.