

TRAINING TIPS FOR DRYLAND CLOSED BRUSHING FOOTWORK PRACTICE

THE TECHNICAL COACH SERIES

GLENN PAULLEY, THROWING ROCKS CONSULTING SERVICES LTD

JOHN NEWHOOK, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

3 JULY 2018 (REVISED 18 JULY 2026)

NO. 6



Several Ontario teams have acquired or built dryland closed footwork trainers to better develop their closed brushing footwork technique during the summer months, so that they are trained and ready-to-go when ice becomes available in the fall. What follows are some training tips and coaching hints for those teams using a footwork trainer this summer.



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

PAGE 1

Throwing Rocks
Consulting Services Limited



TECHNIQUE

The idea behind the footwork trainer is to mimic brushing footwork when brushing in the **closed position and when brushing perpendicular to the path of travel** as Emily Zacharias is doing in the photograph at right. In the photograph, Emily demonstrates the ideal body position when brushing left closed: feet behind the hips, back relatively flat, hands underneath the chest. Once this body position becomes comfortable, and the athlete masters the closed footwork, the athlete is much better able to advance their brushing skills in the early season and become both more effective, and efficient.



*Figure 1 - Emily Zacharias brushes left side, closed stance.
Photo credit: Connie Laliberte*

SURFACE

In use, through trial-and-error we have found the best practice surface to be the gravel midfield of a softball diamond. An asphalt or concrete surface hinders effective foot movement, which is required to produce the “half-moons” that optimally both propel the brusher down the sheet, and get one’s feet outside of the hip line to provide greater force through the arms and hence the brush head. A ball diamond or a fine gravel driveway permits practice with good foot movement, and moreover the athlete’s footwork evidence can be seen in the gravel after each attempt, augmenting any video taken during the training session. At right is 2026 Ontario Scotties champion Grace Lloyd demonstrating the use of a footwork trainer on a softball pitch.



Figure 2 - Grace Lloyd demonstrates using the closed footwork trainer on the right side.



When using the trainer, you should (if possible) mark out a 93-foot distance on a flat, level stretch of (preferably) gravel. While a gravel driveway or path can work, a softball diamond infield is often ideal because it offers lots of room and, if properly maintained, is firm and level. For the 93 feet, simply mark off 31 paces and set a marker at the beginning and the end – two pylons will work, but any sort of marker will do. Note that 93 feet corresponds to the distance between the near hog line and the far tee line.

DURATION

Using a footwork trainer with the correct form is hard work. 20-30 minutes of training 3 times a week is a good initial target. Give yourself a 45-second to one-minute break between each training run.

SPEED

Draw weight, from hog-line to far tee-line, on keen ice is roughly 24 to 25 seconds. So make 24 seconds be your initial target time to negotiate the 93-foot distance, which is equivalent to brushing a draw weight shot. Moving on gravel is more difficult than being on the ice. Though a gravel surface affords better traction, there is also much greater friction and hence more force is required to propel you, and the trainer, forward. Nonetheless, athletes should practice at both draw weight and with hit weight speeds. Your mastery of the correct footwork at different speeds will pay handsome dividends when the season starts. Your goal over the summer will be to reduce that overall time to approximately 11 seconds, or perhaps down to 10 seconds, to simulate brushing a normal-weight hit shot. When training, attach your curling stopwatch to your athletic gear so you can monitor how you are doing.



Your footwork should leave behind “half-moons” in the gravel dust after each run. See the photograph at right. If the closed footwork is performed properly, with both legs performing



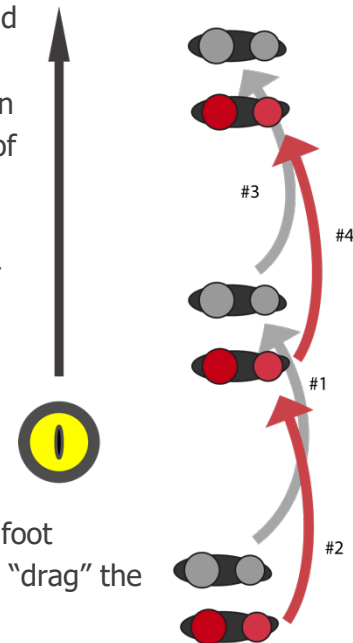
similar actions, then the “half-moons” left behind in the gravel should overlap. Pay particular attention to the evidence of two common errors:

1. An over-extension of the front leg behind the athlete – this will appear as periodic footmarks a greater distance away from the path of the trainer.
2. The lack of “half-moon” footwork with the rear foot – this is a commonly-seen problem on the ice, where the athlete performs the proper footwork with the lead leg, but the trailing leg never gets behind the athlete’s hips, and the foot is “dragged” in a straight line up the sheet. In the gravel, this will appear as a footmark that is in a straight line.

FORM

When practicing your technique with the footwork trainer, you should try to develop smooth, powerful footwork at both draw-weight and hit-weight speeds. To help with this, review the online demonstration video: the link is <https://youtu.be/fXkIBUc0-u0>. During a run, each of your feet will move in a “half-moon” motion, where for a portion of the movement each foot gets behind your hips. Stay on the balls of your feet at all times, with your feet pointing forward (perpendicular to the line of travel). Both feet should be in contact with the ground at all times.

- It is important for both of your feet to perform the same half-moon motions – each foot should duplicate the action of the other. In particular, watch to ensure that your trailing foot performs the half-moon motion; a common error is to simply “drag” the trailing foot in a straight line.
- Similarly, you must “lead” with your leading foot. You should initiate a forward half-moon step with your lead foot before pushing off with your trailing foot to propel you forwards. The forward motion with the leading leg requires strong abductors and hip flexors. When these muscles are weak, the athlete can “fall behind” the trainer because the forward motion initiated with the leading foot is neither far enough, nor quick enough.
- Keep as much of your body weight as possible on your hands. Your hands should be directly underneath your shoulders (with your arms straight down). This permits your head to go past the handles of the trainer, again copying the ideal body position when brushing in the closed position on the ice.



- You need to bend your knees enough so that your back is flat. We never wish to see a position where the hips are higher than the shoulders.
- Moving the trainer in a straight line for the entire 93-foot distance requires practice. Working with a training partner can help keep you on-line.
- You should strive to ensure that your back stays as motionless as possible during a run. In particular, you should try to avoid having your hips move up-and-down with every step, which is a symptom of straightening your legs during the footwork motion. Keeping the back motionless is important, as it will prevent periods where the torso is “lifting” during a stroke, which makes it difficult to apply consistent vertical force through the brush.

When practicing with the trainer, it is a good idea to practice with a partner so that one of you can record video of the attempt. Each recording can be analyzed by your coach for evaluative feedback. Even a short, ten-second clip is sufficient for this purpose.

QUESTIONS

We are pleased to provide whatever assistance we can to coaches and athletes. Our contact information is below.

Glenn Paulley, Ph.D.
 Competition Development Coach
 Throwing Rocks Consulting Services Limited
 Waterloo, ON
 e-mail: glenn@glennpaulley.ca

John Newhook, Ph.D., P.Eng.
 Professor, Dept. of Civil and Resource Engineering
 Room D215, Sexton Campus
 Dalhousie University
 Halifax NS B3H 4R2
 e-mail: john.newhook@dal.ca