

Four Drills To Improving Your Toeside

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Are you unconsciously carving a less-than-maxed-out riding career for yourself? Many, many riders have convinced themselves that they have an “on side” and an “off side.” It’s natural (but wrong) to think that way. After all, some of us are right-handed and some left-handed.

What could be more natural than to have a weak side and a strong side?

Because of this belief, most riders overdevelop their skills on one side. This creates not only a strong side, but also a weak (neglected) side. I’m here to tell you that you don’t have to go down that path. Instead, I want to show you how developing both sides equally can be a big help. Even development has certainly worked for me. I’ve been able to open up my run, putting in more spins and inverts like a raley from either side of the wake. Of course, technically speaking, thanks to the sideways feet placement on the wakeboard, cutting to the wake and jumping the wakes is easier to do from one direction.

If you are right foot forward and riding outside the wake on the passenger’s side of the boat, then you are on your strong side or heel side. Conversely, if you are on the other side of the boat and edge toward the wake from the driver’s side, you are on your toe side. It’s a position that offers less leverage than your heel side. For left foot forward riders, edging in from the driver’s side is



your heel side and provides more leverage.

But just because heel side provides more leverage, you don’t want to get caught up in favoring the heel side jumps and tricks while neglecting everything on your toe side. The secret is to work the toe side equally or even harder than your heel side. The sooner you start working the toe side edging to the wake and jump, the better it is. If you are teaching a beginner, have the rider work both sides equally from the start.

Before you get into any toe side spins and inverts, I have various on-water drills that you could do to greatly strengthen your toe side. Use a 70- or 75-foot non-stretch wakeboard line. The wake is big and defined at that line length, so you will get plenty of lift from the wake when jumping it.

Drill 1: Equal Carving

Start right behind the boat inside the wake and just carve both ways while staying inside between the wakes. Though you will be working your heel side carves also, focus primarily on your body position on the toe side carves. The goal is to have equal weight on both bindings, to stay tall over the bindings and to keep your shoulders closed to the boat on the toe side. Start slowly and make smooth carves. As you get more comfortable, make quicker carves. As you get comfortable inside the wake, make these carving turns just outside the wake on each side. Start slow and then pick up the pace. This drill will improve your balance on your toe side position because you are developing equal skill on toe side as well as heel side.

Drill 2: Jump The Wake From Inside

Start slowly inside the wake and pop the wake from inside to outside. At first, focus on body position – you are directly over the board and relaxed. Then start using your legs to get some pop from the top of the wake. These will be small jumps from in to out. Focus on body position and technique, not distance.

Drill 3: Jump The Wake From Outside

Go outside the wake on your toe side and start jumping the wake toe side from outside to inside the wake. Start just a few feet outside the wake: this will focus your attention on body position, not on using speed or edging from way outside the wake. The key is to have equal weight over the bindings by standing tall over them and keeping your shoulders closed to the boat. This body position will give you maximum leverage to do toe side jumps and tricks. At first just pop the wake and land inside it. You will have to work toe side jumps





LEFT: Raimi Merritt, U.S. Wakeboard Team member, won the Women's Open gold medal at the IWWF Wakeboard World Championships held this past July in Milan, Italy. The gold-medal win adds to her impressive list of World Cup wins in China, Korea Egypt and Qatar. Raimi is sponsored by MonaVie, Hyperlite and Fly High. For Raimi's latest info, check out Facebook or raimimerritt.com.

harder than heel side. Start slow and work your way up. As you feel more comfortable edging up the wake from just outside the wake in the toe side position, your jumps will go farther. From just popping the wake and landing inside the wake toe side, you can aim for the middle of the wake, then three-fourths of the wake, and then go wake-to-wake. The better your body position is toe side, the farther you will be able to jump and do so easily.

Drill 4: Avoid The Jump

Go way outside the wake on your toe side. Turn in slowly and edge toward the wake. But instead of doing a wake jump, stop several feet from the wake and quickly carve away back to way outside the wake. Start this drill slowly. You don't need to go fast at first. Just edge in smoothly so that you get comfortable with the quick transition you will make just before the wake. As your body position improves toe side and you have more confidence in that direction, you will be able to edge more aggressively, stop, and carve back out quicker. These are signs that your toe side is getting stronger. This is a great drill to improve balance and your toe side skills. I do 10 to 20 of them at the beginning of each training day. And of course these drills are perfect for your heel side, too.

Now it's time to start jumping the wake. The goal: make both sides equally strong so that you are not even thinking any more about toe side or heel side. Make these drills part of your time on the water. Start each set on the water with them. Do all these drills switch stance, too.

Once you can clear the wakes, you will be able to do spins and inverts from either direction without even thinking about direction. Remember, really fun wakeboarding means doing tricks from both directions instead of just one.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Staying balanced, especially toe side, is key to Raimi's success on the water. At the base of the wake, at the top of the wake, or in mid air, Raimi always keeps her weight distributed and balanced equally over both bindings. The head and shoulders stay level to the board, all of which provides for plenty of lift from the wake to get lots of airtime to do smooth spins and inverts.

DRILL 3



DRILL 4



NOTICE