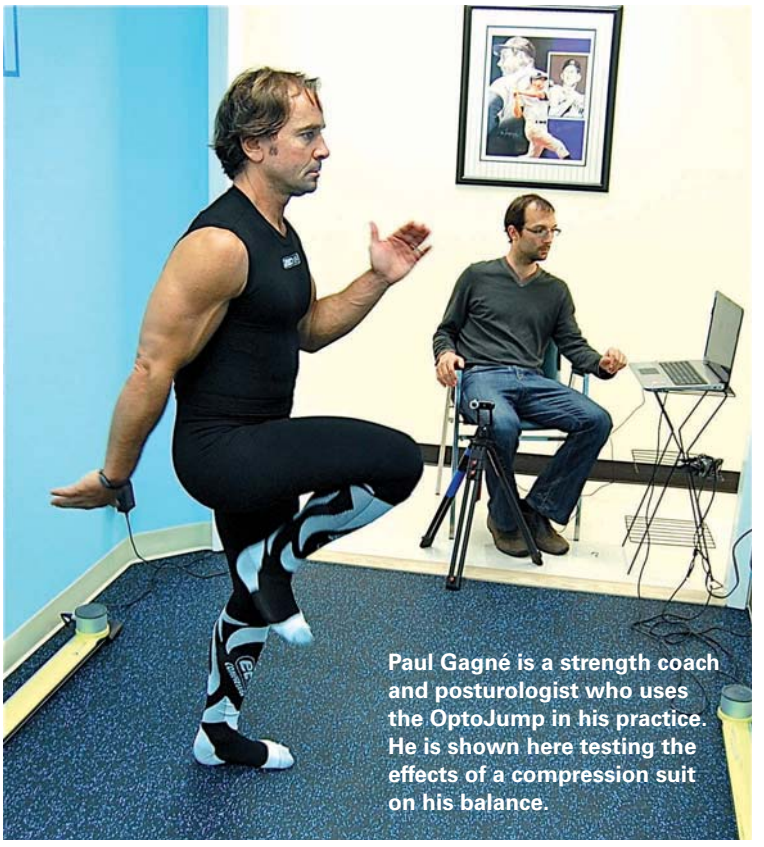


Paul Gagné is a strength coach and posturologist who uses the OptoJump in his practice. He is shown here testing the effects of a compression suit on his balance.

The Quest for Physical Superiority

How Paul Gagné uses the OptoJump to guide his athletes to winning ways

Paul Gagné is a Canadian strength coach who is always on the cutting edge of athletic performance. For example, his work in posture has helped many of the world's best professional golfers, and his understanding of energy system training has made him one of the most sought-after coaches for pro hockey players. So when Gagné heard about the OptoJump®, it was only natural that he flew to New York to try out the system and brought it back with him to Canada.

In this exclusive interview, Gagné talks about the practical applications of his work with the OptoJump to improve the performance of his elite athletes.

BFS: What attracted you to the OptoJump?

Gagné: Because I'm a posturologist, it's important for me to determine what occurs after a postural reprogramming, such as with eye exercises or the use of postural insoles or several weeks of corrective exercises. For any of this, I require objective data. Also, I work with hockey players, and these athletes are at a high risk of concussions. The OptoJump helps us determine when a previously concussed athlete's central nervous system has returned to baseline levels.

BFS: Before you started using the OptoJump what were you doing to determine if a concussed athlete was ready to return to play?

Gagné: We had no measurable baseline at all. We had to go by how the athlete felt, which was risky. After all, you don't want an athlete who is still suffering the effects of a concussion to return to play because this would present an especially high risk of further brain damage.

BFS: You've started working with figure skaters. How are you using the OptoJump with these athletes?

Gagné: The OptoJump helps me measure balance and determine the strength and power of each leg. We have six testing protocols we use with skaters, one being the drift protocol. The OptoJump also instills confidence in athletes, because they can see proof that they are performing better on these physical qualities essential for their sport. Having this data to present to the sport coaches reinforces the value of our program and helps us determine which aspects of conditioning we need to address with each athlete.

BFS: Because the fields of strength coaching and personal training are saturated markets, do you think that having the objective data from the OptoJump gives you a marketing advantage?

Gagné: Absolutely! Many of my professional hockey players are referred to me through sports agents who have a lot invested in these athletes; and when these agents recommend a strength

Photo by Mike Ridewood.

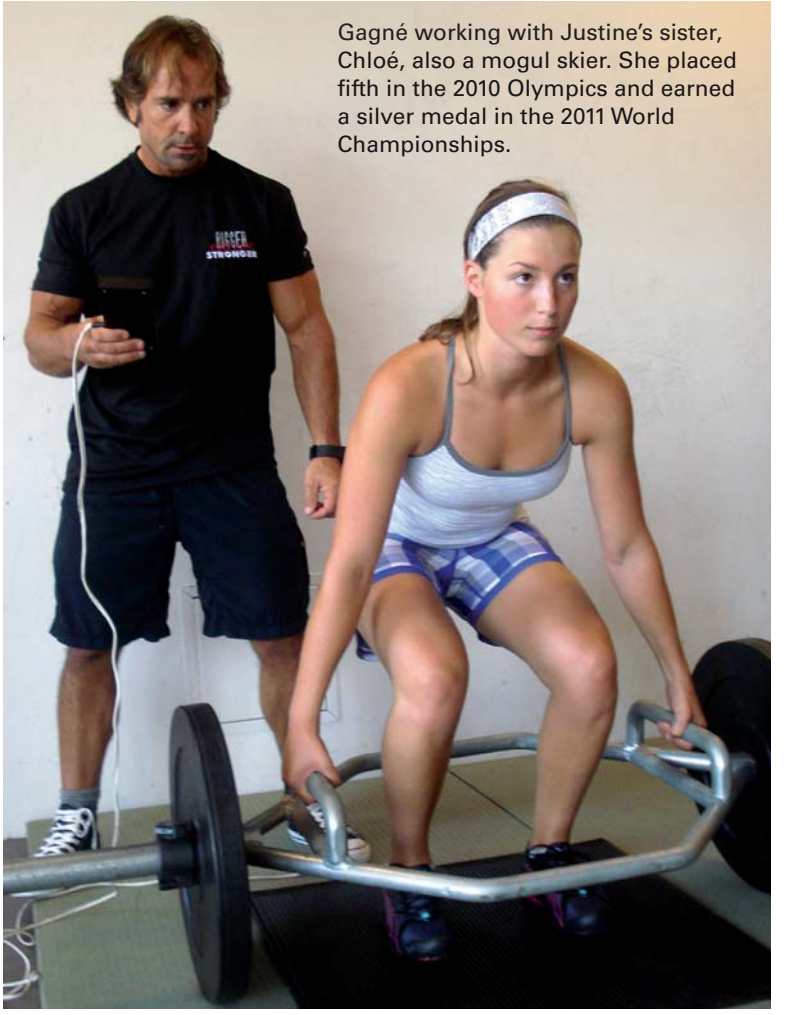
Gagné working with Canada's Justine Dufour-Lapointe, currently ranked #1 in the world in the World Cup for freestyle mogul.

coach, everyone expect results. Being able to present objective OptoJump data to the sport coaches gives me an edge over other strength coaches because I can show that my methods work. Further, I can show that we are helping the players improve specific physical qualities that are necessary to perform at the highest levels on the ice.

BFS: Skaters practice and compete in skating boots. Is there an issue with testing an athlete in bare feet?

Gagné: No. We've found that if a hockey player improves their performance score with bare feet, their performance in a skating boot will also improve. I should also note that in hockey we are seeing a trend towards soft boots to make the foot more efficient.

BFS: As you are a posturologist, does the OptoJump provide feedback for a static postural assessment?



Gagné working with Justine's sister, Chloé, also a mogul skier. She placed fifth in the 2010 Olympics and earned a silver medal in the 2011 World Championships.

Gagné: Yes. But it's important to understand that even in a static postural assessment, the body is always shifting positions to stabilize itself in a standing position. It is difficult to see these shifts with the human eye, but you can see the results with the OptoJump.

BFS: Could the OptoJump help determine if orthotics are doing their job?

Gagné: We haven't used it for this purpose, but we could. A gait analysis could be done on a treadmill, with and without orthotics, to determine the effects of orthotics. I have the privilege of working with Dr. Michel Joubert, a podiatrist who designs all the orthotics for my athletes. He is extremely interested in seeing how the features of the OptoJump could apply to his work.

BFS: You've been doing a lot of experimentation with compressive gear. Does the OptoJump help determine the effectiveness of this type of product?

Gagné: We use compressive gear because it gives feedback to the body via receptors in the skin. Compressive gear increases feedback and thus body awareness, or proprioception. With the OptoJump, I can precisely measure this proprioception.

BFS: Let's say you're working with a new athlete in the off-season. How might you use the OptoJump during this period?

Gagné: It depends upon the length of time I have to work with that athlete. If a hockey player goes to the Stanley Cup finals, I may have only six weeks to train them. With a shorter time period, I have to focus on getting the athlete in balance. If I have more time to work with an athlete, then I can focus more on other aspects of conditioning, such as power. But to more specifically answer your question, the first thing I do with an athlete is a static postural assessment followed by dynamic assessments, which could include testing with the OptoJump.

Gagné spotting pro hockey player Joe Rullier. Rullier has power cleaned 319 pounds, bench pressed 450, and front squatted 485!

Dr. Peter G. Gorman, president of Microgate USA, showing Gagné a special laser device to improve body awareness.

One area I have to address, especially in a sport such as hockey, is how injuries are affecting performance, especially balance. No matter how strong or fast an athlete is, if their balance is affected by an injury, this will impair their performance. Some players who are exceptionally strong and do well on the NHL combines never go on to play in the league because they have poor balance and as such cannot effectively apply those physical qualities to the ice. To see what I mean, say I'm talking to you and someone else is talking to you at the same time – you might understand only 50 percent of what I tell you. If an athlete is not in balance, they cannot focus 100 percent on the skills of their sport and therefore cannot achieve optimal performance. That's why assessing balance is so important.BFS