



Tom and Harty, catching on to Coach Dave's signal, tapped their sticks, too. "Way to go!" Each picked up a water bottle and sucked back a big gulp.

Tom's heart was pounding. He tried to slow down his breathing. "Good work, Harty. You're fast."

"Yeah, good work . . . Tom." Harty smiled at him. "You're fast, too."

"Don't get too comfortable," warned Coach Dave, watching the last skater finish.

He rubbed his hands together. His eyes lit up. He cleared his throat and said, “At the whistle, nine laps — backwards!” He blew the whistle loud and strong.

“Let’s go,” said Harty, giving Tom a nudge with his elbow.

They circled the rink together.

Tom wondered how many laps they were going to skate in one day. *What if Coach Dave makes us skate nine laps eleven times? Nah, he thought, Coach Dave said he was joking about 99 laps. But was he?*

At the end of the day, Tom sat on the arena steps in the hot sun, waiting for his dad. His knees hurt and his stomach growled for dinner. He hadn’t felt this great all summer.

Harty stumbled out the doors carrying his hockey bag. His head was soaked with sweat. “I sure feel like I skated 99 laps today. My legs are doing the wet noodle!”

Tom burst out laughing. “Mine, too!”