

ABOUT MY SKATES

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The most important piece of equipment a hockey player has is his/her skates. Skates are the link between the player and the ice surface. To become a good hockey player, you must become a good skater. To become a good skater, you must start with a good pair of properly fitting skates.

The Boot:

Skates provide you support, mobility and protection. The most important parts of a skate to look at are the counter and the blade. The counter (or heel) is what provides you proper support and protection. Most counters are made out of a strong plastic or polyurethane that provides stiffness. The skate should not bend over to the side when force is applied to the outside of the counter. If it does, try another model of skate to ensure there is proper support.

The Blades:

The blade should be a good stainless steel blade that holds an edge properly. Even though cheaper blades are available, they normally have to be sharpened more frequently and end up costing you more money in the long run. A good blade normally has the hardness of a good kitchen knife. These blades contain specially formulated steel that includes chrome to prevent rusting and carbon to maintain hardness.

Fitting your Skates:

Normally, skates run at least one size smaller than your street shoes. It is important to only wear one pair of socks when you have your skates on. More than one pair reduces the amount of support from your skate. Some players wear thin socks and others wear no socks at all. Try on the skate with the laces loose. Slide the foot to the front of the skate until your big toe touches the toecap. With your knees bent, look at the heel area of the foot. If you can put a pencil or your index finger between the heel and the back of the skate--the skates are too large. Try a skate one half size smaller so that the heel touches the back of the counter and your toe barely touches the inside of the toecap.

Don't be afraid to look at used skates, particularly for younger skaters. You can often find skates well priced and in good conditions, but always ensure there is sufficient support in the counter and the blade is not bent.

Lacing your Skates:

Once you've selected the proper skates, the next important step is lacing them up. The skate should be laced in a cross-laced manner keeping pressure on the laces as you go. Start from the toe and tighten up the laces towards the ankle area. The bottom three or four eyelets over the ball of the foot should be pulled tight with moderate tension. The next three eyelets should be pulled tight enough to close the leather around the arch of your foot and take up slack. However, don't pull too tight or circulation can be cut off. The final top three or four eyelets should be pulled tight gathering all of the loose leather around the upper ankle area. Many players do not lace the top eyelet so their ankle has more room to move and they can bend their knees more effectively. Players should never wrap their laces around the ankles of their skates or tape their ankles. It is important to allow complete flexibility in your ankles, wrapping or taping restricts the amount of movement. Remember that the counter is what provides the proper support, not the ankles.

Skate Sharpening:

How do you know when it's time to sharpen the skates? Any time you buy a new skate--have it sharpened immediately. The factory puts a basic edge on the blade, but it is not meant to be used on the ice. It is kept dull so that it does not cut anyone.

Skates become dull from skating on hard ice surfaces, walking on unclean surfaces, or stepping on cement. Players should never walk on anything but the protected rubber matting at the rink and the ice. Use your skate guards to protect your blades. Normally, skates should be sharpened about every 4-6 hours of use or if deep nicks can be seen on the edges of the blade.

Sharpening Options:

The Hollow or Radius..... Remember, you actually skate on two small edges of your blade (inside and outside). Your blades are sharpened with a radius hollow on the bottom to create the two small edges (it looks like an upside down "U"). A shallow radius such as 1/2" provides a good all around set of edges with good turning and good gliding. A deeper hollow, such as 5/16" creates a more aggressive edge that cuts in to ice easier for quick turns, but reduces the amount of glide, which can slow your speed down.

The Rocker:

Another feature of your blade is the rocker. The rocker is the curvature or shape of the bottom of your skate blade. The most common size is 11 feet which is normally set at the factory. Bigger players may increase to a 13 ft rocker while smaller players may sacrifice speed and reduce it to 9 ft. Goalies tend to have flatter skates with rockers from 26-28 ft. Generally, with a shorter rocker, you sacrifice speed for quicker starts and stops. I recommend our players stay with the standard rocker unless an experienced skating coach suggests a change.

Blade Care:

Taking care of your skates is very important. Always keep them protected with your skate guards. It is also important to always dry off the blades when you are finished skating. Use a heavy towel and be very careful not to cut your hand. If the blades are not dry when you put them in skate guards, they'll rust and make your blades dull. Open up your skates to dry the interior leather. Some players use a fan to help dry out their equipment and their skates. However, do not use a hair dryer to dry out the inside of your skates or you may crack the interior leather.

One Final Thought...

When playing hockey, always know the location of your skate blades. They are dangerous and can injure other players if not monitored. Having a good pair of skates is only the first step in becoming a strong hockey player. It's how you use those skates and practice the skills of ice skating which really determines what kind of hockey player you can become.