

Equipment Tips for First Time Players and their Parents

The following tips were provided by John Shorey author of Hockey Made Easy

Hockey is a fantastic sport and in order to play it safely and enjoy the experience you must have equipment that fits properly to protect your body.

SKATES- *skating is the most important and difficult skill of hockey, if you can afford a new pair of good quality skates it will make a whole world of difference in your child's development. If you can't, purchase the best possible used skates that fit and have good ankle support.*

Skates must fit snugly but not cramp your toes and have good upright ankle support. –one pair of thin 100% cotton socks is all you should wear.

Skates are usually one size smaller than street-shoes.

LACING- *the criss-cross method is considered the most comfortable*

- the bottom 3 eyelets should be semi- loose to allow blood to circulate to the toes
- the middle 3 eyelets should be semi- tight to allow an up and down movement of the top of the foot when starting and stopping.
- the top 3 eyelets should be tight to keep the ankle in an upright position and prevent the child from going over on his/her ankles.
- Do not wrap the laces around the ankle to tie then, this prevents the forward flex of the foot and ankle and will impair your child's skating speed and turning.

BLADES- *the skate blades must be sharp, but not razor sharp, in order for you to stop and start without falling.*

- if they are dull, your child will slip and slide all over the ice and have a hard time standing up.
- if they are too sharp, they will dig into the ice and prevent smooth stops and create a stutter stop and possibly cause him/her to fall.
- if you get a deep nick or burr on the bottom blade you will fall. It should be immediately sharpened by an experienced skate sharpening professional.
- a good skate sharpening can mean all the difference between a great game or a poor game

SHARPENING- *you should not need your skates sharpened every game, but 2 to 4 times a season is average unless you are playing in a "AAA" league that practices and plays 4 to 6 times a week, or get a nick or burr on the blade.*

- a good skate sharpener will cut a hollow ground U shape in the bottom of the blade, this provides 2 edges, an inside edge and an outside edge, both used for different aspects of skating.
- the depth of the cut should be based on your child's height and weight
- a medium sharpening, not razor sharp is all you require. It will keep you with a stable upright position and allow you to bite into the ice, to push and glide without falling down.

HOCKEY STICKS- *after skates, the stick is the most important piece of equipment used for scoring and preventing goals.*

- it must fit properly, just like skates if you are going to develop you shooting, passing, puck handling and stick handling skills
- 2 sticks should be taken to practice and games in case one breaks.

LENGTH – *the stick's length when in an upright position, and while you are standing in your skates should come up to between your chin (maximum) and your collar bone (minimum). If it is any longer or shorter you will have trouble shooting or carrying the puck.*

LIE- *is the angle between the stick's shaft and blade. - the higher the angle; example. 125% lie- the further the puck is away from your feet. The lower the angle; example. 110% lie the closer the puck is to your feet.*

- it's trial and error to see which lie is best for your child based on the way they skate either bent over like Wayne Gretzky did or up right like Mario Lemieux does, as no stick manufacturer puts the lie angle on the stick.
- youth size hockey sticks are now available which are lighter, shorter and have a smaller shaft radius for a better grip by children.

CURVE- *sticks are made for Left or Right handed shots. The lower hand on the stick when shooting determines whether you shoot Left or Right.*

- a slight curve is ok because a straight stick is hard to find and I don't believe is necessary. A big curve is out of the question until your child gets to Bantam and even then I don't think it's necessary.

NEW or USED EQUIPMENT- *good equipment which provides solid protection is essential to prevent injuries.*

- used Shin pads, pants, shoulder pads, elbow pads, gloves, helmet with visor or cage, jock or jill strap, garter belt and neck guard are all pieces of equipment that can be purchased second hand from sports shops or at the annual Minor/Youth Hockey sale at the start of the season to help keep the high costs of playing hockey down.

However having said that, the equipment purchased must fit properly so it doesn't move or shift if your child falls, gets hit by the puck, gets body checked or runs into another player.

- the equipment will cushion the blow or fall providing there is no space between the specific pieces of equipment.

UNDERWEAR- *light cotton, or a breathable material, long john type, top and bottom underwear should be worn under your equipment.*

HOCKEY BAG- *a hockey bag large enough to carry all your equipment is suggested.*

- pockets on the outside to carry your skates and wet underwear are advisable
- keep an extra pair of skate laces, proper length in the bag for emergency and a small towel to dry your skate blades after the game or practice to prevent rusting.

General order for Getting Dressed, either at home or at the rink

1. *light cotton socks*
2. *light underwear, top and bottom*
3. *jock or jill strap*
4. *garter belt to hold up your hockey socks*
5. *shin pads*
6. *hockey socks, tape shin pads in place using Velcro strips or clear shin pad tape*
7. *hockey pants, use suspenders or a special hockey belt on some models to keep them up*
8. *skates, tie your skates now and use skate blade protectors if dressing at home*
9. *shoulder pads*
10. *elbow pads*
11. *neck guard*
12. *sweater*
13. *helmet with full visor or metal cage*
14. *mouth guard*
15. *hockey gloves*
16. *stick, take 2 sticks to the bench in case 1 breaks*

Have a great game!

Hopefully these basic tips will help the new players and their parents get some idea of the equipment their child will need to have for an enjoyable, safe and rewarding hockey experience.

Yours in hockey,

John Shorey

Author- Hockey Made Easy
Canada's Best Instruction Manual