

How to Choose Hockey Skates for Your Athlete



Skates may be the hardest item to choose. There are many choices at various prices. Following the below steps will help you choose a skate that best suits your needs.

What use are you purchasing the skates for?

When buying skates you will want to look for a skate that will fit your needs. If you are a recreational skater that skates a few times a month, then obviously the top performing skate, at the top price, will be way more than you need to spend. If you are a travel player in a highly competitive league and are skating five or more hours a week, then you will want to look for a top level skate as it will offer the performance and longevity you will need. In general, the more expensive a skate is, the higher performance it will offer and the more durable it will be.

Weight

Weight plays a major factor in choosing a skate, for instance, a young player who is just starting out will not need a skate that is overly expensive. Since they do not have much weight and grow like weeds they will grow out of the skate before it breaks down and needs to be replaced. If you are an adult who has stopped growing and do not want to buy a new pair of skates every couple of years you will want to look at a mid level skate at the least. These types of skates will have more durable material in the sides of the boot to keep its shape and support.

Level of play

If you are a travel player in a very competitive league, you will want to look for a top performance skate to give you all the performance advantages that are available. On the other hand if you are just getting started or play in a recreational league, then you will not need to spend that kind of money to get a skate that suits your needs to play and enjoy the great game of hockey.

Amount of play

The more you play the more wear the skate will endure. Skates will break down and crease after time. If you only play once a week then a mid level skate should last five years or more depending on your weight and style of play. On the other hand, if you play in every league you can in a 50 mile radius, chances are you are logging some hours. The more you play the quicker you will wear out the boot. If you are this type of player you will want to look at getting a high mid level to a top performing skate simply for the durability. Some NHL players will go through 6 or more pairs of skates in a year!

Boot

With so many different boot designs on the market, it can get confusing on which is better than the next. Each manufacturer has their own design theories which you will want to read the descriptions on each skate to see if it will fit your needs. There are however, certain characteristics you will want to look for.

Weight – You will want to know the weight of the boot you are looking at as weight has a big impact on leg fatigue.

Fit – Will the boot you are looking at fit your foot? There are basically two types of feet and the same boot will not fit as well on each type of foot. You want to make sure that the boot holds your heel tight with no shifting or sliding. This will give you maximum control.

Tongue – You will want the tongue to have some form of plastic or high density foam insert which performs two tasks; stops lace bit, and adds some protection from flying pucks.

Liner – If you are a tournament player you will want to look for a skate that has a quick dry or moisture wicking liner. I do not think there is anything worse than putting old cold wet skates for three games in a row. These liners will also kill odor causing bacteria.

Ankle Padding – The ankle padding should be form fitting and heat moldable. The ankle padding is what helps the skate form to your fit for the best fit possible.

Outsole – The outsole plays a major roll in weight savings and energy transfer from your legs to the playing surface. Top end models will have full carbon outsoles while lower end skates will have a plastic outsole.

Holders

Holders are an important part of performance. They are like the transmission on a car. You can have all the horsepower possible, but if you do not get that power to the road then you loose much of the performance. There is a fine line in finding the perfect stiffness of a holder. A stiff holder will maximize power but will offer little feel, no rebound for acceleration and will vibrate under hard cornering or stopping. A flexible holder will offer awesome feel and control however, you will loose power. The optimum point is not really known. The Tuuk+ Custom holder is generally regarded as the best on the market. Most NHL players will use this holder regardless of the boot type and it is the holder that all manufactures try to replicate.

Runners

There are two types of runners, stainless steel and carbon steel. Both have advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of stainless steel are; it is a harder, denser metal which will offer better edge retention and it will not rust nearly as easy as carbon steel. The disadvantage of stainless steel is that it will not be as sharp as carbon steel. Carbon steel offers you the advantage of being able to make the edges sharper and easier to sharpen. The disadvantages of carbon are the edges will not stay sharp as long as stainless steel so you will have to sharpen them more often. Also, carbon will rust quickly with the littlest amount of moisture. Most players in the NHL prefer carbon steel, however, they have the luxury of sharpening their skates every day or even in between periods, without having to pay for it either.

Correctly sizing skates

The way to check if a skate fits correctly is to have the skate completely unlaced and slide your foot all the way forward till your toes touch the inside of the toe cap, making sure your toes are flat. Pull the skate back towards you so your knee and ankle are both bent. Check to see how much room or space is between the back of your ankle and the back inside of the skate. The experts recommend that there never be more than $\frac{3}{4}$ ' of an inch. If the player is still growing, $\frac{3}{4}$ ' should be enough for a years worth of growth. If the player is not growing anymore than you will want almost no space remaining due to the fact that as the skates break in you will actually gain room in the skate.

Editor's Note: Special thanks to HockeyX for the above article.