

LAURA STAMM INTERNATIONAL POWER SKATING SYSTEM

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SKATES - YOUR MOST IMPORTANT HOCKEY EQUIPMENT

Hockey Skates

The quality, fit, manner of lacing, sharpening, and maintenance of your skates all affect performance. A cheap pair of skates is a bad investment. To skate well, hockey players must have well-constructed boots that fit properly with blades made of well-tempered steel, properly sharpened.

- The function of the skate boots is to support the feet firmly while allowing skaters to lean their boots inward and outward. Good boots have reinforcing material in the counter (instep) area. The reinforcing material makes that area of the boots especially supportive for the arches and ankles. If boots are well made, you should not be able to squeeze the counter and ankle areas together.
- Top-of-the-line boots fit better, provide more support, last longer, and offer better protection against injury from pucks or sticks. Choose your skates wisely—they are instrumental in preparing you to develop the skating skills necessary for speed, agility, and power.
- Lack of good ankle support almost guarantees that correct skating will be difficult and even uncomfortable. Ankles that cave in cause pain!

Note: Unless there has been a specific injury to the foot, weak ankles are generally a myth. If ankles cave in, the cause is usually boots that are ill-fitting or have poorly constructed counters.



Buying and Fitting Skates

Boots should fit like a glove—snug but comfortable—and should hug the feet firmly.

- Your toes should come up to the fronts of the boots but should not be pinched or curled up on one another. Boots should fit snugly at the insteps and across the balls of the feet. If you can move your feet sideways within the boots, they are too wide. If you can lift your heels when you lean forward, the boots are too long.
- Skate sizes usually differ from street shoe sizes and from one brand to another. Each manufacturer builds boots on a different mold so while one brand might fit well, others might not.
- When being fitted for new boots, wear the same weight of sock you will wear when skating. A sock of

different weight can change the fit. Do not wear two pairs of socks, as this “disconnects” your feet from the boots.

- Before putting your feet into them, unlace your skates most of the way. Trying to jam your foot into a boot that is three-quarters laced is an exercise in frustration—your feet just won’t go in and you’ll think the boots are too small.
- When the skates are laced up there should be a spread of 1.5 to 2 inches between the eyelets on the same row. If the laces are closer together than this, the boots are too wide for your feet and your ankles will cave inward when skating. If your heels slip or you can lift them, the boots are too long.
- Be fitted for skates only at a specialty hockey shop. They are knowledgeable about skates and will help you find the skates that best meet your needs.
- Today’s skates tend to be extremely stiff and difficult to break in. High level players who skate hard and wear them for hours at a time prefer stiff boots because they last longer. But youngsters, small adults, females, and recreational skaters will have a hard time breaking them in. These skaters should consider a brand or model that is a bit less stiff. Another option is to buy secondhand skates that are in good condition. It’s better to have good-quality used skates than poor-quality new skates.
- When choosing used skates, be sure the blades are in good condition and *not* sharpened down excessively. Many hockey shops carry used skates. Hockey organizations often hold skate swaps (usually at the beginning of the hockey season).
- It’s fine to wear corrective orthotics in your skates - they will improve your balance and performance. But the size of the boots must accommodate the orthotics so bring them along when being fitted for new skates.

Lacing the Skates

Proper lacing of one’s skates is essential to good performance.

- Many players lace their skates too tightly. This limits foot mobility and also cuts off circulation, which in turn causes numbness and cramps in the feet. Boots should support the feet, not immobilize them. Properly laced skates support the feet while allowing players to readily bend their knees roll their ankles and boots inward and outward.
- The tightest area of lacing should be from a point above the ball of the foot to a point just above the ankle because this is where the most support is required. The toe area and the area high above the ankles should be just moderately snug.

Note: Many elite players lace the area above the ankles fairly loosely; some even choose not to lace the top set of eyelets.

- ***Do not*** wrap tape around your ankles. It is unnecessary and it inhibits foot mobility!

Breaking in New Boots

During the breaking-in process lace your new boots *loosely* !

- Wear new skates at home - put the skate guards on and walk around in them for several minutes at a time. Some players like to wet their feet (with socks on), then put the skates on and walk around in them. Water acts like sweat; it is sweat that breaks in the boots.
- Never wear new skates for an important skating or hockey event. Break them during practices or at public sessions.
- Some players wear their new skates on the ice for short periods and go back to wearing their old ones for the rest of the session. The hope is to limit the uncomfortable breaking-in time and to avoid blisters.
- Blisters during the breaking-in process are an unfortunate reality that all players must deal with. If you feel a blister starting, take off the new boots or insert a “second skin” material on the affected area. You can also cut a hole in a foam sponge to make a “doughnut” and place this over the affected area; this helps eliminate pressure between the boot and that part of your foot.
- Once broken in, boots should feel as though they are a natural part of your feet.

The Blades and Blade Design

The blades of good hockey skates have high quality blades made of heat-tempered steel; they retain a sharp edge despite extremely rough use. Poor quality blades nick and dull easily and have to be sharpened frequently. There are several brands of blades. Players can buy their favorite blades and have them mounted on their boots.

- Each skate blade, from toe to heel, is designed with two knifelike edges separated by a groove (hollow). The function of the hollow is to expose the edges, enabling them to cut into the ice more effectively.
- The shape of the hockey skate blade is convex (curved). This curved shape is called the *rock*, or *radius*, and resembles a crescent moon or the legs of a rocking chair. The rock (radius) of the blade makes it possible for skaters to maneuver in tight curves and circles. If the blades were straight like those of speed skates, hockey players could gain speed when skating straight ahead, but it would be difficult to weave, cut, or execute sharp turns.
- Goalies move in a straight line forward, backward, or sideways rather than to perform weaving or circular maneuvers. Therefore their blades are almost straight, not highly rockered. Curved blades also would hinder their ability to make skate saves. Goaltenders need their blades to be dull enough in order to easily slide sideways across the goal crease.

Sharpening the Blades

- Blades should be sharpened by an expert and should be sharpened when they no longer dig crisply into the ice.
- Some pro hockey players sharpen their skates after every game; some even sharpen them after each period. However, this isn't necessary or even desirable for most nonprofessional players; excessive sharpening shortens the life of the blades.
- Blades can be sharpened so that the hollow is either shallow or deep. A deep hollow may make it difficult to execute a smooth, effective stop because the edges can unexpectedly grab the ice. Too shallow a hollow may make it difficult to dig into the ice (for pushing or curving).
- Children and small adults require sharper blades and a relatively deep hollow in order for the edges to dig into the ice readily. Heavier people can use less sharp blades and less of a hollow.
- Many high level hockey players have their blades sharpened with a longer radius and a shallower hollow. A longer radius means more blade length is in contact with the ice which in turn means that more distance is covered on each glide. A shallower hollow means the edges won't overly "grab" the ice so there is less friction against the ice during each glide so more distance is covered on each glide. These two factors combine to increase speed.
- Sharply rockered blades (shorter radius) can make balancing more difficult because there is less blade length in contact with the ice. They may allow for tighter turns but the benefits of this do not outweigh the benefits of the increased speed that a longer radius provides.
- Do not have too much blade ground off from the very front or back of the blade. The front (toe) is needed for quick starts. The back (heel) is like the rudder of a ship; it is needed for stability.

Testing the Sharpening

- If the blades are properly sharpened, the inside and outside edges are level with each other. To test the sharpening, place a coin horizontally on the upturned blade. Study the angle of the coin. If it is perfectly level, the edges are even. If the coin tilts to either side, they are not. Take the skates back for re-sharpening; if one edge is higher than the other, skating will be impaired.
- If the sharpener isn't careful the radius (curve) of the blade may increase with progressive sharpenings. When this happens, too little blade is in contact with the ice. Let the sharpener know precisely how sharp, how much hollow, how much rocker you want, and where you want the high point of the rocker to be.

Note: Forwards generally prefer the high point of the rocker to be just behind the middle of the blade; defenders prefer it to be just in front of the middle of the blade.

- Some players make and keep a template of their blades. To do this, trace an outline of the blades after the first couple of sharpenings. After each sharpening, measure the blades against the template and make sure that they

conform to it. Also, ask the sharpener to hand stone the blades after each sharpening. This will guarantee smooth, finished edges.

Your skates are your best ally. Choose and use them wisely.

You can find more information on this important subject in my new book, **LAURA STAMM'S POWER SKATING, Fourth Edition.**

SKATE GREAT HOCKEY!

Laura Stamm

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