



Sticks and Skates

The one point in common about these two important pieces of equipment is that both are very expensive and kids go through them pretty fast. Because of the costs and many choices available it is important to get the right equipment to fit your budget and to fit your skater.

In terms of sticks there is no real need for youth players to buy the top end sticks other than ego or the wanting to be “like mike”. The top end sticks are like giving a beginning driver a high performance race car before knowing how to drive. Lots of talk about flex points, grams etc which is meaningless for almost all youth players. In past columns I have recommended a composite shaft and wood blade. I still recommend that course of action for youth players. The following segment was submitted to me by Jim Stangl and I share it as a good guideline for stick selection .

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT STICK TO GAIN MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE!

Using the correct hockey stick when playing the game can mean catching or making a critical pass during a game! When a player has the correct hockey stick in their hands can make a huge difference in their overall game performance. Using a stick that is the proper Length, Flex and Lie is very important. Many young players are using a stick that is too long for their skating style. Also they may have a stick that is the incorrect lie which means the blade of the stick is not flat on the ice. The flex of the stick for many young players is too stiff so they do not get to feel the puck and their shot slows because they can not flex their stick when shooting.

Hockey sticks are very expensive and purchasing the correct one can be a challenge. Here are some tips to consider when purchasing a stick.

- 1) **FLEX:** All hockey sticks have a flex rating printed on the shafted. When selecting a stick have your son or daughter try to flex the stick. If they can't get the shaft to flex the stick is too stiff.
- 2) **LIE:** The lie of the stick is the angle the blade is to the shaft. The ideal lie for a player will be when the entire blade is flat on the ice in normal skating position. You may have seen players that have heel of the blade on the ice and have a hard time making or receiving pass unless they make adjustments. Typically for young players a lie 5 would work. Lie (6) usually is better for taller more upright players.
- 3) **LENGTH** is the most important part of stick selection. You can assume that

any stick you purchase will have to be cut down to get the proper length for the player. A good guide the stick length is the following.

- 1) When the player is standing (no skates) hold the stick with the blade tip on the floor and mark the shaft at where it meets the chin.*
- 2) How have the player hold the stick at that mark with one hand, arm relaxed. The blade should be close the flat on the floor. If the tip of the blade is up a little that is ok because when the players puts on skates the blade will flatten out on the ice.*
- 3) If you follow these guide lines your player should see improved puck control, better passing and receiving passes, plus an improved shot with a stick they can flex.*

Skates are another big ticket item although if lucky you can get by with only by your skater one pair every 10-12 months. There are lots of choices available however marketing considerations do influence buyers. Again I recommend that skates be purchased for fit and performance. In the past several years some manufacturers have marketed skates that are extremely stiff in the ankle area. This is not good for players as they need to have ankle flex to skate properly. A skater at my summer camp was having trouble with his ankle flex and I recommended that he get new skates that allowed for flex. He did so and the improvement in his skating was immediate and noticeable.

The skate boot is very important but equally as important are the blades. A hockey player skates on about 3 inches of blade in the center of the blade. The shape of the blade (radius) is critical to the balance of the skater. As the skates are sharpened many times the radius can be changed easily as inexperienced operators grind down the blades. This can impact speed, agility and balance. All impact performance. Having the correct hollow grind on the blades is also very important for several reasons. Here are some guidelines to keep a handle on your skaters' blades.

- 1) If the toe and heel sections are ground way down, often close to the plastic holder, replace the steel immediately. These blades are having a negative impact on the skater.
- 2) Have the blades "shaped" twice a season by a professional skate technician.
- 3) Replace the steel at least once a year depending on how often they are sharpened.
- 4) If you buy used skates, also buy new steel and have them shaped.
- 5) Get them sharpened correctly. General guidelines: ½ inch for younger skaters, 5/8ths for pee wee/u10 and then moving up to ¾ or 7/8ths as the skaters get older. You will need to request the hollow grind you want when you take the skates to be sharpened. Do not be dissuaded if they say "we do all of them at ..." Insist or go elsewhere. There are several reason to skate on less hollow blades among which are less energy consumed in skating, easier transitions and increased speed.

Sticks and skates – very important to playing the game properly. Select the right equipment for your skater and make sure the equipment stays in good shape. Every advantage a skater can get is good.

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