

# The art of skatenance

It doesn't matter whether you're coaching professional hockey players, high ranking amateurs or aspiring superstars on your backyard rink-hockey players need a pair of skates. But just having a pair isn't going to do any good if your players don't know how to care for them or prepare them.

## Rockering

The first thing that you need to know about skates is that your blade had better be tilted. That's right, tilted! Forwards will get optimum performance out of forward tilting blades. Tilting is accomplished through the use of a contouring machine. The contouring machine will also "rock" our blades.

The process of rockering cuts down on the amount of blade that touches the ice at any given moment. Although skate blades are almost completely flat, players get better speed but reduced maneuverability. Only goalies really prosper from using flat blades.

## Grooves

Another thing new blades lack is a "hollow ground" running the length of the blades. Forwards and defensemen really need this groove in their skates. The groove is put in the blade by using a sharpening stone with round edges. Once in place, the groove improves the skater's strides and concerning ability. Although the depth of the groove is a matter of personal preference, most players find that a depth of somewhere between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch is most desirable.

## Sharpening

All the rockering and contouring in the world isn't going to assist on-ice performance one bit if the skates' blades aren't sharp. A well-sharpened skate should keep its sharp edge the length of the blade. Too few passes over the stone will cause your edges

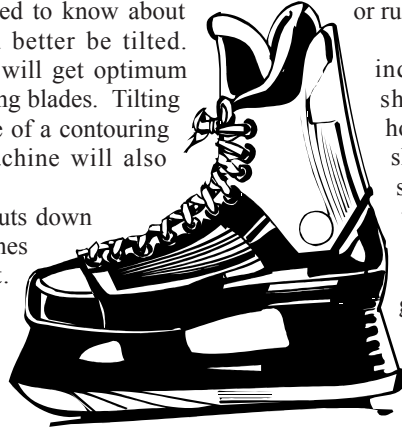
to be uneven while too many passes results in the blade being unnecessarily worn down. Most good sharpeners take their time and check the blades by sight, or by shaving their thumbnail along the edges a couple of times during the sharpening process. Once the blade is sharpened and ready to go, the sharpener will usually run a small hand stone down both sides of the blade to finish off any nicks or rust remaining on the blade.

Again, it is solely up to the individual how often skates are sharpened. Most professional hockey players have their skates sharpened prior to every game, some even go so far as to have them done in between periods. Depending on the amount and type of use your players' skates get, they should probably be sharpened every 4-5 outings.

## Caring for skates

In order to get the most out of a pair of skates it is important that they be cared for properly. Skates that are not kept polished and dry tend to rot and rust rather quickly. Rust on blades dulls the edges and rot can loosen boot rivets and decrease the amount of support provided by the boot. Be sure to tell your players to wipe their blades thoroughly after each use and a little polish or preservative on the boots wouldn't hurt every now and then.

Few pieces of equipment play as important a role in one's performance as do skates in ice hockey. Proper care and preparation can only enhance your team's on-ice performance. Make sure to tell them to remember this the next time they go throw their wet, snow covered skates into their hockey bags.



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