

# The Skater's Edge

*If some of your players have trouble with balance and agility on their skates, stopping or turning - it might not be a skill problem – as much as it might be an equipment problem. Proper skate blade care can go a long way in helping a player overcome some skating deficiencies.*

## ***New skates***

Skates do not come sharpened. Yet some people buy them, take them out of the box and lace them up. They can skate fine because the blades do have edges on them that are reasonably sharp – but not ideally sharpened. There is enough of a hollow ground that the skater has some control, can stride, can turn and can stop. But they should be professionally sharpened to get the maximum edge.

## ***Hollow ground***

The hollow is the concave area between the two edges of the skates. This hollow can be altered to be deeper or shallower depending on the weight of the skater and the condition of the ice. Hard, fast ice surfaces require a deep hollow ground for best control, while ice surfaces that are softer require less of a hollow. Too much hollow will cause skaters to cut too deeply into the ice, minimizing glide, and making it difficult to control stopping and turning.

## ***Contouring***

Skate blades are “rockered” which means that the whole blade is not in contact with the ice at one time (like the rocker on a rocking chair). This is called the **radius** of the blade. The radius reduces the amount of blade that touches the ice. The **lie** is the manner in which the radius is subscribed on the blade. **Contouring** is a combination of the radius and lie – the proper radius positioned correctly on the blade – and can result in improved maneuverability, balance and control and reduced muscle fatigue.

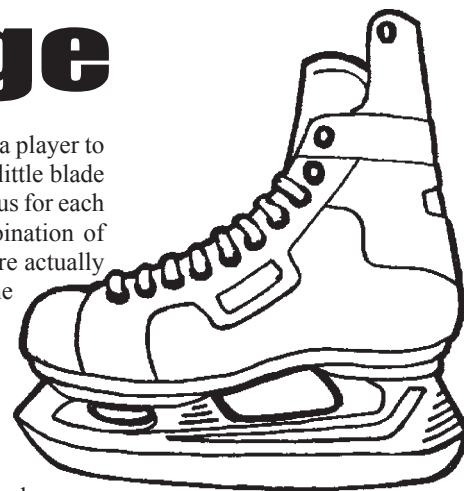
Less skate blade on the ice allows a player to pivot easier and turn sharper – but too little blade on the ice reduces stability. Proper radius for each player is that which results in a combination of maneuverability and stability. There are actually three radii ground into the blade of the skate. The center radius is where most of the skating is done and is the working radius. The front radius is utilized for the final push off of the toe at the end of a stride. The back radius is utilized in turning – too large and turns are not as sharp as they should be – too small and it reduces stability.

When a skater is standing erect on his skates – he should be on the center radius on the middle part of the blade – and should feel in good balance. Moving this point too far back results in weight being too far forward toward the toes. Moving this point too far forward results in the weight being too far back toward the heels.

As skates are sharpened several times over the course of a season, the lie can be changed unintentionally by the sharpener – by taking too much blade off the heel or off of the toe. It is a good idea to check the blades periodically to see which part of the blade is making contact with the ice surface. Balance the skate on a table or flat surface and you will be able to easily see how much and which part of the blade is making contact with the surface.

Players who play the forward position spend the majority of their time skating forward and should be leaning slightly forward as they skate. Defensemen need to be further back on their skates when skating backwards for balance and control.

Every player needs to find their “happy medium” – what is comfortable for them. The majority of your players are already probably at this point. But if some players are having difficulty with stopping, turning or balance – checking their skate blades might be the first place to look.



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