

Editor's note: In each issue of SKATING magazine, one of the country's top skate technicians will provide their expertise on skating boots, blades and related industry equipment.

Knowing when it's time to purchase new boots, blades

BY RICH LIPPERT

Being a skater takes skill, but that skill can only take someone so far — proper equipment helps a skater reach the next level. There are several reasons skaters postpone buying new skates and blades. Primarily, they don't like spending more money just to begin the tedious process of breaking in new boots. However, delaying the purchase of new boots and blades can cause injury and may negatively affect performance.

For skaters whose feet are still growing, boots are usually outgrown before they break down from wear. If their feet are crammed into the toe box, a new fit is required; most low-level skates can be stretched a half size larger, but this is only a short-term fix to extend the boot's life three or four months, after which new boots will still be needed.

If a skater's feet are no longer growing, there are other signs that indicate it's time for new boots: severe creasing at the ankles, holes or tearing in the lining, the skater's heels no longer fit snugly, or a tongue that rotates to the side and doesn't protect the foot from the laces. Some boots may not have clear breakdown signs but still need to be replaced if: the stiffness or support layer no longer offer sufficient support, boots need to be re-tied several times during a practice, or a skater can no longer land an easy jump.

Replacing boots and blades goes beyond

growth and wear-down.

As a skater progresses through the levels, they should consider entirely new skates to accommodate their new skill level.

Precise blades are just as important as well-fitting boots. Blades that have been properly sharpened over their lifetime will last longer than those sharpened haphazardly. The life of the blade is in the hands of the sharpener; one bad sharpen and the skater may not be able to spin or land a jump as easily. However, blades that have been sharpened many times, even by excellent sharpeners, lose their rocker and become more difficult for spinning and landing jumps. Though it may appear that the blade can still be sharpened, this is a sign that the blade's metal has worn down and needs to be replaced. The difference between skating on a new blade versus one that has reached the end of its use is obvious; as my customers say, "There's nothing like spinning on a new blade."

Rich Lippert is the owner of Precision Edges by Rich in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and has 20-plus years of experience in skate sharpening, fitting and mounting skates for all levels of athletes. He began his business by incorporating his skills as a metal and woodshop teacher to help pay for his daughter Kristina's ice time. When he is not at the shop, Lippert is ballroom dancing with his wife, Fran.



ask the expert

MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM
SKATE TECHNICIAN
U. S. OLYMPIC FIGURE
SKATING TEAM

Q: I am a beginner and plan to skate during the weekend public sessions. Can you tell me what size of rental skates I should ask for relative to my shoe size, and any other equipment/clothing recommendations that would make my experience more enjoyable?

Jake — San Antonio, Texas

A: Generally speaking, rental skates run a size to a size and a half larger than your shoe size. It's a good idea to wear a thin sock rather than a thick athletic sock. Make sure the skates are a good snug fit. You might have to try on several pair to come up with the best fit. Lace them up all the way to the top. Once you find a pair that works well for you, make a note of its number so you can ask for that pair again. If you plan to skate often, you might see if the rink could sharpen the pair you have chosen. To help protect your fingers in case you fall, you should always wear gloves or mittens. Dress in layers. It may be cold in the rink, but skating will warm you up, so you may want to peel off a layer or two as you skate. For younger skaters, a skating helmet is also a good idea. Some rinks have them for rent or to lend, but you might have to purchase one from the pro shop.

product spotlight: Boot Gloves

Editor's note: In each issue of SKATING magazine, a skating equipment manufacturer will profile one of its products. This is not an endorsement from U.S. Figure Skating or SKATING magazine.

Say goodbye to cold feet with Boot Gloves — a state-of-the-art Neoprene skate cover.

These covers have a sleek fit and help to insulate against the cold. In-air jump rotation position can be achieved easily and is not impeded by a bulky cover.

They also protect the skate boot and offer added support. Used on a regular basis, Boot Gloves will actually extend the life of the boot.

They are available in black, white and camel with a full range of sizes.

Designed by a professional ice skater, they are manufactured and distributed by Ice Light Productions. For more information or to order online, please visit the website at www.icelight.biz

