



Purchasing Skates

ASPIRE TO SUCCEED

AN ASPIRE SKATER'S GUIDE TO PURCHASING SKATES

When skaters are ready to move on from rental skates and buy their own pair of boots and blades, they can be overwhelmed with the choices. As a skater entering the Aspire program and starting your journey with U.S. Figure Skating, it's time to start looking at purchasing skates (if you haven't already). This guide covers where to buy skates, tips for boot fitting and blade mounting, breaking in new skates and how to properly care for them.

WHERE TO BUY SKATES

Purchase skates from a store that deals primarily with figure skates and is willing to work with you on finding the best fit. The best fitter is knowledgeable about skates, has experience properly mounting and sharpening blades, and has a wide selection of different models to accommodate different feet. Be prepared to spend at least \$150 to \$250 if you buy new skates. As your skill level increases, so will the price of appropriate skates.

IN-STORE VS. ONLINE

Before buying skates online or at a department store, consider the following:

Not all skates are created equal. Even though some sites provide size charts, determining the correct skate size varies among each company. In addition, every person's foot shape, height, weight, age, skating level and frequency of practice all help determine the correct skate.

In-person fittings offer unparalleled service. There are qualified skate retailers located in pro shops in ice rinks and standalone retail stores across the country. Going to a store allows skaters to try on different sizes and brands before deciding on the best boot to purchase.

Wherever you buy your skates, remember to always get them sharpened. Most skates come with a manufacturer's sharpening with a protective coating that keeps the blade from rusting. An initial sharpening in-store will remove the protective coating and give the skater a grind that is best suited to his or her level. Sharpenings, adjustments and blade alignments are often included with the price of a fitting from a qualified professional.

BUYING USED SKATES

Skaters have the option to buy used figure skates as well. Sometimes a good used boot and blade set is better than an inexpensive, lower quality new boot and blade. Coaches can always help determine the best make and model for you. Many rinks and clubs do skate swaps, and older skaters are always selling old boots and blades.

Make sure the boot has support and the blade has some "sharpening life" left. Ask questions about the skates if you buy at a skate swap or from another skating family. Used pairs of skates are also a great cost-saving choice but only worth it if they fit. Oftentimes, boots and blades can be remounted as well if the skater needs a softer boot and lower level blade and vice versa. Be sure to ask questions before you walk away from the option of buying used skates.



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BOOTS & BLADES: FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

An appropriate fit can make or break a skater's experience on the ice. If the boots are too big, the foot will slide around in the boot and the skater will be unstable on the ice. Most skate manufacturers make skates for different levels, and a knowledgeable fitter can show you a variety of skates within your skill range.

Most boots and blades are bought separately, but in the beginning stages of figure skating, boot and blade combinations are available with several options depending on the skater's level. Purchasing boot and blade mounted together can keep the price down, but it's important to speak with your instructor first to discuss what your skater is working on, as that will determine whether this is a viable option. Skate dealers will help you find a blade to match your skates.

TIPS FOR BOOT FITTING

- Skates should fit snug like ski boot not loose like tennis shoes.
- Toes need some wiggle room; the heels and ball of the foot do not.
- Growing children need a little growth room – about 1/8 to 1/4 of an inch (about a half size).
- With the boot unlaced, slide the foot forward until the toe touches the end. Bend your knee and place your forefinger behind the heel with your nail touching the heel. If you can fit the finger behind the heel with a snug squeeze, you have a 1/2-size of growth room (if you're a skater whose feet are still growing). If you can turn the finger sideways behind the heel, the skate is at least a half size too big.
- Leather boots can be stretched up to a 1/2 size in length and a full size in width to extend its comfort as the foot grows.
- A boot too stiff for the beginner level of skating will not break in and a skater will not want to skate if the skates hurt for long. A good boot may hurt at first. Expect a "break in" period.
- Heat moldable boots are far more comfortable to start with than the stiff leather. They can also be molded twice as the skater grows or develops other foot issues.
- If the skater's toes are scrunched, it's time to get new skates.
- Some boots have a higher arch than others, so skaters should try on several pairs of boots or a correct fit. The insoles can also be taken out and replaced depending on the shape of the skater's arch.

Many skate companies have a website and brochures that describe an appropriate boot/blade combination for certain levels of skating. Most offer a variety of options ranging from beginner skate models to elite-level boot and blade options. Skaters may start out with a beginner boot and blade set but will need to move up to a boot with more support as their skills increase.

Height and weight also factor into the strength of the boot needed. A small skater doing a lot of skating and progressing fast may need a higher quality boot and blade than the same size skater who puts in less ice time and less aggressive practice.

BLADES

All blades come with a factory sharpening and a product on the blade to prevent rusting. Do not skate on the ice before getting them sharpened by your local skate sharpener. When the edges become dull, you may notice difficulty holding an edge and more sliding than usual; it's time to get them sharpened again.

Many beginner or stock boots and blades come as a package set with the blades already mounted. As skaters advance from the beginner levels, they should move away from the factory mounted blades. Professional skate dealers will mount blades and work with the skater on finding the right adjustments to match his/her center of balance.

Skaters should be able to glide on all four edges equally well. A boot fitter can detect while watching a skater on the ice if the blade position needs to be adjusted. Skate blades must fit within 1/4 inch of the length of the boot; otherwise the alignment will be off and the skater will have difficulty adjusting.





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BREAKING IN NEW BOOTS

All new skates have a “break in” period. The length of the break in period depends on the skater’s level and how often he or she skates each week. The following tips will help ease discomfort while breaking in new boots:

- Don’t tie the top hooks for the first several times skating in your new boots.
- Be careful stopping in newly sharpened blades.
- If you blister easily, pick up a roll of white hockey tape and tape your skin, just one layer over each part of the leg and foot where the boot rubs too much. The boot will rub the tape and not your skin.
- For ankle bone discomfort, silicone ankle pads, punching a pocket in the boot or padding with sponge cosmetic pads are all useful options in relieving ankle bone pain while breaking in boots.

TAKING CARE OF NEW SKATES

- Guards will protect the blades when the skater is walking on any surface other than ice. Never walk on cement, metal or any surface other than rubber matting without skate guards.
- Soakers are used for storing the blades after the boot has been taken off and prevents rust (blades should never be stored in the plastic guards!).
- Use an old towel or wash cloth to wipe the surface of the blade and the bottom of the boot after taking the skate off and before putting soakers on.
- Use a bag to protect and transport skates to and from the rink. Don’t tie the laces and carry them over your shoulder.
- When you get home after practice, take your skates out of your bag to let them “air out” to prevent blade rusting and damage to the leather.
- Plastic ice and outdoor venues put additional wear and tear on a skater’s boots, usually causing the blades to dull quicker.
- Don’t leave your skates in the car in between practices.

