

# GEARING UP FOR HOCKEY SEASON



Doug Adair helps Cassidy Phillips try on hockey gear as her twin sister, Meaghan, looks on.

STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

## EQUIPMENT TIPS

- ▶ **SAVINGS VERSUS COMFORT:** Look for fit and comfort over saving a few dollars. In the long run, it will probably enhance your child's enjoyment of the game and the dollar difference will likely be negligible. As with most things, you get what you pay for.
- ▶ **FITTING:** Try to take your player to the store for a fitting.
- ▶ **SHOP ON YOUR TIME:** You can get more personalized attention if you shop during off-peak periods. Sports stores are usually busiest Saturdays, so go during the week.
- ▶ **BEWARE OF KITS:** Be wary of pre-packaged starter sets. Just because a child wears a medium shin pad doesn't mean his or her head is also a medium. Best to find a mix-and-match deal and;
- ▶ **THINK HEAD AND FEET:** Before you set out, make sure to set aside a large portion of your budget for skates and helmet. These are key for comfort and safety and deserve the most attention.

BY JOHN CUDMORE  
Staff Writer

## Going cheap won't help your children, experts say

First impressions matter. That particularly applies when the person you are trying to impress is five years old and wobbling around the ice on a pair of hockey skates for the first time.

For families whose initial foray into hockey is just days away, those looming trips to the sporting goods store could go a long way to determining a child's long-range participation.

The last thing you want to do is turn a child off the game due to a lack of comfort.

A word to the wise: take your budding star to the sporting goods store and take stock in what the experts have to say.

"We're a hockey nation, so many men and women are knowledgeable," said Gerry Ertl, owner of All Pro Source for Sports in Newmarket. "But not necessarily on the latest technologies."

"Often, they go at it from the perspective when they played. Many people think they can do it themselves because they have played the game and feel they know how it should work."

Most don't.

Outfitting a player at any age properly is like working a jigsaw puzzle — the pieces are designed to fit

together and provide maximum protection.

The truest way to ensure proper fit is to accompany the player to the store.

"Equipment has to fit reasonably tight to the body for maximum protection," Mr. Ertl said. "(If not) it's a turnoff and dangerous. Equipment is designed to stay in place and you have to be careful about the comfort level. A kid should be able to go out on the ice and focus on hockey rather than getting hurt."

Education starts with mom and dad who are, after all, footing the tab.

"Most hockey moms and dads don't know much at all when it comes to equipment," said Ian Boyd, owner of Boyd's Source for Sports in Stouffville for the past 22 years. "They don't know how it fits."

Kelley Phillips of Aurora won't dispute that notion.

"For me, the ability of young ones to move with all that equipment on is a concern," said the mother of five-year-old twin girls, Meaghan and Cassidy, who were sizing up gear

recently at Rec Cycle N' Sports in Aurora in preparation for their first season of hockey. "What I don't understand is how it fits and feels. I don't want to be responsible for that."

Kelley and husband Paul Phillips are no rookies when it comes to equipment shopping for their children. Older brother Zack, 8, went through the process a few years ago.

"You know how it fits on yourself, but it's hard to say on someone else's body," Paul Phillips said. "We're also trying to manage growth and get them through the season."

Thanks to Velcro, many pieces of equipment, skates excluded, are adjustable and have a longer life expectancy.

For any shopper, the first priority is to establish a budget.

Most retailers agree \$250 to \$400 will buy a reasonable set of gear, including skates suitable for most entry level players.

"You have to educate people on the cost and re-affirm that equipment will fit," said Doug Adair,

owner of Rec Cycle. "But people, especially non-players, are wise to educate themselves in the off-season."

You should take a cautious approach when it comes to pre-packed, mix-and-match sets for the simple reason not all body parts grow at the same rate, he said.

Some retailers provide a personalized mix-and-match starter package and a half-back exchange for items purchased in the store.

Equipment costs might startle new hockey parents accustomed to the relative low expense in outfitting a child for summer sports such as soccer or baseball.

But it is wise to keep in mind the value of quality equipment so it is wise to create a budget.

It's important to have a strong foundation and that starts with skates.

One novice error is to purchase skates the child can grow into over time. It may seem like saving money at the time, but learning to skate in ill-fitting blades is a turnoff.

"If you're buying for two or three years, the skates won't fit," Mr. Ertl said. "You can play for one year, but not two or three. Buying in advance doesn't do any good."

Obviously, the No. 1 thing is the amount of money you have to spend. But at the entry level, even for house leagues, the most important thing is skates and you should buy the best you can afford."

Also near the top of any list is a helmet. Used and recycled helmets may pose safety and sanitary issues. Note, helmets, along with throat/neck protection, must have CSA approval stickers before a player may step on the ice.

Independent retailers pride themselves on personalized and professional service provided by trained sales staff.

In the case of Source for Sports, for instance, there are more than 190 stores across Canada linked as a buying group and comprising the third largest hockey supplier in Canada, Boyd said.

For the consumer, that means prices are more in line with chain stores competing for the equipment dollar, but with added service.

"The most flattering part is when a parent walks into the store and says, 'Fit my child,'" Mr. Boyd said. "It's critical to wear the proper level of equipment for the level a child is playing."

Click here for opinions

## I demand an apology!

It has come to my attention that the following groups are seeking redress in the form of an apology and cash from our government for various heinous acts...

...Well I want my apology too. And a little

yorkregion.com  
it clicks home

cash would go a long way to making me feel better. You see, when my family first moved to Canada about 50 years or so ago from Holland I was teased about my inability to speak English, my funny clothes and strange sandwiches. These dreadful wrongs were committed by Canadians, so pay up Mr. Harper or I'll come to Ottawa and stomp all over you with my wooden shoes...



Read John Slykhuys: "In the Right" in our BLOGS section

For the rest of the story, visit "BLOGS" on yorkregion.com