



Skate Sharpening – Safety Tips From the Pros

When you see National Hockey League players flying around the rink stopping and starting, blades digging into the ice, do you ever wonder how their blades get sharpened just right so the players don't worry about falling down? Barrie Stafford, the Edmonton Oilers equipment manager, who has been a part of five Stanley Cup winning teams has some great tips and rules of thumb.

- Machine Maintenance – The table top must always be clean. You can use a small brush or whiskbroom to remove the dust and always use a vacuum before and after every sharpening and empty the sweep tray. Polish the tabletop daily so the skateholder slides without friction.
- Changing the Grinding Wheel – Before changing, “ring” test the wheel. You do this by placing the wheel on the tommy bar and tapping it with the wheel wrench. You should hear a ringing sound. If you hear a dull “thud” sound, the wheel is cracked and should be discarded.
- Choose the proper grit wheel is a personal preference. Grinding wheel grits run from 60 to 120 (the lower the number the coarser the grind which means the wheel removes material faster but leaves a rougher finish. The higher the grit, the less aggressive it cuts, but you get the mirror-like finish. Make sure the wheel is fastened tightly and all guards are in place. Standing off to the side when starting up a new wheel is a good safety tip.
- Choosing a Diamond – The wheel must be dressed properly before you start sharpening and the best dressing comes with a newer diamond. The diamond will last longer if you rotate it while dressing.
- Hollow/Quill Setting – Before dressing the wheel you must set the quill to the preferred hollow. It can be set anywhere from ¼ to 2 inches. Make your hollow selection and lock the quill into position. Check the radius arm pivot points are tight and the yoke is centred. Ensure the yoke slidebars are secure and slide freely in their ways. The top wheel guard and screws secure the slidebars.
- Dressing the Wheel – Before turning on the machine check the wheel guard to ensure there is enough clearance for the wheel to turn freely. Make sure the Lexan shield is in place before turning the machine on. The wheel spins at 2350 rpm so take care.
- The Skate Holder – A properly aligned skate holder is imperative. The skate blade must be centred vertically when clamped in the holder and aligned horizontally with the centre of the wheel face. Once that's done, it time to start sharpening!