

Outfitting A Player On A Budget

It Doesn't Have To Cost An Arm And A Leg To Dress Your Hockey Player From Head To Toe

By ZAC CLARK

SHOPPING FOR NEW HOCKEY EQUIPMENT can be as intimidating as going into the corner against a bruising defenseman. But you don't have to walk out of your local pro shop feeling like you've had your pocket picked.

With an assist from Tyler Head of Players Bench pro shop in Colorado Springs, *USA Hockey Magazine* has some helpful tips that will make sure every player is outfitted from head to toe without it costing you an arm and a leg.

HELMET & FACEMASK



Expand helmet to largest size and adjust. The helmet should be snug all around, including the chin strap.

No matter what your budget, the one piece of equipment you do not want to skimp on is a helmet. It is the single most important piece of protective gear because it's "protecting your brain," Head says.

Most of the new helmets are expandable, which allows for the most accurate fitting as well as offering room for growth.

Although helmets are available without the facemask, Head says purchasing the combo will save \$10-15 as opposed to buying them separate.

For younger players, Head recommends a cage as opposed to a full shield because they

are more durable and don't require the constant upkeep that a shield does. Prices for helmet and facemask combos start around \$100.

SKATES

The next important piece of equipment after the helmet is a good pair of skates. Once again, you don't want to be frugal when it comes to purchasing skates because "it's the equipment that comes in direct contact with the ice," says Head.

A good pair of skates also helps your player to gain power and a strong grip against the ice. This doesn't mean you have to go out and spend \$500 on a pair. If properly fitted, a good pair of skates should last your growing player at least two to three seasons. This also includes the appropriate maintenance, most importantly, skate sharpening on a consistent basis.

An upper-end skate such as the Easton Stealth (pictured on opposite page) runs around \$330 for junior sizes.

SHIN GUARDS



A properly sized shin guard is measured from the middle of the knee cap to the top of the ankle.

Sizing a pair of shin guards depends a lot on the personal preference of the player. If your player likes to wear his or her shin guard

tucked into the tongue of the skate, then the length of the pad will run shorter. If they prefer to wear the shin protectors covering the tongue, the guard will run longer.

It's not a bad idea for your player to bring their skates to the local pro shop to help ensure what brand and size of shin guard works best to his or her personal preference.

Mid-level shin guards, such as the Itech 455 junior size (pictured), cost around \$50.

PANTS



Look for protection around the hips, kidneys and tailbone. The bottom of the pant should fall from the top to the bottom of the knee cap.

There isn't a whole lot of difference in padding for the shell of the pant from one brand to the next. Some do vary in the protection around the hips and back padding.

Players can go bigger in the pant to allow for extended movement, according to Head. Be cautious as to how big is too big, because you don't want your player swimming in the pant. If the bottom of the pant falls below the bottom of the knee cap, that's a sure-fire sign it's too large.

It's also important when fitting your player that the hip pads sit above his or her hips to ensure maximum protection. The CCM 892

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SeniorTack (pictured) is a high-end pant for a reasonable price, costing around \$90.

SHOULDER PADS

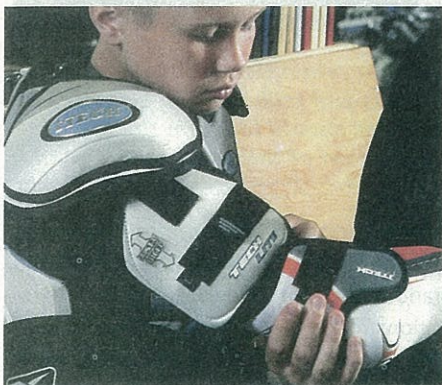


Make sure the player fills out the shoulder pads and their pants overlap the back of the pad. Collarbone coverage is important.

A new feature with many of the higher-end shoulder pads is removable extended abdominal and back protectors for a more customized fit. This not only ensures extra protection, but also allows for plenty of growth room because of the extended coverage.

Higher quality shoulder pads, such as the TechTelite (pictured), offer superb back protection that adjusts to the player's movement, and are also made of a perforated foam construction that inhibits breathability and reduces its weight. The Techlite pad costs around \$70 for junior sizes.

ELBOW PADS



The elbow pads should be locked into place and fitted. Elbow pads should cover the area of the arm not protected by shoulder pads and gloves.

Elbow pads are another piece of equipment where it's important for the player to go with what feels best, Head says.

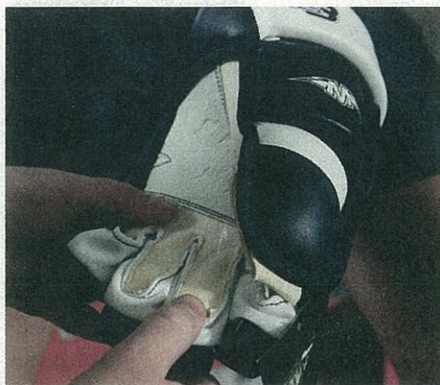
It's not a bad idea for the player to bring their shoulder pads and gloves when trying out new elbow pads. These pieces of equipment all work in sync with one another.

The bicep protector piece of the shoulder pad should overlap the top of the elbow pad and the cuff of the glove should extend past the bottom of the pad.

The difference between high-end and mid-level models is the type of padding inside the elbow pad, according to Head, and the forearm protection offered by the top-of-the-line brand.

A mid-range elbow pad is the Nike/Bauer Supreme 50 (pictured) that runs about \$40 for junior sizes.

GLOVES



Allow for a half-inch gap between the tips of the fingers and glove for growth room.

There are several important features to look for when shopping for a new pair of gloves. Most important is that the cuff of the glove overlaps where the player's elbow pad cuts off.

Any gap between the two pieces of equipment exposes a player's wrist and forearm area, and with the number of slashes and other uncontrolled stick movements, not protecting that area of the arm amounts to a high risk for injury. It's not just the forearm area that's in jeopardy of taking slashes, but fingers as well. The high-quality gloves provide stiff thumb protection and plated plastic inserts for maximum coverage.

Another part of the glove to keep in mind is the palm. Leather is the best route to go because it will last longer, says Head.

The Mission L3 (pictured) is a basic junior-sized leather glove that costs \$40.

STICKS

As much as every player wants one, not everyone needs a one-piece carbon fiber or composite stick. At least not when they're starting out.



While standing flat-footed, the stick should measure between the player's chin and nose, depending on personal preference.

Sure, they are extremely lightweight and look cool, and all the pros use them. Players under the age of 10 should be using wood sticks, advises Head.

The thing to keep in mind when considering a one-piece stick is the weight of the player and the force he or she will be putting into the stick.

"Young kids aren't going to be leaning on and torquing on the stick as much," Head says. "The difference between carbon and wood is the carbon has more bounce and the wood has a better feel but not enough kick."

The Easton Classic Pro junior wood stick (pictured) costs around \$25, compared to the one-piece junior Easton Synergy starting at \$100. ❄



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