
Golden tips for youth goalie equipment

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By John McGourty - NHL.com Staff Writer

"The height of the stick is not as important as the paddle, the paddle being the thicker part of the upper stick. You want it so that when you hold the stick just above the paddle, your stick is flat on the ice, because the paddles come in different sizes."

-- Equipment Manager Steve Sumner

Parents of hockey goalies face a series of expensive decisions when it comes to outfitting their children. So do older goalies who pay for their own equipment.

With a wide array of available equipment, it's important to spend money wisely on equipment that will protect the goalie and stand up to the wear and tear of a hockey season -- and hopefully, multiple seasons.

Steve Sumner is in his fifth season as head equipment manager of the Dallas Stars and has been in the business for nearly 25 years. Before joining the Stars, Sumner spent six seasons with the Houston Aeros of the International Hockey League, concluding his tenure there after the 1998-99 season when the Aeros won the Turner Cup championship.

Sumner previously worked on the equipment staffs of the St. Louis Blues and the Dallas Freeze of the Central Hockey League. He has worked with goalies like Ed Belfour, Marty Turco, Roman Turek, Manny Fernandez, Mike Smith, Johan Hedberg and Alex Auld.

He recently sat with NHL.com to discuss the ins-and-outs of purchasing goalie equipment.

NHL.com: What are the important factors in fitting goalie gloves, trappers and blockers?

Sumner: The kids see what our players are wearing and they want the same stuff. When you are fitting a youth hockey player into goalie gloves and trappers, you want to make sure the fit isn't too sloppy. It should fit the hand nice and snug. They have straps on them so that you can tighten them down, but you want a good fit to begin with. It's important to bring the player into the shop for fitting, otherwise it's really tough to get the right sizing.

NHL.com: With a growing child, is it possible to get more than one season from goalie gloves, trappers and blockers?

Sumner: You can get a few years out of a trapper, but the palms in the blocker may wear out in a year of heavy use.

NHL.com: Do you recommend that goalies not use friction tape on the handle of their sticks because that will make the blocker palm wear out quicker?

Sumner: The material in the palm of the blocker is the same as used in regular hockey gloves. When you use grip tape, it wears through faster.

NHL.com: But you still recommend having a knob at the end of the stick for better control, to keep the stick from sliding out of the goalie's hand?

Sumner: Our two goalies use regular hockey tape on the knob. Both of our guys have had their blockers for two months and there are no holes. If you use regular tape, you'll be fine.

NHL.com: How do you determine the right-sized stick for a goalie? I know as a skater I wanted the stick tall enough to touch my chin while I was wearing skates.

Sumner: The height of the stick is not as important as the paddle, the paddle being the thicker part of the upper stick. You want it so that when you hold the stick just above the paddle, your stick is flat on the ice, because the paddles come in different sizes.

NHL.com: I saw Ed Belfour once grinding down the top of his stick blade and when I asked him why he did it, he said the blade height is not always standardized and some are taller than NHL rules allow. Do you find many goalie sticks not conforming to the rules? And is it something that a player or player's parents needs to be concerned about?

Sumner: With wood, you're dealing with human error and people having sanded it and applied fiberglass and other material to it. I know our goalies measure them every time we get a new bundle to make sure there isn't coating or paint on it that might make it illegal by the time they put their tape on it.

NHL.com: Are there quality differences in chest protectors? Are some chest protectors better made than others?

Sumner: With chest protectors, the big thing is to make sure there is some plastic in the padding area. Some companies just use foam. Over time, the foam gets wet and breaks down and then you start to feel the shot. You want to make sure all the padded areas have some plastic in there to help absorb the shock. It's the same thing with the blocker -- it has a high-density foam that, after a while, will tend to break down. Most blockers have a piece of plastic on top of the foam which helps it a little bit.

NHL.com: The athletic supporter and cup for goalies is different than those used by forwards and defenseman. What are the key elements in purchasing the right kind of cup?

Sumner: Wear two of them. Sounds like a joke, but one of our goalies does wear two. You want to make sure it is big enough and covers all areas. There are cups that are wide enough and high enough to cover the groin area, where sports hernias occur. Sizing them is tough, but you want a comfortable fit that also protects adequately.

This is why when you are buying goalie pants you want a pair that is well-padded in that area because goalies do get hit there a lot. If a guy is a butterfly goalie, that five-hole area gets exposed and you want adequate padding there.

NHL.com: How big should the goalie's sweater be? Obviously, you want sufficient room to cover all the protective equipment. But is there an optimal amount of room and beyond that the sweater is too big?

Sumner: The biggest thing with the sweater is making sure the arms are big enough. I see a lot of kids locally playing with regular skater's sweaters and their arms are really tight. Make sure you get a goalie-cut jersey, which is bigger in the arms. "Goalie-cut jersey" is the term the parent or player needs to use with the salesperson at the hockey shop.

NHL.com: With head injuries so prevalent in sports today, adequate protection is more important than ever. What do you recommend for proper protection?

Sumner: For kids, you want to get a helmet that is certified and has been through all the testing, especially with these sticks today; kids are shooting the puck harder than ever. At our level, shots are going over 100 mph. You definitely want a helmet that has been through the testing and received certification.

NHL.com: Do you recommend throat guards, in addition to the flap below the chin?

Sumner: Yes, especially for kids. Throat guards are important. You see guys in front of the net, while the goalie is down on the ice, and they're poking away at the puck, the throat guard is important for protection. If I had a child that was playing, I would make him wear both the collar that goes around the neck and the flap that attaches to the chin.

NHL.com: Most kids who want to play seem to want to wear leg pads that are as big as possible. But can the pads be too big, limiting their maneuverability?

Sumner: Alex Auld is 6-foot-5 and he wears the maximum pad that the NHL allows. Marty Turco is a smaller and more athletic goalie who likes to move around and skate. He goes out and plays the puck a lot. As a parent or coach, you want the goalie to stop the puck, first and foremost, but you also want him to be able to skate a little bit. If you can't skate, it's tough to play the position the right way. So the properly sized pad is the one that allows you to move comfortably.

NHL.com: What should parents be thinking when buying goalie skates?

Sumner: I haven't seen a really bad goalie skate in my years in hockey. Most of them seem to have good protection. It's one area where you don't see a lot of injuries, to goalie's feet. Make sure the instep has adequate plastic protection because there are some that are lower cut.

NHL.com: How sharp should goalie's skates be? I've had some goalies tell me they don't like sharp skates because they like to be able to slide back and forth and don't want the blade digging in.

Sumner: Our goalies play fairly deep and like to grab when they push across the crease. With the way the game has changed, there is so much speed in the game and there are a lot of two-on-ones and two-on-nones. When there's a rush coming and an opponent makes that late pass, the goalie wants to be able to get across the crease fast. A young player should ask for a half-inch or 5/8-inch hollow when he gets his skates sharpened. I think we've seen a trend to sharper skates in recent years. Ed Belfour always liked a deep hollow.

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Do you have any questions about hockey equipment? Ask the experts at the NHL. Email: **Equipment@NHL.com**