

Goalie Equipment - How times have changed!

Long time hockey fans know that over the past four or five decades, there have been some massive changes when it comes to all the equipment in the game. Perhaps no equipment changes are quite as obvious as the pieces used by goalies; when hockey first began to be televised the goaltenders played with no face protection, hard as that is to believe! Today, of course, all goalies wear masks (or helmets, if you prefer) but even the style of these basic pieces of equipment has changed a lot over the past couple of decades. Let's take a quick look at some of the big changes when it comes to goaltending equipment in ice hockey.

Materials

Strides in manufacturing and newly invented materials have made a huge difference in the types of goaltending equipment that is available. Pads, for example, used to be made just from leather that was stuffed with hair. Pads have always had to be light enough for goalies to maintain their flexibility, yet not so light that a deflection causes a costly rebound. A good balance is found in today's use of synthetic leather and nylon on the outside of goalie pads and cell foams and plastic inside the pads.

Pads aren't the only piece of equipment to undergo some major changes over the years in terms of materials, either. Goalie sticks today are usually reinforced with synthetic materials and fibreglass, while they may be injected with foam in order to lighten the burden on a goalie's arm. Composite sticks, more durable than wood, are becoming more and more prominent among goalies at all levels.

Sizes

If you have followed hockey much since the strike and lockout of 2005, you know that the size of goaltender equipment has been the subject of a lot of debate. There are now official rules about how wide and long a goalie's pads in particular can be, in order to increase the shooting space at the net for players. The idea is to focus on the athleticism of the goalies rather than the equipment advantage.

The Mask!

We started out talking about goalie masks, and it's a good way to end too, because nothing really defines a goalie and her or his equipment like the mask. As mentioned, there was a time when masks were not used at all, but today they are standard. And what an evolution masks have undergone! The original metal with eye holes model was replaced in the '70s and '80s with a cage and helmet style, but after the '90s goalies began showing a preference for the full helmet again, incorporating the full mask style. Only a few goalies in the game today still use cage and helmet models.

The game of hockey may stay the same in its essence, but the equipment used by the players undergoes a constant evolution. Nowhere is this more evident than in the dress of the net minders.

About the Author

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