



# BLADEMASTER:



**DANA HEINZE**  
Head Equipment Manager,  
Pittsburgh Penguins

Imagine a job where you're in charge of working with one of the very top, rising young stars the profession has seen in years, where a large part of how well that person performs is a responsibility that lies directly in your hands.

Welcome to the world of Dana Heinze, head equipment manager for the Pittsburgh Penguins and the NHL's biggest young superstar, Sidney Crosby.

"When you do this job, there are two things that are most important; confidence and consistency," Heinze said. "You have to know what you're talking about."

Nowhere is that more true in the equipment manager's profession than in Pittsburgh, where Crosby is not just the game's reigning MVP and scoring champion, but so tuned in to his equipment that he can immediately tell when something's not right.

"He is one of those players who is very particular," Heinze said. "There are players who might have a small nick and they'd never feel it and just continue to play. Sid is able to feel that and it affects him because he is that good."

Working for a player who is 'that good' has its demands.

"I am very picky about my skates," Crosby said. "If I have a pair that's broken, I'd rather repair those than get into a new pair."

This is not to question the work of Heinze, but more a statement about how demanding Crosby is of his skates, just as he is of himself.

"He skates every opportunity he has," Heinze said. "When he skates, he goes 110 percent, regardless if it's practice or a game. He is hard on his skates. He would try to use his skates the whole season if he could."

Even a player like Crosby then, has 'bad' habits to break. Since beginning his NHL career in Pittsburgh three seasons ago, the Pens star and the



Sidney Crosby works on his skates under watch of Pens equipment manager Dana Heinze.

team's training staff have both had to make some adjustments.

"When I came on board, it was Sid's second year," Heinze said. "We worked together to find his proper contour and the right hollow he wanted his skates sharpened. We got into a really good routine together."

Heinze and his staff also had to break Crosby of the habit of wearing his skates beyond the point of breakdown.

"When I first got here, Sid would only use one pair of skates throughout the whole year. He is the kind of guy who skates every day and he is very hard on his skates. I have worked hard with him to get to switch skates.

He used two pairs of skates last year and that was a big step. He had never done that before."

"The biggest repair I need on my skates is usually the eyelets," Crosby noted. "I like to tie my skates pretty tight, so that puts a lot of pressure on the eyelets. Usually, the top two eyelets always need to be replaced. Beside that, it's pretty much the normal stuff that every guy gets – blades and steel changed. Just because I get my skates

sharpened so much, they wear down pretty quick, so it's important to switch them pretty often."

To prepare for this, Heinze and his team pre-contoured eight pairs of extra blades at the beginning of the season.

"He gets his skates sharpened before every practice and game," Heinze said. "If he gets a nick in his skates, he can feel it and will feel uncomfortable and have to come off to have them sharpened. We change his steel every two weeks or every eight games. It just depends on Sid. He will come to me and he will know that it's time, and I have a pretty good idea of when he will ask me, so we have all of that ready to go, just in case."

One of the big trends in the skate business these days is the move toward super light boots. Sometimes, this creates additional work for equipment managers like Heinze.

"Skates today are definitely being made lighter for the players," he said. "With that – and the fact our guys skate every day – the skates are breaking down faster. We do find ourselves going through a lot more skates. Certain companies have had some design

problems with skates for my players. I can't say that for every team. We've had a couple of occurrences where the material has broken down and there have been a couple major issues that have been corrected by that company right away for us."

With more than 20 players in a dressing room, you can imagine the variety of skate sharpening and contouring Heinze must provide, not to mention repairs.

"When you have 25 different players, you have 25 different needs. The players all act differently and each has different needs for his skates. Plus, here, we skate every day. We are hard on our skates. I am probably working on a pair of skates every day doing something.

"Some players, like Gary Roberts, go through a lot of skates. Mark Recchi, Mark Eaton and Evgeni Malkin use a lot

of skates. But, they are hard on them. Then you have other guys you have to pry the skates out of their hands to switch – like Colby Armstrong or Max Talbot. But, for the most part, I'd say guys are going to use up to four pairs of skates (over the course of a season)."

Since Heinze is in charge of keeping players' skates and other equipment in good shape so they can perform at the top of their game, "the word 'no' →

# Tips from the pros



**BROCK MYLES**  
Head Equipment Manager,  
Washington Capitals

Even before Alex Ovechkin entered the NHL, he had gained something of a reputation as a gregarious, happy-go-lucky young guy who just loved hockey. Loved to play, loved to practice, loved to skate, loved to score. In the few short years since he joined the league, he's done nothing to dispel this impression, as it comes as an honest expression of his personality.

"Working with Alex has been great," says Brock Myles, head equipment manager for the Washington Capitals and the man charged with keeping Ovechkin running on all cylinders, at least as far as the tools of his trade are concerned. "He loves to play the game, and is a real treat to deal with."

This is not to say that one of the most exciting young players in the game isn't particular or demanding when it comes to his gear, especially his skates. "I like them sharpened for every game," says Ovechkin, with his trademark ear-to-ear grin. "That's all!"

Indeed, a man of few, if excited, words, which suits him perfectly.

"We have Alex in a half-inch hollow with a 9.5 to 10.5 contour," Myles says. "He's a big, strong skater who likes to take low, tight turns and needs to stop on a dime, but we want him to glide on top of the ice, not dig in too much."

really doesn't exist in the Penguins locker room," he said. "How do you say no to these guys? We're here to be successful and if it takes three, four or five pairs of skates for that player to be successful, then obviously we want them to have it."

This job all begins with Heinze and his staff keeping a close eye on all players' skates, with a close inspection after every game and practice to identify things that need to be addressed. And like any hockey mom or dad can appreciate, something as simple as wiping the blades off can go a long way to keeping skates in top working order.

Myles sharpens Ovechkin's blades before every game-day morning skate, "but like everyone else in the lineup, we check his edges before the game in case they get banged up during the skate."

Even casual observers of Ovechkin likely notice that, like his passion for the game, he just seems to love hockey gear. He's known for wearing a very noticeable tinted visor, and he is often seen using different skate blade holders and colorful laces, among other things.

"It's my style," he says. No doubt, and he has the substance to go along with it.

"Ovie likes to be flashy out there and we encourage it," says Myles, "as long as it follows the league's uniform guidelines. With his yellow laces, and of course his tinted visor, he definitely stands out among other players in the NHL."

**We have Alex in a half-inch hollow with a 9.5 to 10.5 contour.**

– MYLES

"Last April when he wore red skate blades and red laces in the world championship for Russia, I received plenty of emails about how unique he looked. Alex is pretty picky with his sticks, but he's really easy with his other equipment."

Some star players in the NHL, past and present, demand a little more attention to make sure everything is just right with their equipment. Some even are so superstitious that they reject sticks and skates and other gear that are perfectly technically fine, based

purely on feel or hunch.

"Alex is not high maintenance at all," says Myles. "Our training staff takes good care of any needs he has. Like all players, we make sure he has lots of sticks in stock, that his skates are always sharpened before every game, and we keep a close eye on the condition of his protective equipment to make sure he is safe on the ice and that he looks immaculate."

For a player like Ovechkin, though he might not say so in so many words, he likely wouldn't have it any other way. ■



Cap equipment manager Brock Myles sharpens Alex Ovechkin's blades before every game-day morning skate.

"Every day after they skate, we wipe their skates down and dry off their blades," Heinze noted. "Some players will put their own skates on the skate dryer for about 10 minutes after practice. We have great heat in our locker room and stuff dries really well. For us, the simple things like drying the holders and the steel off every day will help that."

"We change rivets out probably every two weeks on a lot of the players' skates. The sole of the skate is designed so differently from the old days that a lot of the bigger guys feel like their blades are getting loose, so

we take it upon ourselves and we'll change them out entirely every two weeks without the players even asking so it is staying consistent for them."

And back to the star player in the room, Crosby; even he requires some interesting little tweaks to his skates, beyond his sharpening preferences.

"We use washers with the screws that hold his blade in and we also put Teflon tape (plumber's tape), which is very thin, on the bottom of his blade, mount it in there and then put the screws in," Heinze revealed. "Then I put Loctite in the screws because he sometimes would hear a

clicking because there is a little channel in there. Even though his skates weren't loose, if he heard that clicking, he'd think about it and he didn't like that. So, by putting the tape in there, it eliminates that clicking on his skates."

So whether it's repairing eyelets, contouring and sharpening to exact specifications or preventing annoying 'clicks' in skates, Heinze is tuned right into every need of Crosby and the other Penguins.

Though he's not on the ice, Crosby would likely agree Heinze is just as much as part of the team as anyone. ■