

*Equipment improvements make the game tougher, faster and more exciting*

## Catalogue shin pads and tube-skates go hi-tech

Anatomical padding protects the entire head. The Bauer helmets used in the WHL are touted as being "concussion proof" and feature a hard plastic shell and foam padding that doesn't have gaps like those that are found in most other modern hockey helmets.

WHL visors are made by Itech and constructed of unbreakable sealed plastic. While they do have a tendency to fog up, a variety of products, from an anti-fog spray to common shampoo, is rubbed onto the surface to prevent fogging.

Elbow pads protect not only the elbows, but also part of the upper arm and the forearm, overlapping both the shoulder pads and the gloves.

Western League players can use aluminum or wooden sticks made by Koho, Bauer, Easton, Sher-wood and Itech. Players spend hours working on their sticks. Blowtorches are used to change the curve on the blade.

says injuries were not common.

"Those days you were tough if you were going to play," he says. "There wasn't the roughness you see today in hockey.

Shin pads feature a big cup that protects the knee. They run down the front of the leg to protect the player's shins from pucks and sticks. Shin pads are essential equipment for anyone even considering blocking a shot.

hit them back. You would never take a stick to man's face deliberately in my day, because if you did, you would get it right back."

Hockey equipment has undergone major changes in the 20 years since Prince George Cougars coach Ed Dempsey quit playing the game. The protective qualities of all equipment, from shoulder pads to shin pads, has increased drastically while the comfort and playability has also increased.

"There's been unbelievable changes," says Dempsey. "I look back to when I started playing minor hockey and the helmet was just starting to come in."

Dempsey, who wore the old style helmet that just protected the back and sides of the head in those early days, says equipment advances have impacted the game mostly for the better.

Orv Claffey remembers the days when he used to tie old catalogues to his shins using strips of inner tube before he headed out to the river for a game of hockey.

Claffey, one of the original Prince George Mohawks in the 1950s, grew up on the prairies and began playing the game in the days before helmets and other pieces of modern equipment.

"There was no such thing as helmets," says Claffey, who began playing in 1947 when he was 10-years-old. "If you were lucky you had shin pads. If you weren't you used old catalogues."

Claffey says equipment standards have advanced an incredible distance since he began playing. His old gloves, instead of foam

padding, had strips of bamboo in the cuff to protect the wrist. There were no shoulder pads when he started either.

"The equipment they have today is

so much better," he says. "The first shin pads I had were felt with leather on the kneecap."

His stick was a one-piece hunk of wood while his first pair of skates had flat blades. Despite the lack of protection his equipment offered, Claffey



Old tube skates were heavy, cumbersome and didn't offer the ankle support of today's models.

"People always ask 'are the players better?'" he says. "But I think the biggest change has been to the equipment. Everything is so much better, but at the same time it's more durable and it's lighter. I think it's made the



Orv Claffey

game better."

Cougar captain Tyler Bouck agrees. He says advances in equipment have helped make the game faster and harder-hitting, and thus more

exciting for fans.

But at the same time, Bouck says the increased protection modern equipment provides also means players today take more risks.

"Back when there was no helmets, guys didn't get their sticks up as much," says Bouck. "There's less respect now and the game isn't safer because guys take more risks."

Dempsey says players had more respect for their opponents in the past.

"When we didn't have all that protection you knew how much it hurt when somebody got their stick up on you," he says. "Even though it's a vicious game, you knew if you did it to a guy, he could just as easily do it back to you."

Skates have also come a long way since Dempsey's day, when flimsy old tube skates ruled the day.

"The blades now, and especially the boots are so much better," says Dempsey. "When I played we used to get our skates stitched during the season to give us more support."

Dan Hamhuis, a 16-year-old Cougar rookie, says many of the equipment advances are psychological — a player thinks his equipment is better, so therefore it is.

"A lot of it is in your head," he says. "It would make a difference for sure. If I was wearing flimsy old tube skates, there's not as much ankle support and I wouldn't feel as confident and safe out there. The new equipment makes it safer for you. With the older equipment, like the smaller shoulder pads, you could probably play better because you can move better."