

Calgary Herald

NHLers to give heated blades a spin; Former Calgarian behind innovation

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Illustrations: Photo: Nathan Denette, CanWest News Service / Tory Weber introduces the Thermablade Tuesday in Toronto. He says it allows players a better jump and easier turns.

A former Calgary lumberyard worker is hoping an accidental fall he took one wintry day 22 years ago will help to improve the way hockey players skate, especially as the National Hockey League prepares to test his heated skate blades at practices over the next couple of weeks.

Tory Weber has spent the better part of two decades trying to launch Thermablades, an innovation that has cost a group of investors about \$12-million to develop and refine. It has Wayne Gretzky's support, and it has its basis in an idea hatched in 1985, when Weber slipped on the ice after pulling a pair of shoes off a space heater.

"I was laid up for a number of days on the couch," Weber said. "And I was thinking, 'I wonder what would happen if I heated a skate blade?'"

The result was officially launched Tuesday, at a news conference staged at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto. It will be tested by as many as 10 NHL players and will be available to average consumers in select stores by the middle of next month.

A rechargeable battery keeps the skate blade at 5 C, creating a thicker film of water between the blade and the ice. The company claims the heated blade cuts friction by up to 75 per cent, allowing players a better jump and easier turns.

The boot is not included. Curious players would have to take their skates to a specialized store to have their old blades replaced with their new, heated blades.

The new product is expected to retail for \$399 and will not, according to the company, melt through the ice even if the player remains stationary.