

The Ottawa Sun

Blades of appeal; NHLers to test out Gretzky-backed heated skates in practice

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Tory Weber, inventor of Thermablades, shows off his product to the media during a press conference at the Hockey Hall of Fame yesterday in Toronto. Thermablade, which will cost \$399, reduce the friction while the blade glides along the ice.

2. Thermablades use a built-in battery to electrically heat the skate blade, which reduces the friction of the blade gliding on the ice.

Tory Weber had just come back to his Calgary apartment from a class in thermal dynamics at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology when he heard the thump of a newspaper hit his front porch.

This being in February 1985, and winter being what it is in Alberta, Weber put on a pair of sneakers that had been left on a space heater to warm for just such an occasion.

But just one step on to his ice-covered front stairway and his feet came out from under him like butter in a hot frying pan. At that moment the proverbial light went off in Weber's head.

He thought that if warm running shoes increased the slippery factor that much, how would it work on hockey skates?

"I hurt my leg in the fall, but nothing serious enough to go to hospital or anything," he said yesterday at the Hockey Hall of Fame, where he introduced Thermablade, a revolutionary new skate that is set to light the hockey world on fire, so to speak.

"I got to thinking about the class I had taken and coupled it with what had just happened to me and voila, an idea was born."

It would be more than 15 years and countless refinements later, however, before Weber was ready and able to get his invention on the fast track to production.

NEEDED TEAM OF EXPERTS

"I had gone through all the stages of trying to get funding, \$100,000 here and \$500,000 there, but it wasn't until my friend Dhiren Master sat me down and said that I needed a team of experts in marketing, finance and business to get my dream on the road to reality," he said.

"So he put together a team that is still intact and, Dhiren, as much and maybe even more than myself, is pretty much responsible for where we are today."

Where they are today is lining up some NHL players to test their product in game situations.

To help, Thermablade took the invention to Wayne Gretzky, figuring that if they could convince him of

the potential of the new skate, everything else would fall into place.

GREAT ONE'S ON BOARD

Gretzky liked the new skate so much that he bought into the venture, becoming a partner with the team Weber and Master had put together.

So what exactly is the Thermablade?

They are skate blades that are electrically heated with built-in batteries to significantly reduce the friction of the blade gliding on the ice.

"Thermablades are going to revolutionize the game of hockey," Gretzky said in the company's promotional video.

The new skates -- with a suggested price-tag of \$399 -- will be in stores soon.

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