

# Your New Glove

*A Guide to Buying and Breaking-in*

## **Buying a First Glove (From Junior Baseball Magazine)**

Whether you are looking for a child's first baseball glove, or replacing one that's worn out or outgrown, there are choices to make that can have a big influence on the player's performance, success, and ultimately, his fun.

The first glove is perhaps the most important piece of equipment a player will ever own. Why? It's his first connection to the game, and a glove that works well for him will help him play his best, whereas the wrong glove will inhibit his success, reduce the amount of fun, and possibly discourage him from continuing on in baseball after the season is over.



The key to that beginner's glove is control. He must be able to move the glove quickly to the ball, which requires a glove that's not too big and heavy for him.

He must be able to close the glove with his hand, so that the ball does not pop out. This requires a glove that is soft and pliable enough when purchased, or after a very short break-in, that he can close the pocket and 'squeeze' the ball. And it requires a glove that is comfortable and fits his hand well, so he's not constantly fooling around with it in the field.

We recommend a glove that is in proportion to the player's size. We've seen T-ballers, all of four feet tall, lugging around huge 13-inch outfielder's gloves. The parent thought it would help them catch more balls, but the truth is, it is a huge handicap as they have no glove control. They'd do better barehanded than with that leather mattress on their little paw!

As youth sizes begin around the nine-inch pattern range (the measurement is from the bottom of the heel of the glove to the top of the longest finger or webbing), there is a proper glove for every kid. The new generation of pre-oiled gloves are usually excellent, as they are very supple and require little or no break-in. For a very small child, or one with less strength than his peers, you can look into some of the vinyl, or combination vinyl-and-leather models. These are very inexpensive and, while they will not last as long as higher quality gloves, they bend easily and allow the player to catch the ball from day one. There are also full leather gloves in the under-11 inch size, which cost more, last longer, and might require some break-in.

Some new models even have a notch designed into the heel of the glove to allow easy and immediate flexing of the pocket.

Beware of small (11 or 11 1/2 inch) professional model infielder's gloves. Professional shortstops and second basemen use small gloves, which can be mistaken for youth models, except for their high price. These are usually a very good, durable, and stiffer hide, which requires break-in even for the bigger guys and pros, and will never break in sufficiently for a beginner. As much as you want to buy the best for your kid, avoid the expensive, stiff gloves for players under 10 or so.

They'd have to play eight hours a day, seven days a week, for six months before it was broken in. And in that time, they'd make so many errors that they'd be shopping for soccer cleats by then!

## Replacement Glove

As the player advances up the ladder, he may outgrow his glove, or it may be worn out. A good quality leather glove, if it still fits him and he plays well with it, is worth having repaired. New lacing, webbing, patching, and any other repair can be carried out by specialists (see "Old Glove Repair", December 1996 issue).

If it's time for a new one, however, there are again a lot of choices. Is the player significantly larger than he was when he got his first glove? Is he playing outfield or infield more?

There are four basic glove types: infield, outfield, first baseman, and catcher. Most youth players are not yet specialized enough to invest in a first baseman's mitt, and their regular glove will suffice for duty at the first bag. Catcher's mitts are often supplied by the league, but if he's on a club team, and he catches, he'll have to buy his own catcher's mitt. Without going into detail here, simply get the size that fits him - youth or high school. The adult sizes will probably be too large for good control.

For a youth playing different positions, a good range of fielder's gloves would be the 11-1/2 to 12-inches. These are not too unwieldy for the quicker moves required in the infield, yet offer enough 'reach' in the outfield. As the glove increases by half-inch increments, its overall dimension increases geometrically, and weight increases as well.

At this stage, a higher quality glove is a good investment. Again, fit is crucial, and if it doesn't feel good in the store, it's not going to get much better after break-in. Sort of like buying a pair of shoes. Gloves in the \$50 to \$100 range include just about every style, size, and quality level you'll need. We'd avoid any gloves constructed with vinyl, and it's up to you if you want to spend upwards of \$200 or more for the top, premium 'pro' gloves.

For a player who logs most of his time in the infield, stick to the smaller 11 or 11-12 inch gloves. A pre-formed pocket is preferred, deeper for third base and shortstop, shallower for second base (although this sort of specialization at the youth level is not recommended). The outfielders have a larger selection, it seems, with a huge selection of 12 to 12-1/2 inch models. Anything larger than 12-1/2 inch is too much glove, generally, unless he plans to play softball!

## Breaking-in

There are as many theories regarding glove break-in, as there are players. But some are pretty far-fetched. One is to soak the glove in water, then place a ball in the pocket, wrap it with a leather belt, place it in a plastic bag and store it in a warm place. You may end up with a waterlogged, mildew-covered chew toy for the dog when you're finished.

Another technique is to oil the glove and place it in the oven on low for a couple hours, to get the warm oil to penetrate the pores. Rumor has it one very impatient player even tried it in the microwave! His result? Beef jerky!

Here is what some experts recommend about glove break-in:



## Rawlings' "master glove designer" recommends:

1. Press a small amount of shaving cream with lanoline on a clean, dry cloth and carefully work the cream around the outer shell, palm, and back. A light coating is all that is necessary. This will lubricate the leather fibers.

2. Allow the cream to dry thoroughly for 12 to 24 hours.

3. Wipe off the glove and play catch for 10-15 minutes, or 50 to 70 throws.

This stretches and conforms the glove to your hand and speeds the break-in process,

4. Position a ball in the pocket and tie the glove closed for a few days with a string or rubber band around the outer perimeter. An option is to use the new Rawlings "Mit Kit", which is designed to quickly form the 'ideal' pocket. It includes a double-ended pocket form with a large sphere on one end and a smaller sphere on the other, to form the pocket and the web area simultaneously, and a wide elastic 'figure 8' to hold the glove firmly around the form.

5. As the glove starts to break in, pour a small amount of 'Glovolium' on a clean, dry cloth, and carefully work the oil around the outer shell, palm, and back. A light coating is all that's needed.

6. Allow the glove to dry thoroughly for 24 hours so the oil has time to penetrate and condition the leather.

7. Store the glove in a cool, dry place with a ball in the pocket, or a Mit Kit when not in use.

8. Lace will stretch with use. Keep laces taut but do not overtighten. Check for replacement if necessary after each season.

9. Do not over oil your glove! Twice a season is sufficient!

## Wilson's Jim Hackett explains his favorite method:

"With full-grain leather, most major leaguers use foamy style shaving cream to break in their ball gloves.

On a clean glove, spread the shaving cream all over using your hand or a towel. Let the cream-covered glove sit for at least 15 minutes, then wipe off the excess shaving cream and pull/push/pound/massage the glove for a while, shaping the pocket the way you want it. Play some catch and keep pounding it. Sometimes a bat works as a good mallet to pound the pocket (or get a Pocket Shaper to do the job).

Clean the glove off and repeat the process. Depending on the stiffness of the leather, the glove should be ready in an hour or less, but the pocket will continue to improve over several practices or games."



## Cal Ripken, Jr., says:

"I don't do anything strange, like soak it in water or anything. I play with it in practice a lot, and maybe rub a little Vaseline into the palm. I break in a couple of gloves, and if one seems to have the potential to be a game glove, I save it for games once it's ready. I tighten the laces as the glove breaks in over a period of time, so it forms closely to my hand. I don't let anyone else put their hands in my gloves, as they can change the fit and feel. Practice gloves get a lot more wear with all the ground balls and drills. I've had one game glove that lasted me three years, but most last only one."

### Tip :

Bring the player to the store to try on gloves. Have him put on a few that feel good to him, not too loose, and see which ones he can easily hold a baseball in with his palm facing downwards.

Don't be influenced by "autographs" of famous players on the glove, or particularly cool graphics. Nothing's more cool than seeing your kid make a great catch because he had good glove control! In the beginning, his limited skills and budding enthusiasm for the game require a glove that's truly 'user-friendly'.

### Tip:

Buy the smallest glove that will do the job properly for the player. The increase in glove control far outweighs the advantage of additional reach.

### Tip:

Always mark your glove with a permanent magic marker. The best way to mark your glove is to write your last name or your initials on the pinky finger of the glove. Since many gloves look the same, everyone on your team will know that your glove belongs to you. Also, treat your glove like your best friend. Never go to the baseball field without it and remember, never leave the field without having your glove with you!

