

New skate blade for off-ice training unveiled

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Vegas Golden Knights NHL hockey team defenseman Brayden McNabb works out in DriBlades that were developed for off-ice training for hockey players, at Kelly Riou's Next Level Training Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Thursday, June 16, 2022. (Jason Johnson/Alien Kinetics via AP)

In almost two decades of training NHL players, Kelly Riou tried just about everything to help them replicate the unnatural motion of skating

when they're off the ice.

He believes he has now found it, with the help of a retired quarterback and a drone engineer, and hopes it revolutionizes the way hockey players at all levels train in the gym. His Alien Kinetics company unveiled [DriBlades](#) and accompanying weighted slide Monday following development and testing involving a handful of NHL players who work with Riou.

"It's been on my mind to close the gap to allow guys to train and give strength coaches, skating coaches a little bit more of an accurate tool for this crazy locomotion of skating," Riou told The Associated Press.

"Because of the demands of the game, this should've been around before me, truthfully, because the BOSU balls, the unstable surfaces—other measures we use to really try to facilitate or help the player develop—those weren't close enough."

Players pop out the regular blades and can replace them with the DriBlades to do lifting and other dryland workouts. Already one of the best skaters in the league, Stanley Cup champion Chandler Stephenson has tried them out, along with current Vegas Golden Knights teammate Brayden McNabb, Kole Lind of the Seattle Kraken and Lane Pederson of the San Jose Sharks. He raved about the benefits.

"Everything I've done before that's 'hockey-related' has been on the ice, so to have something off-ice where you can break down even more, to work on every inch of your blades, has been great," Stephenson said.

"It's like having a driving range for hockey. It's just been crazy to feel the toes, the heels, the whole sole of your foot. This has made me better because it makes you feel more grounded."

The metal skate insert and the Abductor slide—which former QB Jason Johnson and co-founder called "a dumbbell for your feet"—was

developed with assistance from inventor and entrepreneur Zenon Dragan, known for developing drone technology and having one of his featured in the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum.



Vegas Golden Knights center Chandler Stephenson skates against the Nashville Predators during the second period of an NHL hockey game, Thursday, March 24, 2022, in Las Vegas. New off-ice skate blade technology has been unveiled with the aim of helping hockey players train their bodies better when they're on the ice. Longtime trainer Kelly Riou and partners have developed DriBlades that can replace ice blades for lifting and other dryland training. Stanley Cup champion Chandler Stephenson is among the NHL players who train with Riou and have already tried out the blades. Credit: AP Photo/David Becker, File

Riou said it helps players move their legs in and out off the ice like skating better than using a towel or something else to provide resistance.

Acknowledging how hard it is to translate gym work to the ice, McNabb said he got hooked on using the DriBlades.

"All those little muscles you can't get to unless you are on ice, you can target," McNabb said. "After I stepped on the ice, I noticed an immediate difference."

Johnson, who played at the University of Arizona and then three seasons in the Canadian Football League, said the most common responses from those who tried the blades were, "Why didn't we have this 20 years ago?" and "Why haven't I always been using this?"

"We want this just to be another part of a hockey player's bag," Johnson said. "The fact that you can just pop out your ice blade now and pop in a DriBlade in 10 seconds and train with it, I think is a huge advantage."

Riou, who has been training NHL players and others since 2003 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, said he thought it was a good middle ground between skating treadmills and power skating on ice.

"What were we doing before?" he said. "Here you're in your shoes and then you go onto the ice and see if you're better. That was it before. That's crazy when you understand the physics of skating. This thing actually gives you a chance."

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