

LEFT OR RIGHT, WHICH IS RIGHT?

When our children are old enough to play sports it is time to invest (that is the appropriate term in hockey) in equipment. As adults we cringe at the cost because we know that as soon as the season is over we will be buying a new set gear for the next season to accommodate the growing bodies of our kids.

So off to the store we go to outfit little Wayne Gretzky or Cammie Granato. We start with skates and add all of the protective equipment that we can afford. The last item is the stick. You look to the store clerk and say, "Left or Right?" At this point the clerk, who is probably a part time employee while going to school, looks at your little superstar and says "Left or Right?" Now the decision comes down to the child of which mostly are right handed and they say "right because that is how I write".

The problem with all of this is that is right is wrong. But you ask, "how can right be wrong when my child is right? In fact, he or she writes right, throws right, and bats right. How can right be wrong in hockey?"

Well the answer is that it is desirable to have the strongest arm in control of the stick and for right handed people that is the right hand. It then should be placed on the top end of the stick with the left hand at the middle of the shaft. There are many times during a game when a player will have only one hand on the stick (unlike baseball and golf) and it therefore makes more sense to have the stronger and more co coordinated hand/arm in control for poke checks, sweep checks, and for skating strides. Skating strides you ask?

When a right handed skater starts out going forward he or she will generally stride first with the dominate leg and reach forward with the dominant side arm. When the stick is in the opposite hand it is trailing and can affect balance and forward momentum. This may force the player to begin with the non dominant leg (in most cases left) which for right handed people is the weaker leg. Nothing scientific here but it does make sense.

In the shooting motions the top hand is critical for power in the push pull motion of shooting. Therefore it again makes sense to have the stronger arm in control, so again left would be right for right and conversely right would be right for left.

Twenty years ago most hockey players were left shots because they are mostly right handed. We had a hard time finding right handed shots. Today most players are still right handed but shoot right. Did we evolve as humans over the past two decades to make such a remarkable change? I doubt it. What happened is that with the incredible growth of hockey since Herb Brooks and his gang of college boys toppled the Soviet Empire in 1980 at Lake Placid (think I am kidding about that?) many parents of today's' players did not play hockey and therefore they do not know if right is right or left is right. So today I will tell all new hockey parents that left is right if your child is right and right is right if your child is left.

Confused? Here is the correct way to determine which stick your child should use. If the child is right handed a left stick will do. If your child is left handed a right stick would be best.

Hal Tearse
Minnesota Hockey, Associate Head Coach