

## **The “Broom Stick Test” and how can we can get more “Leftys” in New Zealand Inline Hockey.**

To whom it may concern.

Hi, my name is Gary Young and I have been involved with Inline Hockey in New Zealand in a coaching and/or playing capacity for many of the 20 years of the existence of the NZIHA. For the previous 20 years before 1996 I was also playing or coaching Roller Hockey(quad) .

I know in writing this paper and submitting it to social media, I will very likely come in for some stick/flak or good old rubbishing from many a right-handed player.. Maybe even a few Leftys... but I'm up for that and no bother... it's just my view, backed up by a few stats and some stolen pages from various hockey web sites.

I encourage comment/debate, for that will increase the amount of exposure that this article will get, and therefore more people who are involved with introducing new players to Inline Hockey will become accustomed to using “The Broomstick Test”. It is for these people that I am specifically putting this article together, the pee-wee and U10 coaches, after school co-ordinators, skating rink staff and managers, all those fantastic enthusiasts who are the front line in bringing on the next crop of New Zealand Inline Hockey representatives.

I have long held thoughts on the reasons why we have so many right handed Inline players in New Zealand, when a noticeable majority of players overseas are Leftys. A “Lefty” myself I always wondered how strange it must feel to have your control, or strong hand, at the bottom of your stick.

Over the years of playing and coaching Inline, I have come across many right handed players, especially in the younger grades who, when they play/train, the way they are skating while holding their stick and trying to puck-handle... it... just doesn't look right, or comfortable or technically correct !! I have noticed this the most with new, young or in-experienced right-handed players trying to do anything on their back-hand side!! And I know I am not alone when I say I have even witnessed the bizarre act of a player or 3 swap hands to trap a puck coming to their back-hand side!!

To start with, let's make it clear how to identify the leftys from the right. If a player is holding a stick in 2 hands and the blade (curved bit at the bottom) is on their left...then they are a lefty, their right hand will be at the top of stick. It is the opposite for the right handed players with the stick in 2 hands, the blade is on the right and the left hand is at the top!!

I have put some stats below, of the 16 teams that participated at this year's 2015 IIHF World Championships in Finland. Clearly the majority are left-handed players with 127 and 91 right handed from both groups. Split in to top division and 1<sup>st</sup>. Top Division has 69 left and 36 right. 1<sup>st</sup> division has 54 left and 45 right-handed. As it looks, the lower the teams are placed the more likely they are to have a higher percentage of right-handed players.

Of course there are a couple of teams that knock the theory, USA are the ONLY team in the top 8 that have a majority of right-handed players, and a possible explanation of that is told below in an article that can be found on Hockeygiant.com. Also Argentina who played out of their skins and got their best ever results in 1<sup>st</sup> division coming 4th have a massive 15 to 1 in favour of right-handers !!

I would love to see some similar stats done on our own National teams, an educated guess I would say we would be somewhere between Argentina and USA. At this year's Nationals in Hamilton I watched a Prem Finals game (from the

Stand :-/ ) and saw not one single Left Handed player from 5 separate line changes ( 20 players)

## Placings from 2015 IIHF World Championships

#	Country	Leftys	Rights
1	Canada	8	6
2	Finland	10	2
3	Sweden	10	3
4	Slovakia	7	5
5	Czeck Rep.	12	2
6	USA	4	9
7	Germany	10	5
8	Slovenia	8	4
9	Croatia	11	3
10	Australia	4	9
11	Great Britain	5	9
12	Argentina	1	15
13	Hungary	9	5
14	Latvia	11	3
15	Austria	13	2
16	Bulgaria	4	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>91</b>

The following writing is pasted straight from [hockeygiant.com](http://hockeygiant.com) and [USAhockey.com](http://USAhockey.com). Many other sites have relevant info on how to choose your stick side.

## How to Determine Hockey Stick Handedness



The first question you'll probably ask yourself when you first consider playing hockey is, "Should I shoot left or right handed?" The answer is... probably left handed. Why? Approximately 90% of the world's population is right handed and most likely you are too. If you are left handed, just flip everything in this article around. There's some debate over the subject of choosing which way to hold a hockey stick, but we'll cover as many angles as possible so you can make an informed decision for yourself.

### Dominant hand on top

Why would you want your stronger, more coordinated hand on top, you ask? Your top hand is the one that "anchors" and stabilizes your stick as your puck handling, shooting and passing, skills that require excellent coordination and control. Yes, it would seem advantageous to have your strong hand on the bottom so you could use it to generate more shot power. But even if you could add 10 mph to your shot, hypothetically speaking, would it be worth it if it was at the expense of your shot accuracy and puck control skills? Nope.

Let's assume for a moment that the dominant hand on the bottom actually creates a more powerful shot, since that seems to be a popular argument, regardless of its validity. As previously stated, the top hand is the anchor hand that stabilizes the stick as the bottom hand initiates maneuvers. So with that in mind, consider the difficult challenge of training your sub-dominant hand to become as coordinated as your dominant hand. Have you ever tried writing with your sub-dominant hand? Probably pretty sloppy, right?

The point is that it's much more difficult to improve coordination than it is to build strength. So use your most coordinated hand in the position where the greatest amount of coordination is required – on top. And strengthen your bottom hand and arm in order to increase your shot power.

### Which way feels more comfortable?

There's definitely something to be said for the "natural" proclivities of a beginner when he or she picks up a hockey stick for the first time. It's best to allow a child to develop his or her motor skills in an objective way by observing their natural inclinations. Eventually, as a parent you're able to determine which hand is their dominant hand, which they'll use when writing or throwing a ball.

When it comes to playing hockey, it's not quite so simple because the question must be asked – how does someone who's never held a hockey stick know what they're looking for in the first place? The answer is... they don't.

## **The Broom Stick Test**

There's a simple test that can be done in order to factor in the "natural", hockey-stick-holding tendencies of a beginner hockey player. Keep in mind, this is not a fool proof test and it's only to be used as a secondary guideline for determining your handedness. Pick up a kitchen broom and start sweeping. Most likely your hands will be facing opposite directions. This isn't the way you hold a hockey stick, but nonetheless the end goal is still accomplished. If you're right hand dominant, most likely your right hand will be at the top of the broom stick and your left hand will be in the middle. Whatever the case, you should most likely hold the hockey stick the same way you hold the broom.

### **Dominant Hand at the Top**

In Canada and Europe, most players place their dominant hands at the top of their sticks. As a result, most players from these countries use blades that curve the opposite direction of their handedness: Right-handed players will shoot left, and vice versa.

Coaches from Canada and Europe rationalize this form as follows:

1. When a player is on defense, the range of their stick check is increased if they only keep their top hand on their stick. Thus, if their dominant (stronger) hand is on top, their stick checks will be stronger.
2. Stick handling is controlled primarily with the top hand on the stick. Think of the way a shovel works: The bottom hand works as the fulcrum of the lever, while the top hand controls the shoveling motion. Stick handling works essentially the same way: The top hand controls the stick as it swivels at the point of the lower hand.

### **Dominant Hand on the Bottom**

In the United States, the vast majority of hockey players put their dominant hand lower on the stick. This means that right-handed players most commonly use right-curved blades. Holding a stick like this is thought to add more power to shots and passes, as the lower hand is responsible for the force of the swing.

No one knows exactly why American-born players naturally hold sticks differently than the rest of the world, but the most prevalent theory has more to do with baseball bats than hockey sticks. The idea is that most American children play baseball before they play hockey..

When gripping a baseball bat, the dominant hand is supposed to be placed higher on the bat. Think of the way the fingers are aligned in this grip: The dominant hand's pinky is nearest to the non-dominant hand's forefinger. U.S. players often play baseball before hockey, so the thought is that they grip their hockey sticks like they would a baseball bat... just more spread out, and upside down.

The major theoretical benefit to playing with your dominant hand lower on the stick is an increase in shot and passing power. Your lower hand controls the force of shots —especially slappers —and having your dominant hand lower on the stick will likely add some zing to your game. As you could probably guess, this likely comes with a sacrifice in stick handling.

I hope these articles create some talk and discussions on the subject, and clubs please, be sure your grade coaches and rink staff, beginner school coaches... anyone who has the opportunity to introduce a new player to their 1<sup>st</sup> hockey stick, they all need to try to apply the Broom Stick Test when faced with the question “which hand ?”.. By the way it should work just as well with a shovel/spade or mop..!!

My personal view, just to be clear, is explained perfectly in the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph under ‘How to Determine Hockey Stick Handedness’. I look forward to a day when NZ could have at least have a 50/50 ratio of leftys and rights, similar to Canada and USA. Again, I apologise to all the right handers in the country if I have offended you, certainly not intended. Thanks’ for your time.

Gary Young