



too many...too many...TOO MANY RIGHTIES

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(The article below has been in the making for ten years. As a staff at BU in the mid 80's Jack Parker, Ben Smith and I always discussed or lamented the impact of players shooting/handling the puck the wrong way especially with regard to right handed shooters).

When a baseball player stands at bat most of them are batting right handed. Why is it called right handed? Either because the dominant hand(the right) is on top or because when the pitcher looks in from the mound the batter is on the right side of the plate.

In tennis it is easy to see if a person is right handed and most are, but in our sport all of a sudden there are far too many righties. Where 10 or 20 years ago there were relatively few right handed shooters, now there seems to be a proliferation.

The dominant hand in hockey is the one on the butt end(top) of the stick. For years most people playing the sport shot left-handed which in most cases, not all, meant that they were right hand dominant(right hand on top). Conversely right hand shooters were mostly left hand dominant. This situation held until perhaps the 1980's.

It really made no difference what you were called when you held a stick years ago because they all had straight blades, they could have called left hand shooters "right hand shots", but they did not.

So when a youngster picked up a stick, usually **with the dominant hand** and started to play, since most people are right handed, they were left hand shooters.

Now, because sticks have a curve on them and most people think in terms of being right handed, they apparently are purchasing right hand sticks for their kids? The kids then adapt to them?

So, why are right handed people who play hockey and put their dominant hand(the right hand) on top called left handed shooters? Probably because the stick is on the left side of the body? Maybe, they should have called these shooters right handed, which is really what they are?

Clearly most people are right hand dominant easily upwards of 2/3 of the population, therefore hockey should reflect that statistic and it once did.

Since the early 70's the Soviet Union would send teams to North America to play. Those teams rarely had right hand shooters, some teams had none! In fact most teams had only one or two as reflects the population . This is because they had straight sticks to start, allowing the players to put their dominant hand anywhere they were comfortable. Which happens to be on top where it belongs as well as having their youth programs run by professionals who knew such details.

While discussing why one year the Soviets had an all left hand shooting team, Coach Parker said, " it's probably because they have a whole bunch of right handed people, that's why they shoot left".

In the NHL 16 of the top 25 scorers of all time or roughly 60% are left hand shooters. In the top 100 scorers 63 shoot left handed, only 37 are righties.

The evidence (against too many righties) strikes home most clearly watching some of these players attempt to handle the puck. Because the dominant hand is on the bottom it tends to over-take the top hand and push the puck away from the puckhandler rather than cradling it in. There is a readily evident lack of feel for the puck by these players.

Several years ago while coaching at BU we always tried to find out which hand was dominant in our recruits. Our fear was that a player moving up to the next level could become exposed for his weakness which was poor feel for the puck. If we determined from the outset that even though the player in question may have other strong attributes (character, school work, work ethic etc.) if he was lacking in his feel for the puck it could have crucial implications in a future game.

One such player that we had was Ed Ronan (currently with the Sabres). From day one we gave Ed exercises to do to improve his puckhandling. To his credit he did them. Ed now wears a Stanley Cup ring from the 1993 Montreal Canadiens.

There are exceptions to this theory as BU players John Cullen and David Sacco were right hand shooters and right hand dominant.

Coach Parker feels that, "one of the reasons kids quit (hockey) is because they are not as good as their buddies. How much fun would it be if when you play baseball the coach sent you to short stop and put a left hand glove on you, so you had to throw left handed? You would not be able to throw properly and your friends would laugh!"

The point of this is not to change if you have already begun to play hockey. It probably would not work. Therefore, you have to work your hands to catch up. This means stick handling off the ice, spending the necessary time to improve. If you have a son or daughter just starting, get them a straight stick. Let them do what is comfortable right or left.

This supposition is not scientifically based. However, to reiterate only 37% of the all time top 100 NHL scorers are right hand shooters/puckhandlers, so the next time that you are in a rink see if the composition of the player's reflects the NHL top 100 or the population as a whole, because when you go to a baseball game or a tennis match it does.