

Proper Stick Length

For future editions of Hockey Talk, I will write about the importance of skating, and discuss such topics as proper stick length, knee bend, balance and edge control, and forward striding etc. to enhance skating performance. This week's edition will focus on the proper stick length. As a general rule, the length of a hockey stick should be from the ice - to between the sternum and the chin of a player. At the start of each season, the coach should inspect and make sure if need be to ensure a player is using a proper stick length.

The choice generally depends upon the player's strength, height and skating style. Often parents spend so much money on a hockey stick, they are reluctant to cut it down, especially the new \$200 + graphite models. This is a bad practice and can endure a child's hockey development. Here's a little "food for thought". Having a stick which is too long can adversely affect a player's skating performance and puck control skills. When a player's stick is too long, he or she will bend from the waist not the knees, therefore reducing the effectiveness of the forward stride. An increase bending from the waist will definitely occur when a player is tired. A shorter stick forces a player to bend his/her knees... "All great skaters have tremendous knee bend" when they are skating. Proper knee bend results in knee over the ankle over the toe... forcing the butt to be lower to the ice.

A proper length stick allows a player to have better puck control skills as well. A player will dribble the puck from side to side with less difficulty. When trying to perform this movement, if the elbow of the top arm has difficulty crossing in front of the body or only the tip of the stick is on the ice, the stick is definitely too long! For younger players, junior size sticks with smaller shafts and blades for easier handling are available at all major hockey supply stores as well.

On occasion, parents or players will say " What about the poke check? If a player plays defense, a longer stick may be preferred. But think about the percentage of the time a player is going to poke check in a game vs. skating and handling the puck.

On occasion, the argument is: "A shorter stick will reduce the ability to shot the puck." I disagree... if a player bends his knees properly and gets lower to the ice he can use the same mechanics to have an equally powerful shot. For example, New Jersey Devil's defenseman Brian Rafalski is a world class player using a short stick. His offensive skills i.e. skating, handling the puck, shooting the puck and defensive play are exceptional. When players are jumping to a higher / faster level of play e.g. division or league, a player will find cutting off a half inch/ inch will improve his / her skating and adjustment to the increased pace. If a player is accustomed to a longer stick it's a fair adjustment to go with a shorter stick. I recommend gradually cutting off a half inch to an inch over practices / games. A player may find he /she will cut upwards of 3 inches off their stick. After experimenting a player will feel more comfortable and have better results with their skating and puck handling skills.

Skating is to hockey what running is to soccer. Skating is the foundation upon which all other skills are built. It is the most important skill of ice hockey. Therefore, ensuring a player has the "proper hockey stick length" will enhance skating skills and a player's overall game on the ice.

Yours in Hockey
Coach Rex