



Proper Stick Length

Having too long a stick can adversely affect a player's skating performance and puck control skills and ultimately slow a player's overall hockey development.

As a general rule, the length of a hockey stick should be from the ice - to between the sternum/above the armpits and below the chin of the player. However, after many years of teaching power skating to player's ages 5 to 60 plus, I have discovered that this rule is often ignored. Ignorance is bliss... not! Rather poor performance is the norm.

It truly amazes me how many sticks being used are too long! At the start of each minor hockey season, the coach should inspect and correct to ensure a player is using a proper stick length.

When a player's stick is too long, he or she will bend from the waist not the knees and it will reduce the effectiveness of the forward stride. A shorter stick forces a player to bend his or her knees... all the great skaters have tremendous knee bend when they are skating.

Proper knee bend occurs when the knee is over the ankle over the toe. This forces the butt to be lower to the ice. It causes a player to have a longer skating stride i.e. full extension.

A proper stick length 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. A good test is for a player to perform a tight turn on the forehand side with the puck. Is the elbow of the inside arm getting in the way? Is only part of the blade on the ice? Is the player losing control of the puck?

The choice of the right hockey stick depends upon the player's strength and height. For younger players, junior sticks

with smaller shafts and blades for easier handling are available at all major hockey supply stores. Often parents spend so much money on a hockey stick; they are reluctant to cut it down especially the \$200 plus graphite models. This is a poor decision and will slow the development of the player and reduce his or her on ice success.

On occasion, parents or players will say "What about the poke check?" If a player plays as a defenseman, a longer stick may be preferred but think about the percentage of time performing a poke check in a game vs. skating and handling the puck. For example, Detroit Red Wing's defenseman Brian Rafalski is a worldclass player using a short stick. Rafalski's skating, puck handling and shooting skills as well as defensive skills are exceptional.

On occasion, the argument surfaces "A shorter stick will reduce the ability to shoot the puck." I disagree. If a player bends his or her knees properly and gets lower/over the puck the player can use the same mechanics to have an equally powerful shot.

When players are jumping to a higher/faster level of play example division or league, a player will find if they cut off a half inch/inch off their stick, it will improve their skating and improve their adjustment to the faster pace of the game. If a player is accustomed to a longer stick, it's a fair adjustment to use a shorter stick. I recommend gradually cutting off a half inch to an inch over each practice or game. A player may find he or she will cut upwards of three inches off their stick!

After adjusting to a shorter stick, a player will have improved skating and puck handling skills. As well, their overall hockey development – as a result of using a proper stick length (i.e. below the chin) – will be enhanced!

