

Coach Peter Russo

Hockey, Development, Leadership, Ideas



Hockey Stick Length Explained – Why I carry a hacksaw to lessons

Those that know me know I am pretty adamant about players (especially young players) using the proper length stick. At the end of the season at Brooks School (where I coach) the boys bought me a hacksaw as a joke.

There was one practice in the beginning of the year where there were about 18 back up sticks on the bench. At first the guys were cursing my name because they now had to actually bend their knees when they skate, but as they got used to it many of them started to thank me. One of the biggest success stories was one of our Captains, PJ Kelleher, who scored 4 goals as a Junior and then scored 17 this season as a senior. In total we cut SIX inches off his stick this year by the time the championship game came around. In 3 playoff games (St. Sebs, Choate, Belmont Hill) we scored a total of 10 goals from 7 different players. Of those 7 players there was a total of 20 inches of cut stick from the start of the season. We ended up winning the New England Large School Championship partly because we executed when it counted.

Lets start with skating. To properly skate with the puck with your hands in front of your body proper stick length is vital. (As shown below by one of the greatest all time, Super Mario)



When talking stick length people always come at me with Lemieux used tall sticks. Which just isnt true, it just seemed that way because he had a long reach and wide “puck radius”. Puck Radius is the term I ingeniously use to describe the diameter around a players body in which they can make plays in. The wider the better. As shown above, shoulders in line, hands in front of body while skating.

Now lets talk shooting while skating. This is always the kicker. “But Coach how will I shoot with a shorter stick.” If you want to shoot standing straight up in your driveway, yes you will run into trouble. But if you want to keep your hips down and shoot in stride or execute a catch and shoot you’ll need a proper stick length.



Above is Ovi shooting in stride. Next to that is a picture of his stick length on skates. Near his collarbone. See how his top hand can come off his body and off his shoulder line? He can also maintain his knee bend which is crucial to this shot. With the tall stick his left shoulder is going to have to pull OUT/UP or his knees are going to pop UP. Here is left elbow is able to stay in front of his body line which is important. You want to direct your energy to the puck/net not to the ceiling/corner. He can rip this shot off in stride without giving away shot. He scores a lot of goals.



Above here is a frame by frame of a catch and shoot on the forehand side. I'm not Ovi but I can give one hell of a demo at 50% speed with no pressure on me. See how on the catch my hands are off my body and my top hand is in front of me? This allows me to transfer the puck to my right side, while keeping it inside my body. Now my shoulders can stay in line, I can maintain my stride and come through with power. No stick handle needed. If I can't fit my top hand in front, I can't execute this. Same with on a two touch shot on back hand side.

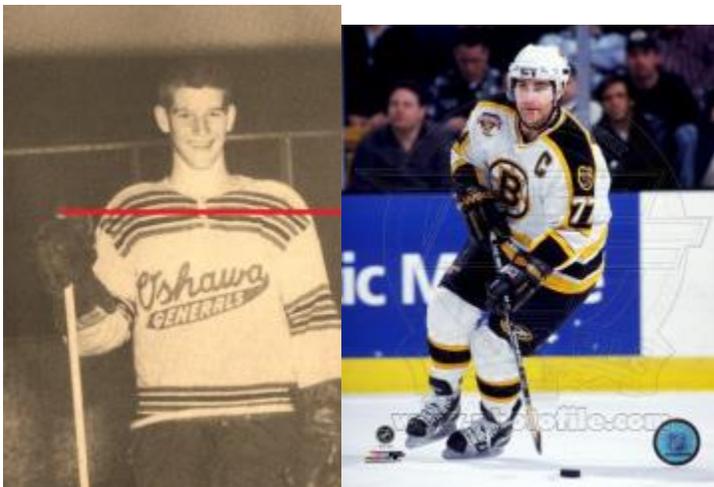


Below are a few more guys who have pretty good puck control..
And with good form around the ice (Hands in front, knees bent, shoulders in line)





Your top hand controls the stick and is crucial to everything you do including skating. There's a difference between a personal preference and a bad habit. If you want to talk about "reach" the lower you sit the longer your reach is so that point goes out the window as it evens out as your able to sit lower with proper stick length. Some of the best Defensemen of all time used short sticks below is Orr, Bourque and Keith. Hands in front, shoulders in line. Able to push and pull.





Also another great, Jean Beliveau



Here's the deal. I understand there are some players in the world who play at high levels that use a longer stick. There are anomalies to everything. Barry Bonds used to drop his hands when he swung a bat, the cardinal sin of swinging fundamentals. He was pretty good at making contact. For young kids who want to develop and grow with that deep knee bend and good form/good habits I think they should have a stick that allows them to do that. As they get older and are done growing and have things figured out fundamentally, fine try different lengths. But as the game gets faster and skills need to be executed with speed, being able to stay low and get your blade face into all different areas is crucial. Being able to take a pass in your feet and get your hands in and then right back out while skating is important. Moving laterally with shoulders in line is important. Every little detail matters and it all comes down to body control and your movement patterns.

Lower your flex and cut your stick. It takes time to adjust, its a 1 step back 2 steps forward deal. If you're constantly pulling up on the 2 or 3 shots you get per game you aren't going to score many goals. If you have to stand up straight around the net or in tight areas you aren't going to win many battles.

If you disagree with me Im beyond OK with that. This is my opinion I even named the blog after myself so you all know that.

Hope this helps and I hope some of you players give this a fair chance!

-Pete