

**GAELIC FOOTBALL & HURLING ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALASIA**



**Hurling & Camogie
Coaching Tips**

Tip 1 - Grip, size and weight of hurley

Length and weight of hurley have a tremendous effect on the user. The traditional method of gauging the length of the hurley by matching it to a player's hip has proved inaccurate and unsuitable. Two players of the same height can have a difference of 10 centimetres in hip height.

Children and beginners are inclined to go for a longer hurley, the perception being that "the longer the hurley the longer the puck." The truth is quite the opposite "long hurleys equals no puck"

Correct length and weight are more important than previously thought. Top players are now using hurleys 3 inches shorter than their counterparts of the 1960s and 1970s. Time and space are very much reduced, tackling skills are improved; opportunities are lost in a split second if the hurley is not completely maneuverable. The game is faster; there are less man to man contests of strength. The hurley that suited those clashes has no bearing on today's game.

Young children's wrists and arms are light and fragile. They can only use hurleys that are light and short.

To assess the correct length, a child should stand straight, hands by side, shoulders square, place the hurley (base on the ground) by child's side, grasp the hurley in the dominant hand, the distance from tip of base to child's hand position is the correct length for that child. If the child can use the hurley like a sword with one hand, it is about the right weight. It is agreed now that most of the trouble with the unorthodox grip comes from starting with hurleys that are too long and too heavy.

Approximately 87% of the population are dominant right with only one per thousand having equal dominance. A player's development will be severely impeded if he/she starts with non-dominant hand on top. Some respected coaches say there is up to 50% loss in potential. Starting players correctly then is of utmost importance to the player's development and enjoyment as well as a club's ability to raise playing standards.

Changing a player's grip is difficult for player and coach but where both parties are willing it is certainly possible and very rewarding. Babs Keating and John Fenton, both supreme stylists and legends of the game, changed from unorthodox to orthodox grip.

Left-handed players need good models and sensitive coaches because they are the minority. A coach should learn how to demonstrate left-handed for the two or three players in every panel. Nowadays every player will write with their dominant hand, this is nearly the only safe way of determining hand dominance. Very small hurleys used in a one-handed game with light air balls will help guarantee dominant hand on top.

Change:

- It takes 3 weeks to change an old habit
- It takes 3 more weeks to learn the new skill
- It takes 3 further weeks for the new skill to become a habit
- It would take 9 weeks for the player to experience the full advantage of changing.

9 weeks seems forever to a child but in overall career, it's a small price to pay for years of enjoyment

Tip 2 - Hurling/Camogie Coaching

The previous tip stressed the importance of young players using the dominant hand. A number of methods can be adapted to encourage children to change to the dominant hand

1. Use very small hurleys in one handed games with light balls to guarantee dominant hand on top.
2. The glove hurley – Superglue a right-handed football glove to the top of a light short hurley. The player puts the dominant hand into the glove. Now he/she can only take the ball in the left hand. When the ball is thrown up, the free hand must grip the hurley below thus becoming a habit and then permanent.
3. The sword grip – This attachment works very similarly to the glove. It is attached onto the hurley and can be taken off when needed. The Cumas hurling website (www.cumashurling.com) has a custom made corrector for this purpose. The under-eight coach's most important job is to ensure that every player is using dominant hand on top, thus allowing mastery of hurley stroke.

It is certain that once a player has orthodox grip and correct length hurley, he/she can advance technical skills very quickly and it can be done in their own time.

Players with unorthodox grip suffer a lot of frustration, expend more energy for less return, have a huge reduction in choice and find their development stalled at a vital stage. A few really determined players have learned to use their weak side but these are not to be taken as models. They would have had much more satisfaction if they had changed but such is the power of habit. It is better to start the right way.

Some right-handed players may initially favour striking on their left side. This is perfectly normal and acceptable. With good practice of shooting and pulling on both sides they will achieve equal dominance and as only children can put it "my weak side is my strong side now". Similarly, some left handed players may favour striking right-sided.

Ultimately we want all players to have full choice when faced with an opponent. One choice is no choice. If I can only strike on one side, I can easily be stopped. Being able to strike right and left keeps the defender guessing and gives more options.

Tip 3 - How to develop a swing

Safety is a huge factor in hurling for beginners. If children are exposed to danger too early, it will stunt their development. The use of hurling aids at this stage is vital. Tyres, footballs, hurling ropes, rubber base hurleys will all help bring young players through the various stages and develop good technique and confidence.

It is very important that the swing or pull is started from the ready position not the lock position. The coach's ability to observe each child and give accurate, relevant and positive feedback will be crucial.

Once the child has learned the mechanics of the swing, he/she must do it: walking, jogging, running and on both left and right sides.

Weak side swing is more difficult for beginners and needs a lot of attention (without reducing motivation). Players must be matched evenly in strength, size and speed to get the most out of the routine.

Go Games with a first touch ball will give every player ample opportunity to become proficient in the swing. Older players might use a bigger ball (e.g. small basketball or replica football). This will ensure better footwork, better body shape, more engagement and better connection. The player will be rewarded when the ball becomes airborne and thus increase motivation.

Tip 4 - Activities suitable for underage players

The following activities can be used depending on the level of development of the children in the group.

It is much more productive to have the children working with bean bags until they build up the physical literacy skills to cope with a ball. It is important that the children experience a sense of achievement and fun and that they are running, jumping, side-stepping etc at full pace with a bean bag with the sense that they are playing the “real” game rather than performing some chaotic activity where balls are all over the place and children lack the ability to control their own environment.

When balls are introduced, suitable balls (e.g. the soft size 3) which can be manipulated by small fingers should be introduced when the group is competent at catching and solo running with the bean bags.

Catching



This activity engages all the aspects of the FUNdamentals programme while at the same time it is a learning process for real hurling game skills. It should be performed in a 20 m square with about 30 children but can easily be adapted in a smaller space for indoor activity.

- Bean bag (ball) for every 2 children
- Hurley held short in strong hand
- Catching done with the non-dominant hand
- Children running around and throwing within the square.

Emphasis: Encourage youngsters to throw the bean bag underarm but to catch down – the eagle’s claw. This is a fundamentally important concept which encourages a proactive learning mode as

opposed to the 'victim' stance of catching underhand and using the body for comfort. Bean bag (ball) should be caught high with the fingers.

Learning objectives:

Mobility: ABCs – running backwards, forwards, sideways, jumping, throwing, evasion skills etc

Co-operation (the only way I can make my partner look good is to deliver the proper throw; to win a catching contest (pair with highest total) against the clock, both partners need to deliver good throws)

Peripheral vision (we can't teach peripheral vision – it must be learned in the context of suitable activities how many coaches do we hear roaring "find or get into the space!"),

Concentration (important for any team game so this activity should be done in 1 minute bursts – that's about the limited concentration span of young children)

Enjoyment – by far the most important by product – if they don't enjoy it, they won't come back so what's the point of it all.

In addition to the above, you are creating a psychological climate where children are living the real game and are lost in their minds.

The other plus in this activity is the risk versus caution factor as the youngsters move about the floor avoiding bumping etc.

The next tip will develop the activity above. It won't be rocket science for the coach but remember that any change in an activity or drill is perceived by the child as a completely new activity.