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KNOW YOUR HURL (AND HURLEY!)



CHOOSING A HURL

Choosing a hurl is a personal decision and there is no “right or wrong”. Some players like a heavy hurl, others like a light one. Some prefer a short hurl while others like a bit of length. In this article we will look at some of the choices and options and hopefully help players, especially those without a hurling background to choose the “best hurl for yourself or for your child”.

Many children use hurleys that are too long and too heavy. This can have long lasting consequences by giving the child a poor grip and swing which can be very difficult to correct in later years.

To begin with, hurling and camogie are striking games and needless to say if a player can develop a good strike, then he/she is going to be a much better player. Good striking comes from having a good

“swing” and a good swing comes from having a “good grip”. There is a saying that “the hurl becomes an extension of your arm” and that is very true, so ideally a player should be able to manipulate the hurl in the same way as they use their arm and wrist. If the hurl is too heavy or too long, then that will not be possible and poor habits will develop. Striking in hurling is a “wristy action” with the hands locked as can be seen in Fig.1. If the hurl is too heavy a player tends to separate the hands – not locked – and this results in a “shovelling or pushing” action when swinging instead of a nice wristy sweet swing. If the hurl is too heavy or the players wrists are too weak or both, then we have a problem which must be addressed as best possible. Ideally children will be able to play a little sword fighting (Zorro) game as again for about 30 seconds, holding the hurl at full length with one hand!

So, the first message or piece of advice is to have the hurl light enough for the player to handle it with one hand. ***If in doubt, go lighter.***

Strong Flexible Wrists

- Strong flexible wrists will improve your use of the hurl greatly.
- Sports such as Handball, Badminton, Tennis and Squash are all excellent to help improve your touch, use of your wrist and general footwork and movement.
- Press-ups and pull-ups will help to strengthen your arms and wrists.
- A mock “Sword fighting or Fencing” game is an excellent way to improve your wrist work and control of the

hurl.

- It is also excellent for footwork and movement.
- You can play the game with a “real” or “imaginary” opponent.
- This exercise will improve your ability to block, hook, kill and flick the ball.
- The “wristy” as it is known as up north is a small hurl about 16” long. It is used with one hand only and is a great way to encourage children to use their dominant hand when gripping the hurl. It is also excellent for strengthening and flexing the wrist. See here for a short video.

<https://learning.gaa.ie/sites/default/files/Wristies.mp4>



What affects the weight of a hurl – The length, the thickness, the size of the “bas” and the material all affect the weight of a hurl.

NEXT, WE LOOK AT THE LENGTH OF THE HURL.

Remember, length of hurl is absolutely a personal choice but there are some points worth considering. Fig below shows some of the considerations. For the beginner, bear in mind that "weight" is most important and the longer the hurl the heavier it will be. So, if in doubt go shorter, at least initially until a good swing and handling of the hurl has been achieved. Weight aside, let us now look at length in its own right. The image on the left shows a long hurl that, when the player is standing up straight and gripping the hurl firmly, appears to have an excess of around 6". That 6" will get in the player's way and make swinging awkward, with the excess length constantly digging into the player's stomach. For an adult to get a proper perception on how this feels to a child, try kneeling down with your own hurl and notice how difficult it is to swing or to rise a ball. The image in the centre shows a 6" gap between the heel of the hurl and the ground. Swinging and handling this hurl will be much easier. However, reach will be compromised.

The image on the right looks comfortable and is the best fit!

However once again **If in doubt, go shorter** especially for the beginner.

SIZING YOUR HURL

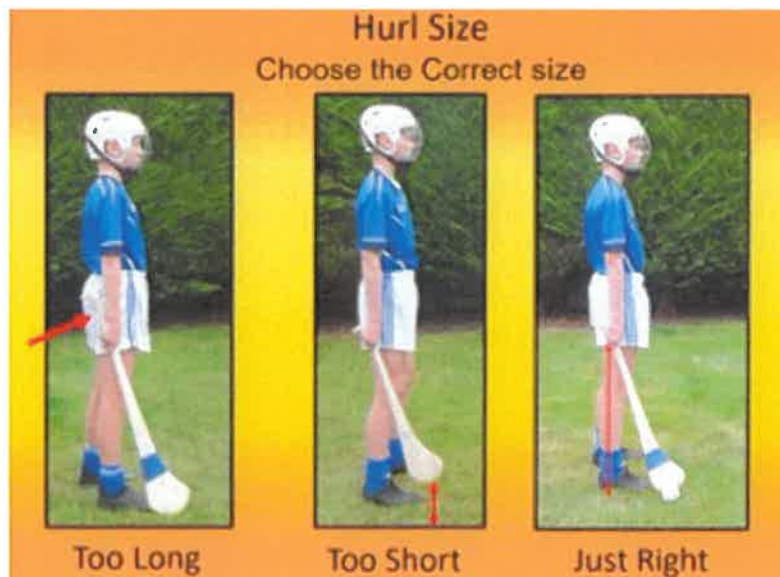
- Standing straight, looking forward with your hurl held firmly (shaking hands with the hurl) at the "butt" (top of handle) swing your hurl like a pendulum.
- The hurl should brush the ground just opposite your toe.
- Your hurl will be held at a slight angle and the heel will almost be on the ground.

RECOMMENDATION:

- For tall youths and adults, using a short hurl 32" or 34" puts the player at a serious disadvantage when it comes to reach. It is very easy to shorten a 36" hurl down to a 30" for a tidy strike or to avoid a hook but it is impossible to lengthen a 34" to a 36" or 37" when you need that extra reach to hook, block, flick or even rise a ball.

SIZE OF "BAS"

The size of the "bas" has increased enormously in the last 30 years, ridiculously so in some cases. You can see from Fig below a difference of 3cm. between a modern hurl and one from earlier years. Some people are of the opinion that the bigger the "bas" the easier it is to strike and block the ball. This is not true as if you notice the markings on a used hurl, you will see that the ball contacts the hurl usually in the "sweet spot" Fig below which leaves much of the "bas" unnecessary and just adding weight to the hurl. Again, this is a personal choice but for children in particular a smaller "bas" is more suitable.



- A large “bas” will not improve your striking or stopping ability. However, it will add unnecessary weight to your hurl and as such limit your touch, swing, and reaction.
- Chose a “bas” that is not too wide.
- If you look at the markings left by a sliotar on a hurl you will notice that much of the bas never comes in contact with the sliotar, so is unnecessary. The centre of the bas or “sweet spot” is where the striking and blocking is done.
- Spring- What about the Spring! – The spring in a hurl is a term for “flexibility”. This is tested by holding the hurl by the handle with one hand, with the “bas” on the ground, while exerting downward pressure with the other hand around the centre of the hurl. This should be done with care and not frequently as it can break or weaken the hurl. Usually, some degree of a bend is desirable as it absorbs some of the shock when a ball is hit resulting in no “sting” coming through to the hands. (This issue has been alleviated in recent times with good quality grips). If the quality of ash is poor and there is no “give” at all in it, players often refer to such hurls as “planks” or “boards” and cast them aside. It must be said that some players do not favour any spring in a hurl at all, again personal choice. Ash quality varies greatly, much depending on where it is grown, heavy ground, wet ground, by a river or on a ditch etc.
- Grain- What about the grain? The grain tells you about the age of the ash. If the grains are spread out Fig.5 then the ash is young. If they are close together the ash is old. The grains are the “rings” of a tree with each one denoting a year’s growth. If a tree is cut in cross-section the age of the tree can be calculated by counting the rings. Young ash is more flexible and pliable and is the preferred choice for hurls. Another important point to note is that usually when a hurl cracks or splits, it will do so along the grain. If the grain curves, as in Fig opposite. with the shape of the hurl then that hurl can be repaired by banding (or hooping) and gluing or “splicing”. If the hurl has a straight grain, then usually a section of the “bas” breaks off and the hurl cannot be repaired. Hurls with well-spaced out curved grains are keenly sought after and much coveted by those who do not own one.

