



**THE
CAMOGIE
ASSOCIATION**
An Cumann Camógaíochta

Camogie Coaching Corner

By Peter Casey

www.camogie.ie



The Grip and Swing

As the fastest field sport played by females in the world, Camogie can be an extremely challenging game to master. According to the learning.gaa.ie it is estimated that there are over 170 skills in hurling and camogie. As a coach it can be very daunting to get around to teaching multiple skills. In every squad (even inter county senior) one of the biggest challenges is to deal with players with varying levels of skill proficiency and athletic prowess. Often in coaching courses we get asked what is the best way of dealing with such a group.

Very often coaches believe that theirs is the only team that has a gulf between its strongest and weakest players. Thankfully the wider GAA family is making huge efforts to be far more inclusive than in the past – even though we still have a long way to go – and coaches want to be able to improve their weakest players while still challenging the strongest players. We would all love to develop our players to their potential in the hope that one day some of them could play like Carrie Dolan, Aoife Donohue, Ann Dalton, Sarah Dervan and the other Galway and Kilkenny players who performed in Croke Park in the recent league final.

When trying to help coaches deal with their dilemma often as tutors we have to share our own experiences. One of the best things I ever learned is that development is non-linear. We like to think of things in terms of linear improvement but development is more a mishmash. Players develop at different rates and most likely your best players now will not be the best in the future and your weakest now could one day be your strongest. However to be one of the strongest in the future there are a few essential skills that players need, or else it will be very difficult for them to master the other skills.

The essential skills are often referred to as the basics or the basic skills and it really is an unfortunate term. Referring to them as basic demeans them in a sense with the result that coaches often fail to give them the care they require. The essential skills in hurling are the grip and the swing and if we get them right we will have loads of boys and girls able to play hurling and camogie but if we neglect these skills then it will be a struggle. The first few months of a child's hurling or camogie career is a really important time.



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If all under 6 coaches said that by the end of the year, all players will grip and swing the hurley correctly, they will have done most of their job. I'm in the fortunate position of coaching my club under 6's every Sunday morning. One of the first things we do 3 or 4 times in every session is to sing the new song we are learning, sung to the air of Baby Shark.



Hurley hand doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
Hurley hand doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
Hurley hand doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
Hurley hand!

Catching hand doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
Catching hand doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
Catching hand doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
Catching hand!

C shaped swing doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
C shaped swing doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
C shaped swing doo doo doo doo doo doo doo
C shaped swing!

All children raise their dominant hand while singing the first verse, their non-dominant hand for the second verse (which was learned in week 3) and swing a very short hurley with one hand for verse 3 (learned in week 6).

The grip and swing are the skills that enable all other skills to happen. Striking from the hand, rising, hooking, blocking, first touch are all much easier to teach and learn when players have learned a good grip and swing. By taking our time with the grip and swing and learning the 6 main points about the skill we can keep our group together far more easily and children are active agents in their own learning. Rome wasn't built a day but with careful repetition over the first while, young children should develop good habits that will stand to them over a long period of time.

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The other major factor that effects a child learning the grip and swing is the size and weight of the hurley used. It is quite difficult to buy a hurley suitable for under 6's and unfortunately the ones sold in most supermarkets are much too long, thick and heavy. Most of the well known hurley makers however sell suitable child hurleys. The Camogie Association recently published a really useful guide for sizing a hurley correctly. In my experience this is the maximum size that children should use.

CHOOSING THE CORRECT HURLEY SIZE

Choosing the correct size hurley will increase a player's success at mastering the skills of the game. A shorter, lighter hurley is especially recommended for children and those new to the game.

HOW TO MEASURE THE CORRECT SIZE:

- Player stands nice and relaxed with their hands down by their sides.
- The distance from the ground to their wrist is the correct length.
- Player should be able to hold the hurley at the top and the hurley should be just touching the ground.
- If a player is between sizes it is still better to have the hurley too small rather than too big.

TOP TIP!

Place your finger horizontally just underneath the grip as shown.

With the correct size, your finger should align with/touch the player's wrist bone.

WHAT ABOUT THE WEIGHT?

Players should hold hurl in their dominant hand and be able to make ever increasing larger circles for 30 seconds comfortably. Then this is correct weight.

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Children who are very tall for their age could go up a size and children who are shorter should go down a size but the main advise is that it is better to go for a shorter hurley when learning the grip and swing.

There are great strikers in our games now like Patrick Horgan, Aaron Gillane, Joe Canning, Chloe Morey, Denise Gaule and Gemma O'Connor. While they all have their individual differences they also have a lot of similarities. In order to be a good striker you need to have a good swing. Learning the hurley hand and its positions, the catching hand and its positions and a c-shaped swing and what that looks like over the first year of a child's camogie career can give them a better chance of also becoming a good striker and hurler.



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