There are only a few NHL goalies that wear the catching glove on the right hand. Mathieu Garon, Jose Theodore and Josh Harding always look a little weird in net, but do they have any real advantage, or is it just a coincidence that Garon and Theodore are playing so well in November?

While this is easy to argue on both sides, there's reasoning why "righty" goalies have a true advantage. In fact, most would agree that righty goalies have an advantage because they're so rare and shooters are simply not used to playing against them. Shooting is a muscle-memory action - you do it without thinking of what hand a goalie's glove is on – so I agree with that mindset, but bear with me as I dissect this argument from a goaltending point of view.

First of all, players shoot glove-side high more than ever these days due to the fact that butterfly goaltending has dominated the game since the mid 90's. Goalies not only drop on almost every shot, but now they've refined the butterfly even more by keeping their elbows in tight to their body and dropping their gloves down to their sides in order to cover that "six-hole" (underneath the arms). So the gloves actually connect to the pads, instead of the elbows sticking out like chicken wings, which allow the gloves to "float" out in the open where players can score underneath the arms and "through" the goalie. Then you have the size restrictions placed on gloves, which have made them smaller than ever before.

That being said, shooters always have a better chance to score in the top and lower corners instead of the five-hole (duh). Let me also overstate the obvious by repeating the age-old adage, "If the goalie sees it, he's going to stop it." So for the sake of this argument, we'll focus on the two main factors in goals being scored; time and space. The more you have of both, the higher scoring percentage you'll have.

In today's NHL, more pure goals (non-deflections) are actually scored to the stick side because goalies are quicker to react with this lighter, smaller glove than deflecting a puck with a stick in their hand. It's also a well-known fact that "stick-side and just over the pad" is the toughest save for a goalie to make, because it takes more energy and time for them to move a heavy stick instead of a light glove. Realize, however, that there are many factors coming into play here, including the shooter's skill, the velocity of the shot and the goalie's quickness and agility.

Now I found some great numbers published by statistician Dirk Hoag regarding shootouts since the start of the 2005-06 season. They somewhat prove the argument that "righty" goalies have an advantage. Although this is just for OT shootouts, left-handed shooters have a 9.1% better shooting percentage (37.3 - 28.2) against left-handed catchers and right-handed shooters boast a 7.8% edge against right-handed catchers (32.8 - 25.0). Let it also be known that roughly 66% of NHL shooters are lefties and only 10% of goalies are "righty".

Lefty vs. Righty Goalie Shootout Matchup

Matchup	Attempts	Goals	Save %
L Shoot/L Goalie	971	362	62.7%
L Shoot/R Goalie	108		

27

75.0%

R Shoot/L Goalie

577

163

71.8%

R Shoot/R Goalie

58

19

67.2%

So a right-handed shooter on a righty goalie (67.2 save %) is going to have a higher scoring percentage (32.8%) because of this penultimate reason (drum roll, please): the distance between the puck and the goal-line is shorter when shooting to the stick-side, which is the high-percentage target area. A shot to the glove-side will have to travel across the body and against the grain, which is a greater distance, giving the goaltender more time and space to react and make a save.

That means a left-handed shooter on a righty goalie (75 save %) will have a lower shooting percentage (25%), because the distance between the puck and the goal-line is longer when going stick-side. A shot to the glove would be a straight line, which is a shorter distance. Since goalies are quicker on their glove side, those righty goalies will make more reaction saves against left-handed shooters.
Therefore a left-handed shooter on a lefty goalie (62.7 save %) is going to have a higher scoring rate (37.3%) because the distance between the puck and the goal-line is shorter (a straight line) when shooting to the stick side.

That's congruent with a right-handed shooter on a lefty goalie (71.8%) having a lower scoring percentage (28.2%) because the distance between the puck and the goal-line is longer (across the body) when shooting to the stick side.

Are you still with me!? Basically, when the situation includes "opposites" (a leftie shooter on a "rightie" goalie), there's a lower shooting percentage because the glove is actually lined up with the shooter's stick, which is a shorter distance to the glove. Goalies are quicker glove-side than stick-side, so those righty goalies are going to have a better save percentage against left-handed shooters, which is the case for roughly 66% of the NHL players.

But I'll be brutally honest and play the "Occam's Razor" card, as I believe the simplest explanation is the correct one. Right-handed goalies are so rare that they really just confuse shooters and make more saves. I'm no math magician (err…mathematician) and I'm not a big fan of statistics, but after watching Mathieu Garon and Josh Harding play on consecutive nights this past weekend, it's fairly obvious they fool a lot of shooters and the rest of the time the shooters don't have the time and space to make an adjustment to their shot.

Comment on 'Right-hand Men' in Justin's blog The School of Block