

Choosing a Hurl

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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. Here 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 hurls 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.

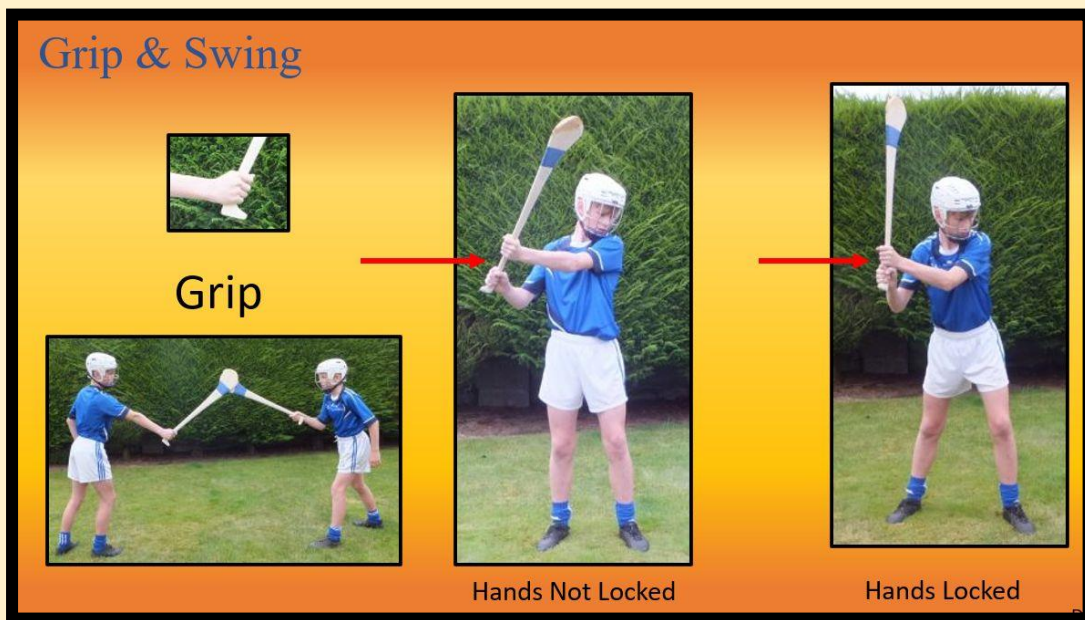


Fig.1

To begin with hurling is a striking game 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 seen in Fig.1 for about 30 seconds, holding the hurl at full length with one hand!

So, the first message or piece of advice is:

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 an “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.

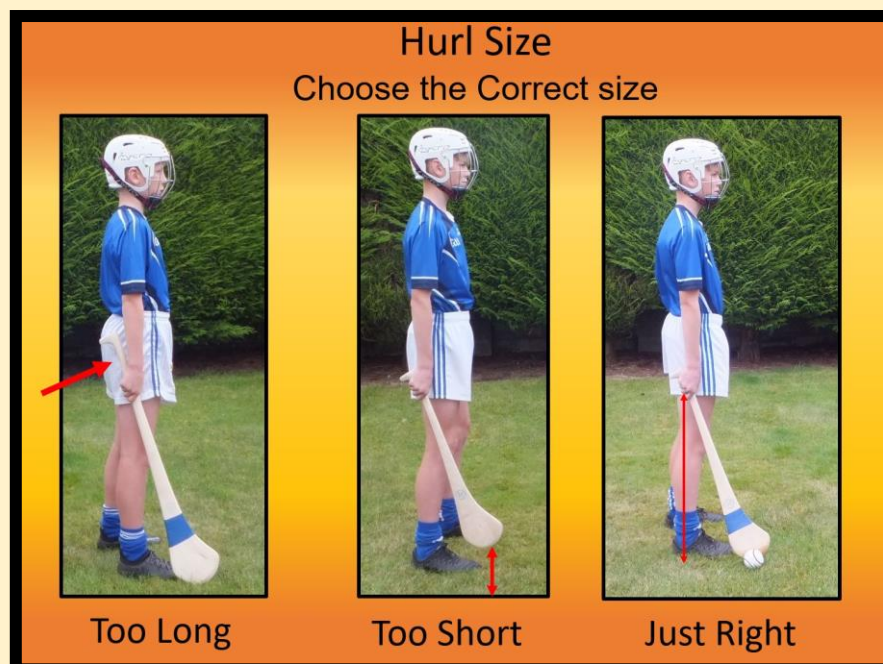


Fig.2

Remember, length of hurl is absolutely a personal choice but there are some points worth considering.

Fig.2 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 players 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!

Once again ***If in doubt, go shorter*** - especially for the beginner.

Sizing your Hurl

- Standing up 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 (by holding it shorter) 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.3 a difference of 3cm. between a modern hurl and one from earlier years.



Fig.3

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.4 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.



Fig.4

- **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 it 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, a 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 Fig5. 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.



Fig.5

- **Rooting-** What is “rooting”?
Rooting refers to digging out and cutting down your own ash tree. The hurls are made from the root of the tree. The tree is then brought to a sawmill and cut into planks or boards. They are then brought to a hurl maker who marks out a hurl (or two if he is lucky) on the plank and proceeds to make the hurl. This was common practice years ago if you were fortunate enough to be a farmer or knew a farmer who would give you the tree. There is quite a lot of work involved however, but you could get a nice few hurls out of a good root.
- **The Band-** should hurls be banded?
A well banded hurl (nails not driven into the grain) while adding a slight weight to it will certainly protect it and help it to survive the rigours of games much better.
- **Spliced or Pieced.** What is a “spliced or pieced” hurl?
When a hurl just splits or cracks at the “bas” with the wood intact it can usually be glued and banded and will then be as good as new. However, if the piece is broken away entirely, usually gluing and banding will not be a success. However, splicing which involves inserting a totally new piece of wood to the hurl is a hugely effective method of repair and is actually much desired by players.
Splicing is a great skill and often players say that a hurl actually feels better after splicing than it did when new!
See Fig.3 where the insulating tape is split there was a splice, which is hardly noticeable.

- **Where to purchase-** where should I purchase a hurl?

Ideally purchase your hurl from a local manufacturer if there is one in your area where you will be able to try out a few sticks and chose your favourite. Good clubs will have a stock of hurls where their members can go through them and pick out their “own style”.

Unfortunately, these privileges are not open to everyone and many players end up having no choice whatsoever when picking a hurl.

Manufacturers vary greatly with the style of their hurls with huge variations from county to county. Players get very attached to certain styles of hurls and many will travel the country to get hurls from their favourite supplier. The good hurl makers also know the “type or style” of hurl that their customers prefer. Having some of the top county stars among their customers is a source of pride and they will go out of their way to make sure that their customer is happy.

Purchasing a hurl directly from a shop can be tricky. If the shop sells hurls manufactured locally or sourced from a good supplier then usually the quality is fine, but many stores sell hurls that are really just ornaments for tourists. They can be quite poor and not suitable for playing with. The further one goes from the stronger hurling counties the more difficult it can be to source good hurls.

Ideally every club should source a good supplier and keep a stock for its members.

- **Composite Hurls-** What about composite or “Non-Ash” hurls?

As a traditionalist, fussy, particular, hard to change “Ash person” I have to say that in all honesty some of the recent composite hurls are quite decent and have their place. Some of the ones I have tried are certainly better than some of the poor-quality ash “hurls” that are being pawned off on unsuspecting players.

The composite hurl has a couple of distinct advantages – they are consistent in shape, size, and weight and all three of those are important considerations.

Hurls are like pillows- it is hard to sleep on one that you are not used to so with the composite hurls every one is the same and that problem is removed.

The sting in the hands that comes from a poor hurl would have initially been a problem for composite hurls but that is no longer the case with the development of high-quality grips.

So, all in all if you cannot source quality ash hurls, I would say try out a few of the composites. Certainly, for a stock in schools or clubs abroad in particular they are filling a gap.

They are also a bit more durable, and this is a big consideration for clubs, schools and players that are strapped for cash or for players that are not fanatics and who are just trying out the game. “There is nothing as bad as a bad ash hurl. It would put you off the game”.

Considerations when choosing your hurl - summary

Too Long	Too Short	Too Heavy
Hard to swing	Limits length of strike. Golfers do not use putters on the T-Box!	Will develop poor grip & swing. Swing will be slower
Can develop a poor swing	Will miss several hooks, blocks and flicks	Touch will be limited. Blocks, Hooks, Flicks, Reach
Probably also too heavy	Will limit your reach for a ball. Limits ground striking	A heavy hurl for a goalie will greatly limit your reaction and your ability to reach and stop shots.
Handle gets in the way		
A heavy hurl will adversely affect your swing, strike and touch	A heavy hurl will limit your reaction, your ability to reach, stop shots, hook, block and flick.	Goalies – chose a hurl that is not too big or too heavy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortening your grip on the hurl in tight situations is an acquired skill. • It is quite easy to shorten say a 36" to a 32" (to avoid a hook) but it is impossible to lengthen a 32" to a 36" (if you need to reach further). • A properly sized hurl gives you the option to use its full length when required and to shorten your grip when necessary. 		

General

- If in doubt chose a shorter, lighter hurl.
- There is a growing trend where tall youths and adults are using hurls that are very "short". This can also greatly affect how you play.
- A hurl is a "tool" so we should choose the best tool for the job. Your hurl is called upon to perform many tasks in a game.
- Unlike a golfer who can chose from a bag of clubs for every shot, the hurler or camogie player carries just one, so a good choice is essential.

Download a poster and leaflet on choosing your hurl **HERE**

<https://learning.gaa.ie/fogartyshurlingresources>