



# HOCKEY 'PRENEURS'

By **MIKE BEGGS**

Every hockey dad, or mom has witnessed this. The tykes file in the dressing room and stand their sticks by the door, before – inevitably – one of them comes in and knocks the whole pile down.

Well, Gary and Jennifer Dolson have a solution. They're creators of the Stik-Rak, a lightweight storage device that allows coaches and trainers to carry up to 20 sticks to and from the bench – in one hand.

It promises safety, portability, order (sticks can be organized and easily identified on the bench), security (with today's expensive sticks less likely to be stolen, or lost), and branding opportunities for teams, companies, or charities (coming in black, navy blue, and red).

It has netted pockets for storing tape, laces, the game sheet, room key, cell phones, etc. There's also a nylon carrying case available, perfect for transporting sticks out to the team bus, or onto an airplane. (Dolson notes that NHL teams can still be seen hauling sticks between the bench and dressing room in a shopping cart, or garbage can!).

In its second full year on the market, he says the internationally patented Stik-Rak (manufactured and distributed by McCarthy Promotional Products) is "starting to grow legs." It's being used by 100s of minor hockey teams, a few NHL teams for travel purposes, and several Ontario Hockey League clubs (like the Brampton Battalion who had two Stik-Raks last year, one for the forwards and one for the defence). They're selling it through the Hockey Hall Of Fame, have set up a U.S. distributorship in Buffalo, and have received orders from as far off as Finland through the web site ([www.stik-rak.net](http://www.stik-rak.net)).

"Once the players, coaches, trainers and equipment managers try this product, they just basically don't want to live without it," he says.

"They describe it as a work horse."

"It's very friendly to the coaches and the players, so sticks aren't all over the dressing room and around the bench. Coaches' jobs have enough (detail)," adds local carrier Steve Small, owner of The Trophy Shop in Mississauga. "It makes it easy to wrap it up and take (the sticks over to the bench)."

"It's also sponsorship. They can put a sponsor's

name on it. All the parents look at the back of the bench, they will see it."

Away from the rink, the Stik-Rak is also being used for lacrosse, skiing, fishing, carrying gardening tools, etc.

"Even at home with garages (they're being used as organizers)," Dolson adds. "We've actually seen people run over sticks when they're backing out – \$300 sticks."

Port Credit's Bob Chandler, one of two GTA franchisees for the Calgary-based Stick-Fix, repairs high-end composite hockey sticks at a fraction of the replacement price.

"We can fix anything on the hockey stick," he says. "It's kind of like a dentist. We take exactly (what's) there and we rebuild it. I can get it back the same day. Realistically, we will tell people it's a couple of days."

Repairs start at \$65 plus taxes per shaft. From there it depends on the condition of the blade. At his premises at 755 Lakeshore Rd. E., Chandler has an inventory of some 100 rebuilt sticks. At Bert's Sports Chalet, a drop-off point for Stick-Fix, owner Anand Mahabir says people will, "bring it in two pieces. (Sometimes the stick) will just snap in two. A lot of times it will snap a foot from the blade."

"A lot of people will use the repaired stick as their practice stick, and buy a new stick for games."

The owner of Fuel Fitness in Mississauga, personal trainer Marc Lebert has developed a workout apparatus (The Equalizer), which offers portability, versatility, and affordability. Shaped like hurdles, but made with sturdy 8-pound steel bars, this total body strengthener can be easily configured to do chin-ups, pushups, dips, squats, crunches and stretches – 75 exercises, in all.

"What it does, it gives (people) a portable way to do their weight training. You don't have to drag weights around," he says.

At least one Mississauga North Stars rep hockey team incorporated The Equalizer as part of its dry land training process this past summer. The idea is to coordinate basic strength training moves with their body weight.

"It's very important in training to have a very strong core. It's getting the full body working together," he



**Above:** Chris Lawrence of the Tampa Bay Lightning puts the Lebert Equalizer to the test.

**Below:** The Stik-Rak is the best way to corral sticks before and after the game.

explains. "You go in the corner fighting for a puck, it's pretty nice to have a strong upper body, but it's better to have your legs and abs working together with your upper body."

The players have also been using it as an agility ladder, by simply laying it on its side.

Almost two years on the market, The Equalizer (patent pending) has already made minor inroads at the NHL ranks – between Stanley Cup champion Scott Niedermayer pictured jumping over one in a Nike Bauer ad, and Alexander Ovechkin's trainer having purchased three of them.

Sales are reportedly up 200 per cent from last year. Available online ([www.lebertequalizer.com](http://www.lebertequalizer.com)), or at 360 Athletics in Mississauga, the Equalizer retails for just \$99. (Lebert also does a TV infomercial).

"You can buy a lot of expensive equipment for your (conditioning), but you don't need it. (You don't have to) break the bank," he comments.

"(But we also) see a market for big-name players using it at home. Most of them are doing some strength training in the offseason." **GOODLIFE**

## JOINING THE HOCKEY NATION

"We are a Proud Hockey Nation." So claims Steve Jamison, Mississauga resident and former coach, convenor, and Dad to a hockey player in the Erindale Spitfires organization. If you are a "first timer" hockey parent, you need someone like Steve Jamison to show you the ropes and get your child on the ice. For folks new to the fabled and scary world of kids' hockey, it can be intimidating to know how or where to get started. From the summer timing of registration, through to the different levels ("how can they be novice when they've been playing for 4 years?"), and all the equipment they need, and how it goes on, it's enough to frighten away almost anyone.

According to Jamison, most parents who have been hanging around the rinks for a while are more than happy to show the new guys how it all goes together, both physically, as well as from a logistical standpoint. Darin Buckland, father to two girls in the hockey system, advises all hockey parents to start at a used hockey equipment store, such as "Play It Again Sports", as young children often outgrow the equipment, rather than wear it out. And there are many, many, pieces of equipment to consider. Hockey players require:

- Skates (they have to fit right – some stores will "cook" them in the oven to have them moulded to young feet)
- helmet (CSA approved and well-fit – ask at a sports store for an adjustment if you need one)
- neck guard, chest protector, hockey shorts, elbow pads, shin guards, jock (or jill for the girls)

- tape for the above parts which don't seem to stick securely to bony little limbs
- jersey and hockey socks (most teams will supply but you want an extra for tryouts/evaluations)
- hockey stick (if you don't know how to tape the blade and the handle, grab a local 14 year old and they'll do it for you). A good hockey store will fit the stick to the child, length wise (the top of the stick should land about the middle of their forehead, with skates on but some prefer it shorter for utmost manoeuvrability.)
- while a mouthguard isn't required equipment, many parents like the extra protection this gives their children
- Kids can wear comfortable clothing underneath – from "official" hockey undergarments, to long underwear, and my kids' personal favourite, pyjamas. These protect them from the harsh Velcro closing of many of the under padding equipment requirements. And it saves you from having to rush down to ice level five minutes into a practice (the bathroom breaks are another story).

The kids are set – now for Mom and Dad. Prepare yourself for the politics of kids' hockey (if you have been involved with your public school politics you are already well prepared), and the levels of house league, which run in order from green (newbies), through blue, white, red, and then into the rep "A" levels. Get

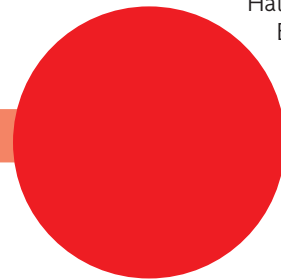
By **KATHY BUCKWORTH**  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
**STEVE UHRANEY**

through these and you'll likely find yourself on a friendly association team where hopefully you'll find some parents like you (from the yelling end to the head buried in a book end). Grab a Tim Horton's coffee and you'll fit right in.

Jamie Harada, who plays herself, as do her two kids, offers this extra advice for parents. "Start preparing your stomach in the summer months for those arena hot dogs. Bring a blanket – arenas are cold – get a hockey bag deodorizer (amazing how five year olds can sweat) and during tryouts, try to find a friend on the same team, to have a back up driver."

All associations in the Mississauga/Oakville area are run entirely by volunteers. Remember that and be nice- but also remember to call on them if you have any questions. Or, know that all hockey parents have "been there, done that", and are more than happy to share their experience (and misery). You'll bond together over that morning coffee and that cold arena. Jamison offers a few more pieces of key advice. "Fleece lined jeans. And remember...before you count your money... only 1 in 50,000 kids born in the same year make the NHL." Lastly? "Invest in Tim Hortons."

The 7:00 a.m. practices? We'll see you there. Kathy Buckworth's latest book, "Journey to the Darkside: Supermom Goes Home" is available at bookstores everywhere. Look for Kathy herself at any Mississauga arena as she tracks 3 of her 4 children through the Erindale, Clarkson, and Applewood hockey associations. With a blanket. And a coffee. And a book. **GOODLIFE**



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