

Bat left, throw right: baseball stardom?

October 26 2017, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Every little kid who loves baseball dreams of making it to "the show"—the major leagues.

Now, a new analysis offers a few signposts that might make it easier for that dream to come true: Players who throw right-handed but bat left-handed appear to have a better chance of succeeding in the big leagues.

The analysis found that players with this specific combination of skills are seven to nine times more likely to play on a Major League team, compared with high school and elementary school teams, said lead researcher David Mann.

These players also are 18 times more likely to have a career batting average of .299 or higher, Mann and his colleagues found. In addition, Hall-of-Famers with at least 1,000 at-bats are nearly 10 times more likely to throw righty and bat lefty.

Hall-of-Fame players with this skill set include Ty Cobb, Ted Williams, Yogi Berra and Wade Boggs, Mann said.

Mann, an assistant professor of sports medicine with Vrije University Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and his colleagues published their findings in the Oct. 26 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Batting left-handed appears to help in offensive success, while throwing right-handed gives a player a better chance to find a defensive position on the field, the researchers said.

Players who bat left-handed have a number of advantages in baseball, Mann said:

- Since most batters are right-handed, pitchers are less practiced at throwing to lefties.
- The direction of lefties' bat swing throws their momentum toward first base, helping them to run there quicker.
- There often are larger gaps on the right side of the field, where

left-handed batters are more likely to hit the ball.

At the same time, players who throw right-handed are able to play more positions on the field, making it easier for coaches to work them into the lineup, said Jacob Pomrenke, director of editorial content for the Society for American Baseball Research.

"Left-handed players even in Little League are kind of shuffled off to first base and the corner outfield positions, and pitcher of course," Pomrenke said. "Right-handed throwing players can play all over the diamond. Throwing right-handed is always going to be a little bit of an advantage."

For example, the positions of catcher, middle infielders and third baseman are almost always filled by right-handed throwers, Pomrenke said. Right-handers also are as good as lefties at playing first base and in the corner outfield.

Three of the 10 current Major League players with the highest batting average throw righty and bat lefty, Mann said—the Washington Nationals' Daniel Murphy, the Cincinnati Reds' Joey Votto and the Houston Astros' Josh Reddick.

Other notable modern-day players with this combo include the LA Dodgers' Chase Utley and Curtis Granderson; the Houston Astros' Derek Fisher, Brian McCann and Juan Centeno; the New York Yankees' Didi Gregorius and Greg Bird; and the Chicago Cubs' Tommy La Stella, Kyle Schwarber, Leonys Martin and Alex Avila, Mann said.

Mann doesn't think that certain kids are born better able to throw right-handed but bat left-handed, however.

"We certainly don't believe that this is innate," Mann said. "We believe

that this can be taught, though it should be done early in development."

Mann said it's not clear to him why a developing player who is right-handed would usually adopt a right-handed stance when batting.

"It may be because it is better for the purposes of control, when first starting, to have the [dominant hand](#) closer to the hitting end of the bat," Mann said. "This helps to increase control, but may sacrifice speed and power."

As an analogy, Mann provided the example of a child learning to use a hammer.

"They will hold the hammer close to the hitting end of the hammer to increase control, and only later will start to hold the hammer further from the hitting end as their control gets better, helping them to increase their power," Mann said. "For batting, it may be that in the long run it is better to have the dominant hand further from, rather than closer to, the hitting end of the bat."

Mann said he and his colleagues want to call into question "the standard convention that people who are right-hand dominant should bat in a right-hand stance, and that those who are left-hand dominant should necessarily bat left-handed."

Instead, Mann said, "We suggest that children should learn to bat both ways, and that they will in most cases settle on one preferred stance. The data suggests that people who are right-hand dominant will be much better off in the long run if they end up adopting a left-handed stance."

More information: David Mann, Ph.D., assistant professor of sports medicine, Vrije University Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Jacob Pomrenke, director of editorial content, the Society for American

Baseball Research, Phoenix, Ariz.; Oct. 26, 2017, *New England Journal of Medicine*, www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc1711659

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