

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 fro 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).

"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), 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**

