

Abstract

Left-sided athletes are often perceived as better performing as they can leverage their minority status within the sports world. While various specific left-sided athletes, such as Lionel Messi and Rafael Nadal, perform at the very top of their disciplines, these might be simply non-representative outliers. The current thesis puts the hypothesis of left-sided over-performance to test via a battery of tests and regressions. My thesis thoroughly analyses the prevalence and the performance of left-handed/left-footed athletes across 5 different sports. As majority of the current studies are focusing only on a few performance metrics in the given sport, my work broadens the knowledge on the topic since it compares the performance of left-sided and right-sided athletes in many categories in order to cover a great portion of the in-game action. Furthermore, this thesis also expands the current understanding of the (potential) left-sided advantage in direct encounters between both teams and individuals, achieving so by implementing predictive Bradley-Terry models that are based on past matches. The overall results are rather surprising: in the majority of the performance comparisons between left-handers/left-footers and right-handers/right-footers, no significant difference between the two groups was detected. Moreover, no important impact of left-handedness/left-footedness on direct contests was found. However, in 4 out of the 5 examined sports there was a significant overrepresentation of left-sided athletes. The results could serve well to coaches or scouts who are looking to seize a prospective advantage of the knowledge of the left-sided performance characteristics.

JEL Classification C01, C12, C21, C51, Z20

Keywords handedness, footedness, performance, overrepresentation, sport, athletes

Title Do Left-handers and Left-footers Have a Competitive Advantage in Sports?