

Lefties have element of surprise in sports arena: study

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Growing up as the odd one out may be what gives left-handed people an advantage in the sports arena, where they have the element of surprise, said a study published Wednesday. About one in ten people are left-handed, but in a number of sports like boxing, fencing and table tennis, they were overrepresented to the tune of about one in five, study co-author Mark Panaggio told AFP.

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In baseball, more than 30 percent of athletes were southpaws -- and for the top hitters in the US major league the figure rose to 58 percent.

"Left-handers have a slight boost in their skill ability just due to inherently being left-handed," Panaggio said of the findings published in Britain's Journal of the Royal Society *Interface*.

The study used a [mathematical model](#) to test the assertion that hand preference arises from an evolutionary need to balance cooperation (as in hunting in groups) and competition (as in battle or sports).

"If you have a left-hander facing a right-hander, the left-hander would have spent the majority of his time competing against right-handed individuals because they are more common ... whereas the right-hander would have had very little experience against left-handers," the scientist said.

"In those type of confrontations the left-handed person should have an advantage."

However, the inverse is also true.

Only about six percent of quarterbacks in American football were left-handed, Panaggio said.

Five of the world's 120 top male golfers were left-handed, and none of the top 100 women.

"We believe that it is due to the fact that it is difficult to find equipment for them to play with," said Panaggio, of Northwestern University in Illinois.

Until well into the 20th century, schoolchildren risked beatings for

writing with their left hands. The English word "sinister" derives from the Latin for left.

Yet left-handers have occupied a disproportionate place in US politics. Before Barack Obama, four of the past five US presidents were also lefties -- Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan (who was ambidextrous), George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

The study pointed out that left-handers had a higher accidental death rate.

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