

Men's Lacrosse Field Positions

Attack

- The attacker's responsibility is to score goals.
- He generally restricts his play to the offensive end.

Midfield

- The midfielder's responsibility is to cover the entire field playing both offense and defense.

Defense

- The defender's responsibility is to defend the goal.
- He generally restricts his play to the defensive end of the field.

Goal

- The goalie's responsibility is to protect the goal and stop the opposing team from scoring.

Basic Rules of Men's Lacrosse

1. Men's lacrosse is a contact game played by ten players: a goalkeeper, three defenders, three midfielders, and three attackers.
2. The object of the game is to shoot the ball into the opponent's goal.
3. The team scoring more goals wins.
4. Each team must keep at least four players, including the goalie, in its defensive half of the field and three in its offensive half.
5. Three players (midfielders) may roam the entire field.
6. High school games are generally 48 minutes long, with 12-minute quarters.
7. Each team is given a 2-minute break between the first and second quarters, and the third and fourth quarters.
8. Half time is ten minutes long.
9. Teams change sides between periods.
10. Each team is permitted two timeouts each half.

11. The team winning the coin toss chooses the end of the field it wants to defend first.
12. Men's lacrosse begins with a face-off.
13. The ball is placed between the sticks of two squatting players at the center of the field.
14. The official blows the whistle to begin play
15. Each face-off player tries to control the ball.
16. The players in the wing areas can release; the other players must wait until one player has gained possession of the ball or the ball has crossed the goal line. Center face-offs are also used after a goal and at the start of each quarter.
17. Players may run with the ball in the crosse, pass, and catch the ball. Only the goalkeeper may touch the ball with his hands.
18. A player may gain possession of the ball by dislodging it from an opponent's crosse with a stick check, which includes the controlled poking and slapping of the stick and gloved hands of the player in possession of the ball.
19. Body checking is permitted if the opponent has the ball.
20. All body contact must occur from the front or side, above the waist, and below the shoulders.
21. An opponent's crosse may be stick-checked if it is within five yards of a loose ball or ball in the air.
22. If the ball or a player in possession of the ball goes out of bounds, the other team is awarded possession of the ball.
23. If the ball goes out of bounds after an unsuccessful shot on goal, the player nearest to the ball when and where it goes out of bounds is awarded possession.
24. An attacking player cannot enter the crease around the goal, but may reach in with his stick to scoop a loose ball.

Personal Fouls in Men's Lacrosse

The penalty for a personal foul is a 1- to 3-minute suspension from play and possession to the team that was fouled. Players with five personal fouls are ejected from the game.

Slashing

A player's stick contacts an opponent in any area other than the stick or gloved hand on the stick.

Tripping

A player obstructs his opponent at or below the waist with the crosse, hands, arms, feet, or legs.

Cross Checking

A player uses the handle of his crosse to make contact with an opponent.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

Any player or coach commits an act that is considered unsportsmanlike by an official, including taunting, obscene language or gestures, and arguing.

Unnecessary Roughness

A player strikes an opponent with his stick or body using excessive or violent force.

Illegal Crosse

A player uses a crosse that does not conform to required specifications. A crosse may be found illegal if the pocket is too deep or if the crosse was altered to gain an advantage.

Illegal Body Checking

Occurs when any of the following actions take place:

1. Body checking of an opponent who is not in possession of the ball or within five yards of a loose ball.
2. Avoidable body check of an opponent after he has passed or shot the ball.
3. Body checking of an opponent from the rear or at or below the waist.
4. Body checking of an opponent by a player in which contact is made above the shoulders of the opponent. A body check must be below the neck, and both hands of the player applying the body check must remain in contact with his crosse.

Illegal Gloves

A player uses gloves that do not conform to required specifications. A glove will be found illegal if the fingers and palms are cut out of the gloves, or if the glove has been altered in a way that compromises its protective features.

Technical Fouls in Men's Lacrosse

The penalty for a technical foul is a 30-second suspension if a team is in possession of the ball when the foul is committed or possession of the ball to the team that was fouled if there was no possession when the foul was committed.

Holding

A player impedes the movement of an opponent or an opponent's crosse.

Interference

A player interferes in any manner with the free movement of an opponent, except when that opponent has possession of the ball, the ball is in flight and within five yards of the players, or both players are within five yards of a loose ball.

Offsides

A team does not have at least four players on its defensive side of the midfield line or at least three players on its offensive side of the midfield line.

Pushing

A player thrusts or shoves a player from behind.

Screening

An offensive player illegally moves into and makes contact with a defensive player with the purpose of blocking him from the man he is defending.

Stalling

A team intentionally holds the ball without conducting normal offensive play, with the intent of running time off the clock.

Warding Off

A player in possession of the ball uses his free hand or arm to hold, push, or control the direction of an opponent's stick check.

The Rationale For The Rules

Players respond and play better when they know the reason why they are being told to do something, rather than receiving unexplained orders. It is imperative to continually discuss and reinforce the rationales for the rules with the players. Referring again to John Wooden, he stated:

It is unlikely that a teacher of any subject finds it as necessary to follow the laws of learning as closely and specifically as it is for the teacher of the fundamentals of (lacrosse). A fundamental must be explained and demonstrated, the correct demonstration must be imitated by the players, their demonstration must be constructively criticized and corrected, and then the players must repeat and repeat the execution of the proper model until the correct habit has been formed to the point where they will react instinctively in the correct manner.

Here are the rationales for the rules:

RULE ONE: Every player must be able to catch, throw, and shoot left-handed and right-handed.

There is no way around this one. The "one-handed" lacrosse player is dead, and the sooner you insist on competency with both hands, the better it will be for the players. Start with your players on day one. Make them practice with both hands during your practice and insist that they practice their weak hands on their own.

On the first point (practicing with both hands every practice), I do not believe or expect that you can train your players to use their weak hands effectively during the limited time available to you; however, no player likes to look incompetent. If you make all of your players use their weak hands every day at practice, even if only for 5 minutes, they will practice their weak hands on their own, even if it is only to avoid being embarrassed.

On the second point (insisting that they practice their weak hands on their own), I always remind my players that they are not going to awaken magically one morning with a left hand. They must practice, preferably early in their careers. Learning to play with both hands is like learning a foreign language: the younger they begin, the easier it is. Once a player goes a few years dependent on only his primary hand, he loses confidence in his

weak hand and finds it difficult to practice it, much less use it in a game.

Please note that I have not included scooping or playing defense among the things that a player must be able to do with both hands. I have found that even the best athletes have problems learning to scoop with both hands, and switching hands while playing defense is too complicated to be called fundamental.

RULE TWO: The more time your players play with their sticks perpendicular to the ground, as opposed to parallel to the ground, the better players they will be.

This one sounds simple, but gets complicated quickly. The premise is that if a player keeps his stick perpendicular to the ground, he can protect the full length of his stick with his body. To the contrary, as his stick becomes parallel to the ground, the head and butt are exposed, and he is susceptible to a number of checks. Teach your players to play with the crosse next to their heads ("in the box position") and the shaft perpendicular to the ground and protected by their bodies at all times. The second they catch a ball, no matter where it is thrown, they should adjust their sticks so that the crosse is in the box position, and their bodies protect the shaft. The moment they scoop a ground ball, they should return the crosse to the box position. When they throw or shoot the ball, they should do it overhand, from the box position.

The ideal is not often realized, however, because in order to "play perpendicular," a player must first learn to catch, throw and shoot with his wrists, not his arms. Frequently, players cannot do this because they have learned how to catch, throw and shoot with their arms extended rather than relying on their wrists. This problem is often exacerbated by the fact that their pocket is as deep as the rules permit. More often than not, this creates a whip in their stick. It is impossible for players to catch, throw, or shoot with their wrists when their sticks have whips; they must extend their arms. So, if you have a player who just can't get the knack of "playing perpendicular" with his wrists, the first thing to check is the bag in his stick.

As an added problem, every offensive player wants to crank. They want to perfect the side-arm heat that rips twine ... and they spend hour upon hour standing in front of the goal, flat footed, cranking away, developing the worst habits. You should do everything in your power to discourage this (virtually) useless activity. Throughout the entire season, a player may have three or four opportunities to stand and wing the ball sidearm towards the goal or to a teammate. That same player should have scores of opportunities to catch, throw, and shoot in close quarters where he must protect his stick. Thus, just as with playing with both hands, you should insist from day one that your players (on the field and on their own) get used to "playing perpendicular."

RULE THREE: Make your players move the ball. The less time the ball spends in your players' sticks, the better players they will be.

I insist on this rule early on because it is easier to learn to carry the ball after having learned how to move the ball than the other way around. Few things are more difficult

than teaching a player who has learned to "tune out" (i.e. to run down the field with the ball oblivious of his teammates) to move the ball. Moreover, players who learn to carry the ball too long develop a horrible sense for the game. I'm not saying that you shouldn't teach your players how to dodge or to run around an opponent. I'm saying that they'll generally be better off if they first learn how to move the ball from the defensive end of the field into the goal in a matter of seconds. The only way to do that is to force them to move the ball (which can always travel faster than any one player's two feet) all the time.

RULE FOUR: Make your players move the ball on the ground.

This is a corollary to Rule 3 and will improve your transition game dramatically if you don't already live by it. The premise is simple: as teams scramble for loose balls, they get spread out and pulled out of position. If your team picks up a loose ball, it can capitalize on the opponent's misalignment only if it can move the ball before the opponent has time to readjust. You should therefore teach your players to move every ground ball they pick up as soon as they possibly can. Teach them to throw every ground ball they scoop to the first open man on your team that they see - whether behind, across, or in front of them. Ideally, the players off the ball are moving themselves to strategic positions and surveying the game situation as their teammate scrambles for the loose ball so they can quickly exploit the opposition's misalignment when they get the ball. The player scrambling for the loose ball cannot do this because his eyes are on the ball on the ground. He has no idea how the opposition is aligned or who on his team is most strategically placed. A good way to practice this concept is to have your team make three quick passes after every ground ball they scoop in scrimmage situations. They (and you) will be amazed at how many scoring opportunities this simple strategy creates.

RULE FIVE: Make your players move without the ball.

All lacrosse players, fans, and referees have a tendency, if not a habit, of watching the player with the ball. With everyone watching the man with the ball, it's difficult for him to do anything without drawing attention. The players off the ball, however, are to some extent disregarded. Thus, it's easier for a player to get into shooting, catching, or scooping position when he does not have the ball. Moreover, every player plays without the ball for over 90% of the season. It is imperative that they make the most of this time. I tell my players to make the most of their time without the ball by moving and thinking - especially immediately after they throw the ball, when everyone turns their heads to see who's going to receive it. I joke with them and tell them, "Don't watch your pretty pass." By learning not to watch their own "pretty passes" to their teammates, players learn to perfect the art of the give and go.

In sum, make your players recognize that when they do not have the ball, they should be moving and analyzing so that the second they receive the ball, they can comply with Rule 3: MOVE THE BALL!

RULE SIX: Make your players move to the ball.

This may be the most important, and least observed, of all the rules. A player who is open and wants a pass should always move to the ball (unless he is so close to his teammate that he'll just run into him). This is particularly true when a player is (1) open on the backside, (2) not being watched by a defenseman in front of him and (3) receiving a pass to shoot.

There is no more egregious sinner in lacrosse than the player who is open backside and stands with his stick in the air. That player should move to, and call for the ball. Similarly, a player who is not being watched by the defenseman between him and the ball should move to the ball because he can run right past the defenseman and get open. A player receiving a pass to shoot must always move to the ball lest he catch it, turn and get run down by a sliding defenseman or goalie. This is an especially tough concept to instill in young attackmen. They always think that if they are open, they should not move because they will only run into a defenseman and coverage. Just the opposite is true. If a player is open close to the goal, someone is coming to get him. If he stands still, the defenseman or a goalie sliding to him will crunch him, frequently before he has time to catch or shoot the ball. If he moves to the ball and protects his stick (see Rule 2, play perpendicular), however, he is very difficult to stop and frequently avoids getting hit.

These are only a few of the good reasons to make your players move to the ball. Suffice it to say that teaching your players - especially attackmen - to move to the ball is one of the greatest services you can perform. It is also important to remember this rule when you arrive at practice to find your players standing flat-footed, cranking at the goal sidearm. Give them grief, and tell them to practice moving to the ball when they shoot

RULE SEVEN: Make your players look at a spot behind the goalie as they shoot.

Shooting is the most underrated aspect of the game of lacrosse at every level. Few teams or players practice it on a regular basis. Worse yet, some teams permit their players to shoot consistently without any rhyme or reason, or without looking at the goal. A lacrosse player who shoots without thinking or looking at the goal is like a basketball player who dribbles staring at the floor and shoots in the general direction of the basket with his head down. He will score randomly, not consistently. A player must have a shooting theory, and he must look at the goal as he shoots.

Unfortunately, the most commonly taught shooting theory is: "Look at the goal before you shoot, and pick a spot." This is impossible. If a player is in possession of the ball in shooting position, he is usually being pressured, if not run down. He simply does not have time to adequately evaluate the goalie's positioning and make an accurate shot. You should therefore teach a shooting theory where your players automatically look first to the highest percentage spot to shoot. This is a spot "behind the goalie." A spot "behind the goalie" is a spot out of the goalie's momentum. That is, if a player is carrying the ball or is moving to the ball as he receives a pass in shooting position (see Rule 6, move to the ball), the goalie is moving with him (either to his right or to his left). I tell my players to look first at a spot in the opposite direction that the goalie is moving (i.e. behind the goalie). If the goalie is moving to his right, a shot to his right is in his flow. A shot to his

left, however, forces him to change his momentum and go the other way. This is a difficult task for the best goalie.

If a player looks first to his highest percentage shot and finds that the goalie is taking it away (or simply out of position), he can adjust and direct his shot to another spot as he is shooting. In sum, do not teach your players to look at the goal and pick a spot. Teach them to look first at the best spot to shoot and adjust accordingly. As an aside, one of the best ways to teach this, or any other, shooting theory is to train your players to watch their shots until they hit the net. It helps a player stay focused on the goal, the goalie, and his shot.

RULE EIGHT: Teach your players to shoot with a quick release.

Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest player in any team sport, is widely praised for the quick release of his shot. This same ability is a great asset in lacrosse. The reason for this follows logically from indisputable facts that have already been discussed: (1) if a player is in possession of the ball in shooting position, he is, or shortly will be, receiving defensive pressure, and (2) goalies move.

Too many players develop the habit of twirling their sticks, taking two steps, or winding up before they shoot. This means that they are usually shooting under defensive pressure and the goalie has had time to set and get a fix on the ball. This is especially true when a player has just received a feed.

If that same player, however, develops the skill of releasing his shot at the same moment he receives a feed, he will be able to shoot with less pressure than will bear upon him in a moment, and the goalie (who has just turned around, or moved across the front of the goal) will not be able to pick up the ball as easily.

Teaching this skill is difficult. You do not want a team full of "quick stickers." The proper method of developing a quick release is to give with a feed as it is received and actually catch it in shooting position, instead of catching the ball and then winding up to shoot. The best analogy is the centerfielder in baseball who must catch a fly ball with a man tagging at third. That centerfielder does not catch the ball over his head, take three steps and throw to home. Rather, he sets up behind where the ball will land, approaches the ball as it descends, gives with his glove as he is making the catch so that he catches the ball behind him and at shoulder height (not in front of him and over his head), and quickly releases the ball toward home in the same motion. The act of catching the ball is actually the wind-up for the throwing motion.

The same is true in lacrosse. A player should give with a feed and turn his body as he catches it, so that he is prepared to shoot at the moment he catches the ball. The player can then utilize Rule 7 and zero in on the highest percentage shot as he is shooting.

RULE NINE: Your defensemen must have better stickwork than your attackmen and midfielders.

In today's game (where clearing time is limited), defensemen have to be able to clear the ball or their team is in big trouble. It is not in a player's or your team's best interest to take an inexperienced player and stick him on defense because his stick skills are not great. Nor is it helpful to have defensemen practice their stick skills by throwing crossfield passes while standing still. This will not improve their stick skills. It will only instill bad habits. Make your defensemen do every cutting, shooting, and stickwork drill (with their long stick) that your midfielders and attackmen do. Rotate your defensemen and let them play offense (with their long stick) in live drills, like fastbreaks. I have found this to be the fastest, most fun way to improve defensemen's skills.

RULE TEN: Your defensemen should play defense like a boxer boxes.

Too many players stop moving their feet when they make a check, or make a check and leave their sticks in a place where it does them no good. The best way to keep them from developing these bad habits and develop good habits is to teach them to play defense like a boxer boxes.

A boxer does not box with his hands by his waist. He keeps them up, ready to punch. A defenseman should not play defense with his stick on the ground. His stick should always be up, in a position to check. A boxer does not punch and stand. He punches and moves. A defenseman should not check and stop. He's got to keep moving. A boxer does not throw a punch and leave his arm extended on his opponent's nose. A defenseman should not check his opponent and leave his stick on his opponent's hip. He must check and return his stick to checking position so that he can check again. In short, a defenseman must learn to move, check, and reload.

This rule makes especially good sense for me because I do not emphasize traditional "poke" checks (where a player slides his stick across his opponent's body) with younger players. I always found they had a tendency to lunge, not poke. I like to teach young players to keep their sticks up, ready to check their opponent when he puts two hands on his stick. Depending on how you coach, you may need to modify this rule.

RULE ELEVEN: Your defensemen do not have to take the ball away to be good defensemen.

John Wooden taught that a defense's goals are: (1) to prevent the other team from getting a high percentage shot (especially one where a player receives the ball to shoot moving towards the basket, rather than away from the basket), (2) gain possession of loose balls, and (3) begin the transition game. The exact same goals are applicable to lacrosse, yet too many players measure their worth by their ability to strip an opponent of the ball. While this is a valuable skill, it is by no means required.

You should teach a young defenseman that his job is to be in position when the player he is guarding puts two hands on his stick so that he can check that player's hands. A

defenseman need never strip an opponent of the ball to be great. It is far better to teach your defensemen that the most important skills are footwork, anticipation, and hustle.