

# **Boys Lacrosse Spectator Guide**



**Produced by the Minnesota Boys  
Scholastic Lacrosse Association**

# Play of the game

Lacrosse is a fast-moving sport which features the goal-scoring and checking of hockey, the offensive strategies of basketball, the throwing and catching of baseball, and the running of soccer.

## Players

Each team fields 10 players at a time: a goalie, 3 defensemen (usually with long sticks), 3 midfielders, and 3 attackmen. A team may not exceed 6 players in its offensive end or 7 players in its defensive end (players serving penalties count toward both ends); a team violating this rule is “offside,” which is a technical foul. Normally the midfielders play at both ends of the field, but any player may cross midfield provided the team doesn’t exceed the limit at either end.



Teams normally carry 15 to 30 players; substitution may be done “on the fly” through the area in front of the scorer’s table.

## Equipment

All field players must have helmets, shoulder pads, arm pads, gloves, and mouthpieces. Goalies don’t need pads but must wear other gear. Failure to wear required equipment results in a 1-minute non-releaseable penalty. In particular, mouthpieces must cover all upper or lower teeth and be in the mouth; biting on the corners is not sufficient.

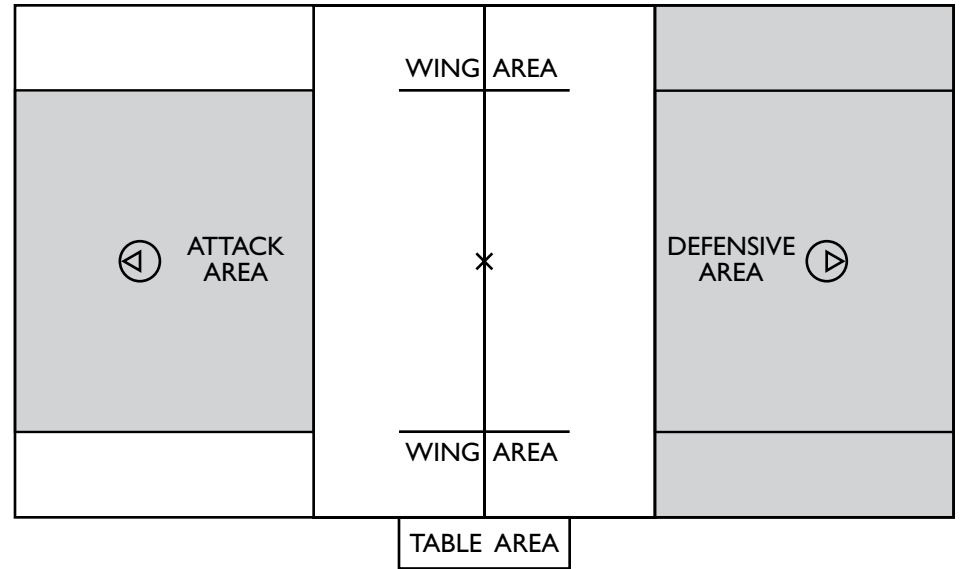
The crosses (sticks) must be within specifications. If the pocket is too deep, it is a one-minute non-releaseable penalty. Crosses violating other requirements earn a three-minute non-releaseable penalty. If either is found just after a goal, the goal is disallowed.

## The field

A regulation lacrosse field is 110 yards long by 53 $\frac{1}{3}$  to 60 yards wide. The goals are 6 feet by 6 feet, and they are surrounded by a 9-foot diameter circle called the “crease.” There is a scorer’s table area (which also serves as a penalty box and substitution area), and there are lines marking attack, defensive, and wing areas.

## Face-offs

Though there are exceptions, there is normally a face-off at the begin-



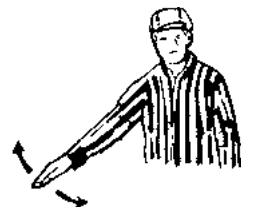
ning of each period and after each goal. During the face-off, all attackmen and defensemen must be in their respective defensive areas, and there must be one midfielder from each team behind each wing line (unless a team is man-down, when one or both wing areas stay open).

The two face-off men come down facing each other, with their sticks parallel to the midline and their bodies to the left of the head of their sticks. Both hands must be on the stick and touching the ground. Violations result in loss of possession. The official calls “set” and then blows the whistle. At this point, both players try to gain possession or direct the ball to one of their teammates. The defensemen and attackmen cannot cross the defensive area line until the officials declare the face-off has been completed.

## The crease

The crease area offers protection to the goalie. No offensive player may step on or in the crease area, nor may they interfere with the goalie while the goalie is in the crease. However, offensive players may reach into the crease with their sticks provided they do not interfere with the goalie.

If the offense steps in the crease while it has possession or while there is a loose ball, the ball is awarded to the defense. If they do so while the



Crease violation

defense has possession outside of the crease, it is a 30-second penalty. A player without possession may enter his own crease at any time.

When the defense has possession of the ball in the crease, they have four seconds to run or pass the ball out of the crease. If the defense has the ball outside of the crease, they may pass the ball into the crease, but it is illegal to enter one's own crease with possession by stepping into it.



### Advancing the ball

Once the defense secures the ball, they have 20 seconds (timed via official's belt timer) to move the ball across midfield (this rule is not enforced in U15 and lower games).

As soon as the offense has possession on or over the midline, they have 10 seconds (arm count) for either the ball or a player carrying the ball to touch inside the attack area. They may then bring the ball back out, after which there are no counts unless there is stalling.

In both of these cases—as well as having possession for more than 4 seconds in the crease—violations are a loss of possession for “failure to advance.”



### Ground balls

When the ball is on the ground, players attempt to scoop the ball by sliding their sticks underneath it. A team proficient in getting ground balls often has a good chance to win because they tend to have more possessions and hence get more shots.

### Cradling

When a player has the ball, he will “cradle” by rocking his stick back and forth to try to hold the ball in his stick. The force generated by cradling helps keep the ball from falling out or being checked out of the stick, and it keeps the ball in the proper position in the pocket for passing and shooting.

### Where the ball restarts

If the ball goes out of bounds on a shot—as determined by the officials—the team that has an in-bounds player closest to the *ball* (not

the end line) when it goes out of bounds is awarded possession at the spot where the ball went out. This is true even if the shot is touched or deflected *provided* that the momentum from the shot is what carries the ball out of bounds.

For any out-of-bounds ball that isn't a shot, if Team A is the last team to touch the ball, then Team B is awarded the ball at the spot where the ball went out of bounds.

If there is a violation resulting in a whistle, the ball restarts at the spot where it was when the whistle blew or—if it was in the attack area—outside the attack area.

Goalie interference/crease violations *with clearing team possession* and time-serving penalties in the defensive end result in a “free clear,” with the ball being awarded just across midfield.

### Stick checking

Players may attempt to dislodge the ball from an opponent's stick by “stick checking,” which is hitting the stick (or the gloved hand on the stick) with their own stick.

### Passing

Though players may run with the ball, they can move the ball more quickly by passing it. Most passes are thrown overhand and in the air, although you may see bounce passes and behind-the-back passes.

### Shooting

Players will usually shoot overhand or sidearm, although some players will attempt underhand and behind-the-back shots. Sometimes a player will beat his defender by “dodging” to get open and get a shot, but often a pass (or “feed”) from a teammate will result in a shot. In this situation, the attack player may try to “quick stick” the ball into the goal by redirecting the pass without cradling first.

### Body checking

Body checking is legal in lacrosse under limited conditions. Illegal body checking is a personal foul. At the U15 and U13 levels, modified body checking is allowed but traditional body checking is penalized (minimum 2:00 non-releasable penalty). There is no body checking of any kind at the U11 and U9 levels.

# Fouls and penalties

There are two kinds of fouls in lacrosse: technical and personal. Technical fouls concern advantage; personal fouls concern safety, conduct, and illegal equipment issues and are penalized more harshly.

## Change-of-possession fouls

If Team A has the ball and commits a technical foul, the officials will blow the whistle and award the ball to Team B. In this case, no one serves penalty time. These are known as “change-of-possession fouls.”

If there is a loose ball (i.e., neither team has possession) and Team B commits a technical foul, the official will yell “Play on!” and hold one hand straight up. If Team B gets the ball or if several seconds pass, the officials will stop play and award the ball to Team A. However, if Team A quickly gains possession, the official will point in the direction of play, yell, for example, “Blue ball!”, and play will continue. This improves the flow of the game by reducing the number of whistles, and it allows Team A a chance to press an advantage (e.g., a fast break) without allowing Team B time to re-group. Unfortunately, spectators often think the officials missed a foul when in fact the official has correctly called a play-on. The play-on is not often used in youth games.

No penalty flag is thrown for change-of-possession fouls. If play must be stopped, the official will simply give the signal for the foul committed and then point in the direction of play.

## Time-serving technical and personal fouls

If the ball is loose or in Team A’s possession and Team A commits a personal foul, the officials will throw a penalty flag and stop play immediately.

However, if Team A has the ball and Team B commits either a technical or personal foul, the officials will throw a penalty flag and allow play to continue. This gives Team A a chance to complete their scoring attempt. The whistle will blow to end the play when Team A brings the ball out of the attack area, loses possession of the ball, commits a technical or personal foul, completes a shot on goal, or has the ball touch the ground (but not as part of a shot).

If Team A scores a goal during the flag-down and Team



Technical Foul

B’s foul was a technical, the penalty is not enforced. However, for a personal foul, the penalty is served whether or not a goal is scored.

After the whistle blows, the official will signal the offending team, the offending player’s number, whether the foul was a 30-second technical (by making a “T” with the arms) or a personal (by signalling 1, 2, or 3 minutes), and the nature of the foul committed.



Personal Foul

Normally, all of a team’s penalties—whether personal or technical—are released if the other team scores a goal, but unsportsmanlike conduct penalties are usually non-releaseable, and some other situations result in non-releaseable penalties as well.

## Personal fouls

More serious rule infractions are classified as personal fouls. Personal fouls always result in a time-serving penalty (one, two, or three minutes, depending on the severity). Personal fouls include slashing, illegal bodychecking, cross-checking, tripping, unnecessary roughness, illegal/missing protective equipment, and unsportsmanlike conduct.

### Slashing

Using the stick to hit any part of the opponent’s body except for the gloved hand on the stick is a slash. It must be a “definite blow or strike”; contact itself does not constitute a slash.



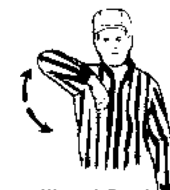
Slashing

Swinging the stick in an out-of-control fashion may also be called a slash, whether it hits the stick, the opponent, or neither. Hitting both the stick and the opponent simultaneously may also be called a slash.

At the youth level, any contact with the head is a slash, as is any one-handed check.

### Illegal Body Check

It is not legal to body check an opponent that does not have the ball and who is not within 5 yards of a loose ball. When a player is checked, it must be done with both hands on the stick and it must be above the waist



Illegal Body Check

and blow the neck. A body check that hits the chest and rides up to the neck or head is illegal.

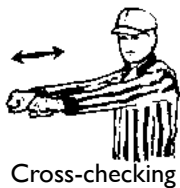
The check must be applied with the shoulders or hands. Body checks with head contact result in non-releaseable penalties.

Body checks must be applied from the front or the side, but if a player turns just before getting hit so that a check that would have been from the front or side ends up being from behind, no foul has been committed.

It is illegal to check a player who has any part of the body (other than the feet) touching the ground.

### **Cross-checking**

Hitting the opponent using the portion of the stick between the hands, whether done by holding the stick extended or thrusting the stick into the opponent, is called cross-checking and is illegal.



Cross-checking

### **Tripping**

It is illegal to trip an opponent by making contact using the hands, arms, legs, feet, or crosse at any point at or below the waist. However, if a player is trying to scoop a ball and an opponent trips over his crosse, or if a legal stick check makes a player trip over his own crosse, no foul has been committed.



Tripping

### **Unnecessary roughness**

Unnecessary roughness may be called against a player making a particularly violent hold, push, or body check (even if the body check is otherwise legal).



Unnecessary roughness

### **Unsportsmanlike conduct**

Unsportsmanlike conduct includes foul language, berating officials, and taunting. These penalties are non-releaseable.

## **Technical fouls**

As previously mentioned, a technical foul can result in possession

being awarded (if the team offended did not have possession) or a 30-second penalty (if the team offended had possession). Technical fouls include pushing, holding, warding off, illegal procedure, illegal screens, interference, withholding the ball from play, conduct fouls, offsides, and crease violations.

### **Pushing**

Pushing of a player who does not have the ball and is not within 5 yards of a loose ball is illegal. Pushing from behind is illegal, but if a player turns his back to the opponent just before the push there is no foul. Pushing is legal under limited circumstances.



Pushing

### **Holding**

It is not legal to restrain the opponent using the stick, to touch the opponent with the free hand, to hold the opponent with the portion of the stick between the hands, to hold or step on the opponent's crosse, or to pin an opponent's crosse against their body.

Holding is legal under limited circumstances, including the opponent having possession or being within 5 yards of a loose ball, the holding player has both hands on the stick, and that only the hand, shoulder, or forearm is used.



Holding

### **Warding off**

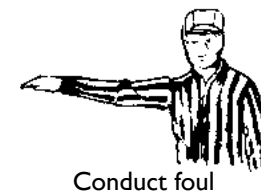
An offensive player with the ball may not use his hand or arm to try to direct the crosse of the opponent away from his own crosse. An offensive player to put his free arm in a blocking position and hold the arm stationary.



Warding

### **Conduct fouls**

It is illegal to object an official's call by arguing or gesturing. It is also illegal for coaches to come onto the field except at halftime, to tend to an injured player, or to warm up a goalie. Also, players may not enter the coaches box. Violations of these rules are conduct fouls (particularly egregious complaints or conduct are penalized as unsportsmanlike conduct).



Conduct foul



Illegal procedure

## Illegal procedure

Illegal procedure is kind of a catch-all category for various rule violations. It includes delay of game (e.g., team not ready within 20 seconds of ball marked ready for play), illegal touching of the ball, illegal timeout requests, illegal substitutions, violation of the rules governing face-offs, and many other situations.

## Illegal screen

Offensive players may set screens (or “picks”) as in basketball by standing motionless; this allows a teammate to get open by cutting so his defender runs into the screen. A screen is illegal if the player does not establish his position and stand motionless before contact occurs. The screening player may not hold his crosse out or lean in an attempt to block the defender.



Illegal screen



Interference

## Interference

It is illegal to block the motion of players who do not have the ball and who are not within 5 yards of a loose ball (except by making a legal screen). It is also illegal to interfere with the goalie while the goalie is in the crease, and it is illegal to step on or kick an opponent’s crosse.

## Withholding the ball from play

It is illegal to keep the ball from play by keeping a stick clamped over the ball, standing on the ball, or holding the stick so the ball cannot come out (e.g., by holding it against the chest or by thumbing the ball).



Withholding

## Other technical fouls

Some other technical fouls have already been discussed. These include offsides, crease violations, goalie interference, and illegal re-entry of the crease.

## Officiating

Lacrosse games are typically officiated by two or three officials.

For youth games, the officials may be new and working just as hard as the players to learn the game properly. They deserve the respect of the players and fans for trying to learn a difficult job under pressure and intense scrutiny.

At the higher levels, officials are taught to look for advantage and disadvantage when applying rules requiring judgment. For example, a slight push in the back at midfield might not draw a penalty if the offended player stayed on his feet and maintained possession of the ball. However, if the player was pushed illegally and forced out of bounds, the official will probably throw a flag because otherwise the team being pushed would be disadvantaged by the push.

## Youth rules

There are key rule variations for middle school and younger age groups. These include no 20-second clear rule for U15 and under, no 10-counts for U11 and U9, restrictions on body checking, no one-handed stick checks, and a point of emphasis on slashing. Youth games are called more tightly—and penalties are generally longer—than varsity high school and college games in order to protect the younger players.

Poor behavior by coaches, players, and fans has no place in lacrosse, especially in youth games. Fan abuse of players or officials can result in ejection from the game site or game termination and a forfeit.

## Lacrosse vs. hockey

Many spectators in Minnesota assume the rules of lacrosse are the same as in hockey. While there are some similarities, there are many differences. For example, in lacrosse:

- There is no “icing”: you can throw the ball the length of the field.
- The offside rule and crease rules are different.
- One goal by Team A releases **all** releasable penalties being served by Team B.
- Goalies serve their own penalties (with some youth modifications).
- There are no penalty shots.
- It’s illegal to play without a stick.
- The flag-down rule is different from the delayed penalty rule.

# History

Lacrosse was invented by Native Americans long before Europeans settled North America. They played with goals placed from a half mile to several miles apart, and they often had more than 100 players per team. It was considered more than just a game, and they played to settle disputes, for spiritual development, to help in the healing process, and to prepare for war.



There are currently about 300 men's NCAA and 200 men's college club programs in the U.S. The NCAA lacrosse championship is the second-most-attended NCAA championship event.

## Minnesota lacrosse

In Minnesota, there are 18 MBSLA (club) and 68 MSHSL boys lacrosse teams playing at the high-school varsity level. College lacrosse in Minnesota takes place through the Upper Midwest Lacrosse conference, with teams in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Iowa.

On the youth level, lacrosse is exploding. There are hundreds of youth U9 through U15 teams playing in spring and summer leagues throughout the Twin Cities and other parts of the state.

### **Become a Minnesota lacrosse official!**

One of the most pressing issues facing Minnesota lacrosse is finding officials and coaches. No prior experience with officiating or with lacrosse is required: the training courses will teach you everything you need to get started.

See the Upper Midwest Lacrosse Officials Association website ([www.umloa.org/training](http://www.umloa.org/training)) to get started.

## Links

Minnesota Boys Scholastic Lacrosse Association: [www.mbsla.org](http://www.mbsla.org)

Upper Midwest Lacrosse Officials Association: [www.umloa.org](http://www.umloa.org)

Lacrosse discussion forums: [lacrosseforums.com](http://lacrosseforums.com)

US Lacrosse: [www.uslacrosse.org](http://www.uslacrosse.org)