

Lacrosse 101

By Jim Anderson

North American Indians began playing a form of lacrosse several centuries ago in preparation for battle. It was called "Baggataway" and games lasted up to several days. French missionaries to North America gave lacrosse its modern name, as the stick the Indians played with resembled a bishop's staff - "crosse" in French. The game as it is played today originated around 1840. Canada declared lacrosse, not hockey, its national game in 1867.

Honor the game. Lacrosse is an emotional and physical game, but at all times, our players, coaches, and parents are committed to honoring the game of lacrosse. This is true both at practices and games. We do not accept taunting opponents or talking back to officials. We do not throw our equipment in frustration. To fit in on our team, you must commit to play and act like a champion --before, during and after the game --regardless of the score. Win or lose, our fans, opponents, and referees will know that the all of us in Lacrosse 'honor the game'.

The Basics of the Game

Boy's lacrosse is fast paced game played by ten players: a goalkeeper, three defensemen, three midfielders and three attackmen. The object of the game is to shoot the ball into the opponent's goal. The team scoring the most goals wins.

- Each team must keep at least four players, including the goalie, in its defensive half of the field and three in its offensive half Three players (midfielders) may roam the entire field.
- Generally, junior lacrosse games are 40 minutes long, with 10 minute quarters. We use a running clock, so the clock runs during out of bounds situations etc. Each team is given a two minute break between the first and second quarters, and the third and fourth quarters. Half-time is ten minutes long.
- Teams change sides between periods. Each team is permitted two time-outs each half. The team winning the coin toss chooses the end of the field it wants to defend first.
- Boy's lacrosse begins with a face-off. The ball is placed between the sticks of two squatting players at the center of the field. The official blows the whistle to begin play. Each face-off player tries to control the ball. 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.
- Players may run with the ball in the crosse, pass and catch the ball. Only the goalkeeper may touch the ball with his hands.
- 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.
- Body checking is permitted if the opponent has the ball. However, all contact must occur from the front or side, above the waist and below the shoulders. An opponent's crosse may also be stick checked if it is within five yards of a loose ball or ball in the air.
- If the ball or a player in possession of the ball goes out of bounds, the other team is awarded possession of the ball. 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.
- An attacking player cannot enter the crease around the goal, but may reach in with his stick to scoop a loose ball.

Two teams of ten players are on the field at one time. Teams usually line up with one goalkeeper, three defenders, three midfielders, and three attackers. On face-offs, players must remain in their respective playing zones until one team gains possession of the ball. Also, teams must have at least four players in their defending half and three players in their attacking half of the field at all times of the game. A maximum of 4 'long sticks' for defense are allowed on the field at any time. Any player may score a goal and every player must contribute on defense when necessary. Substitutions may take place any time during the game. Players must enter and exit the field through the penalty area, or 'box'.

Positions

Midfielders (or Middies) - As the main ballcarriers on the team, middies cover the entire length of the field playing both offense and defense. Their responsibilities are to bring the ball up the field into the attack zone to set up offensive plays and scoring opportunities with their attackers. Ideally a team will have at least 3 midfield 'sides' or groups of 3, who rotate on and off as they get tired.

LSM (Long Stick Midfielder) The rules of lacrosse allow for 4 defensive long sticks to be on the field at any time. Therefore some teams use a specialized defending midfielder who carries a d stick. Often this player starts as a wing at a face off. If we win the ball, he will come to the sidelines and be replaced by a middie. If we lose the ball he stays on and defends.

Attackers - Positioned in the opposing goal area, they are typically the best stick handlers and are the primary goal scorers on the team. Together with the middies, the attackers work the ball offensively to set up scoring opportunities.

Defenders - Play in the defending goal area around their goal crease. These players use longer sticks (shafts up to 72 inches) that enable them to better "poke check" the sticks of opposing ballcarriers. Defenders constantly check attacking players to prevent them from taking shots on their goal. They also work with their goalie to "clear" the ball from their defensive zone up to the midfielders.

Goalkeeper (or Goalie) - Plays inside the "goal crease" in front of his team's goal. He uses a larger headed stick (up to 15 inches wide) to best defend against oncoming shots. He is the only player allowed to touch the ball with his hands, but can only do so when blocking shots inside his goal crease. He may not control the ball with his hands, only with the stick. Our team will always direct the highest level of respect to the players who don the goalkeeper's equipment. After games our players always run to congratulate and 'bring in' our goalie and he will be the first player in our line of players shaking hands.

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Terminology

Lacrosse players love their gear. In a way, lacrosse brings players back to the middle ages, with a suit of armor and a sword. For many, the next best thing about the game is the terminology. These terms open the door to an understanding of the rules, fundamentals, and tactics of the game. There is certainly an extensive lacrosse vocabulary that players and serious fans need to learn.

Ball- or Ball down All players shout ball any time the ball is on the ground. Often this is the first indicator to the player who had it that he has dropped it. Ball can also signal the intent of a player to go after the ball instead of the man. (see below)

Body Check - Defensively using the body to hit an opposing ball carrier or while contesting an opponent for a player a loose ball. The body check must always be done above the waist and from the front or side.

The Box- The rectangular shaped area around the crease / goal. Defenders seldom press players outside of the box. The distance involved makes it all but impossible to score from outside of the box. The rules state that the offense can only possess the ball for so long without entering the box. At the end of a game the team that is ahead must keep the ball inside of the box.

Butt The end of a crosse opposite the head. All shaft ends need to be covered with a butt-cap.

Change planes – When a shooter has a close in shot, the goalie must respect where the ballcarrier starts his shot. If the shooter holds his stick high, the keeper does the same. Therefore it is most effective for the shooter to start high and shoot low, or vice versa. This is ‘changing planes’.

Clamping - On the face-off, a player pushes the back of his stick down on the ball in the attempt to gain control of it.

Clearing - An important defensive maneuver where defending players run or pass the ball out of their goal area. Clearing is best done along the sidelines, away from the front of the goal.

Cradling - In order to maintain control of the ball when moving along the field, players turn their wrists and arms to cradle the ball in the stick pocket.

Crease - The eighteen-foot diameter circle surrounding each team’s goal.

Cutting - An attacking player without the ball darts around a defender toward the goal in order to receive a “feed pass.” A cutting player is a cutter.

D Cut - A maneuver used by an attackman to get open for a shot. The player starts on the GLE, about 5 yards away from the goal. He then makes a rounded cut, on the side away from the ball. (completing a "D" shape) This is often the third attackmans’ move during a fast break.

Extra Man (aka Man Up or EMO) - Describes the team at a player advantage in a penalty situation. Opposite of man down.

Face-off - Takes place at the start of each quarter, after every goal, and after certain dead balls. Two opposing players crouch down at midfield, hold their sticks flat on the ground and press the backs of their stick pockets together. The ball is then placed between the pockets and, when signaled to start, the players “rake” or clamp on the ball to vie for control.

Face Dodging - A player with the ball cradles the stick across his face in an attempt to dodge a stick-poking defender. Generally an open field dodge that does not involve changing hands.

Fast Break - When an offensive team quickly mounts a scoring attack enabling them to gain a man advantage over the opposing defense. Almost always a four on three.

Feed Pass - An offensive play in which one player passes the ball to a cutting teammate for a “quick stick” shot on goal.

Flag Down – Tells our offense that a penalty will be called. This means that we should do all that we can to get off a shot without dropping the ball to the ground, which will halt play.

GLE (Goal Line Extended) – An imaginary line that extends straight out from the sides of the goal line.

Gilman Clear – Defender, typically the goalie, clears the ball by throwing it as far as he can down the field. Sometimes this is a desperation move, but it is often better to create a ground

ball situation in the opponents end than around our own goal area.

Ground Balls - Players compete for the control of loose ground balls by stick checking opponents away from the ball while simultaneously trying to scoop it up. All Ravens yell 'ball down' when the ball is on the ground. See also 'release'.

Head: The plastic of the stick connected to the handle.

In the Dirt - The often trampled area approx. 15 foot radius area in front of the goal. Shots from outside the dirt area should be bounce shots, which are more difficult for keepers to stop. Also known as the 'hole'. A much smaller area than 'the box.'

Invert -- Any offensive play that involves 'inverting' the middies and the attack. In a man on man situation, this puts the defensive bigs out on top with our attack, and the middies defending the area around the crease.

Man Down - Describes the team which has lost a player to the penalty box and must play with fewer men on the field. We will always establish Man Up and Man Down teams before the game. Man Down teams are often tricky, since it is likely that a defender was penalized.

Man-to-man - A defensive setup in which each defending player guards a specific offensive opponent.

Out-of-bounds - When a shot goes out of play, the player closest to the sideline where the ball went out gets the ball.

Passing - An integral part to quickly moving the ball. Players throw overhand or underhand to each other. In most cases a high pass is easier to deal with than a low bouncing dribbler. Slowly thrown lobbed passes give the defense time to react and often result in the catching player being hit before the pass arrives. We prefer that passes be 'zipped', or thrown with authority, instead of lobbed with a high arc.

Pick - An offensive player without the ball positions himself against the body of a defender to allow a teammate to get open and receive a pass or take a shot. Picks must be stationary and 'passive'.

Pocket - The head of the stick in which the ball is held and carried. The pocket is strung with leather and/or mesh netting. In order to be legal, the top of a ball cannot be seen when looking at the pocket from the side.

Poke Check - A defender jabs his stick at the exposed stick end or hands of an opposing ballcarrier in an effort to jar the ball loose. These checks are very effective in that the checking player stays in balance and keeps a cushion of space between himself and the ballcarrier.

Quick Stick - When the ball reaches an offensive player's stick on a feed pass, he catches it and then shoots it toward the goal in one swift motion.

Raking - A face-off move by a player who, in trying to gain possession of a ground ball, places the head of his stick on top of the ball and sweeps it back. Raking is done standing still. This means that often people who rake will be legally hit by an opposing player. Raking is a very bad habit that is difficult to unlearn. EXCEPTION: Goalkeepers can rake or 'clamp' a ground ball legally from the crease.

Release - Players shout release when they succeed in scooping a ground ball. This indicates to teammates that they can no longer make contact with the opponents to drive them away from the ball. Doing so is a penalty.

Riding - When an attacking team loses possession of the ball, it must quickly revert to playing defense in order to prevent the ball from being cleared back out. In most riding situations, the goal-keeper will be left un-marked.

Roll Dodge - An offensive move in which a ballcarrier, using his body as a shield between a defensive player and the cradled ball, spins around the defender. To provide maximum ball protection, the ballcarrier switches hands as he rolls.

Support – When a player without the ball moves into a position where the player with the ball can make a clear pass.

Scooping - The manner in which a player picks up loose ground balls. He bends toward the ground, slides the pocket of his stick underneath the ball, and lifts it into the netting of the stick.

Screen - An attacking player without possession of the ball positions himself in front of the opposing goal crease in an effort to block the goalkeeper's view.

Shaft: A hollow aluminum or composite pole connected to the head of the crosse.

Skip – To pass to a non- adjacent teammate. Also known as a star pass. (like drawing a star)

Slap Check - A stick check (inferior to the poke check). The defender uses his stick to slap the stick of the offensive player who has the ball. Poke checks are preferred since it is easier to keep your feet moving and stay balanced during the check.

Slide- When an offensive player with the ball has gotten past his defender, a defending teammate will shift his position to pick up that advancing player.

Square Up- To position one's body in preparation to pass. This means to aim the leading shoulder towards the target.

Stick Check - In an effort to dislodge the ball from the "pocket," the defending player strikes his stick against the stick of an opposing ballcarrier in a controlled manner.

Unsettled- Situation - Any situation in which the defense is not positioned correctly, usually due to a loose ball or broken clear, or fast break. Teams that hustle (like us), score many goals during unsettled situations.

V Cut - A maneuver used by an offensive player to get open for a pass. The offensive player feints in causing his defender to react and move, he then cuts sharply away (completing the "V" shape) See also "D cut"

Zone Defense - When defenders play in specific areas of their defensive zone, rather than covering man-to-man.

On Field Communication

The following is a brief list of some of the directions that you may hear the coaches direct toward players either in a game or scrimmage.

"All even" -- This is shouted when penalty time has ended. It means that there is no longer a team with an extra man, and we would go back into a 'normal' set.

"Man / ball" --Lacrosse is unusual in that the first person to reach a loose ball should not always be the one to make the first play for it. Often it is better to take 'man' which means the first player impedes the ability of the nearest opponent to scoop up the ball. A trailing teammate will then take 'ball', and once the ball is scooped, he calls 'release'. (see release)

"Back hand down" --When scooping a ground ball, players will often hold their stick in too much of a vertical position. This makes it impossible for the ball to enter the pocket of their stick. Hence 'back hand down' tells the player to hold their stick in a more vertical position.

This mandates an athletic, flexed body position.

"Double the ball" -- When the opponent has possession and we are man up, we have an extra defender. This enables us to put two defenders on the ball. This may also be called in the latter stages of a game where we are down by a goal or two and the opponent stalls or 'holds' to let the clock wind down.

"Sticks up" --This is directed toward the defense, especially in a man down situation. Holding their sticks high makes passes, especially skips, more difficult.

"Use both hands" or "2 hands" --Players at all levels tend to attempt to scoop ground balls using only one hand. It is normally a bad idea because the chances of an effective scoop decrease greatly and because a one handed scoop puts the player in a vulnerable position in terms of being checked by an opponent. This also applies to defensive players stick checking opponents. One handed checks are much more difficult to control.

"Run through it" --Encouraging players to run through as they attempt to scoop a ground ball. Often times even if the ball is missed, running through give the player a chance to kick the ball clear.

"Hold" or "Kill the penalty" -- This is called at times when we are in possession and we want to maintain control of the ball. Often we may be looking to complete substitutions on the fly. Other times we may be man down and looking to take some time off of the clock. Players must concentrate on maintaining possession of the ball and avoid risky passes and not take shots.

"Who's that to?" -- Sometimes players have a tendency to throw the ball without choosing a teammate as a target. It is much better to keep moving, often away from pressure, in order to give a teammate a chance to get into a supporting position.

"See what you hit" -- During body checks it is vitally important to 'see what you hit'. Such checks should be made with a shoulder or upper body. This means keep your head up as you make contact with an opponent. Dropping your head and contacting an opponent with the top of the helmet is called spearing. THIS IS ILLEGAL, EXTREMELY DANGEROUS, AND WILL NEVER BE TOLERATED BY OUR COACHING STAFF.

"Change planes" -- Goalkeepers must always respond first to the position of a shooters stick. Hence if the ball is held high, the keeper will respond by preparing to block a high shot. Changing planes means that shooters should start high and shoot low.

"Move" (or move without the ball) - Also see 'support'. Similar to basketball, the offensive players are harder to guard if they continually move around even when they don't have the ball. Think "Hold for 2, go someplace new." All offensive field players need to be aware of open spaces on the field. Being in a cluster, or 'bunched up' generally helps the defense. Moving to space means to find a position where you can make a clean catch, preferably in a shooting position.

"Move it" - Pass the ball, don't hold on to it.

"See what he's got" --You have the ball; see if your man can cover you. Often, this is a chance to draw-and-dump, drawing the double-team and dumping the ball to an open teammate. When you hear this, I want you to trigger the offense; if you can't take your man or draw a slide, pull the ball back out, settle it down and retain possession.

"Match up" --You will hear this (or "Get a man") when you first get on defense. Everyone needs to find a man; when you hear me say this, call out the number of the guy you are covering. If you aren't covering someone --or if two of you call out the same number -- somebody is open. Find that player and make sure that you or a teammate goes to cover him.

"Drop in" --We play defense all over the field, but we play tight man-for-man only within our defensive zone, where you have teammates who can slide over and help out if you get beaten. If you hear me yelling this, you are playing too far out from the goal.

"Oh unlucky!" - Encouragement when unfortunate events occur, meaning don't worry keep playing hard and good things will happen!

"Just run with him " – On defense, don't try to strip your opponent, just stay stride- for-stride with him. Prevent the player from running by you toward the goal. Delay him and allow the rest of the defense to get into position. Many times, that is all it will take to cover an

opponent; trying to do more may be costly.

"Settle it" --Let's slow the ball down and set up in our offense. There is no rush. There will be plenty of times when we prefer to take our time with the ball and run our set offense rather than run all over the field. This will often be called in a situation where we want to burn some time off of the clock if we possess the ball in a man down situation.

"Get it behind" or "Get it to the attack" --This means we want to start up our offense from behind the goal. IT DOES NOT MEAN YOU MUST THROW THE BALL DIRECTLY TO AN ATTACKMAN. Pass the ball to teammates along the perimeter of the offense and down to the attack, or carry the ball to the side of the field so you can get an easy pass to an attackman.

'Middie Back" or "Stay onside" --For midfielders, always tied to your name, as in "Jim, stay onside." It means that if you cross the midfield line, we will be offsides (a teammate who normally stays either in the offensive or defensive zone has crossed the midfield ahead of you). Generally this will be the trailing midfielder, or the one who is furthest from the goal we are attacking. When you recognize that you are the one staying back, stand next to the half line, raise your stick, and shout 'Middie Back!'

"You have the cut-off" or "You've got the break" --for midfielders on a face-off, this is the person whose primary job is to make sure the other team does not come up with a fast break. If you can't come up with the ball, you must slow down the other team so that they won't have a fast break opportunity.

"You have the point" --For defensemen, this means you have the first slide on the fast break, the responsibility to stop the man carrying the ball upfield. Stop the break at the top of our defensive zone, never outside of it. For attackmen, it means that you play up high if we get a fast break, and that you will be the player most likely to get the first pass from the guy carrying the ball upfield. Your job will then be to look for the feed to someone near the goal or to shoot yourself."

"Tango" --When we are completely dominating a game, the coach may call Tango. In this situation, our object is to pass the ball around without looking to score. A coach once told me that a perfect game score was 12-0. A shutout by the defense, 3 goals per quarter, with every goal set up by an assist. Under no circumstances will our team run up the score on our opponents.

"Wide" – To move the ball towards the sidelines, away from the middle of the field. Especially important in the case of a clearing pass. Throwing the ball up the middle, often into the teeth of the defense, can have very bad results.

BOY'S LACROSSE PERSONAL & TECHNICAL FOULS:

There are personal fouls and technical fouls in boy's lacrosse. The penalty for a personal foul results in a one to three minute suspension from play and possession to the team that was fouled. Players with five personal fouls are ejected from the game. The penalty for a technical foul is a thirty-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.

Personal Fouls

Slashing: Occurs when a player's stick viciously contacts an opponent in any area other than the stick or gloved hand on the stick.

Tripping: Occurs when a player obstructs his opponent at or below the waist with the crosse, hands, arms, feet or legs.

Cross Checking: Occurs when a player uses the handle of his crosse between his hands to make contact with an opponent.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Occurs when any player or coach commits an act which is considered unsportsmanlike by an official, including taunting, arguing, or obscene language or

gestures. Players on our team who are called for unsportsmanlike conduct will be suspended from play for the rest of the game PLUS all of the next game.

Unnecessary Roughness: Occurs when a player strikes an opponent with his stick or body using excessive or violent force.

Illegal Crosse (Stick) : Occurs when 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 any other part of the crosse was altered to gain an advantage. The refs can ask to check a stick at any time. PLEASE check with the coaches if you have any question regarding the legality of your crosse.

Illegal Body Checking: Occurs when any of the following actions takes place:

a. body checking an opponent who is not in possession of the ball or within five yards of a loose ball; b. avoidable body check of an opponent after he has passed or shot the ball; c. body checking an opponent from the rear or at or below the waist; d. body checking an opponent above the shoulders. A body check must be below the shoulders and above the waist, and both hands of the player applying the body check must remain in contact with his crosse.

Illegal Gloves: Occurs when 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

Holding: Occurs when a player impedes the movement of an opponent or an opponent's crosse.

Interference: Occurs when 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 player, or both players are within five yards of a loose ball.

Offsides: Occurs when 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: Occurs when a player thrusts or shoves a player from behind.

Screening: Occurs when an offensive player moves into and makes contact with a defensive player with the purpose of blocking him from the man he is defending.

Stalling: Occurs when a team intentionally holds the ball, without conducting normal offensive play, with the intent of running time off the clock.

Warding Off: Occurs when 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.

Thanks for taking the time to read this information.