

ARTICLES AND TIPS

When to check, and when not to check

January 16, 2003

The ONLY time a defenseman should start throwing checks is when their opponent is fading away from the goal – that is when they are the least dangerous.



Christian Cook, New Jersey Pride, Receive 2002 Warrior Trophy for MLL Defenseman of the Year from MLL Founder and CEO Jake Steinfeld. Christian is also teaching defense this summer at Jesse Hubbard's "Lacrosse Experience" June 28-July2

This week's article will focus on a fairly simple topic that causes many defensemen to make silly mistakes (young and old alike). When to check, and when not to check. Many young defensemen are taught by their coaches and encouraged to "hound" their man all over the field from the minute they pick up a long-stick. The coaches yell "use that 6 foot stick to your advantage" and want them to relentlessly poke and slap their attackman – thinking it will lead to a bad pass or shot. While this is true in theory, it also leads many defensemen to over-commit and become their own worst enemy.

There are specific times when you want to use your stick while playing defense and times you want to focus on your body position. Any time an offensive player is bearing towards the goal, from behind, the wing or up-top, your first thought as a defensive player should be "where am I in relation to the goal and where do I want to direct my opponent?" Body position is very important – you can use your stick to your advantage at this point, but it won't be through the use of checks. Specifically, if an offensive midfielder is driving toward the cage and you push them down the side (as all defensive players should learn to do) you should ONLY lift their bottom hand with your stick. It allows you to disrupt their dodge/shot/pass while not losing body position. NEVER slap or poke at this point in time. The lift is the most underutilized and underrated check in lacrosse at any level. ANYBODY can use it and it works on EVERYONE. If a player is dodging from X and they get a step advantage, a defenseman can use the lift as leverage to get their feet back in position. IF it is used to lift a player's elbow or arm it causes the attackman to veer away from the cage giving the defenseman time and space to catch up and get back into position.

The ONLY time a defenseman should start throwing checks is when their opponent is fading away from the goal – that is when they are the least dangerous. Young defensemen (and some older, arrogant d-men) sometimes play too far out on their players when they don't have sound footwork and body positioning – this is exactly what an offensive player is looking for. The more spread a defense is, the further the slides are, the more time it takes – a defense doesn't have time (play from the inside out – keeping things tight and quick – less time).

Defensive Tips from the Best: Tommy Smith **University of Virginia; All-American 1995, 1996, 1997**

Communication Is Key

The number one key to being an All-American defenseman, is the communication you have on the field between yourself and the rest of your teammates. Communication can make good players great and great players All-Americans. It's amazing how easy team defense can be with everybody (goalies and short stick midfielders) barking out calls to their fellow teammates. It is even more amazing how you can intimidate an offense just by how loud you can yell out a call (even if a defender is beat). Everyone in the defensive end should be yelling a call. Whether it's the man on the ball (yell "I got Ball"), the players off the ball (yell "I've gotcha left/right"), or the slide man (yell "1st slide"), also call ("cutter", "shot", "iso", etc.) every player is communicating and working together as a team.

One-on-One

This can be a defenseman's dream or nightmare. With that aside it is definitely the one time a defenseman has an opportunity to show his athletic ability. There are a couple of things for defenseman to keep in mind when going one-on-one with an offensive player. The first thing that defensemen should focus on their "ready position" when preparing for a good one-on-one battle. Defensemen should always have a slight bend to their knees, almost as if they are sitting in a chair. Secondly, defensemen should also always have their sticks out in front of them, not at their waist, this way they are ready to engage their attackman. Finally, defensemen must play on the balls of their feet, not on the back of their heels.

Attacking Defense

My final tip for any defenseman would be to play an attacking style of defense. A lot of defensemen, especially at the collegiate level, will get beat for goals because they are too worried about taking the ball away from their man. Remember your job, as a defenseman is to stop your opponent FIRST. Be physical and initiate the contact and never play on your heels. You have a six-foot stick in your hand; make sure you take advantage of this luxury. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the poke check. Keep poking the bottom hand of the attackman. This will drive him crazy! Attackmen cannot stand physical play; so BE THE AGGRESSOR! Your physical play will bother the attackman so much that it will take him out of his game. You can develop take-away checks such as the over-the-head or the "kayak" later on, but the poke check still remains the most effective check in one's arsenal.

Closing Tip

Remember, coaches love aggressive defenseman, however know your opponents and weaknesses and more importantly your own. Keep practicing.

DEFENSE 101

(Regy Thorpe of the Rochester Knighthawks, shares his defensive expertise with the fans. Reprinted from plpa.com, Professional Lacrosse Players Association)

1) Position of your stance.

You should be on the balls of your feet and never get caught flat-footed. Watch the opponents' waist. Do not get in the habit of watching someone's stick because you will end up falling for his stick fakes. Concentrate on looking at their waist. Be within 3 - 5 yards of your opponent if he has the ball. If your opponent is primarily a feeder then your stick should be right on his gloves not allowing them to stand there and feed. Being 3 - 5 yards away from your opponent will not allow the player to get a full speed run at you when he goes to make his move on you. When your opponent makes his move make contact and try to keep equal pressure on him and do not get over extended. Push him out with your stick or body. Make him go to his weak hand. If he stills get by you, then try to keep a stick on his gloves, which could help in altering his pass or shot. Do not get in the habit of chasing a players stick. You do not have to take the ball away every time your opponent gets it.

2) Off Ball Defense

If the player you are playing does not have the ball then you should be in a position to help/slide if your teammate gets beat. You should always see your man and also the person with the ball. This is known as keeping your head on a swivel. Talk to your teammate and let them know that if they get beat your going to be the first one to slide. Once the initial slide has taken place, the second, third, and even fourth slide can be the most important slide especially if you are playing a team that can really move the ball. Sometimes a player will be in limbo whether to slide or not. Do not get caught by only sliding halfway. If you are the slide then do not hesitate. Slide with your stick first and then follow through with your body.

3) Communication

This is the most important part of defense. You could be the best defender but if your teammates are not communicating with you then you could get easily beat whether it is a pick or just a simple switch. Talk to one another and make sure everyone on your line knows who is sliding and when to switch. One player can not be successful on defense alone. The team needs to make a commitment to defense.

4) Know Your Opponent

This is an extra step that will really help improve your overall defense. Try and find out whom you will be covering in an up and coming game. It might be two or three different players. You should ask your teammates and/or watch films on the player(s) you will be covering. Get to know what their favorite moves are and with what hand are they more dominant. This will help you prepare for them properly. You can not cover each person the same.

5) Conditioning and Training

This is an extra step to really help your defense. You should be on some type of weight training program to give you a physical edge against your opponent. Your coach or trainer should be able to find a program that fits you. Jump rope is also an excellent way to improve your quickness in your feet. Practice as much as you can and always try to become a better offensive player. There is nothing more dangerous then a defensive player who can also run the floor and create some good offensive opportunity for his team.

POKE CHECK, POKE CHECK, POKE CHECK

Lacrosse coaches, Coach Kev included, are often heard screaming that the three most important checks in lacrosse are, in order of importance: number one, the poke check; number two, the poke check; and number three, the poke check. I knew a coach who once berated his team for a full ten minutes for not using the poke check. "Why?" he shrieked, veins bulging from his neck, sweat beading on his forehead. "Why do you all insist on trying wrap checks and slap checks and over the head checks and body checks and god knows what other kind of checks?" "To get the ball back, coach!" some brave midfielder suggested.

The coach threw his hat down and stomped on it and was so choked with rage he could barely squeak out how many pushups he wanted that brave midfielder to do.

"Who ever told you that the purpose of defense was to get the ball back? The purpose of defense is to keep your man from getting off a clean pass or shot!" This coach gives great advice! And I'm not just saying that because of his stunning resemblance to Coach Kev, bulging veins and all.

And what was this coach's suggestion for keeping your man from getting a clean pass or shot off? He had three suggestions, actually: first, the often touted, but woefully under-utilized poke check; second, the often touted, but woefully under-utilized poke check; and the third...well, you get the idea.

The lowly poke check: it's not flashy, doesn't register "Oooos" and "Awws" from the crowd, and most likely will never knock a ball out of an opponents sticks. But, and I speak from experience here, it is the most annoying defensive tactic that can be used against an offensive player.

How does it work? Well, as an offensive player, if I constantly have to drop my bottom hand away from my stick to protect it from the pesky poke check, or if I constantly have to move my stick away from the pestering poke check, I will never be in a good position to get off a decent shot or pass. Because it's awful hard to do anything but look cool with only one hand on the stick, and if I'm constantly moving my stick away from where I want to throw the ball, any pass I do end up getting off probably won't be a good one.

I suppose you could argue that perhaps Coach Kev is just too old and slow to beat a poke check anymore, because anyone can beat a poke check. This, however, is not true. (I don't get older, I just get craftier.) Actually, anyone with a shred of athletic ability can beat a slap check, a wrap check or an over the head check, or even a body check, and quite easily, because all of these checks cause the defender to over-commit to one side or another, giving the offensive player the chance to simply roll the other way. Even *I* can still beat a wrap check! But a well-executed poke check allows the defender to stay square with his opponent, giving no room to roll on either side.

Coach Kev's advice, then, is to use the poke check constantly, and practice it religiously. The other checks are useful only when your opponent makes a mistake and leaves his stick vulnerable, or as a last resort after you've made a mistake and all you can do is slap at anything that even resembles a lacrosse stick. But, if you persistently use the poke check and us it well, you'll never get beat, and then you'll never need to use any of those other checks. Say it with me, then! The three most important checks in lacrosse are: the POKE CHECK, the POKE CHECK and the POKE CHECK!

DEFENSE REVISTED

(Defense Tips from Toronto Rock Defenseman Dan Ladouceur January 15, 2002)

Hello lacrosse fans, my name is Dan Ladouceur and I play for the Toronto Rock. Here are a few tips to consider when thinking defense. As previously mentioned on Pro Tips, knowing your opponent and their tendencies is a key element to mounting any form of effective defense. Some important areas you may want to consider are channeling a player, playing open or closed off ball and being in a slide position.

Channeling a player is done, for the most part, with your foot and body positioning. For example, if you have a player who you know likes to go underneath the bottom defender and dive across the crease area, and then that defender needs to shut off the bottom lane. This is accomplished by simply overplaying the low side of the ball carrier and squaring off his feet and upper body to the ball carrier. This puts your body in the lane that the ball carrier wants to penetrate, forcing his first movements to be toward the top of the zone and subsequently into the defender's teammates. Proper positioning for shutting off a low lane may appear to give the ball carrier a step on the defender, however this is not always the case. If the ball carrier reads to defenders closed body position and thinks he can beat him in a foot race, either around the top of the zone or through the middle, he must also concern himself with the four other defenders taking up positions throughout the defensive zone. These players will be available to "slide" into position for a big hit or to strip the ball. The same sort of body positioning is appropriate for a player that you know has a great outside shot and that likes to shoot on the run. Obviously you don't want to let that player run unmarked across the top of your zone, so you channel him down to the insides taking away his movement across the top and decreasing his effective angle on the net. Again, utilizing your foot and body position, you would want to close the lane that runs across the top of your defensive zone, forcing him down the sides of your zone and into your teammates for help.

When we talk about being in a slide position or being a slide guy, there are a couple of things to consider regarding your responsibilities. First of all, if at all possible, you want to avoid sliding from the crease position. Sliding from the crease position leaves a man unmarked in a very high scoring percentage area. If the ball carrier you are sliding to is able to get a pass off to the crease man you just left, they have created a quick stick opportunity and your goalie will not be pleased with your decision. Secondly, the slide needs to be done very quickly so as not to telegraph your intentions. If the ball carrier is able to anticipate your action, this may allow him to dump the ball to an open player once you start your movement, leaving another defender in a two on one situation. The ideal slide position is from the high position on the off ball side. This makes it difficult to make a pass to the open man, and leaves the valuable crease area protected.

Last area to cover is how you want to set your body up while playing off ball in the defensive zone. You can either set up open or closed on the man you are guarding. Open simply means that you are in a position that allows you to see the rest of the field and to move into positions of help if need be. You want to keep your check in front of you as much as you can so you watch the ball, but you cannot lose focus on the guy your marking as he may take that opportunity to slip behind you to cut to the middle. Playing closed means that you are playing a basic one on one game with an offensive player. Wherever that player goes, you want to stick with him. This generally means fighting through picks and screens and always being within a stick length of your check. Playing closed is very difficult and requires your teammates help as far as denying any player from setting effective picks.

Again, knowledge of your opponent is key when deciding what tactics to employ in your defense. Knowing your opponents strengths allows you to choose where to channel the player, whether to play him open or closed as well as where the most effective slide would come from.

Princeton Midfield Defense

(Ben Strutt, former player and assistant coach at Princeton University, talks to d-middies about different ways for them to improve their skills.)

When covering the ball:

Play defense with your feet. Play basketball a lot to learn how. Get your hands up in front of you. You can throw punches to your opponent's body as long as both your hands are on your shaft.

What are you looking at when your opponent starts to dodge at you? (His eyes? His stick?) These are common mistakes. You'll probably get faked out. You should be looking at his waist. Wherever his waist goes, he is going. If you ever played football this is where you are taught to look when trying to tackle someone. You can still see what he wants to do with the ball out of the corner of your eye.

You want to dictate where your man goes, not the opposite. **DO NOT SQUARE UP!** Force him to his weak hand or toward a diminishing shooting angle. Do this by slightly turning your hips and shoulders and mostly by actually being on one side of him. The key to good team defense is tricking your opponent into taking poor shots. So play your individual defense accordingly.

Once he makes a move, close the distance between you, and take a good angle so you'll meet him at a point where he becomes dangerous.

Don't throw stick checks until you have perfected footwork and body position. A check thrown when not in good foot position will almost always result in a whiff or a foul!

If you are in good position and your man is getting ready to pass or shoot, the most effective check is a lift check. Get under his bottom elbow with your stick (or glove on your stick) and lift up and toward yourself (to avoid nipping his facemask on the way up).

When off the ball:

There are six players on the offense, so your man will only have the ball about 17 percent of the time. That means 83 percent of your defensive game is played when your man doesn't have the ball. So you better be good off-ball because that's most of your D game.

1. Spend most of your time looking at your man and the other players without the ball.
2. Use all your senses: **FEEL AROUND, LISTEN AND TALK.** Your goalie should be telling you where the ball is and what defense you are in and what formation the offense is in. This way you don't have to take your eyes off your man.
3. See the ball 10 percent of the time, just to get more info. Do this with a quick turn of the head, and then see your man again.
4. **KEEP YOUR HIPS TURNED TOWARD YOUR MAN AT ALL TIMES!** You won't have time to turn and find him if he is receiving a feed. If you think another opponent is behind you, reach your hand out to try to touch him without taking your eyes off your man. Be big in there, push people around.
5. If you're going to look at the ball as it's being passed around the horn, **ALWAYS TURN THROUGH YOUR MAN!** This means if you are playing defense against the top left middle and he passes the ball to the leftwing attackman, who throws it to the attackman at X, who throws it to the rightwing attackman, you need to move your body in a certain way. **DO NOT TURN YOUR BODY COUNTERCLOCKWISE** in this situation and follow the ball. You should see the pass to the leftwing attackman and then **LOOK OVER YOUR RIGHT SHOULDER** to see the ball at X and the right wing, without turning your feet or hips. Thus you have turned **THROUGH YOUR MAN** to see the ball.
6. Cover the offensive players, not spots, even when in zone. (I.e. adapt the shape of your zone to their formation).
7. As for playing team defense, when in doubt slide early, help and double often.

General:

As a D-Middie accept your role on the team. You aren't going to score a lot of points, but if you are good at defense you will have a lot of fast break opportunities that offensive middies won't. If you can't accept your role on a team you aren't going to be a part of a lot of winners anyway. Most lacrosse players don't get a lot of PT. You have maybe 40 guys on a team and 18 play a lot. That's just the way it is.

I was probably middle of the road in stick skills as a DI college middie, but I got more playing time than any other middie at Princeton because I was a groundballer, hustled, played D-Mid, wing on face-offs and man-down defense.

Be the toughest son-of-a-gun you can. Never lose a 50-50 ground ball. Always run as hard as you can when out there. You'll be off soon to rest. Part of your job is to set the tone, pace and volume of the game. You want to instill fear and self-doubt in your opponent. This hurts their confidence and makes them less aggressive, which makes you more effective.

Drills:

1. When scrimmaging in practice, concentrate on not looking at the ball when on defense. You need to adapt a feel for the game that is going on that you can't see.
2. A good drill in practice is playing one-on-one defense in a drill or even in a 6-on-6 situation with a "stub." A "stub" is an 18-inch section of lax shaft with the ends taped for safety. We'd even do drills where the whole defense goes with stubs, but it works better when one or two guys work in with stubs. Often we'd make up 10 or so of them from broken d-shafts or old aluminum shafts. This drill makes defenders emphasize playing defense with their feet instead of their sticks, which is so important.
3. Play all the basketball you can. Find pick-up games at gyms, playgrounds, schools, etc. Play against people taller and faster than you. The principles are exactly the same, and it's a lot easier to get a pick-up game of basketball going than a pick-up game of lacrosse.

CHICKEN SOUP FOR LACROSSE PLAYERS

By Quint Kessenich

GENERAL

1. Lacrosse is a contact sport. If you are not willing to pay the physical price, play tennis or golf.
2. Show respect for the game, for your teammate, your opponents and yourself.
3. Everyone makes mistakes. Don't get down on yourself. Take responsibility for it. Learn from it and don't make the same mistake ever again.
4. Lead by example. Give credit and accept blame.
5. Play within yourself during the game. Expand your game on your own time and during practice.
6. Focus on your effort at practice. Winning is the byproduct of hard work.
7. Strive for consistency. Finish each play.
8. Eliminate unforced errors. Focus on the little things, like scooping with two hands, passing and shooting overhand. Don't try and pull moves that only the best players can make.
9. Make the correct turn after scooping the ball on a ground ball. Always turn toward your bottom hand on the stick (butt end).
10. Notice that offense is played using straight lines, and that defense is played at angles.

GOALIES

1. See the ball at all times. Don't cheat, but trust your intuition.
2. Be ready for every shot.
3. Make the routine saves and never turn the ball over in your end.
4. Take away the near pipe.
5. Make one miracle save per game.
6. Talk to your defense; make them better through your communication.
7. Never show your opponent weakness or vulnerability. Maintain your composure. The next shot counts, not the previous one. Stay positive.
8. If you give up bad goals in practice, you will give up bad goals in games.

DEFENSE

1. Defense is played with your feet, not your stick.
2. Big eye man. Little eye ball.
3. When being attacked behind the goal, don't ever get beat topside.
4. Midfielder defense – force your man “down the side” toward the corner.
5. When you slide to the ball carrier, go where he will be, not where he is.
6. Be physical when needed. Take the body when you check and check hard.
7. Clear the crease, and let your goalie garner the loose ball.
8. Always keep a man in the hole.
9. Don't slide up the field.
10. When you are off the ball rely on your teammates to help you recognize where the ball is.
11. When riding, never leave a short stick to cover a long pole.
12. When clearing, give the ball up to the short sticks when they are open. They are better suited to carry the ball to your offensive zone.

OFFENSE

1. Move the ball, move your feet. Lacrosse is a running game.
2. Get in shape.
3. Play your man – move, cut, pick, make him cover you. Work him.
4. Always catch and square to the goal.
5. Shoot to the back of the net and always with authority.
6. Don't drop the head of the stick when faking the goalie.
7. Shoot high to low from the inside.
8. Take 100 shots in practice for every shot you take in a game.
9. Talk on offense.
10. Curl away when pressured or double-teamed.
11. When you see the back of your opponent's helmet, cut or backdoor to the goal.
12. Play to your strengths.
13. The game should be played with your stick up and your hands up, not at your waist.
14. Always see the ball. Explode on cuts. Anticipate the next play.

TIPS FROM THE BEST MIDDIES

KEVIN FINNERAN:

"As a midfielder sweeping across the top of the field for a shot, it is important that you have a good angle from which to hit the goal. It usually takes a couple of steps to get your hands free and get your speed up, so start your dodge 5-10 yards from the outside of the near pipe. This will give you an "alley" to set up the shot and still have an angle on the cage."

"A key part of being a midfielder is creating fast breaks. When you play defense, learn to anticipate when the opposition is going to shoot, and by getting that jump on your man and bursting out, you can start a lot of breaks for your team. Don't wait for the goalie to make the save and yell "break." If you've got a feel for his game, you can set off upfield before everyone else."

PETER JACOBS:

"The most important thing in face-offs is concentrating on the whistle and anticipating when it is going to be blown. That will help you start your move and get a jump on your man. The best way to improve is simply through repetitions. Get a whistle and a partner, and go through the starting routine over and over and over. It's mostly a mental thing, but it's something that you can definitely improve."

"After the whistle blows, the most important thing is to stay as low as possible. This will keep you closer to the ball, giving you more control and allowing you to keep your stability when people are pushing you around. One of the best drills is to just hold that low-centered face-off stance, while people throw balls at you. Then try to pick them up as quickly as possible, remaining low the whole time."

ELEVEN GOLDEN RULES TO CHAMPIONSHIP LACROSSE

1. Learn to catch, throw, and shoot RIGHT AND LEFT HANDED.
2. The more time you play with your stick perpendicular to the ground instead of parallel to the ground the better player you will be.
3. Move the ball, the less time the ball is in your stick the better player you are.
4. Move the ball off the ground (when you pick up a ground ball pass it immediately) - by way of explanation, the team that scores the most transition goals usually wins the game.
5. Move without the ball - a corollary to this rule is don't watch your pretty pass. Let the defender do that while you move, when he takes his line of sight off of you, then back door your man.
6. Move to the ball:
 - a. move to the ball when you are open on the back side (standing waving your stick only draws defenders),
 - b. move when the D-man is not watching you (you get the advantage on him)
 - c. move to any ball that you are receiving.
7. Look at a spot behind the goalie when you shoot - it is likely that he will move and if you look at the goalie you will hit him so look beyond him.
8. Shoot with a quick release (because a slow release lets the goalie see the ball and setup for your shot).
9. D-men need to have better stickwork than Attack or Midfield (cause that long pole is harder to handle especially in tight situations than a short pole) KEEPERS NEED TO BE THE BEST STICKHANDLERS.
10. Play D like a boxer boxes (on your toes, moving, countering, resetting, recountering, attacking . . . not just one check and hold)
11. You don't have to take the ball away to be a good D man -- play good position, stay in the offensive player's hands and you can be a big time D-man.

LEARNING THE GAME OF LACROSSE

by Gary Gait

Having played the game of lacrosse for over 31 years, I can honestly say that the most educational experience that I've had on the field came at a young age. At the time, I had been playing lacrosse for 5 or 6 years, but had not achieved great success. Then I met a coach that changed everything.

Up until that point, I was really just going through the motions, trying to do whatever the coaches asked of me. The new coach took a totally different approach to teaching the game than any of my previous coaches had. More specifically, he wanted us to understand why we did things a certain way and why some players were successful and others were not. He made me realize that the mind is equally as powerful as the body; because to truly participate in lacrosse you need to understand why you do certain things during a game. This is the only way you can truly elevate your play.

Instead of simply having us do a drill, he started with the basics which included an explanation of why we were doing that drill and what specific techniques we should use to be successful. One example would be something as simple as going after a ground ball.

For instance, if we did a one-on-one ground ball drill, we all worked on getting in front of the other player and putting our elbows and arms in front of our bodies to protect them (and ultimately the ball) from checks. We learned to keep our feet in front of the ball so our opponent didn't have the opportunity to scoop it up. In addition, we were taught how to use the upper body and arms to gain inside position.

Next, we worked on positioning and how to take a strategic angle that would drive an opponent off the ball. If we were trailing, we would add deception with regards to which side we would attempt to go after the ball.

As you can see, a simple ground ball drill was more than just a simple exercise in which one could simply "go through the motions." Above all, no matter what particular drill we were working on, we were taught to remember that repetition was key to training the mind and body.

Our new coach strongly believed that one of the keys to becoming a great player was to improve our understanding of the game itself. This was accomplished by watching other players and teams every chance we got. More specifically, if we were watching a high school game, he instructed us to watch the seniors play and to study their every move. In turn, we would practice these moves on our own until they became second nature to us.

In retrospect, the mere fact that I was taught to watch lacrosse and play with a constant focus on learning and improving, has been the single greatest achievement of my lacrosse career.

JESSE HUBBARD'S LACROSSE TIPS - THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER

Practice:

1. The key is to throw against a wall or with a friend every chance you get. Throw right-handed and left-handed.
2. Keep the stick in your hand as much as possible, even if it just for a few minutes a day. Cradling, switching hands, and scooping are things you can work on anywhere. These fundamentals are just as important as catching and throwing.
3. Visualize yourself making a good play when you are practicing your fundamentals. The goal of practice is to be prepared for any situation that arises during games. Lacrosse is too fast for you to waste time thinking about what to do during the play. You should be reacting to the situation, already knowing what to do.
4. Adjust your pocket so that you are able to retain the ball while also throwing and catching smoothly. Try different types of pockets to see which one fits your game. You should be able to shoot hard without the ball getting caught in the pocket and "whipping."
5. Watch the best lacrosse if you aspire to be the best. Watch Major League Lacrosse or high-level college games and imitate what the best players do. You won't be able to do some of the moves right away, but keep practicing and you will develop your own style of play.

Quick Pointers:

1. Keys to carrying the ball: Keep your feet moving and change directions. Also, protect your stick by keeping your elbow in tight. Excessive cradling actually exposes the stick to the defenseman. If you are going to use a "power cradle", make sure you turn your body and shield your stick with your shoulders and back.
2. Off-ball play: Anticipate what is going to happen on the field and put yourself in position to help your teammates. If you are open, don't just sit there; move toward the player with the ball and call for it.
3. Feeding: Throw the ball to where the cutter will be rather than where he is now. Great feeders know how to lead the cutter. Get the ball up high toward the feeder's head and throw it at a speed at which he can handle it. It does no good to fire a feed to someone if he can't handle it, even if it is right on his stick.
4. Shooting: Most shots in games are on-the-move shots. The best shots to take are overhand shots to the lower corners of the net. Aim in between the pipes and the goalie's hips. There is a lot of room down there. If you shoot it hard and down, all that is down there is the goalie's legs. If you shoot high, the goalie's torso, head, and stick each could make the save. Make the goalie work by throwing it to where his stick is not.

MILLIONS TIPS

Tip # 1 Midfield Play

To be a top midfielder you must possess the whole package. Don't focus too much on any individual aspect of the game. Here are some things to work on:

- Shooting - During practice, focus about 90% of the time shooting on the run. That is really all you will use in a game.
- Face-off - Don't rely on the other guy all the time. Learn some moves and practice!
- Defense - Learn what it takes to be an individual "D" guy both on and off ball. Also learn the concepts of good team defense.
- Conditioning/Stamina - As a middie you need to be the most well conditioned player on the field. How else are you going to make a big stop on D and then go to the O side and stick a corner?
- Ground Balls - We all know they win games! Be relentless, and learn the proper technique.
- Between the Restraining lines- Just be smart, move the ball to a player in front of you and don't sell out. That means don't go for a check and get beat in this part of the field, your better off getting in the hole preventing unsettled play.

Tip # 2 Off season Preparation

Here are a few things to work on while getting ready for the upcoming season:

- Stick work - You should have your stick in your hands at least 3-4 times a week during the off season. Spend about a half-hour playing wall ball or catch with a friend. Dedicate 15 minutes to each hand! Also, if you have access to a goal spend a fair amount of time doing some shooting.
- Speed and Endurance training- You should ask your coach or fitness trainer at school for a combination speed and endurance workout. You should also do this 3-4 times a week. You should spend time running long distance (approx. 3 miles is good) and different length sprints (100, 60, and 40 yards are good).
- Playing other sports during the off-season will also make you a better lacrosse player.
- Watch lacrosse- Get your hands on a NCAA game or a World Championship game tape and watch as much as you can. Don't just watch to be entertained, watch to learn. Focus on a certain player, watch his moves and then see if you can emulate those moves in your practice sessions. If you do these three things I guarantee you will be a better player at the start of the season, and way ahead of most of your teammates!

Tip # 3 A Shooters Close Game

- Play games to shoot more accurately! The following are a few ideas to increase your shooting percentage in close and around the crease.
- For extra control, keep your hands 12 inches apart. Shoot high to low and off the goalie's hip. Accuracy of shot is more important than speed in close. Use more wrist action in close. Make fakes with your shoulders rather than your stick!

Tip # 4 Stick Doctor

There are a few things you should know about your stick and pocket. Believe it or not, stick knowledge can really help your game.

1. Figure out what a type of pocket will best suit your style of play.
2. Mesh vs. traditional?
3. How deep of a pocket?
4. Where do I want the ball to sit while carrying the ball?
5. Do I want a quick release?
6. How many throw strings do I need?

7. You can get answers to those questions by experimenting with your own stick or asking your teammates that may play with different pockets to try theirs.
8. Have a backup stick that plays exactly like the one you are currently playing with.
9. Take care of it! After you are through with a game or practice don't toss your stick in the garage or closet. If you play in the rain and mud, stuff some newspaper in the pocket so that when it dries it will keep its shape.
10. Know what makes a stick illegal.

Tip # 5 Shooting The Rock

Play games to shoot more accurately! A great way to challenge yourself, put the pressure on and add some fun to your practice sessions is to play some games while your out shooting. A couple my brother and I always used; tie some aluminum cans to the corners and take a ten shots each from all kinds of distances and angles. When we had a goalie we would have best of twenty competitions. Five bouncers, five on the run, five high and hard, and five mix. The other great one is a simple game of horse. Loser would always carry the goal home. Those are just a few ideas, be creative, it will make you a better shooter.

Tip # 6 Being A Great Defender

The following are some skills that most GREAT DEFENSEMEN seem to possess. Work on these tips to round out your game!

1. Good body position is essential for one on one play and team defense.
2. When playing one on one, break down in an athletic stance keeping your hips between your man and the goal. Shuffle your feet when moving. Do not cross your feet!
3. Know your opponents' strengths and take them away. Force the weak hand.
4. When you slide, do it under control. Slide body on body.
5. Communication is the key to good defense. Who has the ball, which has the slide, etc? Function as one unit!
6. Take pride in the little things. Get after the ground balls! Start the offense!
7. Attitude, you will not get beat!

Tip # 7 Hoover Vacuum

GROUND BALLS win games. Here are a few tips to make you into the human vacuum.

Use the proper technique. Keep your body low to the ground and in between the ball and your opponent, keep your hand nearest the butt end of your stick down, explode through the ball, and immediately cradle and tuck your stick. Look to pass right away or run away from pressure. Go for loose balls passionately and with attitude. The player who wants a ball more gets it. Ground balls win games and will keep you on the field if you're good at it.

Tip # 8 Protect The Stick

STICK PROTECTION Proper technique is essential! Here are some helpful tips:

Cradle the stick vertically keeping your elbow locked in on your stick-carrying arm while cradling mostly with your wrist. Try to keep the head of your stick near your ear or just below. Your elbow should stay within 4 inches of your ribs. Don't swing your arm! Your free arm should be kept in a comfortable protective position. Try not to run on the same line or plane. Run in and out. Keep your head up! Your goal should be to keep your body between the defender and your stick.

Tip # 9 Riding Attack

RIDING Don't feel your job is done as an attackman when the goalie makes a save. Ride hard until the ball is cleared through the midfield line.

Riding Tips:

1. Be in shape
2. Know how to break down and play "defense"
3. Use the sideline to your advantage (force the clearing player in that direction)
4. Don't go for the clearing players stick head (check his hands)
5. Be relentless!
6. If you focus on these tips you will probably increase your playing time and you'll be surprised how many easy goals your team will score.

Tip # 10 Rocket Shot

How can I improve my shot so I can score from about twenty yards? There are a few keys to scoring from outside. First, take a lot of bounce shots. They go in more frequently. Second, try to be deceptive. Try to hide your stick behind your body until the last second. Finally and most difficult shoot with the proper technique. Hands and elbows high and away from your body, hands 12 inches apart close to the bottom of your handle, turn your shoulders and hips and uncork like a golfer.

Tip # 11 Crease Defense

The key to playing crease defense is to make sure you always stay in between your man and the ball. You also must know how to play through picks. There are two ways. First you can play an area or zone and "switch" on all picks or you can try to stay with your man through all picks. I know that's a bit complicated, if it doesn't make total sense talk with your coach. The last thing you must do on the crease is talk with the rest of the D and be ready to slide. Hope this helps!

Tip # 12 The Best Defenders

The toughest defensive players for me to go one-on-one with are the guys that keep an athletic stance, play solid position defense and throw constant poke checks, rather than trying to take the ball away. If you're a defensive middie or close defenseman, work on those concepts first and you'll be a tougher player to beat.

Tip # 13 Getting Stronger

Weight lifting programs can help you to become stronger and faster. Always make sure your program is designed by a coach or someone who knows the correct way to lift. The most effective exercise to increase the speed of your shot (although most of your velocity comes from technique) are wrist and forearm exercises. Something as simple as squeezing a tennis ball on a regular basis can help you out.

Tip # 14 Becoming A Great Dodger

Want to be a great dodger? Here are a few tips...

1. Don't dodge with the intention of blowing by your defender. Your thought should be to make a move to get your hands free for a pass or shot, if only for a second or two.
2. Execute all of your moves in a game at FULL SPEED. (Practice your moves this way too)
3. Learn to play lefty and righty equally as well. It does not matter how good you are at a dodge. If you make the move the same way every time, your defenseman will recognize this and you'll never get your hands free.

Tip # 15 Being A Great Shooter

The most important factors in having a fast and accurate shot are:

1. Setting your hands about 12 inches apart near the bottom of your handle. Keep your hands and elbows high and away from your body.

2. Turning your upper body about 90 degrees while cradling your stick in the same direction and uncork in the direction of the target. Good golfers use the same principle when hitting long and accurate drives. At the same time push off with your legs in the direction of your target like a pitcher does in baseball.
3. Shoot overhand never losing sight of your target.
4. Practice, Practice, Practice...

Tip # 16 Shooting On The Run

1. Any time you're on a goal practicing your shot (hopefully all the time) spend 85% of the time running full speed and shooting. Don't worry if you miss the goal badly the first few hundred times.
2. Your power will come from a big hip and shoulder turn while cradling your stick behind your body. Just as your ready to release your shot uncork your body (like a golfer) in the direction of the target.
3. Again, this is a tough skill even for top players. It is going to take a considerable amount of practice to master. Watch some high level lacrosse to see it in action!

Tip # 17 Moving Off The Ball

Off ball play is an overlooked and important part of the attackman and midfielder's game. 60-70% of the goals I score are assisted by a teammate. To get these scoring opportunities however, you must know how to move without the ball.

Here are four tips:

1. After throwing a pass, immediately cut to the goal for a return pass (give and go), Most defenseman relax after you give up the ball...make em pay.
2. If the defenseman covering you goes to double or help a teammate, follow behind him and get in a passing lane.
3. Always cut to the ball as hard and fast as you do when you dodge. You'll be surprised how open you get just by cutting 100%.
4. Watch top level lacrosse and see how the mids and attackmen cut. Also watch and play basketball.

Tip #18 Ground Ball King

GROUND BALLS win games period. Here are a few tips to make you into the human vacuum.

1. Use the proper technique. Keep your body low to the ground and in between the ball and your opponent, keep your hand nearest the butt end of your stick down, explode through the ball, and immediately cradle and tuck your stick.
2. Look to pass right away or run away from pressure.
3. Go for loose balls passionately and with attitude, a lot of times the player who wants a ball more gets it.
4. Ground balls win games and will keep you on the field if you're good at it.

MORE TIPS FROM THE BEST

(Jesse Hubbard Former Princeton All-American attackman and Team USA member)

Mastering the Fundamentals

Lacrosse is a great sport to play because anybody can dramatically improve through practice and repetition. Sports such as football and basketball rely so much on speed, quickness, strength, and jumping ability that those who excel are usually those who are the most naturally gifted. In lacrosse, these gifts definitely provide an advantage, but they are not as important as the basic ability to pass, catch, and pick up ground balls. Mastery of these fundamentals is essential for every lacrosse player. If you're not the fastest, quickest, or strongest player, remember that you can always improve your fundamentals through practice and determination. If you happen to be blessed as a natural athlete, you should not be complacent with your stick skills. I've seen many great athletes who are not good lacrosse players because they do not work on their stick skills. The bottom line is that nobody wants to be a liability on the field. Being able to pass and catch with both hands will allow you to help your team.

Reaching Your Full Potential

The goal of any serious lacrosse player should be to reach full potential. There are two types of lacrosse players: those who see it as something to do only in the spring time, and those who work year-round to perfect their skills so that in the spring they have the ability to dominate games. Don't let your stick collect dust during the off-season. Serious players have their lacrosse sticks in their hands all year, always practicing and trying to improve. They find time in the summer and between other sports to improve their lacrosse ability. They play catch with a friend, find a wall to throw against or a goal to shoot at. These players often make it to the next level and reach their potential.

Becoming a Better Shooter

The most important way to improve your shooting is to practice it on your own-over and over again. Here are some suggestions: Be Creative: Experiment to make shooting on your own more fun. Shoot side-arm, behind the back, whichever way you can think of. This will give you a better sense of how the ball releases from your stick. Practice Situations: Practice the things you will most likely do in a game. Imagine that someone is playing you and that you must run by him/her to get the shot off. Imagine where the goalie would be and try to shoot where there will be open net. Watch Lacrosse: Watch as much lacrosse as you can whether it's live, on TV, or a tape. This will give you a sense of how shots develop as well as how different players shoot. Tape lacrosse games when they are on TV. Watch it a few times and pick out individual players to see how they shoot. Then, when shooting on your own try to imitate what they did. Don't get frustrated if you can't perfectly duplicate their shots. Just keep trying and over time you will develop a better shot.

BALL MOVEMENT – KEYS TO A GREAT OFFENSE

“Move the Ball Around the Perimeter” - The offense must move the ball around the outside of the defense from one side of the field to the other. The cross-field pass is one of the toughest passes in the game to complete because of the threat of the defense intercepting the ball, and even worse – transitioning that take away into a fast break. Therefore, it is critical that the offense focuses on swinging the ball around the perimeter outside of the defense. It is also important that players know how to get in the clear. A player should never pass through the middle of the defense unless a cutter is coming towards the ball or is uncovered all alone.

“Getting Open” - In order for a team to move the ball around a defense, players need to be able to get clear of their defender. A player can use several methods of getting open off a cut i.e. Give and Go, V-Cut In and Out, V-Cut Down and Back. Good execution of cuts is dependent on good timing, anticipation and the perfect pass. The biggest part of cutting is making sure to move behind the defender, making it difficult for him to keep an eye on you and the ball.

“Move the Ball!” - Movement of the ball in any offense is important. Missed opportunities result when a player holds on to it too long. This delay of hanging onto the ball too long gives the defense time to get into good position to back up the defender checking the ball carrier, catch-up to a cutter, or even in some cases catch a rest. The best teams move the ball consistently, and with a sense of immediate pressure. (Note - The passer should not pass too quickly so as to not allow the play to develop.)

“Passing to that Cutter in the Middle - What Makes A Great Feeder!” - The key is to give a “shooting” pass to the stick target and to get the ball to the receiver as soon as possible where he can be an offensive threat. (Note - A “shooting” pass is one where a receiver does not have to move his stick to receive the pass and then move it back to shoot. The feeder must also make the pass away from the defender. If the cutter is closely guarded, the feeder has to put the pass close to the cutter’s body on the outside of the defender. It is also important that the feeder become the eyes of those receiving the feed; put the ball where the play can succeed and let the cutter adjust his game. One last final point is that the feed needs to occur so as to allow the shooter time to make good decisions and to select his spot in the net. The golden rule on offensive feeding - “Pass early, never late”. And if you have had to think about it, its probably too late.

“Making Great Passes Means Getting Rid of That Defensive Pressure” - In order to be able to make the great pass, the passer has to free his stick from the defensive pressure. An offensive player can accomplish separation from his defender –

- (1) Keeping his moving. If he stands still, he is easier to check and pressure.
- (2) Faking like he is going to go one-one, then stepping away to avoid contact and passing unmolested.
- (3) Pushing into his defender with his upper arm, then stepping back and passing unmolested.
- (4) Setting up the defenseman with his eyes by looking one way to pass, which will draw the defenders stick to that side, then passing the other way unmolested.
- (5) Turning his body sideways and using his upper arm to protect his stick. He then leans into his defender and relaxes his body to equalize the pressure created by the defender cross-checking him. Once he stabilizes the checking, he now is in a position to pass.
- (6) Holding the stick high and to the side of the body away from the defenseman always helps a ball carrier in keeping his hands away from defensive interference. Also, its important for the player to avoid turning his back to the play to avoid a check, but rather use his shoulder for protection. (Note – The ball carrier is the quarterback on the lacrosse field and should always be watching what is happening on the entire field.)

“Passing Lanes” - For the best results the passer should be on the same plane as the cutter. By entering in the cutter’s line of vision, the passer makes it easier for the cutter to see both his defender and the ball.

“Know Your Teammates” - One way of establishing communication between the passer and cutter is eye contact. Other forms of initiating the play are verbal signals, hand signals, etc. The key to success of any offensive play is the anticipation of the cutter by the passer and the skill level to catch the ball by the cutter.

“Another Rule An Offense Must Live By” - Never pass to a teammate who is standing still.

“Draw and Dump Lacrosse” - A player must be a strong scoring threat as a one-on-one player. Dodge on the outside lanes of the lacrosse field, not in the middle. The position allows the dodger more room to beat the defender and move into scoring position. Also, from this position the cutter will be at a better angle for him to see both the ball on the pass and his defender. A dodger also places focus on the net rather than a cutter which allows for more passing lanes.

“Make the Right Pass” - The speed of the pass depends on the distance of the cutter and the feeder and on the ability of the cutter to make the play. (Note - It takes two to make a completed pass)

“Swinging the Ball” - A good offense is able to move the ball from one side of the field to the opposite side. By swinging the ball, the defense has to move laterally from ball side defense to off-side ball defense making it harder for the defensive players to back one another and settle into playing position defense.

“Make the Goalie Move” - By moving the ball around the perimeter, the goalie’s ability to play good angles becomes increasingly difficult as he keeps readjusting his positioning to the ball. Good ball movement will not allow give him the time he needs to set himself. Goalies are most vulnerable as they move across the crease laterally.

“Get the Ball in the Corner” - Its is good to move the ball back to the corner of the field and allow the ball carrier an opportunity to go one-on-one or feed to a cutter or pass back up to the top for a play.

“Another Offensive Golden Rule” - If you make a pass you must cut. On any pass to a non-cutting teammate, the passer must cut unless it is a set play. This rule gets rid of any standing around and creates movement for the defense.

LOOSE BALLS

(John Rosa of the Albany Attack, shares his expertise with the fans, reprinted from plpa.com, Professional Lacrosse Players Association)

My name is John Rosa. I am a member of the Albany Attack Lacrosse Team. I have been asked to talk about loose or ground balls. (I will refer to them as loose balls). Loose balls are a very important part of lacrosse. Many times they can determine the outcome of the game. Being an effective loose ball guy takes effort, skill and focus. Out working your opponent is essential.

There are 3 keys to picking up a loose ball: The first is to anticipate where the ball is going to be. This involves understanding the bounce mechanism of the ball.

1. To get a step ahead of your opponent you need to leave before him. Reading the play is crucial. Knowing when a shot is being taken and from where is vital in determining ball outcome.
2. The next key element is player positioning. It's important to get low when picking the ball up. This allows you to scoop the ball with ease and creates a smaller target for your opponent to hit!
3. It is important to use two hands when picking up a ball. A common error is scooping a ball up with one hand. In doing so the player tends to stand up straighter making it easier for the opponent to hit him and dislodge the ball from his stick.
4. The final key is to scoop through the ball. This creates momentum and speed making you a harder target to defend against. Note, when battling for a loose ball getting low is key.
5. Protecting the ball in front of you (close to the middle of your feet) while maintaining a wider stance provides you leverage, thus giving you the advantage over your opponent. Remember to use your legs to protect the ball from the opposition as you scoop it up.

These techniques are easy to learn when practiced consistently. Dedication and hard work need to come from within! Play hard and have fun!

FINISHING

by Jim Fritz

As a player comes in 1-on-1 on the goalie, drops his shoulder and shoots one wide, there is one main problem. He shot sidearm. Pfeiffer head coach Jim Fritz puts a high premium on finishing and shooting sidearm is not an effective method of putting the ball in the back of the net. Having produced 18 All-Americans, three players with over 200 points in their career, one World Team player, one NCAA record holder and the leading scorer throughout the entire NCAA in 1997 (ahead of such notables as UVa's Doug Knight), his players obviously subscribe to his theory.

“With more and more young players using whips and offset heads, and trying to bring the heat, I am seeing a definite drop in the ability to put the ball in the back of the net,” Fritz says. “As players are coming to the college ranks, I’m noticing more and more that the fundamentals of shooting, and more importantly, finishing, are not there. Anyone can be a shooter; All-Americans are finishers.”

While there is a time and place for a well-placed sidearm shot, it is frustrating to see even the top players miss when a good overhand shot would have put the ball on cage, and possibly been a goal, or at least forced the goalie to make a save.

That said, how do you become a finisher? That’s easy. You have to spend hours shooting and doing it the RIGHT way, and this requires you to find a stick with a pocket that works for you and your game. Utilizing the following basic steps will help improve your overhand shot:

- 1) Hands are important. Make sure your hands are 12 inches or so apart. Get in the habit of doing this off a catch so that you can be cocked and loaded as you receive the ball.
- 2) Your hands must be extended away from your body. Remember, if you’re hands are free, you are open!
- 3) Rotate your hips to catch the ball, and as you shoot, your front foot, hips, shoulder and stick should be pointing at the goal. Use the pipes as guidelines if you have to.

When you shoot sidearm, more often than not, where your stick finishes dictates where the shot is going. Also, for a middie on the run, shooting sidearm greatly reduces your angle and the amount of cage you have to work with.

Shooting overhand has some other advantages as well. For one, you don’t tip off whether your shot will be high or low. It’s easier to look one way and shoot another. It’s also easier to move the goalie as you move and cut, and still stay square for the overhand shot (TIP: shoot where the goalie isn’t!). Most importantly, it enables you to shoot at the single hardest location for the goalie to make a save: high-to-low opposite (TIP: ALWAYS shoot high-to-low off a feed. Make a goalie work!). The key is to not put the ball on the ground, but rather, change the plane so that the ball goes by the goalie at the knees and hits the back of the net.

Now, the question is how should you practice? Here are some tips:

- 1) First things first, work on the stick skills. If you can’t throw and catch, then you won’t be able to shoot.
- 2) Put the time in on the wall, by working on your right-hand, left-hand, quicksticks, etc. One good drill is the bad pass drill. As you are hitting the wall, throw your pass in such a way that, when it bounces back to you, you have to reach out and grab it. Bad passes will occur in games, and in order to shoot, you have to have the ball in your stick.
- 3) Speaking of games, make all your shooting drills game-like. Put yourself in situations you would be in during games. Midfielders especially should do drills on the run, and attackmen should do their drills on the move. Practice off a dodge, off a cut, off a groundball, etc. Make sure to have as many balls as you can, say 25 to start. Do 25 shots off a righty dodge, 25 off a lefty dodge, etc.

- 4) Remember that all drills should be done with both hands. After a good shooting practice, you should have taken between 400-500 shots. While it is great if you have a net in your yard, there are lots of ways to get better without one. First, go to the park or your school and find a tennis court or a softball/baseball backstop (my favorite). Mark off four corners (6' x 6'), using bandanas, T-shirts, or hats as targets.

If you are fortunate to have a wall and a cage, here are some good drills to do by yourself:

- 1) If the cage is next to a wall, face the wall, pass, catch and shoot.
- 2) If the cage is behind you, face the wall; pass to wall and work on turning and finishing, or shooting with your back to the net.
- 3) If the back of the cage is pointed at the wall, pass off the wall, catch and finish.

In closing, these are some things that will make you a finisher, and not just a shooter. Overhand is the way to go.

DODGING

(Jake Bergey of the Philadelphia Wings, shares his expertise with the fans.)

Hi Lacrosse Fans. My Name is Jake Bergey of the Philadelphia Wings. I know that you have learned other aspects of the game from other players on this site but I am going to talk to you about doing a dodge and going to the goal. There are three or four dodges that I like to do. Face dodge, Roll dodge, Split dodge and finally Bull dodge. If you can master these then you will be on your way to scoring some goals.

Face Dodge - The face dodge is probably the easiest dodge to learn and also very effective. Catching the ball from a teammate your Defense man is usually sluffed in playing team D. As he charges out at you, you wind up to take a shot and pull the stick across your face tucking it by your opposite ear. You accelerate past the D man to an opening for a shot on goal or a pass to another teammate.

Split Dodge - Split dodge is similar to the Face dodge but instead of making the D man think that you are going to Pass or shoot the ball you are going to make him think you are running by him on one side but with a quick plant with your front foot, You switch your stick from one hand to the other in front of your face and again accelerate past the D man on the other side.

Roll Dodge - The roll dodge is very effective for the quicker player. On your way to the goal you are feeling that the D man is playing one of your hands more than the other. As you feel this pressure you once again plant your front foot and keeping your back to the D man you switch hands midway through the dodge hoping that you catch him off balance. This quick change of direction should free you enough to either draw a double team or allow a good shot on goal.

Bull Dodge - Bull dodge, as its name suggests is for a player that has a size or strength advantage over the D man. There is not too much to this but getting your body in close to the D man and basically running over him.

Something that you have to remember about all these dodges is that you have to do them at full speed. Do not go half speed through them because this will give the D man time to catch up with you after the dodge. I hope that I helped you in this field. Remember that you have to practice these very often to master them. This should help you get started.

DODGING AT A CLOSER LOOK

- (1) Each ball carrier must be an offensive one-on-one scoring threat in order to keep the defense honest.
- (2) The best time to dodge is when the play is still flowing into the offensive zone. The defense will still be looking for their checks and will not be in a position to back up their teammate.
- (3) Once the defenders are all marked in the offensive zone it is more difficult to penetrate one-on-one. Thus, passing and player movement will create more chances of confusion and a better possibility of going one-on-one.
- (4) A one-on-one check off a weak check takes precedence over anything else.
- (5) The offensive players can run set plays or a clear out for the ball carrier to go one-on-one (to isolate the ball carrier with no backup).
- (6) An ideal dodger is a player that can go both ways, he must also have an inside roll and an outside shooting game.
- (7) Protection of the stick is the most important factor in completing an effective dodge. The simplest rule of protection is: Keep your head between and in direct alignment with the head of your stick and the opponent.

Face Dodge

The face dodge is best used when the defenseman is charging toward the ball carrier or when he is throwing a slap check. It is especially useful on fast breaks and man-up situations in which the defense has to slide to the ball. It is more difficult to execute the face dodge off a poke check because it is aimed generally in the path of the dodger's stick.

The ball carrier can help set up a face dodge by faking a pass. With a good fake the opponent generally will raise his stick in the air to block the faked pass, this will in turn open up the opportunity for the ball carrier to use the face dodge.

A right handed face dodge will occur as the ball carrier in one motion pushes off with his right foot, side steps to the left with his left foot, and then pulls the stick across his face. This will give the player at least one step on the defenseman. In this particular case, the dodger should remain right handed with his stick positioned to the left front of his body and in direct line with his own head and his opponent. When he has separated himself from the check, he can either bring the stick back to his right for a shot or change to a left handed grip.

Finally, the face dodge can also be executed on a crossover step as opposed to a side step. This crossover move is difficult when attempted on the move, but can be quite effective from the stationary position. The best example of this is when the offensive player has possession of the ball and takes one or two steps toward the goal, faking a crank shot from the outside. The defender will normally check down to stop the shot. This gives the attacker the opportunity to use the cross over and get in for a 6-yard shot on the goal.

Split Dodge (The Ankle Breaker)

The split dodge is very similar to the face dodge, but instead of making his defenseman think he is going to shoot or pass the ball carrier fakes one side, but with a quick plant with the front foot, he switches the stick from one hand to the opposite and explodes past the defenseman to the stick side.

The ball carrier takes the ball to his right with his stick in his right hand. The defender is forced to follow him running parallel and in a hip-to-hip position, thus crossing his feet. The ball carrier then plants his right foot and redirects his body diagonally switching his hands by sliding the left hand to the top of the shaft and placing the right at the bottom. He then brings the stick quickly across the face and accelerates with the stick now in his left hand.

Roll Dodge

The roll dodge is most effective dodge for quicker players and when the defense over plays and commits to one side. The roll dodge is most commonly used in the open field or on inside rolls to the cage. When the ball carrier takes his first step on the roll dodge. He faces away from his opponent and throws his hips into him (Note – It is important for the dodger to get as close to the defender as possible). The head of his stick stays even with his own head as he makes his pivot. If he places the stick below his head the defense will check it and he leaves it behind the defense can throw an effective wrap check. It is important that he keep his stick in this position even after he has rolled off the defender. Otherwise he will risk exposing his stick to the defender.

When the roll dodge is executed in the midfield the ball carrier should be cautious of how close he is to the defensive box. A defender can slide very quickly and be there when he makes his pivot out. Thus, the golden rule is any dodge within 14 yards of in front the cage should result in a lateral pivot out of the roll.

The roll dodge should be the tightest when it occurs from area surrounding the goal. When executed properly it can result in a point blank range shot. It is important that the dodging attacker get five yards past GLE. Otherwise, the defender can use the crease and slide defender for help defense. On the way to the goal the ball carrier engages the defenseman to over play his stick side by faking a forehand shot. As the defensemen over commits he plants his front foot and rolls to the opposite side switching hands and using his back and shoulders to protect his stick and the ball. The dodger should be prepared to shoot quickly and go high or low or even across the crease.

Bull Dodge (Jim Brown Special)

The bull dodge is best used by those players that have size and speed against their defenseman. There is not much too the dodge except that the ball carrier needs to get his body in close to the defenseman and then keep the stick close to his ear. Generally, it is mostly used with a one handed dodge and when the ball carrier is taking a direct rout or path to the goal for a shot. The key is to protect your stick with your body and just out run your opponent.

SHOOTING

(Derek Malawsky of the Buffalo Bandits, shares his expertise with the fans.)

Hi there my name is Derek Malawsky of the Buffalo Bandits! What I'm going to share with you today are a few tips of the trade. Over my 20 years of lacrosse experience I have learned a few different methods to shooting the ball. I will begin to explain the different shots and techniques that can be taken and when they can be most effective for you. You always can practice on your shooting!

SHOOTING (GENERAL)

What you need to always remember when taking a shot is that you have to have the correct grip of the stick. Either if you are left or right your bottom hand is the stabilizer with your top hand being 2/3rds of the way up the stick is the guide to where you want the ball to go. The key to getting power into your shot is in your arms as well as in your legs. So in saying that, your footwork needs to be in sync with your arms. The back foot is the foot you want to be shooting off, as well as getting your velocity from that back leg and then follow through onto your front foot. The timing between your legs and arms is crucial to a good shot. Now you have the primary techniques of taking a shot - next we will add those techniques into various types of shots that can be very effective in different situations.

OVERHAND SHOT

An overhand shot is the most basic shot in lacrosse and it was probably the first shot that you learned. This shot can be very deceiving for the goalies at times because it is hard for them to get a read on where exactly your aiming. I feel that this shot is your most accurate shot for picking the corners. Also when you want to one time a shot this would be the easiest method in getting a quick release.

SIDEARM SHOT

A sidearm shot is used by a lot of the players nowadays. It is also an accurate shot as well as a high velocity shot. I use this shot quite often in many occasions. An outside shot needs to have a little more zip on it so this is a good time to let it fly side arm. The side arm shot is a great way to shoot around a pick because you are in motion and it is easier to get a lot more torque into your shot. So a hard side arm bounce shot is a fantastic shot in this situation.

UNDERHAND SHOT

An underhand (sub) shot is not used as often as the others are but I believe it can catch the goalie unexpectedly. Those are the best times to take a shot on a goalie when he least expects it. The raised sub shot is dynamite if done correctly. You want the goalie to think that you are shooting low at his feet, so you wind up your underhand shot and you make the goalie begin to drop to his knees and you raise it to the upper portion of the goalie. This is a very difficult shot, but once you get it down it is a great shot to have in your repertoire.

BACK HAND SHOT

A backhand shot is a tricky shot and it can catch the goalie off guard too. A great time to use this one is when you are on the opposite side of the floor and you don't have much of an angle to shoot at or when you are cutting across the front of the net and once you get the goalie stepping you then drop it over your shoulder short side. Lots of practice on this shot and you could pick up that extra goal per game.

TIPS ON SHOOTING

Scoring is obviously the key to winning lacrosse games. In order to be a winning team, accuracy is the most critical factor in scoring. Most teams average well below 60% on putting their shots on the cage. In fact, most teams average around 50% and that means the goalie doesn't even have to make a play on one out of every two shots. When a shot ends on target, three things can happen:

1. The goalie makes a clean save.
2. The goalie makes a save, but is unable to gain control of the ball.
3. A goal is scored

The first is an advantage to the defense, but the second two are the advantage to the offense. The fastest shot in the game doesn't amount to anything on the scoreboard if it doesn't go in. At Neuqua, the first priority is to get the ball on the cage and even better on the ground. The team goal is 65% of its shots on cage. Therefore, the team will be required to shoot at a higher clip in practice of 75%.

Mike Kubik's Six Primary Steps To A Deadly Shot

1. **SHOOT OVERHAND** – Not sidearm, underhand or even three quarters. The best three shots in every player's game is the overhand, the overhand and the overhand. The shot offers a shorter release time, more accuracy, and is the least visible for the goalie to read.
2. **HIDE THE HEAD OF THE STICK** – Back exposed to the target and for those harder shots the wind up will be side arm with the release coming straight over the top. This type of motion will use the strongest muscles in the back.
3. **EXTEND YOUR ELBOWS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM YOUR BODY.**
4. **EXCHANGE WEIGHT** – A shooter knows that he is properly using all his body when he feels his entire body moving forward. The head will move forward and almost rest on the chin, the back foot will pull off the ground, and everything else should move toward the cage. This is all called selling out the body.
5. **LIFT THE FRONT ELBOW** – The front elbow has three important points on the shot. Point one is when the elbow is about mid level as the player is pulling back, it is important that the focus be on keeping the elbow extended here. Point two is as the shooter begins his release, it is important that he brings the elbow high and leads his hands and arms and almost serves as the cross hairs of a rifle. Point three is the follow through and here the elbow moves at the target.
6. **SNAP THE WRISTS** – The final step is the most missed in lacrosse and it is what separates the good shooters from the great shooters. Proper grip with the thumbs facing up the shaft will help encourage the snap as will the feeling of shooting down toward the goal.

THE BREAK AWAY

by Mike Keegan

If ever there was a time to choke, it's now. After a long, hectic battle for a loose ball, you find yourself alone at the restraining line with the ball. There's nothing between you and the goal except 15 yards of green grass.

You start your sprint for pay dirt and watch as the goalie fortifies his position between the pipes. In the next couple seconds, you will ask and answer several questions in your head: Where should I shoot the ball? Should I throw a fake? If so, how many? Is there a defenseman closing in on me? But there's one question you can't let slip through your mind: What if I get stuffed?

You can't think of the embarrassment. You can't tell yourself that this is so easy you should score it 100 out of 100 times. You can't realize that the goalie has nothing to lose and plenty of glory to gain. You can't worry about coach pulling you out of the game. Or about letting your teammates down. Or about looking like a chump in front of that cute girl in the stands.

Because in this situation, confidence and a clear head make things a lot easier. As in any athletic endeavor, mental imagery can play a key role.

The Burst

Whether you've just scooped up a loose ball, stolen an errant pass while riding, or received a pass from a teammate, the most important thing to do when you find yourself alone behind the defense is to sprint immediately toward the goal. Any split second of hesitation will allow the defensive players to catch up with you. Equally important is stick protection. There is nobody between you and the goalie, so for the first few steps, you don't need to worry about looking up to feed a teammate or getting your stick ready to throw. You will be doing the shooting, just as soon as you get to the goal. A common position for running with the ball, one that an absentminded player might mistakenly fall into, is to keep the stick by your head or behind you. Instead, hold the stick in front of you, shielding it with your body. One option is sometimes called "Pizza in the oven" where you hold the butt end of the stick with one hand and extend your arm in front of you.

The Approach

When approaching the goal from straight up top, let yourself drift very slightly to one side. If the stick is in your left hand, let your body drift slightly to the right. If your stick is in your right hand, drift slightly to the left. The purpose of this is to make sure your stick is in the center of the goal. This gives you the best shooting angle. And while fading a little to the side is helpful, fading too much can cut off your shooting angle and make it tougher to hit the shot. So keep your body inside the pipes.

Since no game or shot is ever the same, you inevitably will have one-on-one opportunities with the goalie from more than one angle. Whether it's directly from the wing or from the top corner of the box, the ideal approach is to sweep across the front of the goal. Do not run directly at or outside the near pipe. That cuts off the shooting angle, making your job more difficult. Approaching properly forces the goalie to leave the near pipe and follow you across the goal, making it tougher for him to make a save.

The Fake and Finish

Depending on the proximity of the defenseman, you may or may not throw a fake before shooting. If you fake don't bring the stick all the way out in front. It's just a quick wrist pump and head fake. While running full speed, you probably won't have time to get the stick in front of you and then pull it all the way back to shoot. A well-placed hard shot without a fake should be sufficient. It's OK to choke up on the stick a little if you have to. It'll help protect the stick if the defenseman is close behind.

PICKS AND SCREENS – AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO GET SETTLED GOALS

1. Pick and Screen Strategy

The main purpose of picks and screens is to set a teammate in the clear for an open shot or a pass. For a team to be successful offensively they must become passionate about the use of picks in their offensive structure. Generally, speaking the best defenders play a team's biggest scorers, thus picks can be used to create switches and mismatches on offense.

2. The Action-Reaction Principle

In lacrosse either the offense creates the action or the defense creates the action. If the offense creates the action, it will force the play and thereby create a reaction by the defense, which will be a slight physical delay with the defense chasing. Thus, if the offense team sets a pick (action) and forces the defense to switch (reaction), something good will happen offensively.

3. Setting A Strong Pick

- Use the element of surprise which means V-CUT!!!
- Set picks that allow the cutter to have proper spacing to work in if he catches the ball
- Headhunt - Set picks with wide body facing the defender; do not allow the defender to just squeeze through the pick
- Use the pick-and-roll

4. Cutting Off The Pick

- The angle of the picker should determine the direction the cutter takes off the pick
- The ball carrier or cutter must wait for the pick to be set before he can move his defender into the pick
- The ball carrier or cutter should fake first and set the defender up before he uses his pick
- Touch shoulders with the picker so as not to allow the defender to get through
- If the defender is picked off, the ball carrier or cutter should cut to the net looking for a goal
- If the defenders switch the feeder or ball carrier should look to see if the picker is open off the pick-and-roll

MARK MILLON'S RIDING ATTACKMEN

I recall looking around at the 30 talented attackmen at the 1994 and 1998 World Team tryouts and thinking, 'how will the coaches pick the five best to represent the USA in the World Games?' They were all tremendous athletes, had been captain of their team and earned All-America honors and various other accolades. These guys were fast, good dodgers, good finishers and good feeders, all the things you needed to be selected as one of the five.

I continued to think about what aspect of the game would help a player make this team. What would distinguish the best from the best? How could an attackman stand out amongst such an impressive crop of players? When I finally came up with the answer, I was surprised at how easily it could be overlooked.

Riding, or "fore checking" to those Canadian readers, is a sometimes forgotten aspect of an attackman's game. The coaching staff and selectors at both the USA Team tryouts emphasized the importance of riding and how doing it well could mean the difference in making the U.S. National team. They elaborated on its importance so much in each session that it became foremost in the minds of the players. The lesson to be learned here is that at any level of lacrosse, riding is a critical aspect of the game. Succeeding at it can land you a spot on any team. In some cases it can push you into the starting lineup, perhaps over a player who is a bit more talented or polished as a scorer.

Let's take a look at the skill of riding in more detail and touch on the elements that can make you great at it. First, it's got to be a group effort. It takes all three attackmen to make a successful ride. Make sure your teammates are reading this, because the only way to be successful is if you are all on the same page. You can't achieve a good ride if only one of you is playing hard — the result will be an easy clear for the other team. Ideally, help from the riding middies will make your ride easier as an attackman.

If each attackman commits to the ride, you should generate at least one goal on a turnover per game. What makes a good riding attackman? Hustle, hustle and more hustle. If you simply hustle and don't play lazy you will become a very good riding attackman.

An initial concept to grasp is that your job as an offensive player is not done once the opposing team makes a save. If you can make it difficult every time for the other team to clear the ball, it will eventually wear them down and provide you with frequent potential scoring opportunities.

Secondly, you must understand the concepts of individual and team defense. At the start of most settled clears the opposing team will have four players to your team's three (three defensemen and a goalie). Because of this, you will need to understand the concept of playing a zone or an area of the field. As the ball moves to your area and you feel you can make a play on the defenseman or goalie you will need to know how to play defense.

Don't attempt to rush the defenseman in an out-of-control manner and over commit. Rather, approach him in a controlled manner breaking down at the knees in an athletic position. You want to make sure you don't go for his stick fakes and especially do not jump and leave your feet in an effort to pick off a pass. Defensemen have great stick skills, and if they give you pump fakes and you jump he will easily run right by you. Also, just as your defenseman has done to you, scout him. Know his weak hand and get him to go that way. Use the sideline to your advantage, try to get him to go toward the sideline and simply push him out of bounds. Also, make sure you try to check his bottom hand. When defensemen clear the ball they often show a lot near the head of the stick but can quickly and easily take that away. The bottom part of the stick and the hands should be the target.

The last component of being a good riding attackman is to be in shape. If you can ride hard on every clearing opportunity you will eventually wear down the opponent. It takes a lot of stamina to play hard during your offensive possessions and the ride. Be relentless and create havoc. You will be surprised how this can help you make a team or increase your playing time.

COMMUNICATION IS KING – A GOALIE’S PERSPECTIVE

(MLL MVP, Greg Cattrano)

Developing into a successful goaltender takes a good mix of hard work, patience, discipline and hand-eye coordination. It may take years to develop certain instincts that enable a goalie to make a mere two additional saves per game. But those two saves can be the difference between victory and defeat.

From kick-saves to the ever popular “popcorn saves,” each time the ball is deflected, it’s another notch in the stat book. As goalies we cheer from within and build that internal momentum to stop the next shot that comes our way. Goalie confidence is the opponent’s worst nightmare. The stat book grows with a set of black parallel strokes crossed with a diagonal line when the goalie gets hot. But are these scribbles the only measure of a goalie’s success?

Communication is the hidden save that always goes unnoticed after a game or even after a season. No mark is made in the stat book when a defense makes a killer stand late in the game. There is no special system that counts the number of words the goalie spits out during regulation. Simply, a quiet defense is a losing defense, and it is the goalie’s responsibility to command perfection from his defensive unit when it comes to the essential dialogue.

“Prevention saves” can be defined as those made in a game that stop a team from getting easy chances to score goals. These saves are made whenever a defense communicates effectively and forces the offense to withdraw its shot. From years of experience playing in middle school to the MLL the notion is guaranteed. The goaltender must rally the defensive troops, and quarterback the defense for the entire game. There are numerous ways a goalie can communicate with his defense, but the following are the six most important.

Ball Location - Calling out the ball location will assist those defenders covering a man without the ball. Defenders are taught to play both the man and the ball, but sometimes they lose track of the ball. Sample calls are, “Top Right, Side Left, Back Left, Back Center, Middle.” Goalies need to be loud, but repeating the location of the ball while it is still in the same spot is unnecessary chatter.

Defensemen Not Covering the Ball - Calling out slides is another important aspect of goalie communication. At all times, the goalie should tell defenders who will be sliding. If a team slides from the crease, then it will be the crease defenseman. However, in most cases, our offensive counterparts move around and a defenseman is pulled off the crease. It is the goalie’s responsibility to assign another defenseman so slide. The call I use to tell my defenseman who is sliding is, “HOT!” It should sound something like this: “James, you’re hot! Who’s got his back?” It can get complex and fast, so it should be kept simple. Goalies should focus on making his first slide call and with comfort can begin calling second slides. It is also extremely important to let the crease defenders know when the ball is thrown into the crease. If the ball enters the crease, it should be met with a loud “CHECK!” call. This call will tell the defenders to check down on sticks in the crease. It is essential for a goalie to change the octave of his voice when calling, “CHECK!” It should go something like this: “Top left, side left, back left, CHECK!”

Defensemen Covering the Ball - It is also essential for the goalie to communicate with the defensemen who are covering the man with the ball. This is usually done when the shooter becomes a threat to score by driving hard to the cage. This situation happens at the side of the goal or when a midfielder sweeps down from the restraining box. The proper call to make in these situations are “HOLD!” and, “COVER!” When a defenseman is covering an attackman driving to the goal, the goalie should yell, “HOLD!” a split second before the attackman reaches the pipe. It takes time for the defenseman to register what is being communicated. This will help keep the attackman in a difficult position to score from behind the goal. Now with the threat to turn the corner taken out of the equation, the goalie must make sure the defenseman keeps his stick right on the attackman’s hands to eliminate the chance of an easy feed to the crease. The call “COVER” should be used when an offensive player is getting too close to the goal or the defender doesn’t know where he is on the field. Just like some defenders lose sight of the ball, others lose their position on the field.

Clearing and Riding - The goalie must also communicate to his defense when his team is clearing or riding. On clears, the goalie is responsible for directing traffic and communicating to his defense where he wants the ball to go. This is important since the goalie is able to see the entire field while a defenseman is carrying the ball. The defender might only see one open man, while the goalie can see other open teammates. When riding, goalies should tell defenders where they want them. Always call out ball location. On transition defense, it is the goalie’s responsibility to call out the break coming toward you. On 4-on-3 breaks, the goalie should be letting the defense know who will be taking point, when to pickup the ball carrier and when to hold. On other transition breaks, goalies should call out the formation. As soon as it is even strength again, the defense should be told to match-up on their man.

Motivational Communication - One of the most important goaltending roles is to motivate the defense. Since you are the captain of the defense, it is your responsibility to lead the defensive unit. The defensive four must work as one to succeed. If one fails, they all fail. It’s the goalie’s job to keep the defensive core intact. After each goal is scored (by either team), the goalie should huddle up the defensemen and talk about unfinished business. Whether losing by 5, or winning by 10, the goalie must keep the same level of motivation. Games last 60 minutes and teams must be focused the entire time. Praise and encouragement are the only tools a goalie should use.

Non-verbal Communication - The spotlight will be on the goalie a large percentage of the game. Goalies receive plenty of attention after making the big save, but also when they are being shelled for 20. There are two instances when a goalie communicates with the team without using a single word. When he is a brick wall. A goalie can inspire his team when he plays out of his mind. When a game is close, a big save can motivate the team and get the offense rolling. A dash up field can also inspire a team. Goalies should remain poised and in control at all times. However, as great as it feels when they are at the top of their game, confidence can come

crashing down quickly. Never get flustered and always keep your head up and remain positive; there is never any blame to be passed around.

LACROSSE NUTRITION

Being a student athlete is very demanding on the human body. Besides training for lacrosse, each player must tackle the rigors of everyday student life. Long days with little sleep to recover can have devastating effects on the human body. To keep oneself from becoming sick or not performing at peak capacity, consumption of the right amount, and kinds of foods is critical.

Before I begin, I must explain a few key terms. Calories simply refer to food. Each food item you eat has a calorie amount assigned to it. When you eat that food, you are consuming that amount of calories. There are four different kinds of calories: carbohydrates, protein, alcohol, and fat. On the other hand, burning calories refers to expending energy. When you exercise or simply go about your day, the human body must burn calories to function. Without calories, the body will not work and will begin to shut down.

Increasing body size (lean muscle mass: LMM) while still maintaining speed, agility, and quickness can be very beneficial in lacrosse. To achieve this, one must consume more calories (food) than one expends (burns). This may sound easy, but consuming the right amount and kinds of the right foods is the trick. The human body will not grow in size without excess calories to fuel the growth process. These excess calories should come in the form of carbohydrates and protein. Remember that you are not just an athlete, you are also a student. The body will not function properly if there are not enough carbohydrates in your system. Therefore, those fad protein diets are not beneficial for your growth and can drastically hinder your performance on the field. What are the right amounts and kinds of foods you should eat, you ask? The following will provide the answer for that question.

Envision your plate of food. Divide the plate into two equal halves. On the right half of the plate, place your complex carbohydrate food items. Complex carbohydrates include green, leafy, vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower, and salad. They also include whole grains, unrefined rice, and certain kinds of pastas. On the left half of your plate, divide that section into two, forming two equal quarters. In one quarter of your plate, place your low fat, high protein food source. Low fat, high protein food items include boneless, skinless, chicken breast, turkey, turkey burger, lean cuts of steak, pork, and other meats, and certain types of beans, such as black beans, refried beans, and pinto beans, etc. Now, the remaining quarter of your plate should consist of your fat. Fatty foods range in variety, but include any types of oils, cheeses, desserts, snacks, whole milk, etc. This approach should be taken when eating your meals. Remember that the human body will not grow unless there are excess calories present. Therefore, make sure you eat at least three healthy meals per day. (50% Complex Carbohydrates, 25% High Protein, 25% Fatty Foods)

The amount of calories you expend daily is a much tougher question to answer. Instead of providing you with the physiological answer to this question (which I will provide for you in a future article), you can answer it yourself. You will know if you are expending more calories than you are consuming if you are not increasing your body weight. Keep in mind, I'm not referring to increasing body fat. If you are putting weight on, but your clothes still fit the same and your stomach line is not expanding, you are probably increasing your lean muscle mass and are on the right track. If you are increasing your body fat, you should re-evaluate your eating and adjust the proportions of the calories you consume.

TAKEAWAYS & SLIDING

By Greg Paradine

Takeaways

1. Must be strong enough to generate power and speed not only for the check but also for the recoil.
2. Load up the shaft with sand in the times when you are not throwing checks.
3. Cut down the shaft to the length between chin and mouth.
4. Throw checks only with an intent and purpose.
5. Timing is everything so it is critical you study the cradle of attackman and learn tendencies.
6. If you miss your check are you in a position to recover.

Sliding

1. There are two types of slides. A slide from the adjacent and a slide from the crease. The slide from the crease is the easiest one to make but also leaves a player open in front of the goal. If the ball is behind or the side without an angle to shoot we may slide from the crease and the goalie can now come out and pick up the crease man. Generally, though we only want to slide from the crease on dodges from the top of the box or when we have forced an attackman to inside roll and his back is to us. More commonly we slide from the adjacent or what is called the near man.
2. A player becomes a threat in front of the goal when he nears 12 yards. We must slide at this point especially if the ball carrier has his shoulders square to the goal.
3. Communication is king. Must learn to call hot and fill so that everyone knows who needs to be where, before it ever even takes place.
4. Trust.
5. Technique - Head up, lead with stick, close with body, always under control.

HANDS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

December 2003

Recently I was working with a keeper who was having some difficulty getting to shots in the corner of the goal. It was clear to me that the goalie was not seeing the ball and when the goalie was seeing the ball the move to the ball was quite late. So I began to watch the goalies eyes and had the goalie work on watching the ball in my stick and then in the air and then into the goalie stick pocket. It sounded good, but the keeper was missing the ball very late in the sequence. I must have shot about 30 times and the goalie got only a couple. The shots were from about 7 yards and well placed (all above the belt). As the goalie got more frustrated by the numerous misses, I still encouraged watching the ball through the whole flight. But, the well placed shots when right in time after time. The keeper was watching the ball through the whole flight more and more and began to tip a few of the shots off goal. But, the goalie was no making the save cleanly.

So I started watching the goalie's top hand and I began noticing that if the ball went up the goalie's hand went up, straight up or even a little back and up. If the ball went left, the goalie's hand went left or even a little back and left. If the ball went right the goalies hand went right, actually it went back and right. And all of these were misses or tips, not a clean save in the lot. Further some were misses. The goalie was taking the stick to the area where the ball was going but it was too late or too little or too imprecise to make the save with the stick pocket.

I began to work with the keeper to drive the top hand OUT toward the ball to keep the hand itself in the line of vision (to retain that speedy eye-hand coordination). There was some improvement, but not as much as I expected. This long afternoon (for the goalie) continued with another batch of 30 or so shots and the goalie got more frustrated because many of the shots went in. I was watching to pick up something and then I saw the top hand slide on the shaft and I began to focus on the bottom hand during each shot. The bottom hand was holding the stick tight.

I call this choking the stick with a fist grip. When the bottom hand is choking the stick the top hand is not the one in charge. This bottom hand tight, top hand loose, might work up to a point, but when the ball is close and the shooter is shooting around the keeper, this make the top hand later or the stick face at an odd angle when the ball is near the net.

This is not an isolated story. The next day I was working with a very talented keeper who had a great year the previous year and he is struggling mightily with 7 yard shots that are savable, given some good concentration and technique. I started watching his bottom hand and instead of having his bottom hand as a pivot, he was choking the stick and has a loose top hand. The ball kept going in.

What is even more bizarre is I realized just then that my own problems on inside shots were because I had gotten lazy and was playing with the bottom hand dominant instead of the bottom hand loose and the top hand tight/dominant (with thumb pressing on the side of the stick pinching it to the side of 1st joint of the index finger.- this puts the wrist to the back of the shaft for maximum rotation) and the elbow pointed mostly down so that the move from high to low is fluid and fast with a tomahawk chop of the forearm and a snap of the wrist to turn the head to the ball. The next day I emphasized this on purpose when I was playing goal. My eye hand coordination came back and I was playing good goal again. Very exciting.

But back to the keepers. Each of them is now transitioning to a tight top hand grip with a loose bottom hand. When they drive their hand to the ball with that top hand dominant grip, their body moves easily behind the hand and they are getting to all the corners. It is really easy to go TO THE BALL with a strong top hand grip. With a bottom hand choke, it is nearly impossible.

So coaches, take some time with your keepers at about 7 yards (at this distance they can't compensate for bad technique or limited watching of the ball) and work with them to use the following, I call it shifting gears:

1st Gear - Watch the Ball

2nd Gear - Watch the Ball with your hand (top hand at eye brow level, but not in front of that eye)

3rd Gear - Setup the rest of your body in back of that hand (knees and elbows bent, chest in front of the hips and both wrists to the back of the shaft, shaft not up and down but a bit across the body)

4th Gear - Save the Shot, by driving the top hand to the ball and stepping with the ball side foot as you watch the ball throughout its whole flight from the shooters stick into the goalie stick pocket

5th Gear - Corral the ball and get into the throwing stance to get the ball out to the guys / gals who can run the break

Just like in a car, when you shift gears, you quit thinking about the previous gear and get to the next one. So, when the shot comes, help your keeper to STOP thinking about Setup and SWITCH to thinking about SHOT.

I was at the Genesee Valley Division I Fall Ball Tournament and MOST of the goals scored were NOT because the goalie was beaten on a great shot, but because the goalie was beaten by NOT BEING in 4th gear (ready and concentrating on the ball coming to him) when the shot was taken. Some weren't even in 2nd or 3rd Gear.

Watch for this with your keepers and let them know that most cars can't get to their top speed unless they are in the top gears. Even an only modestly capable athlete in 4th Gear on every shot is better than a spectacular athlete stuck in 1st or 2nd or even 3rd gear. Our job as coaches is to get consistency from our goalies by teaching them how to be in the right gear every time so that they can do their best at each opportunity. And also don't forget to tell them it is how you hold that stick that helps you get to the corners.

SIMPLIFY AND UPLIFT

May 2003

All the time, I am thinking about what to COMMUNICATE to coaches and keepers to help them improve and how to THINK about the best techniques in the simplest way.

Two things this month involve this kind of communication:

Staying in the shot to the end

Basic stance (getting in it and getting in it again).

These are really related. As a coach you have to fight the keeper's belief system to have him/her progress to the higher levels. The more that the keepers think that they can't make the save the more the keeper will go into a BLOCKING stance (hands in, chest out, locked knees, etc.) instead of continuing to drive the hands and body at the BALL.

In working with good (not great) keepers, I have also found that many tend to try to read the shooter and some get pretty good at it. What I mean is that they try to determine where the ball is going by the motion that the shooter uses to shoot the ball. Then along comes a shooter that a) has a different motion or b) the shot is too close in to have time to read it. These keepers will also try to block shots (with body or stick with lots of rebounds) instead of saving the ball with their stick mesh)

The great keepers play the ball not the shooter. Thus, they can stay in the shot longer and get to more balls, after all it is the ball that is saved by the keeper. In order to do this the keeper must put all his/her focus on the ball (not the shooter, the moon or other distractions). And, the keeper must be in a stance that allows him/her to drive out to the ball to make the save.

There are two points here;

Getting in a good stance prior to the shot

Driving to the ball for the save.

A coach needs to understand that

Once a keeper loses track of the ball it takes a long time (approximately 4/10ths second) to find it again. So one objective is to NOT LOSE TRACK of the BALL.

Being ready to make the save is crucial to making a high percentage of saves (more important than position in my view)

These points are also related and the basis for the technique of WATCHING THE BALL WITH YOUR HAND (pointing your top hand toward the ball in flight and as player drives/dodges AND setting up behind you hand on those passes and dodges). THE KEEPER WILL BE READY PRIOR TO THE SHOT on feeds and drives using this approach.

Once ready in a good stance then all the body parts need to flow to the ball (not just the hands). This is the real basis for stepping. Stepping is a result of attacking the ball with everything and NOT sideways stepping, but forward stepping. If the keeper is driving the top hand to the ball (always the 1st part of the save move) and stepping forward, the natural tendency to follow his/her hand will gain the needed width to cover the goal.

This point and one more is the real reason for this column. Keepers that WAIT on the SHOT (instead of drive to it) can make some saves based on their reactions/quickness. But, their range is limited by the rigidity of some of their body parts as they wait (legs, chest, etc.). These waiters have trouble with shooters that shoot the corners and off hip shots. But, if the keeper will drive his hands forward and his whole body forward on every shot, he/she will get to more corner shots (have more range). This needs to be practiced and that is the coach's job.

At the risk of rambling on in this area, by combining belief building, ball tracking, early setup and attacking the shot, IMPOSSIBLE SHOTS become POSSIBLE SAVES. These need to be practiced too. In my clinics we work on impossible shots by telling our keepers that everything, that is everything, that I shoot that day is possible to save and it is their job to work on their technique and ball concentration in order to be able to make those saves. I have devised some special drills to help them a) understand the situation and b) overcome their lack saves on close in feeds, cross crease passes, drives from behind and other tough but make-able saves.

GOALIE (THE BASICS)

Rule 1 - Watch the Ball - Many goalies struggle because they watch the game, guide the defense and get caught looking at the shooter's motion or eyes during the shot. These are all distractions to the real job of watching the BALL and reacting to it. If you can't see the ball because of a screen or the shooter is hiding the ball behind his shoulder or helmet, wait patiently for the ball to appear from the area where it is and then react to it.

Rule 2 - Watch the Ball Too - In clinics, I teach that the 1st rule of goaltending is to Watch the Ball. The second rule is also to watch the Ball (that's how important this is). But, some folks miss part of this. If you watch the ball in flight, see it land and simultaneously move to be setup for a shot from that person, you are moving with the ball and will not be late on cross crease passes or feeds into the middle or other similar passes. We tell our keepers, set up on every exchange and watch the ball ALL THE TIME. Tony Seaman said the other day that this sounds so simple but is very hard to do, so practice it until you can see the ball rotating during a pass or shot.

Rule 3 - Get Ready Early - I expect that nearly half the goals scored are scored because the keeper is not ready to move to the ball. I think that this means hands and elbows in front of the chest with the wrists on the backside of shaft with hands raised to cover the higher shot. Knees are bent with the chest slightly ahead of the hips. Weight should be forward a bit ready to step to the shot.

Rule 4 - Play on the Balls of Your Feet - If you play with your weight on your heels, most likely you will rock backward on the off-ball foot and kick the front foot towards the ball. This rock is slow and the kick both short to be effective limiting your range. If you play with your weight on the balls of your feet, you can step quickly to the ball without rocking first. To facilitate the step, play a little pigeon-toed (toes closer together than heels). In this position when you lift your ball side foot your body will flow to that side (try this slow footed and nothing happens). Since the goal is to have your WHOLE body moving toward the ball to make the save, this stance helps and is faster than other stances.

Rule 5 - Get Your Hands Off Your Chest - If your hands are back or down out of your vision, your mind has to tell your hands and your body where to go (and likely your wrists are to the side of the handle limiting the amount of wrist rotation you can use to get to the ball). Having your hands up in your vision (we call this eye-thumb-ball) lets you drive your hand to the ball (it's quicker) and your body will follow. Get ready is called Rule 3.

Rule 6 - Make a great move to the ball - If you are ready this usually means driving your top hand to the ball and making the save.

Rule 7 - Play the Pipe and High - As a shooter comes closer and closer to the goal (let's talk about drives from behind first), he wants to shoot high on the pipe side (between the goalie and the pipe). If the goalie's stick is up there already, then the shooter has to change the shot or shoot it into the keeper's stick. As a cutter cuts and is fed, he usually receives the ball high and shoots high. So playing with the stick low and stabbing to the ball gives the shooter the edge. Playing with the stick high (top even with the crossbar), gains you a couple of saves per game that you won't get by stabbing. Play the pipe closest to the shooter's side. We call this Rule # 6 (NEVER get beat PIPE side)

Rule 8 - Start the Break - The object is to get the ball and keep it until your team scores. The keeper can do this by getting a ground ball, cutting off a pass, running out a shot to the back line or making a save. Once you have the ball, get it moving up field preferably by throwing a good pass over the other team to your player so he can lead the break for a goal. We call this Rule 5.

Rule 9 - Quit Baiting or Guessing and Play the Ball - Once you have a good, mobile stance and are watching the ball, we suggest you quit guessing, watch the ball (Rule 1 and 2) and driver your top hand to the ball. This really works a lot better for a very high number of shots than stabbing or guessing.

GOALIE (GET YOUR BODY IN THE GAME)

This month I have been working with an excellent group of young Division I college goalies. Four things have struck me as we are working together to raise their game from all-star at the high school level to similar heights at the Division I top 20 school level. First, no one had taught them that where the hand goes the body will follow. In our clinics we call this "EYE-THUMB-BALL", meaning line up your top hand in a good position between your eye and the ball (by looking either over or beside your thumb at the ball). This positions the keeper to have the whole body move as your hand moves to the ball. Keep that hand up high and out in front (just to one side of your face (not by your ear). In this position, with both hands far enough out in front so that your elbows are in front of your chest, you are ready to move effectively.

Second, there are very talented goalies that react instead of step-to the shot. The step-to gets the keeper off his/her heels and helps his whole body flow to the shot. This step definitely makes you smoother and faster to the ball. Third, work on your footwork so that you never have to take your eye off the ball. When the ball is behind, face behind. As the ball moves to the front, step to the pipe (while the ball is in the air and while you can gauge where it will land) and then step toward where it will land with your hands high. If it is a quick stick shot, then make the shooter change it because your position is perfect as you step toward the shooter. If he has to change it either he may miss or he will take enough time for your defense to check him.

Last, prepare for the distraction of movement by practicing and warming up with movement. Many goalies are good at warm-up, but the distractions of the shooter moving (shooting on the run, dodging or cutting and being fed) seem to have the keeper move back on his heels and drop his hands. The keeper must be on his toes with weight a little forward and hands more forward and up as discussed above. Otherwise, the keeper is not ready to make a save. Work on the step and the 'EYE-THUMB-BALL' with moving shooters so that the keeper has his whole body moving smoothly to the shot, every time. Instead of having one part of your body trying to move fast (hands) and the other lagging behind (say your leg), get all the parts moving and you are faster and smoother. In one week, the university coach we are working with says that his goalies have improved dramatically by having us focus on these four basics. These are talented keepers, but return to these basics is making them better. It is not just reaction and courage but fluid, smooth, full-body motion to the ball that makes a great keeper.

GOALIE (STOPPING DRIVES FROM BEHIND)

There are a number of factors that can contribute to having the keeper be susceptible to the crease roll. Many keepers tend to watch the behind player by peeking around the goalpost while basically facing forward. If that is the case with your keeper that is the first thing to change. When the ball is behind the keeper should be centered in the goal, 1 yard from the goal line and facing rearward. As the feed comes to the front or the shooter drives the crease, the keeper takes one step to the pipe and then to the ball. If it is a feed, the second step is toward where the ball will land. If it is a driving shooter there are two options; standard post play and "down-the-line" (see below).

The second critical point on close in shots, especially drives around the crease involve watching the ball. It is common for the keeper to look at the shooter, instead of watching the ball. Thus, the keeper loses track of the ball and can be easily beat close in. The keeper has got to look at the ball and only the ball.

Third, it is common to not be ready on these close shots. Being ready involves lining up the keepers eye, the top hand thumb and the ball with both hands out and in front of the chest (with knees bent either a little for high shots or a lot for low ones). This eye-thumb-ball is vital for the keeper to move to the shot. Otherwise he is more stabbing or guessing, neither of which works. The object of a keeper is have the shooter score on only the very best, nearly perfect shot. The first failure of keepers on crease drives is leave the post too early, leaving the shooter access to a shot between the near post and the keeper (too easy). When the shooter has to shoot around the keeper at the far post, it is harder for the shooter and they will miss the net more than if the keeper gives up the near post early. On every shot the keeper should take a step and move his hands at the same time.

Last, there are two ways to handle the shooter that gets more to the front of the goal. The first is to keep hands high and cover the shooters stick with the goalies stick (thus making him make a big move in close altering his shot and upping the miss / save percentage). This is the usual or standard technique and staying on the post almost too long is vital to this working. The second approach is taught as an advanced technique and is called "down-the-line". It involves staying on the near post very long and as the shooter shoots to the long post, stepping down the line at the far post (not out to the shooter) and making the save. This really works. But, it takes a lot of practice since the footwork is different than for any other save.

In general, try to teach your keeper everything except "down-the-line" until he has mastered the other fundamental techniques and then decide if he has the presence of mind to learn this additional specialized technique. Most keepers that get beat on drives are distracted from watching the ball, give up the post too early or have their hands too low to react smoothly and quickly to the ball. Get those skills honed and your keeper will be better on every type of shot that he can see.

KOUDELKA'S DRILLS/WARMUP

1. Have the goalies take 10 minutes to "walk the line". This gets them stretched, focused and let's them work on the PROPER FORM. 20 imaginary shots to each area. Stick side high, hip and low; off stick side, high, hip and low. Then let them imagine different shots coming to different areas.
2. Then get them in the goal and work on their arc play. I feel this is the difference between saving 50% of your shots to 60% of your shots. Whichever arc they feel comfortable with, whether it is a 3, 4 or 5-step arc, they must be able to master it. I have them work on the arc for 30 seconds at a time. Have them imagine the ball up top, to goal line extended then having the ball behind. This allows for them to work on turns also. The objective in this drill is to be in the proper place at all times and try to not use the stick to find the posts.
3. Then it is shot time. Goalies love to take shots. We will shoot tennis balls at our goalies a lot. Here are a couple of tennis ball drills: Just using gloves, practice stepping to the ball and leading with your hands. Using an attack stick, practice getting the body behind the ball, while still working on hand-eye coordination. Using the goalie stick, practicing on not giving up rebounds. The tennis ball is a lot harder to catch because of the weight. If a goalie can catch a tennis ball off a shot, the lacrosse ball should be pretty easy to catch.
4. Using a wall is an effective way to warm-up a goalie. Have the goalie face the wall with the coach behind him. Throw the ball at the wall and let the goalie just react to the shot coming off the wall. This is to quicken the reactions of the goalie. You can also practice turns and angle shots off the wall as well.
5. When using the real ball, I like for the goalies to see shots that they will see in a game. We will have our players shoot on our goalies. I like for the shots to come from about 10 yards and tell the shooters where to shoot. This allows for teaching of the goalies and accuracy work for the shooters.
6. Another drill that we use for the goalies is the breakout drill. Goalies will throw about 50-75 breakout passes to defensemen. A goalie is only as good as his clearing ability. The way the game is now, goalies must have a great stick.

Warm-ups - A good warm-up takes a goalie through some stages

1. seeing the ball and catching simple shots,
2. getting into a good stance and stepping to the ball on each shot
3. making high speed saves
4. getting good movement on low shots
5. making high speed saves on low and bounce shots
6. making saves to all parts of the goal
7. moving and resetting on feeds and sweeps
8. reacting to in-close shots

For the first six, I shoot on the goalie by moving through an arc from goal line extended on one side to goal line extended on the other side and then back again. Each arc that I walk, I shoot and work on a different part of the warm-up. The first arc is about 6-8 yards out, the shots are slow to medium and all are on the stick side high. The second arc is the same distance out with a little more speed to the same place. I take about 10 shots per arc and at this point I wait for the keeper to set up (get ready) and provide encouragement to get his weight forward onto the balls of the feet and take a step on each shot. The next arc is for offside high. First low-medium speed and then a little higher speed, still waiting for a good setup. After these first four arc walks, I step back to 9-12 yards and pick up the speed for two arcs. I don't shoot my fastest, but pretty hard. I look for good step and good hand movement. If it isn't there yet, I do two more arcs until he/ is in a good stance and making saves on almost every shot. At this point, I have quit waiting for the keeper to setup, I expect him to be set and ready by the time I get the ball in my stick.

For the next two arcs, I shoot worm burners (low to low) to get the low save step and stick rotation working. If the keeper's movement (especially a consistent step with the ball side foot) isn't there, I will do two more "worm burner" arcs. Then two arcs of bouncers at the goalies feet (overhand - high to low). Then

two arcs of high-speed bouncers and worm burners mixed. Next are two arcs of shots to all parts of the goal.

By this point the goalie is working hard, setting up well and making most saves. I insert a feeder from behind so that the keeper must watch the feeder, step and turn (by stepping to the pipe then to the shooter) and get his weight/stance right (weight forward on the balls of the feet and hands OUT) BEFORE the shooter catches the ball. This is a crucial part of warm-up, since this is the part of goaltending where the goalie must get ready early or be beat by the shooter. After 10-15 on one side we move the feeder and shooter to the other side (making sure the feeder is 5 yards back of the goal line extended and 5 yards from X) and do 10-15 more.

Last, we put the feeder on goal line extended and feed the shooter who is in front of the goal 4-6 yards out. This gets the keeper used to following the ball and setting up for close in shots (mostly high). Fewer of these are going to be saved, but since it happens in games, the keeper needs to seem them and will get some of them. I wrap up with 10 outside shots to anywhere at full speed challenging the keeper to get 5 in a row. For the second half of warm-up, I also insert an outlet player up field. After each save, the keeper throws to the outlet. This provides some throwing and outlet warm-up. Then the outlet person throws the ball back to me or to the feeder (when used).

HOW TO DEFEND BOUNCE SHOTS?

There are three keys to bounce shots; 1) your stance, 2) your hands and 3) your concentration.

Stance - In the stance area, the most important part is to bend your knees, a lot. If you have to guess about whether or not it's a bounce shot, guess that it is and get your butt low with your knees bent a lot. Your muscles will always help you rise back up (quickly) to the high shot, but there are no muscles that can help you speedily get low. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart with your right foot a bit forward of the left (if you are right handed) and with both feet pointed in a bit (a little bit pigeon toed facilitates taking a step with either foot without first replanting the back foot). With the left foot back a bit, you can still take a step with either foot, but the left knee is out of the way when you rotate the stick down for the off-stick side save. Your shoulders should be in front of your hips a little so that they will turn with you when you rotate your stick for the save.

Hands - Your hands need to be out from your body with the bottom hand out a bit farther than the top hand (this helps in rotating the stick head down to the ground). The hands need to be a foot apart -- between the gloves (if not you will miss shots under your stick in both low corners). This is true for all shots, since we do not want to change grip or hand position on the stick during the save.

Save - When the shot comes, take a step (always) directly at the ball and rotate the stick so the stick head goes down and in front of the shot. Since your hands started up high, you can see that this rotation of the stick was caused by both moving the top hand (closest to the head) down and the bottom hand in front of the facemask. Once learned this is a very quick and effective move.

ADVANCED POSITION AND FOOTWORK

We teach a minimum amount of steps in all circumstances for a number of reasons. When the weight is distributed on the balls of both feet (with more on the stick side foot and the stick side foot a little ahead of the other or back foot) and the feet mildly pigeon-toed, the lower body can move smoothly and quickly to the ball (by lifting the ball side foot, pushing off with the off-ball foot, stepping with the ball side foot, recovering with the back side foot and replanting the ball side foot to reset the stance on the balls of the feet). Second, when the player's weight is on the back foot or on the heels of either foot, movement is slower and/or fosters the "rock-and-kick" move seen in hockey goalies (too slow and too little range for field lacrosse).

When the player is moving his feet, he/she is shifting weight around. This weight shifting becomes a habit that, in my experience, results in the weight being on the wrong foot during the shot, inhibiting good stepping. We call this foot moving or weight shifting, "dancing feet." It is to be avoided. It takes me hours to get an otherwise good keeper to set his stance, get his weight on the balls of the feet (meaning get the weight just off the heels and that is all) and STOP rocking his weight from foot to foot.

All of this is by the way of saying that we try to get one foot anchored early (especially on passes from behind) and get the weight forward and balanced, MORE THAN TRY TO WORK DISTANCE FROM THE GOAL FOR ANGLES. Clearly, there is no doubt that position can affect angles and the distance one must step to make the save. What we have found is that, if the balance is not good then there is NO step and the keeper gets beat by the better shooters anyway. So, I have prioritized my approach to get the keeper into a balanced stance in good angular position and to not come out off my normal arc unless the shooter is within 4 yards and one-on-one.

I am not saying that the move out to the crease line doesn't cut down angles. It just is a far less priority than "calm feet" and "good weight balance." I would rather have the keeper in a good stance with hands out front doing "eye-thumb-ball" sighting of the ball. It gives the keeper the best chance to drive his hands to the ball. What I have summarized here is very, very fast (especially the hands out front and "eye-thumb-ball" sighting) leading to what we call STUFF saves (saves we wouldn't get otherwise--the offensive player should have scored).

Experience has told me with these priorities that moving out to the shooter should only happen in emergencies. In emergencies (shooter loose, moving to the front of the cage and inside 5 yards), we play the same balance but increase the emphasis on playing the close-in shooter "stick-on-stick" to make the shooter change his motion (and either hit the keeper/pipe or miss). If there is time to set up farther out, we do it only if the shooter is not a good feeder. If he is we cover the pipe, the angles and play "stick-on-stick" focusing on the ball, making the shooter make a great shot instead of shooting around a keeper that is too far out.

Notes Low Shots

Occasionally, I get asked with my hands up and out stance, how do you cover low shots? This question and your angle positioning are related. Once one plays the upper third of the goal strongly with the grip and hands out and up approach that I keep repeating, the keeper needs a move low that is equally fast and consistent with the rest of the stance and positioning. There is such a move. It consists of driving the bottom hand at the ball (don't pull this hand out to the side) and snapping the top hand to the ball (both wrists have to rotate freely to do this). This move is so fast that when it is used with a step and with driving the hands out past the forward foot toes, the keeper can be very effective low, even though he is set up for higher saves.

Once this type of play is normal for the keeper, the fact that the keeper is stepping on all shots means that conserving stepping width is NOT NEEDED. Thus, stepping out to the shooter to conserve stepping width is not useful. Stepping out to make the target areas available to the shooter smaller is useful as long as one can retain a balanced and calm feet stance to react to the eventual fakes and/or shots. As you can see, this discussion is in some ways circular. That is why I reserve it for the advanced coach regarding the advanced player playing against the more precise shooters.

GOALIE (CARDINAL RULES)

Cardinal Rules - The cardinal rules of goaltending:

1. **WATCH THE BALL**, not the shooter or any other distraction.
2. Be in a **READY STANCE**, knees bent, hands out from the chest, weight on the balls of your feet, and **TAKE A STEP** on each shot.
3. Cover **NEAR PIPE** first (make the shooters shoot across you to the far pipe, a harder shot to make without missing).
4. Position your hands out from your chest so that you can nearly sight the ball by looking over your top hand thumb (we call this **EYE-THUMB-BALL**). Don't get too literal here--your top hand should be a bit to the side of the helmet so that your helmet covers part of the goal and your hand and stick covers another. But, **DO GET YOUR HANDS OUT FRONT** in your field of vision so your body and mind can follow your hands to the ball.
5. Play with hands high so that the shooter, who wants to shoot high, especially in close, believes that you have the high area covered. (This also makes the off-stick side save high easier.). When the shooter tries to change his shot, he may miss, but in any case he will take more time, time that may bring you a defender to check the shot or shooter.
6. Play a little pigeon-toed so that the push off is off the balls of your feet and is powerful and smooth when you step. This helps you avoid the much slower rock (on the off-ball heel) and kick (with the ball side foot) that is not as effective as the faster step to the ball (see the Getting Your Body In The Game column).

Over half of the shots that go in shouldn't and that the reason is that the keeper is out of position or distracted. So try playing goal using these 6 rules on every shot and you will improve.

Winter Workouts - What can you do for off-season training. Here are a few tips:

1. Fatigue is the enemy of a goaltender. To fight this a keeper needs strength in the quads (upper legs) and upper shoulders. Weight work doing the military press and its variants and squats and their variants are good for these areas.
2. Playing goal is basically an anaerobic (strength) not aerobic (endurance) activity. So running needs to consist of sprints complemented by distance for general conditioning. The sprint I like the best involves running 20 yards in one direction and turning sprinting back 20 yards in the opposite direction and doing that 12 to 14 times in one minute. Once that is mastered shorten the distance to 17 yards and begin to work your way up to eighteen of those in one minute. This drill really gives you the legs that you need to play with. We use it at Towson for all our players. Don't just do one; work up to three or four sets and you will improve.
3. The best drill that you can do to become better is a thing called walking-the-line. Jumping rope and playing catch to learn to handle the ball better both are good basic things. But, walking-the-line helps you work on save skills. It works like this; setup in your stance, you can even do this in your room, and think about a shot to an area of the goal and then decide the shot is coming. Then, make a move to save that shot. After each shot evaluate your technique. Adjust and try again. Take a step on each shot, preferably a triple. Getting your feet coordinated with your hands in your best off-season drill.

MORE GOALIE BASICS

Recovering a loose ball within the crease - Kneel behind the ball so that one leg is on the ground behind the ball and parallel to the goal face while the other foot is out front. Although a bit awkward, this position ensures that the ball will not be accidentally raked into the goal. Then carefully rake the ball into the stick. The four seconds does not start until the ball is in the stick so do not hurry. Interference is illegal but may not be observed by the officials.

Throwing the ball from within the crease - Once you catch the shot or recover a loose ball, IMMEDIATELY step to one side of the goal. Do not cock the stick for a pass until you are outside the goal face. It is essential to practice this each time you receive the ball and step (usually a big one) and then pass.

Receiving a throw from within the crease - In preparation for receiving a pass from a teammate, always move behind the goal. This avoids the possibility of the pass accidentally being thrown into the goal, which counts for the other team. It also puts the goalie into a better position for either throwing or running the ball. IN the case of throwing, he has the added separation from the offensive player to arch the ball above their sticks. If the decision is to run, the goalie has many more options of using the crease to provide the best escape.

Move the head first; the body will follow - Your head can move faster than your body. You also need to anticipate where your body is going to end up. So when there is a feed from behind the goal, practice turning your head first as you follow the ball. It is important to practice turns both left and right. Also position your stick in anticipation of the type of shot to expect. A low feed is likely going to an attackman on the crease that will quick stick the ball and thus a high shot. A high feed is like going to a midfielder who will bounce the shot.

Verbal assistance to your defense - It is very important for the goalie to be both encouraging and instructive to his defense. Know the name, capabilities and strengths of each of your defensive players. Providing encouragement to your teammate also can unnerve or dishearten the offensive player. Knowing their individual strengths can help the goalie anticipate when it is appropriate to prepare the other players for a slide or a check sticks to knock down a feed.

GOALIE (GREAT WARM-UP BAD GAME)

The keeper asked, "I do real well during the warm-up but don't do well during the game, suggestions?" This is a common question and one that deserves some answers. Here are a few:

- *Too used to your warm-up* - The keeper becomes too used to the person or persons that warm them up. Unless that person really works to provide a diversity of shots and moves, the keeper will become proficient at stopping that person. The cure is to change shooters. Rotate who is doing warm-ups. One of the persons used a lot needs to be the coach that works with the keeper each day, but others can and should be used. Also, the shooters need to switch hands and shots to make the keeper watch different motions and shot locations.
- *Warm-up too static* - Keepers can make saves that are from the same location with the shooter standing while the same shot from a different location with the shooter moving can't be made. This is because there are a lot of distractions when a shooter is moving. It is easy for the keeper to watch the shooter, his stick, his eyes or other things when watching the ball is paramount. By varying the warm-up with a lot of sweeps, the keeper is better prepared to face game conditions.
- *Warm-up without passes* - A common mistake is having the shooter shoot and the goalie save and then pass back to the shooter. After the initial part of the warm-up, add a behind player. This player feeds the shooter, thus making the keeper do his setup facing the rear and turn as the ball is passed to the shooter, setting up again and making the save. After a few of these outside, move the shooter in -- first close to the post and then directly in front of the goal, sometimes cutting and sometimes standing. One other warm-up is to put two shooters out front and have them pass to each other before shooting. This makes the keeper change position and forces him to work on his footwork and concentration.
- *Warm-up without screens* - During some warm-ups we use a screen, either a crease attackman or a defender (on the shooter) so that the keeper can work on managing the ball through a screen. This is usually done late in the warm-up.
- *Watching the shooter instead of the ball* - Some keepers do not watch the ball, but try to watch other things. This watching other things is not as effective as watching the ball (only). Combined with knowing the shooter, etc., this bad habit can be evidenced in good warm-ups with bad games since in games you know less of what is coming so watching the ball is more important.

GOALIE (THE BEHIND THE BACK SHOT)

I feel strongly that the keeper must protect between him and the pipe because there is no defensive help there (help is in the middle not at goal line extended). This is critical to team defense that he make that save a lot of the time. So, when the defense lets the shooter come deep enough with no pressure on his back to prevent the behind the back shot, the coach better go back to the drawing board on team defense. Almost always a behind the back shot on cage that goes in is not the keepers fault, but the defenders fault.

Even so the behind the back shot can be saved. It is almost always high to high. So if the keeper dips his stick head when the man comes inside he will almost always give up the score. The key to making the save is to work with hands and elbows in front of the chest with stick head high. Watch the ball and not the man and sometimes you can drive your hands to the ball even if it is behind the back and get a piece of it. It takes some practice, but once you realize that it is a most always a high shot then practice will help the keeper get a few of them.

If coaches are willing to train the keeper, then they also need to train the defense. The D should not give up this shot. Some work with the defense is needed to keep the player from topside every time by driving him out toward the sideline improves the defense a lot. It basically takes away the behind the back move (can't turn his shoulders to get it off if the D man is pushing on his back). If the defense plays better on the drive from up top then the coaches can concentrate on helping the keeper make the saves that he needs to make consistently (like cross crease feed stuffs and 10 yard high to lows) instead of ones behind the back.

GOALIES (MANAGING FEEDS AND PASSES)

As a keeper gets better at making saves, we find that there is a difference between making saves on even tough shots shot by a nearly still shooter and making saves on shots when the player is driving or when there is a pass immediately before the shot. On the drives, the keeper sometimes gets antsy because of all of the distractions caused by the movement and the possibility of the moving shooter beating his man. This can be overcome by including a lot of movement/driving shooting in warm-ups so that the keeper is not as distracted and learns to watch the ball even during dodges and drives.

A different sort of thing happens to a goalie when there is a pass or feed just before the shot. He is out of position (by definition) and many times hurries to get into the new position and in the process drops his hands, doesn't set the feet right, finishes with weight on the heels of the back foot instead of on the toes with most on the front foot, etc. This causes a different sort of antsy-ness and confusion. But, this sort be overcome by understanding two things:

- The ball does not change direction once it is thrown
- The keeper can set up, during the flight of the ball, based on where the ball is going to land.

Many keepers watch the ball and then move to it after it lands. The watching the ball is right, but the waiting to move is not. The key here is to move toward where it is going to land before it lands based upon where it is going to land. Since a 60 mph pass that goes 12 yards take 4/10ths of a second to go that distance, the keeper has all that time to react and set up in a position that is based upon where the ball is going to land. There really is plenty of time. Most passes are not even that fast and few are less than 10 yards long. So, there is a lot of time to set up, if the keeper starts to move as the pass is thrown.

This takes practice, especially on feeds from behind into the crease. On these, the keeper turns from facing the ball when it is behind the cage while watching the ball in flight, steps to the ball side pipe and then steps to where the ball is going to land with hands high. This two step is faster than spinning around and having your feet out of position. The closer the ball is to the crease the higher the likelihood that the initial shot will be high, so come with your hands high. If the defense is late in covering the shooter, at least the keeper can make the shooter change the shot (buying time for the defense to recovery). By changing the shot the shooter may miss and often does.

Coaches need to incorporate a lot of from-behind feeds and cross-crease passes into warm-ups so the keeper can work on moving with the pass to set up where the ball is going to land and to set up with hands high (using eye-thumb-ball alignment as we have discussed in previous columns), feet, hands and arms right with knees bent so that the best possible reaction to the shot can be made.

This sounds simple but remember; take the time that the ball is in the air to set up for a shot that will come from where the ball is going to land. Don't wait for it to be caught to start the setup, which is too late.

GOALIE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Question: I'm a Freshman in high school, and start for the JV team on a top 20 NY State team. I am short for a goalie, being only about 5'4", and I generally compensate well for the height disadvantage. But, when coming across the crease from pipe to pipe, there are really only 2 options I know of. 1st, You can take the giant step from pipe to pipe, which is the faster of the 2, but when I do this it shrinks me because of the amount I have to stretch my legs, and leaves the top of the goal open. The other, is to take a shuffle step, but that's too slow for the level of competition I play against, because I never get to the pipe in time to react to the best of my ability. So do you have any pointers on this problem?

Reply: Shorter high school and college goalies and growing youth goalies can use a number of tricks both regarding cross-crease and other moves. First, for shorter keepers at all levels (I have two at Towson), we have the keeper grip the stick with the top hand a little below the throat. To re-enforce this, we put a nub of tape on the stick handle below the throat and then learn to grip the stick below that nub. This raises the top of the stick about an inch. Second, we have the keeper set up with hands high and the stick near vertical (with wrists to the back of the shaft). This position allows a fast move to low shots and still have a smooth stick rotation to the top corners while covering the top of the goal easily.

Regarding cross-crease passes, the triple step (similar to the shuffle that you mention) is fastest overall. If you play on the balls of your feet in the initial setup and need to get to a similar stance on the other pipe, then (from a mildly pigeon-toed stance) lift the foot on the far pipe side and push with the back (near pipe) foot (this is fast). Then take a short step with the lead foot, recover the back foot and reset the lead foot as you drive your top hand toward the ball. When you lead with your hand (moving the top hand in line with the ball as it is passed), you will get into your stance just as the ball is received by the offensive player. The key to understanding this is that there really is a lot of time during the pass to get to the far pipe if you move with the pass (not after it is halfway or most of the way there). This early movement is based upon keeping your hands up and in line with the ball, your body will follow your hands (if your feet are well placed and you are balanced on the balls of your feet). Thus, cross-crease is not a height problem, but footwork, balance and hand position move. If you keep your hands in close to your chest and do everything else right you will also be late to the shot. So don't be fooled that this is a "footwork" technique, it is not. If you go cross-crease with the hands down, you will almost always be late to the ball, especially on the higher quick stick shot. So, lead with your hands and as you get to the far pipe, there is a very good chance that your stick will be covering a part of the goal where the shooter wants to shoot. He will either still shoot (into your stick) or attempt to change the shot. As he changes the shot, he will either miss, or the defense will get to him or you will be ready to move with his move to the ball (that's why a balanced stance as you come cross crease is so important).

Question: I am a freshman goalie and have noticed that I have a problem judging bounce and screened shots. Do you have any advice for my problem?

Reply: The key to bounce and screen shots is to step to the ball. This sounds trite, but if you step your whole body is involved with the save and will help you adjust better than if you just use your eyes and stab. Keep your hands out and off your chest. This combined with stepping (from a knees bent stance) should help you drive to the ball.

Question: I have a question about matching sticks with the attacker in close. If their stick is held up really high, how do I match my stick with theirs? Just bring it as close to it as I can? You taught me to be patient and watch the ball being released before I moved to meet it...but how do I get to it in time if they're really close in?

Reply: The key to quickness is to have your hand between your eye and the ball. Then your autonomic nervous system helps you react quickly as you a) move your hand to keep sited on the ball and b) have your body follow your hand (both autonomic actions). So, if the ball is up high then your hands will rise in a line between your eye and the ball (this keeps your stick in line with their stick too). This makes the shooter shoot around you and your stick. The alternative is to stab at the ball in flight. This stabbing at the shot (from a low hand position) is not as quick as rotating from the hands up and out position. Stabbing seems fast but it is not, it is just spectacular and gives up a lot of rebounds. So get your

hands out and rotate the stick SMOOTHLY and quickly to the ball and you will make good saves even in close.

Question: What can I do to stop point blank shots more often?

Reply: The key to point blank shots is to be in a great stance and stay calm until you can see the ball. So what is a great stance. Try these pointers: On the balls of your feet (so you are ready to move) Knees bent (you can move easily either up for high or down for low shots) Hands out from your chest with your elbows in front of your chest (so you aren't hindered in your move to the ball, especially to the upper corners) Hands on the stick so that the wrists are to the back of the stick (for best rotation of the stick to all areas) Thumb and forefinger grip (so that both hands allow the stick to rotate freely to all corners) Stick high (to take away the top of the goal) Chest forward of the hips (in preparation for stepping and for an effective shoulder turn to low shots) Position yourself so that the shooter cannot shoot between you and the pipe on low angle shots (takes away his first choice) Once you have got this mastered and have the top and pipe covered, you will question whether or not you can get to low shots. If you hold your bottom hand almost still and drive your top hand to the ball, the stick moves so fast that you can easily play the low shots too.

GOALIE TIPS FROM THE BEST: BILLY DAYE

(Former North Carolina All-ACC Goaltender and USCLA Player of the Year)

Fundamentals

Your feet should be shoulder width apart and your hands should be way from your body to prevent being handcuffed on offside shots. Your hands should be 12-18" apart. Most importantly, you need to find a comfort zone where you are ready to attack the ball and make the save. Practice your outlets just as much as you practice making saves. There is nothing worse than making a great save and then giving the ball back to the other team because of a bad pass.

Communication/Leadership

Talk to your defense and let them know where the ball is on the field. As the quarterback of the defense, you must recognize situations such as fast breaks and direct your defensemen to the correct positions. The tone of your voice says a lot; if you are not a vocal person, you better start being one. Stay positive even after a goal is scored. A goalie that has control of his defense will have the respect of the team.

Attitude

If you give up a goal do not get down on yourself or your defense. You can't take the goal off the scoreboard but you can recognize what you did wrong, practice that step or specific movement, AND GET THE NEXT ONE. Have confidence in your abilities to stop the ball. If you lose your confidence, your defense will soon follow. Always believe you can save every shot.