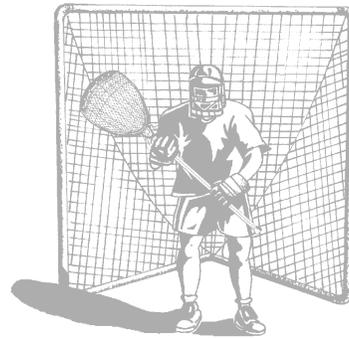




Lacrosse 101

A Basic Guide to Boys' Lacrosse for Parents
and Players



By: Chris Gunther
Program Coordinator
2nd Revision

Table of Contents

<i>“Son, you want to play La-what?!”</i>	4
<i>Background</i>	6
In the beginning...	6
Later on...	6
Today...	7
<i>The Basic Idea Behind the Game</i>	8
<i>The Playing Field</i>	8
<i>The Positions</i>	11
The Attack	11
The Midfield	11
The Defense	11
The Goalie	11
<i>Personal Equipment</i>	15
<i>The Crosse</i>	17
Dimensions of the Crosse	18
Dimensions of the Pocket	19
<i>Fundamental Skills</i>	20
Scooping	20
Cradling	20
Throwing (Passing)	20
Catching	21
Shooting	21
<i>Play of the Game</i>	21
Pre-game Activities	21
The Game Itself	22
<i>Penalties in the Game</i>	22
Technical Fouls	23

Personal Fouls	24
Other Penalties	25
<i>Obscure Aspects of the Game</i>	26
The Shot Rule	26
Offsides Rule	26
The "All Released" Rule	27
Slow Whistle Technique	27
Technical Fouls and Goals	27
Personal Fouls and Goals	28
<i>The Officials</i>	28
<i>It's Your Turn</i>	29
<i>Glossary of Commonly Used Lacrosse Terms</i>	30
<i>Common Referee Signals</i>	33

“Son, you want to play La-what?!”

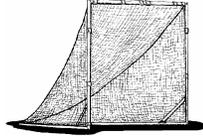
This booklet was written for the novice player and parent who have heard about Lacrosse, but are not sure exactly what it is. It is designed to explain the background of the game, along with other aspects such as the playing field, the protective equipment, and the more common rules.

Although Lacrosse (in some form) has been played in North America for at least 300 years, it has taken a "back seat" to other sports such as soccer, football, and baseball. Why this is so is not obvious, since Lacrosse contains all of the elements to make a fast-paced, contact sport. One common explanation is that the sport is too expensive to be popular because of all the personal equipment that is needed. Perhaps, but football is also very expensive, and yet it is a very popular sport. Personally, I think the game has been given a "bad rap" because of its misunderstood origin as a "war game" played by many northern Indian tribes. Consequently, Lacrosse has been viewed by many to be a game that was played by a bunch of ignorant savages.

Fortunately, not everyone felt this way. In the late 1800s the game spread from Canada into upstate New York and then to Long Island. In the early 1900s the game appeared in Baltimore, Maryland.

Like many men, I became directly involved with Lacrosse because my son (who was 8 years old at the time) said that he wanted to play. (Although, recently my son, Will, told me that he doesn't remember ever saying that he wanted *to play*. He only remembers suddenly playing the game!). Having lived around Baltimore all of my life, I had an idea of how the game was played. I wound up coaching a team of 9-11 year old boys in a small in-house program called Freedom Optimist Lacrosse (FOL). My team played against three other teams in the same age group in a round-robin fashion. There were also four other teams for boys ages 12-14, who also played each other. That was more than 14 years ago.

Since then, the FOL has grown from eight teams to more than 20 teams ranging in age from 5-14. Five years ago, my wife Mary Lees and I were asked to run the boys' program. Four years ago the FOL joined the Maryland Youth Lacrosse Association (MYLA). Today, all of the teams (except for the 5-6 year olds) are involved in some level of travel Lacrosse around the Baltimore area. Oh, by the way, Will played Lacrosse for four years at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia.



The idea for writing this booklet came from many years of answering questions about the game. The southern part of Carroll County is a growing area, and people are moving here from all parts of the country. Many of these people have never heard of Lacrosse. All that they know is that their son walked in the house one day and said that he wanted to play some game called "Lacrosse".

Now, these parents are stuck because they want to give their son the opportunity to play this game, but they don't know anything about it. Unfortunately, there are very few, if any, introductory books about Lacrosse. That is where this booklet comes in.

As stated above, this booklet is designed to present the fundamentals of Lacrosse. I do not discuss drills, since there are plenty of books already written about them. Instead, I discuss the basic ideas behind the game, the fundamental skills needed to play the game, the more common rules and penalties, and some of the more obscure facets of the game that puzzle most novices. It is my intention that by the time you finish reading this booklet, you will understand why Lacrosse is rightfully called "the fastest game on two feet".

Chris Gunther
August 2002

Background

In the beginning...

The sport of Lacrosse is the oldest known athletic game played in North America. Originally, it was known by names such as "baggataway" or "tewaarathon", or "The Creator's Game" and was played by North American natives as part of various ceremonial religious rites. The game, like the stick itself, was developed by North American Indians as early as the 15th century. Solemn rituals and dances often preceded the game. White men (Jesuit missionaries from France in this case) first encountered the game around 1630. The original equipment used was a wooden stick that resembled a bishop's crosier. The French word for "crosier" is "la crosse".

The reason for the resemblance between a crosier and a Lacrosse stick was due to the way that the stick was fashioned. A stick was normally made by stripping a branch (e.g., willow) of its bark, bending the branch at one end, and holding the branch in this position with leather thongs. Additional leather or vines were used to make the "pocket" of the stick (see Figure 1).

Indians played the game not only for recreation, but also to settle tribal disputes and to toughen warriors for fighting. Some old records indicate that Lacrosse was used as a substitute for war, and was called by some North American Indians as the "Little Brother of War". Games were played by as few as 100 and as many as 1,000 men, and lasted two or three days. Often, play would begin at sunup and end at sundown each day. Goals, consisting of rocks or trees, were generally 500 yards to a half-mile apart, but could also be several miles apart. There were no sidelines, and players raced far and wide over the countryside. The ball was typically made from a hard wood. As you may have guessed, there were very few rules, and "personal fouls" were non-existent.

Later on...

In the early 1820's, white settlers in Montreal took up the game. When the Dominion of Canada was created a decade later, Lacrosse was designated (and still remains) the national sport. Canadians introduced the game to the United States, England, Ireland, and Scotland. Today, Lacrosse is played in the United States and Canada, as well as in England, Australia, Argentina, Japan, Norway, Sweden, and various countries in Eastern Europe.

Today...

Lacrosse appears to the uninitiated to be a combination of football, hockey and basketball (although Lacrosse precedes all three games by at least 100 years). There are 10 positions on a Lacrosse team - one goalie, three attackmen, three midfielders, and three defensemen. The object of the game is to put a 5 oz. hard-rubber ball into the opponent's net using a long-handled stick with a triangular pocket at the end, while keeping your opponent from doing the same to you. Like soccer, Lacrosse is played on an open field with goals at both ends. Like hockey, the players carry sticks and can roam behind the goal. Like basketball, the offensive players can set picks and run patterned offenses and fast breaks, while the defenses typically play either man-to-man or zone. Substitutions are essential in this game, especially for the mid-fielders (middies) who must cover a large amount of the field. The defense and the attack men normally restrict their play to half of the field, while the goalies operate mainly in their respective *crease** areas, around the goal.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association has taken over the directing of intercollegiate Lacrosse, with the first NCAA Lacrosse championship being played in 1971. With the support of the NCAA, the sport has continued to grow as more and more youngsters reenact this modern version of an old Indian tribal game

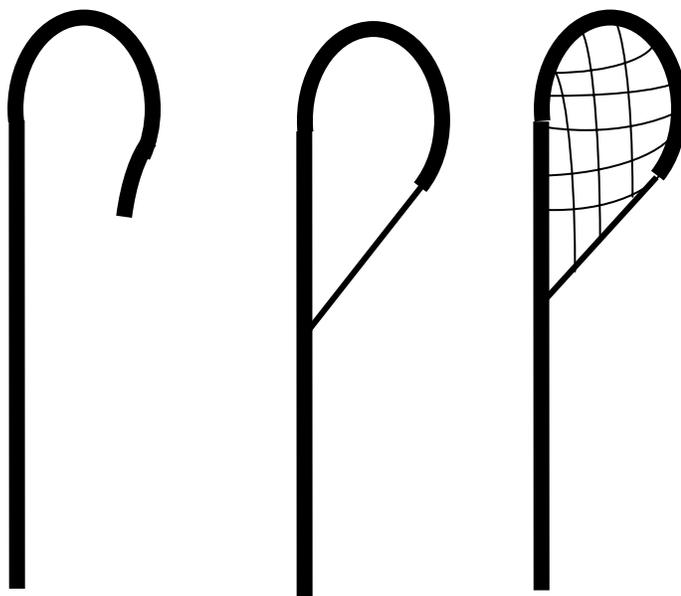


Figure 1: A Bishop's crozier (or crosse) is shown on the left. The middle and right drawings depict a Lacrosse stick as it would have been made by the Oneida or Iroquois Indians.

* Terms that are italicized are further defined in the Glossary at the end.

The Basic Idea Behind the Game

Lacrosse is touted as being "the fastest game on two feet". Many of the rules in the game are designed to keep the ball moving as much as possible. For example, Lacrosse players are allowed to substitute for each other while the ball is in play (*substitution on the fly*). This substituting can be done without checking in at a table or blowing a horn to stop play.

Lacrosse is also a contact sport, although not in the sense that the North American Indians would have played it 300 years ago. Today, the game is played with Lacrosse sticks, a five-ounce hard rubber ball, and protective equipment. The overall purpose of the game is simple- put the ball into the opponent's goal. The ball is normally carried in a Lacrosse stick, but the ball can also be kicked in order to advance it. The rules of the game can appear to be quite complicated, but the underlying theme is to control the players' aggression, keep the play balanced, and keep the game moving. For the most part, neither the offense nor the defense is heavily favored during the game. The result is usually a fast moving, high scoring contest.

The Playing Field

The field has changed drastically from the fields that were used when Lacrosse was called the "Little Brother of War". The game is now played on an area a little larger than a football field, although football fields are commonly used for convenience. A diagram of a Lacrosse field is shown in Figure 2. The field is similar to a hockey rink in that the goals are inset into the play area. This positioning allows players to run behind the goal in order to set up offensive plays.

The goal is made of metal, and is six feet high and six feet wide. The circle around the goal is called the *crease*, and is used to protect the goalie under certain circumstances (see the section on The Goalie). The back of the goal comes to a point about seven feet from the front frame. This triangular configuration allows the goalie to run around the goal without stepping out of the crease.

The box-like area around the goal is called the *attack area* or the *defensive area*, depending on which team is being considered. The hashed lines are present so that players and officials can distinguish between the playing area and the sidelines.

The *centerline* is used for a number of reasons. First, the line cuts the field in half. Second, it is used as a place to *face-off* (which is similar to hockey) at the beginning of the game or after a goal is scored (see Play of the Game). Third, it denotes offsides. The lines located at the centerline and parallel to the sidelines are called the *winglines*, and are used only during the face-off.

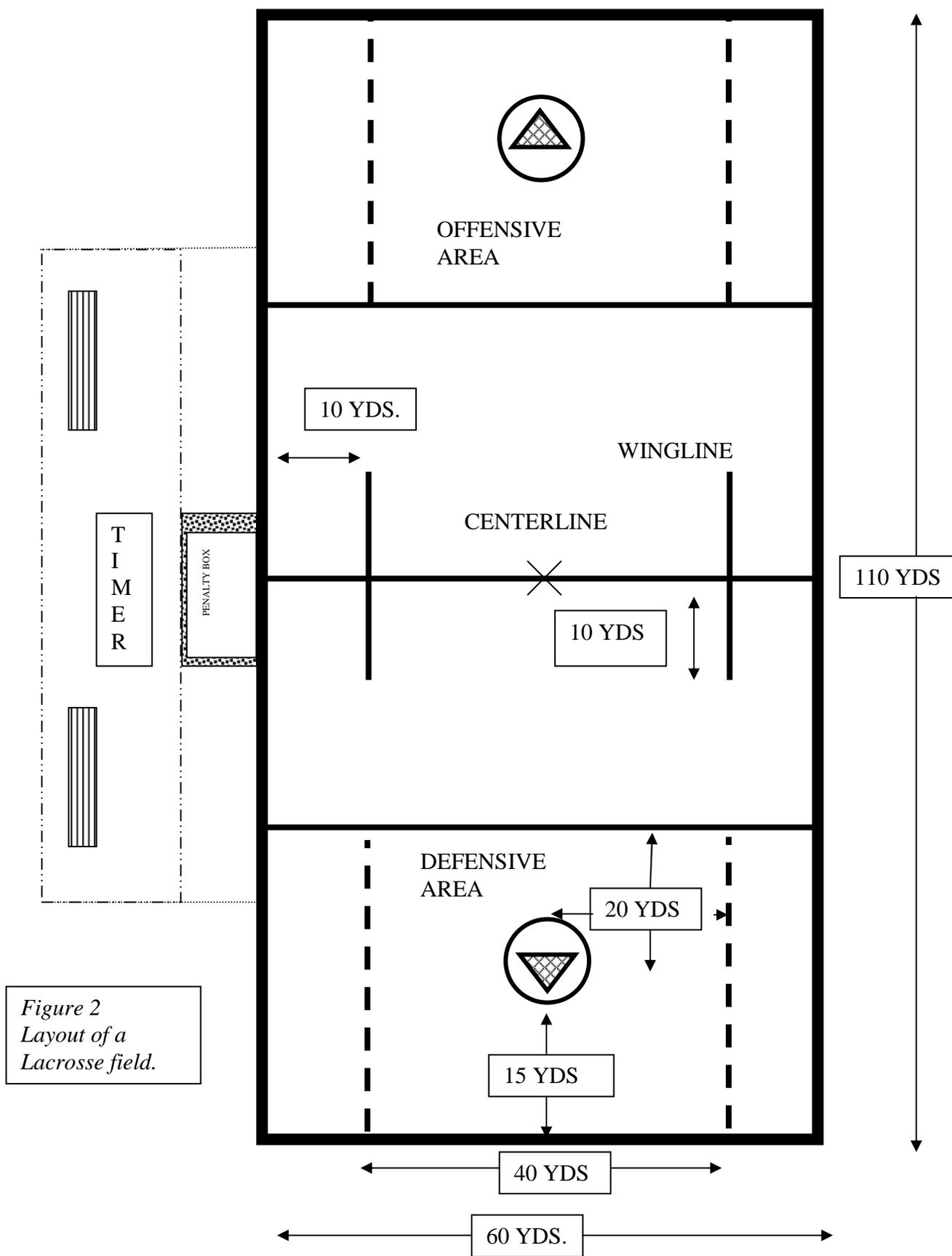


Figure 2
Layout of a
Lacrosse field.

The Positions

Modern day Lacrosse is played by 10 players on each team. The players are divided into (3) Attack, (3) Midfielders, (3) Defensemen, and (1) Goalie. Each of the four positions is briefly described below, and the positions are further illustrated in Figure 3.

The Attack

The three Attackmen are primarily responsible for scoring goals and for initiating offensive plays. They usually restrict their play to the offensive half of the field and around the goal of the opposing team. They are not allowed into their opponent's crease. The Attack must be quick and have good stick skills in order to elude the Defense on the opposing team. Traditionally, the Attack is divided into a left attackman, a crease (center) attackman, and a right attackman. However, these positions often become blurred because of the offensive plays that are run.

The Midfield

Midfielders (or middies) are responsible for the "transition phase" of the game, that is advancing the ball from their defensive half of the field to their offensive half of the field. Midfielders are allowed to run anywhere on the field (except into their opponent's crease) and they play both offense and defense. They must be strong runners and have good stick skills. Most of the substitutions that occur in lacrosse take place with the middies. The midfielders are normally divided into the two wing middies (left and right) and a center middle.

The Defense

As might be expected, the role of the Defense is to help the Goalie by keeping the opposing team off-balance, thereby forcing the offense to miss a shot at the goal. The Defense accomplishes this by being quick, aggressive, and by staying between the opposing players and the goal as much as possible. To help keep the offensive players "at bay" the Defensemen are allowed to use longer crosses (or "long poles"). These lacrosse sticks are usually 72" long, while the Attack and Midfielders' sticks are 40"-42" long. The Defense is divided into left, crease (center) and right positions. Like the Attack however, these positions become blurred because of the offensive plays that are run by the opposing team.

The Goalie

The Goalie, or goalkeeper, is a special position. The Goalie is someone who has the courage to stand in front of a shot-on-goal, and try to block the shot with his stick or body, or both. Now, it is quite normal for a person to duck or flinch when an object is thrown at him, especially when that object is a hard rubber ball. It is called self-

preservation. Yet, the person in the goal must force himself to overcome the temptation to get out of the way. It is not an easy thing to do, and few players can do it well. It takes a special person to play the goalie position effectively.

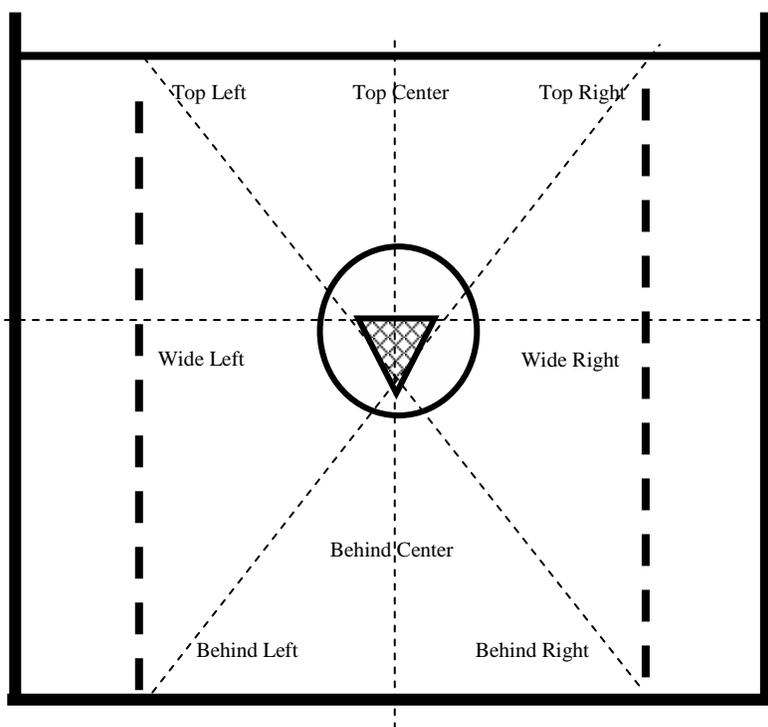
To give you an idea, imagine a lacrosse ball being thrown at you at 60 mph from 30 feet (10 yards) away. The ball is traveling at 88 feet per sec. You have about 0.3 seconds to react. Is the ball going to bounce, or is it a direct shot? Where is the ball going to strike the goal? Now, just get your stick in position, move your feet for balance, and block the shot. Piece of cake!

Obviously, it's not easy to block such a shot. However, understand that a 60-mph shot is not a fast shot at the high school or college level. Any good 14-year old player can shoot that fast. And although a 7-year old player cannot shoot the ball at 60 mph, it sure looks that way to a 7-year old Goalie!

The Goalie has to be quick, and have a great deal of "field sense" in that he must anticipate the movement of the ball. He is the "Director of the Defense". Part of his job is to "call the ball", which means to tell his teammates where the ball is located relative to the goal. This is done by arbitrarily dividing the goal area into eight sectors, as shown below.

Once the ball is carried into defensive area, the Goalie yells the location of the ball to his teammates. Shouts such as "Top right, top center" automatically tell the three defensemen in which direction the ball is moving.

The Goalie is often viewed as the player who let the other team score. Although it does appear that way, appearances can often be deceiving. Sometimes, despite a great effort by the Goalie to stop the ball, a well-placed shot becomes a goal. Also, while it is true that the Goalie is usually the last player who could block the shot, he is not always the player who allowed the shot to be taken in the first place. That "honor" goes to at least one other member on the goalie's team. Someone missed an assignment. Someone didn't *check* properly. Someone was fooled by a *dodge*. Someone forgot to *slide*. Someone... The possible combination of events is enormous. The point is that if the ball reaches the Goalie, then someone else on the team was involved. The Goalie is the last (not the only) line of defense.



Goalie Privileges

In Lacrosse, the Goalies have certain privileges that are not afforded to the other players. For example:



The Goalie's stick has a wider head than the other sticks used in the game. In addition, the length of the Goalie's stick is not restricted like the other sticks are (see Dimensions of the Crosse).



The Goalie is allowed to touch the ball with his gloves. He may not catch the ball, but he may swat at the ball to deflect it away from the goal.



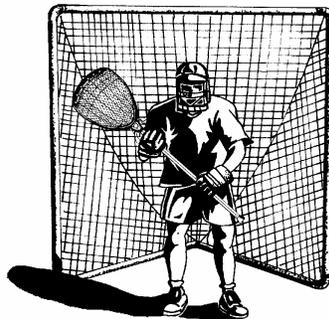
Neither the Goalie nor his stick may be touched for four seconds once he has possession of the ball inside his crease. Before the four seconds have elapsed however, the Goalie must either pass the ball, or run out of the crease. If he elects to run out of the crease, then the other team may check him as if he were any other player. In addition, he may not re-enter the crease with the ball.



An opposing player may not touch the Goalie's stick in any way while the Goalie is standing in his crease and is in the act of passing the ball. If an opposing player does interfere with the Goalie and the pass is incomplete, then the goalie's team is awarded the ball at the centerline.



A Goalie is considered to be in the crease as long as some part of his body is either inside or on the crease line.



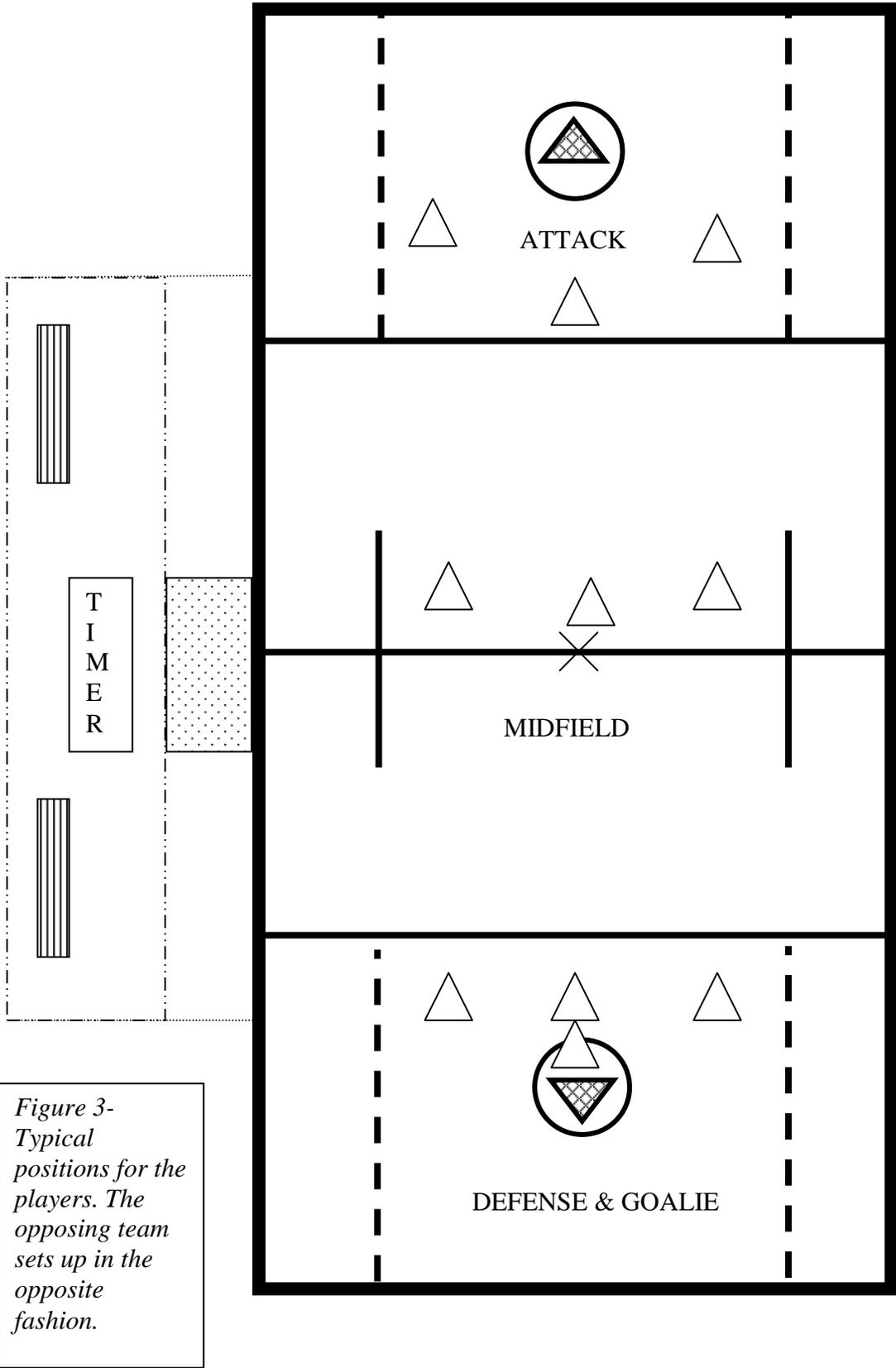


Figure 3- Typical positions for the players. The opposing team sets up in the opposite fashion.

Personal Equipment

Since Lacrosse is a contact sport, players are required to wear equipment so as to minimize injury. The personal equipment consists of a helmet, mouthguard, shoulder pads, arm pads, and gloves. Rib pads are optional. Usually, no protective equipment (other than an athletic supporter) is worn below the waist.



The Lacrosse helmet is lighter in weight than a football helmet. The reason is that blocking and hard hitting are not allowed in a Lacrosse game. On the other hand, a full mask or faceguard is fastened to the front of the helmet. The purpose for the faceguard is to prevent both the ball and the end of a stick from striking a player's face.

The shoulder pads are also lighter in construction than those used in football for the same reason as the helmet. Although body checking is allowed, the contact itself is limited to a stand-up body block and can only occur to the player with the ball within three steps of distance.

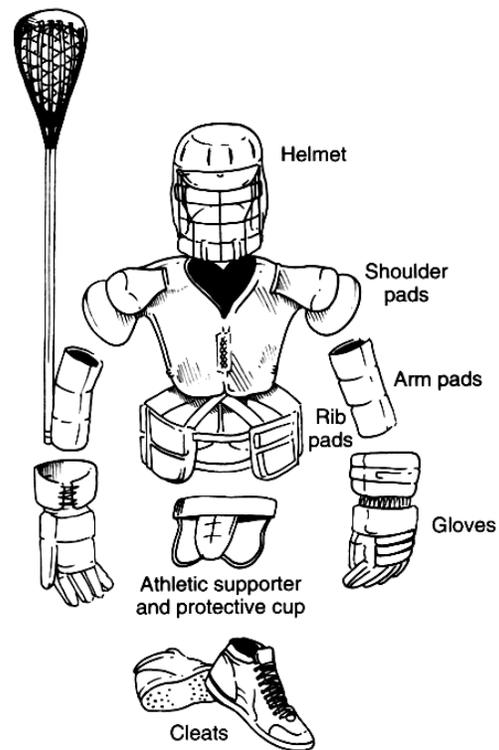


The arm pads are primarily designed to protect the elbows. They usually consist of long tubular pads that slide up the arms and rest between the shoulder pads and the gloves.

The gloves are similar in design to hockey gloves, but are more flexible. They consist of two main parts - the hand padding and the wrist cuff. The gloves are padded to protect the hands and wrists from being struck by an opponent's stick. It is important to understand that a player's hands are considered to be part of his stick, and therefore are "fair game" for being checked.



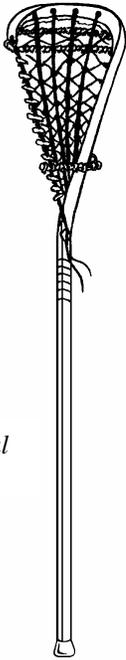
The entire "ensemble" is shown below. Please note that rib pads and cleats are optional, but a very good idea.



The complete Lacrosse outfit. The only required item that is not shown is the mouthguard. Rib pads and cleats are optional, but are encouraged.

The Crosse

Today, the Lacrosse stick, (also known as the "crosse", or the just the "stick"), bears little resemblance to the crosses that were used 300 years ago, or even 20 years ago. Prior to the early 1970s, sticks were made from hard wood, and closely resembled earlier sticks used by the Indians. The "open side" of the stick was closed with a wall consisting of leather and catgut. The pocket of the stick was made from leather thongs and special twine (refer to the drawing on the left). Although not considered to be so at the time, the stick was actually out of balance because it was heavier on one side. In addition, *scooping* the ball was difficult because the "top" of the wooden crosse was thick. The thickness was there for strength, but hindered the player in getting the stick under the ball.



*Traditional
stick*

In the 1970's other materials, including fiberglass, were tried for making the stick. Also, instead of being one piece, the stick was divided into the handle and the head. Although fiberglass turned out not to be a suitable material, high impact plastics were (and still are).

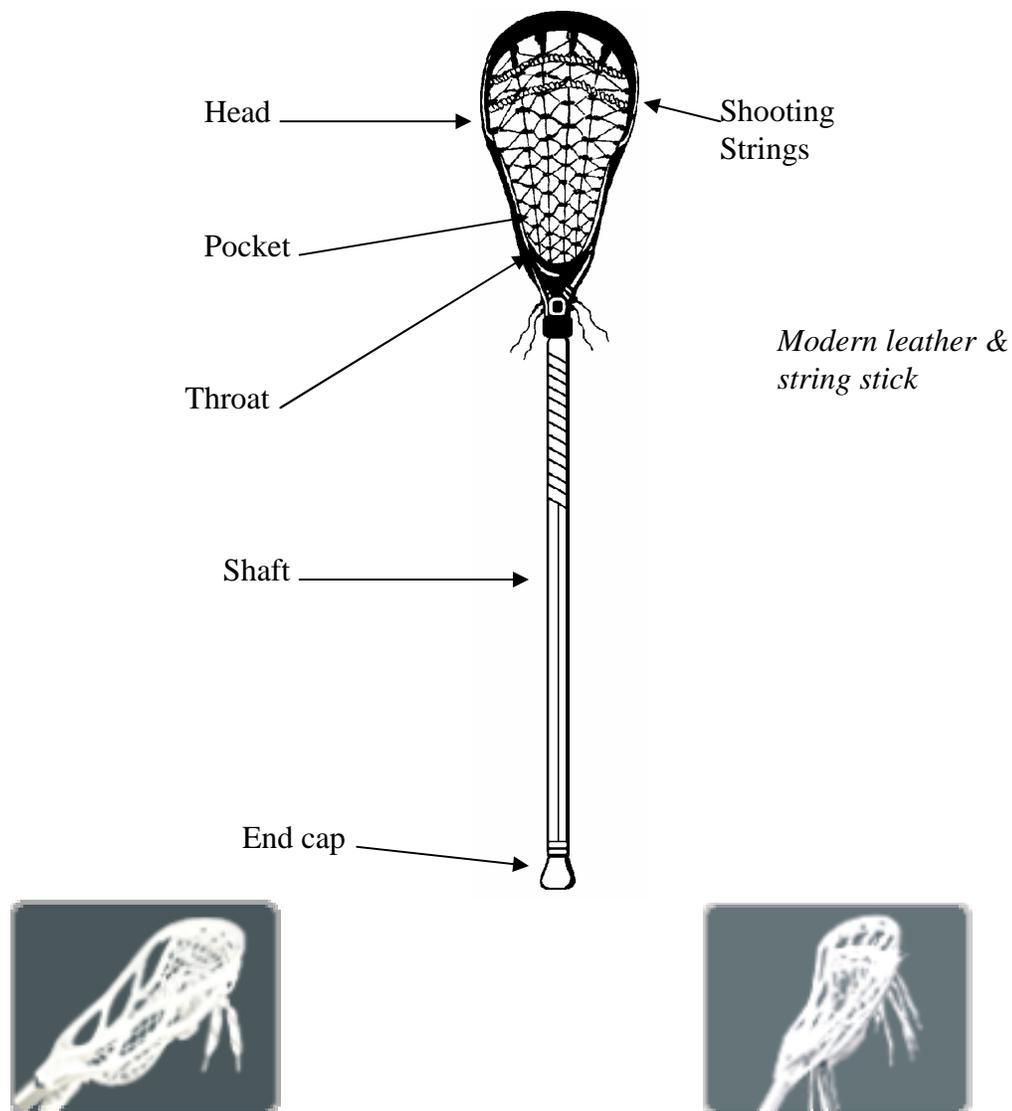
Today, the Lacrosse stick typically consists of a plastic head and a metal shaft. The shaft itself can be made from aluminum, titanium, a plastic composite, or a combination of all three! Today's stick is well balanced and about one-fourth the weight of a traditional wooden stick.

The head of the stick now comes in different configurations, although it retains the same overall shape as the one shown on the next page. The differences among modern sticks have to do with weight, and the ease of scooping, cradling, and shooting.

The string arrangement that holds the ball can be made from two different basic configurations. One is the leather-and-string (traditional pocket) and the other is the mesh pocket. Both pocket configurations have advantages and disadvantages, although the mesh type appears to have become more popular in recent years. Both configurations usually carry shooting strings, which are designed to lift the ball out of the head, before the ball makes contact with the top of the head frame.

In the past, the traditional pocket was more popular because it was possible to tighten the outside leathers, which would minimize side-to side ball movement in the pocket. The result was a more accurate pass or shot. However, the major disadvantage to the traditional pocket was that the leathers would stretch when wet, and eventually rot out.

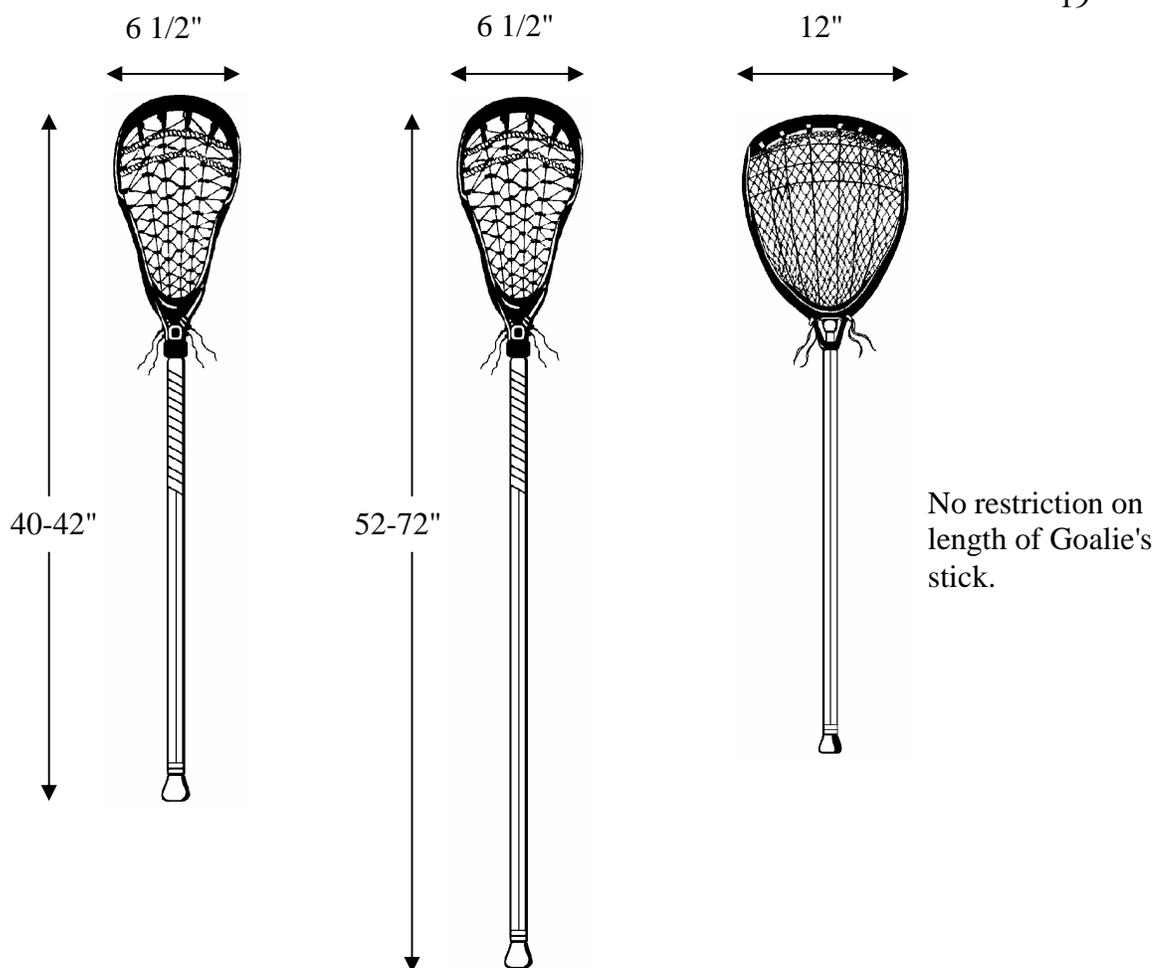
The mesh pocket, which is made from a synthetic waterproof material, did not have the design to hold the ball still until the "Power -V" evolved. The Power-V (Power-Vee) consists of a long shoestring that is woven through the mesh of the pocket in a V-shaped fashion, so that the point of the "V" is towards the front of the head. This configuration holds the ball near the throat of the stick, but does not hinder passing or shooting.



Two of the modern stick heads used in the game. The one on the left is The STX Quark, and the one on the right is Brine Cyber

Dimensions of the Crosse

Although there are a number of different styles for the head and a number of different materials for the shaft, the overall Lacrosse stick must meet certain requirements. The Attack and Midfield sticks are usually the same crosse, while the Defense stick is usually longer. All three positions use the same head on the cross. The Goalie's stick has a much wider head compared to the other positions (see the drawings on the next page).



The three types of crosses that are used in the game. The left stick is the Attack/Midfielder's stick. The center stick is for the Defense, and the right stick is used by the Goalie.

A head coach has the right to call for a "stick check" on a player from the opposing team, if he thinks that the player has an unfair advantage because of a modified stick. The officials are required to measure the stick. They also test the ease with which the ball falls out of the pocket. If the dimensions of the player's stick do not meet the requirements presented above, then the stick is removed from the game. The player then serves a 3-minute penalty in the penalty box for Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

Dimensions of the Pocket

Although part of the stick, the pocket is isolated here because of its importance. The pocket is simply a depression in the strings or mesh next to the neck, and is the place where the ball is carried in the head of the stick. As might be expected, there are rules to the dimensions of the pocket. The main rule is that the pocket cannot be so deep that the top of the ball can be seen below the frame of the stick-head. If the pocket is determined during a stick check (by the Officials) to be too deep, then the pocket can be corrected,

but the player must serve 1-minute penalty for Unsportsmanlike Conduct. This rule does not apply to the Goalie, whose pocket can be as deep as he wants.

Fundamental Skills

There are some basic movements or skills used in lacrosse that need to be explained. A lacrosse player must learn five basic skills before he can play the game. They are *scooping*, *cradling*, *passing*, *catching*, and *shooting*. Everything that happens in lacrosse starts with these five skills.

Scooping

Scooping is the act of picking the ball up off the ground by using the crosse. Remember that a player cannot use his hands to pick up the ball. Instead, he slides the head of the stick under the ball while he is moving. The idea is for the player to bend over, pick up the ball with his crosse, stand up, and continue running in one fluid motion. Scooping is beautiful to see when it's done correctly, but ugly to watch when it's done incorrectly. The most common mistake that a player makes is not bending over. Instead, he tries to scoop while standing in an upright position, and ends up either spearing the ground or pushing the ball so that it accelerates away from him.

By the way, it is common for a coach to scream "Scoop it!" at a player just before the player attempts to scoop the ball. To the uninitiated, this phrase sometimes sounds like "Stupid". Please consider this possibility before complaining to the Commissioner (Thank you).

Cradling

Once a player has the ball in the pocket of his stick, he keeps it there by cradling. The act of cradling involves the shoulders, elbows, and wrists. The reason for cradling is to keep the ball pressed into the pocket while the player is moving. If a player does not cradle the ball, then it will probably bounce out of his stick while he is running, dodging, being checked, etc.

Throwing (Passing)

Throwing a lacrosse ball involves a series of smaller movements being brought together at the same time. In this case, the player puts his hand near the neck of the stick, shifts his weight in the direction of the pass by moving his opposite foot forward, slides his hand down the shaft of the stick and pulls the end of the stick towards his body with the opposite hand. Fortunately, it is easier to do it than it is to describe it!

Catching

Passing the ball is a lot more fun when there is a teammate at the other end who can catch it. In my opinion, the skill of catching is the toughest one to master because it requires extensive eye-hand coordination. All one has to do is watch a group of 7-8 year olds play, and then watch a group of experienced high school players. Keep in mind that the head of the crosse is only six inches wide (except for the Goalie's stick) and that the pass can be anywhere from 10 feet to 90 yards.

Shooting

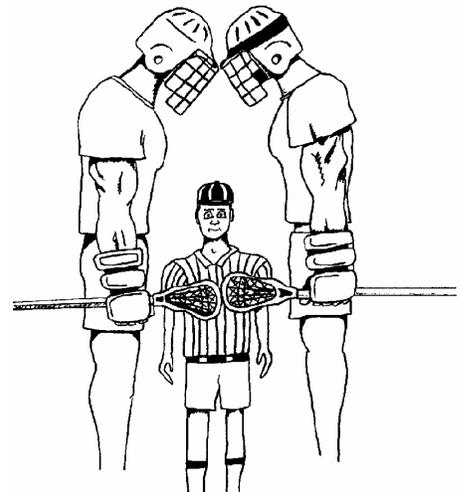
As you would expect, the idea of shooting is to throw the ball at that part of the goal where the Goalie isn't. Hitting the Goalie with the ball does not count, unless the ball bounces off of him and breaks the plane of the goal. Shooting the ball while on the run is no easy feat, especially when someone with a big stick is chasing the shooter!

The most common shot that a player is taught is the bounce shot. This shot, which is aimed just in front of the Goalie's feet, is hard for the Goalie to stop because of the time needed to get his stick down to the ground and to anticipate the movement of the ball. Other shots, such as ones placed in the upper corners of the goal or behind the Goalie, are also exciting to see.

Play of the Game

Pre-game Activities

During warm-up, the officials request the head coaches to give them the jersey numbers of the team captains and the in-home. (The in-home is usually an Attackman who will serve a bench penalty, if such a penalty is assessed). The captains meet in the middle of the field to determine who will defend which goal. The decision is made by a coin toss. The visiting team calls the toss.



After the officials have ensured that the score table and timer are ready, then they will usually signal the starting players to line up in the middle of the field. The teams line up facing each other, so that the Goalies have their respective goals to their left. This time is used to make sure that the players understand any modifications to the rules for the particular level of play. (For example, the MYLA insists that a player who does not have the ball keep both hands on his stick during play.) After the rule modifications are reviewed by the officials, the Goalies shake hands with

each other and go to their respective goals. The remaining players shake hands with each other, and then take their respective positions on the field.

The game is divided into four periods (or quarters). In the MYLA, each period ranges from eight minutes to ten minutes, depending on the age of the players. A timekeeper usually keeps the game time on the sidelines. In addition, penalty times are kept on the sidelines. Teams switch goals at the end of each quarter.

The Game Itself

After the players take their respective positions, the game begins with a face-off. Two players (usually center midfielders) face each other on opposite sides of the centerline and in the middle of the field, and wait for the official to give the command crouch over the ball. The players line up the heads of their sticks on either side of the centerline and on either side of the ball without touching it.

During the face-off, only the center midfielders and the wing midfielders are permitted to contest for the ball. The remaining players must stay behind the restraining lines on either side of the field. After the official blows his whistle, the two center midfielders try to gain control of the ball by bumping each other away from the ball while trying to scoop the ball either into their respective sticks, or out to one of their wing midfielders. At the same time, the wing midfielders race in from their respective winglines and try to scoop the ball. After one of these six players gains possession of the ball, the official signals "possession" by winding his arm in a windmill fashion. At this point the remaining players are free to move about the field according to their positions.



At this point, any number of events can occur. The team with the ball obviously tries to score a goal, while the other team tries to gain possession of the ball and advance it to the other end of the field. The ball changes possession many times during the game. Combining this fact with substitutions-on-the-fly can make for a very exciting game.

Penalties in the Game

As would be expected, most of the rules center around the players' conduct on the field. As in hockey, there are rules against excessive physical contact. For example, opposing players are allowed to make contact (i.e., body checking), but only from the front or side, and only when the ball is within 15 feet of the contact. In addition, a player may not make contact with an opponent while the opponent is in a stooping or crouching position. Players who violate these rules are assessed a penalty, from losing possession of the ball to serving time in the *penalty box*. Penalties are divided into three categories - technical, personal, and miscellaneous, as explained below.



Technical Fouls

Technical fouls are normally considered to be minor infractions, and result in turning over the ball to the offended team. If the offended team had possession of the ball however, then a technical foul is a timeserving penalty. For example, if opposing players are scrimmaging for a loose ball and one player pushes the second player from behind, then the ball would be awarded to the player who was pushed (turnover). On the other hand, if the first player has possession of the ball and is pushed by an opposing player, then the opposing player would serve 30 seconds in the penalty box, and his team would play "man down" for that amount of time.

As with most personal fouls, technical fouls are released either when the offended team scores a goal or when the penalty time has expired. The one exception to this rule is Unsportsmanlike Conduct, which is explained below under Personal Fouls.

TECHNICAL FOULS

INFRACTION	DESCRIPTION
Bench Penalty	This foul is used to control the coaches and players on the sidelines. Usually, an attackman on the field serves the penalty.
Delay of Game	A player or team fails to take position on the field in a timely manner.
Holding	Interfering with the movement of an opposing player by holding him with the head of the crosse or by using a portion of the stick handle.
Illegal Use of Hands	A player may not use his hands to control the ball. The exception to this rule is the goalie, who is allowed to swat the ball away from the goal.
Illegal substitution	A player steps onto the field before his teammate gets off.
Interference	Impeding the free movement of an opposing player, unless the opposing player has the ball or is within 15 feet of a loose ball.
Offside	A team fails to keep three players on the offensive half of the field, or four players on the defensive half.
Pushing	Making contact with an opponent from behind, so as to knock him off balance.

Personal Fouls

Personal fouls are more serious in nature, and are always timeserving regardless of ball possession. The minimum penalty time for a personal foul is one minute. The maximum time is five minutes, which results in ejection from the game. The common personal penalties in Lacrosse are listed below.

PERSONAL FOULS

INFRACTION	DESCRIPTION
Cross checking	Using the portion of the stick handle between the gloves to push an opponent. A player must keep his gloves together on the handle in this situation.
Illegal body checking	Hitting an opponent with a forearm, or with excessive force.
Slashing	Striking an opponent with excessive force anywhere except on his stick or on the gloved hands. If a player makes contact with his opponent's stick first before striking another part of his body, then slashing usually is not called.
Unnecessary Roughness	Most often referred to as a "late hit". This penalty is usually called when a player body checks an opponent with excessive force either after the ball is passed or after a goal is scored.
Tripping	Obstructing an opponent below the knees with the stick, hands, feet, or legs. Unless this action is flagrant, it is usually downplayed to a holding penalty.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Profanity, taunting the other team, fighting, or any other action that an official thinks is unsportsmanlike. It is the most serious of all the penalties. Unlike other personal fouls, Unsportsmanlike Conduct is "full serve" meaning that the penalized player must serve the entire penalty time regardless of what occurs on the field.
Illegal Equipment	An equipment check can be called by a coach during a dead ball situation, or by a referee between the first and second or third and fourth periods. Usually the equipment check centers on the crosse, which must meet certain requirements (see the discussion below on the crosse). The penalty can range from 1-3 minutes, and is full served.



Other Penalties

These penalties result in a turnover of possession only.

MISCELLANEOUS FOULS

INFRACTION	DESCRIPTION
Crease violation	An offensive player is not allowed to enter his opponent's crease at any time. If he does, then the ball is given to the defensive team. If a player with the ball steps in the crease and scores a goal, then the goal is called back and the defensive team is awarded the ball.
Moving Pick	The official term in Lacrosse is an "Illegal Offensive Screen". Either way, an offensive player who does not have the ball may not "block" a defensive player (as could be done in football).
Warding Off	A player with the ball may not push a defensive player's stick away with his hands or arms.



Obscure Aspects of the Game

The Shot Rule



Probably the most confusing rule in Lacrosse is the "shot rule". Here's the situation: a player takes a shot at his opponent's goal and the ball misses. The ball then rolls out of bounds without being touched by another player on either team. Now, in games such as basketball or soccer, the ball would be awarded to the opposing team. However, in Lacrosse, the ball is awarded to the player who was closest to it when it went out of bounds. This rule is unique because it allows the team who threw the ball out of bounds to get it back. The reason for the rule is to allow the offense to maintain pressure on the defense, and to allow another chance to score a goal.

There are two common misconceptions regarding this rule. The first misconception is that the player who wins the foot race to the area where the ball went out of bounds is the player who should be awarded the ball. The key to understanding the rule is that the official must make a judgement call regarding which player was closest to the ball when and where it went over the sideline or endline. The foot race is over when the ball goes out of bounds, not when the players reach the line. In a situation where the ball went out over the endline, it is often the Goalie who is awarded the ball because neither team had a player behind the goal.

The second misconception deals with using part of the equipment during the race to the boundary line. It is common to see players holding their sticks straight out in front of them while racing to the point where the ball is going to cross the boundary line. The sticks are not part of the race. Only the player's body is watched at this point. If the sticks were included then the defense would almost always win because a Defenseman's stick is usually 2 1/2 feet longer than an Attackman's or Midfielder's stick.

Offsides Rule

Another obscure rule in lacrosse is the offsides rule. Under normal circumstances, each team is required to have four players in its defensive area and three players in its offensive area. However, if a defenseman has the ball and thinks that he can make a *fast break* for the opponent's goal, he may do so as long as one of the middies stays on the defensive half of the field. This middie is called the onsides middie and is usually pre-selected by the coach. The onsides middie waves his stick in the air to designate who he is. He is free to go onto the offensive half of the field after the defenseman comes back over the centerline. If a midfielder fails to stay on the defensive half of the field, then his team could be called for being offsides and lose possession of the ball.

Another situation involving the offsides rule occurs when a loose ball comes close to the centerline, but does not actually go over it. If the midfielders on both teams have not stepped over the centerline yet, then the Attack and Defense must stay on the defensive

half of the field. In this case, both the Attack and Defense contest for the ball while trying not to step on or over the centerline. If any of these six players does step on or over the centerline, he is called for offsides and the other team is awarded the ball. Oftentimes, players will "nudge" their opponents in an effort to force them over the centerline. It is then up to the officials to decide if the player was truly offsides, or if he was pushed offsides. If the player was pushed, then his team is awarded the ball at the centerline.

The "All Released" Rule

Sometimes during a face-off neither team gains possession of the ball before it rolls into one of the two offensive areas. Once the ball enters the area, then all of the remaining players are "released" or allowed to move and go after the ball. This does not mean that the players at the opposite end of the field can run across the centerline to chase the ball. It does mean however, that all of the players can move even though the officials did not signal "Possession".

Slow Whistle Technique

Although this topic could just have easily been presented in the next section regarding the Officials, I chose to place it here because of all the confusion that it causes. Keep in mind that the basic idea behind lacrosse is to keep the game moving. When an infraction occurs by the defensive team, the last thing that an official wants to do is stop play (and possibly destroy a fast break) unless the ball is dropped or a player is injured. So, instead of blowing a whistle, the referee throws a flag to indicate that a penalty has been committed. The penalty is either a personal type or a technical foul with possession. If the ball is dropped, goes out of bounds, or the player with the ball regresses the goal, then the play is stopped and the penalty is assessed.

On the other hand, if the offensive team commits a personal foul or a technical foul with possession, then play is immediately stopped and the penalty is assessed.

Technical Fouls and Goals

Here's the situation: the ball carrier is running down the field and is pushed from behind by a defensive player. The referee throws a flag but does not stop play. The ball carrier regains his balance and continues running towards the goal. He passes the ball to a teammate, who in turn shoots and scores a goal. Question: What happens to the penalty?

Well, in the case of a technical foul the penalty is erased by the goal and no time is assessed. The reasoning is that a technical foul is not serious enough to have a defensive player serve penalty time after his team has been scored on. Instead, the referee signals that the goal was good and tells both teams why the flag was thrown. If the reason was a technical foul, then the referee signals that the penalty has been erased.

Personal Fouls and Goals

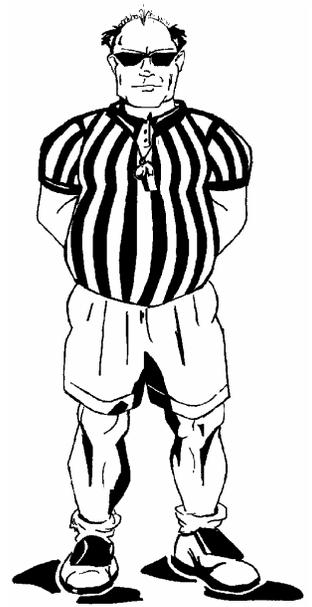
Personal fouls are considered to be serious enough as to be timeserving even after a goal is scored on the defensive team. For example, suppose that the scenario described above for technical fouls happens to occur with a personal foul (e.g., slashing). In this case, the referee would signal that the goal was good, and then assesses the personal foul on the "guilty" player. The team that was scored on must now face-off while being one player short. This means that this team will only have two middies for the upcoming face-off because the other players are required to stay behind their respective restraining lines.

However, an exception is allowed at this point. An attackman is allowed to "stand in" as a mddie during the face-off. This attackman however, may not cross the centerline. He must stay on his offensive half of the field. If he does cross the centerline, the referee could penalize him for being offsides.

The Officials

Last, but certainly not least, a few words should be said about the officials, or referees in the game. Normally, there are two officials on the field. This number can vary, and it is common for one official to call a game played by 9-10 year olds. It is also common for three officials to call a NCAA Division I game. Some of the more common referee signals are depicted after the Glossary.

Having been an official, I can attest to the fact that it is not an easy task. Each official has certain responsibilities on the field, depending on the location of the ball. The officials are responsible for calling offsides, illegal substitutions, possession of the ball when it goes out of bounds, personal fouls, technical fouls, and goals. The way this is done in a two-official game is by dividing the lacrosse field along an imaginary diagonal line. Each official is responsible for watching play around one of the goals, while the other official watches the players' movements further away from the goal. It should therefore not be surprising to see the official who was further removed from an illegal play to make the call. Often, the reason is that the closer official was watching another part of the field when the infraction occurred.



There is a popular notion in lacrosse that a paid official is obligated to call a perfect game; that is, he will see all of the infractions and assess the proper penalties. Of course, this is not possible because many of the infractions are judgment calls and are based on the official's angle of perception, as well as subjectivity. Some officials like to "let the boys play" and consequently make very few calls. Other officials call a much tighter game, sometimes to the point where there is little play at all between whistles. It has never ceased to amaze me how well parents and coaches can call a game from the sidelines!

Because the game of lacrosse is so fast and physical, coaches (and parents) sometimes overreact in heated situations. However, there are few things more embarrassing in

Lacrosse than a loudmouth coach or parent who is out of control. In order to keep control of the game, the officials are allowed to call bench penalties on the two teams. Bench penalties are last-ditch decisions by the officials, and are preceded by ample warnings to the coaches and parents. The bench penalty consists of taking one of the Attackmen from the team (who probably had nothing to do with the situation) and assessing a 30-second technical foul on him. It's unfair, but sometimes it's necessary in order get someone's attention. If the behavioral problem persists, then the officials have the right to suspend play until the offender leaves.

It's Your Turn

Okay, you have a working understanding of lacrosse now, so have some fun. Outdoor practice for the FOL starts in the beginning of March, and the game schedule is usually available around Good Friday. In addition to your son's games, there are lacrosse games to watch at the local high schools and colleges. No matter what level of lacrosse is being played, the fundamentals never change - they just happen more quickly!

Other sources of information of information can be obtained from:

- U.S. Lacrosse, which is located on West University Parkway (next to Johns Hopkins University) in Baltimore, Maryland
- E-lacrosse, which is a website (www.e-lacrosse.com). This site contains links to lacrosse programs around the country.



Glossary of Commonly Used Lacrosse Terms

Attackman	One of three players who stays in the offensive half of the field, usually around the other team's goal. The primary role of the Attackman is to score goals.
Backup	An Attackman's move into a position to regain possession after a shot (see the Shot Rule above). The term also refers to a defender who is supporting a teammate who is guarding the ball.
Checking	An attempt to dislodge the ball by either body or stick contact. This maneuver can consist of a poke check, a wrap check, or a body check.
Clear	A pass or run to advance the ball from the defensive to the offensive half of the field.
Close Defense	The three defensive players who play immediately behind the and in front of the goal, and are responsible for covering the three Attackmen. Close defense typically uses longer sticks than the Attack or the Midfielders.
Cradling	Moving the arms and wrists so as to keep the ball in pocket of the stick.
Crease	The circle, consisting of a 9-foot radius, around each goal.
Cut	Movement of an offensive player without the ball so as to free himself for a pass.
Dodge	The ball carrier's move to elude an opponent.
Extra-man Offense (EMO)	Advantage by the offensive team because at least one of the members on the opposing team is in the penalty box.
Fast Break	A quick transition that results in a momentary numerical advantage for the offense over the defense. Typically, the advantage is 4-on-3 (not including the Goalie).
Feed	A pass to a teammate who is in scoring position.
Goal Line Extended (GLE)	An imaginary line that runs from the goal outward to both sidelines and is parallel to the endline. The GLE is used as a reference by defensemen to know when to closely guard an offensive player.

Groundball	A loose ball .
Hold	A legal maneuver by a defender to push his opponent away from the goal. A defender can apply legal holds with his hands (while they are holding his stick), arms, and body to the front of the offender.
Holding	Illegally impeding an opponent from moving forward or dodging. Holding usually occurs when the defender wraps his arm and stick around the ball carrier long enough to impede the ball carrier's movement.
Hole	The area immediately outside the crease and in front of the goal. It is a favorite place for the offense from which to take a shot at the goal.
Isolation (iso)	The space created for the ball carrier so that he can dodge his opponent. The ball carrier and his teammates work together to create the space.
Lax	Slang term for Lacrosse. The "x" essentially represents another type of cross.
Long pole	Another term for the defenseman's crosse.
Man-ball	Tactic whereby one player scoops the ball while a teammate body checks an opponent within 15 feet of the loose ball.
Man-down Defense (MDD)	Defensive situation where a team has at least one player in the penalty box.
Mark up	A defensive maneuver where each man on the defense finds an offensive player to guard.
On the fly	Making substitutions while the clock is running. A player must run off the field before his teammate can run on. It is similar to a relay race.
Penalty Box ("the Box")	An area located along the sideline and in front of the scoring table. It is used by players who are serving timed penalties.
Pick	An offensive tactic whereby an off-ball player stands motionless so as to block the path of the defender who is guarding the ball carrier.
"Quick Stick"	The act (and art) of shooting the ball the second that it is caught. Many players perform this maneuver by swatting the ball into the goal with their sticks.

Riding	Preventing the defenders from advancing the ball to their offensive half of the field.
Scooping	Picking up a loose ground ball with the stick.
Screen	A maneuver used by an offensive player to block the Goalie's vision while the ball carrier is dodging to shoot at the goal.
Shooting	Throwing the ball at the goal in an attempt to score.
Slide	A move by an off-ball defender from his assigned offender in order to block a ball carrier who is moving unobstructed towards the goal.
Square-up	Body-on-body and stick-on-stick position between the offensive and defense.
Unsettled Situation	A situation where the defense has fallen out of position and has momentarily given the advantage to the offense.
Winglines	The lines located parallel to the sidelines and perpendicular to the centerline. These lines are used to position the wing middies prior to a face-off.
"X"	An imaginary spot directly behind the goal and outside the crease. It is a favorite place for an Attackman because he can set up a pass, run around to the front of the goal, or backup a shot.

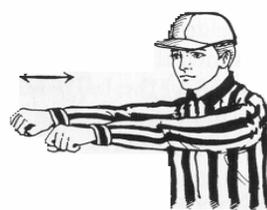
Common Referee Signals



illegal body check



slashing



checking



tripping



holding



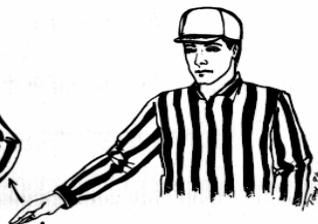
warding



stalling



offsides



crease violation



play

