



# US LACROSSE COACHING EDUCATION PROGRAM

## **Cradling in Boys Lacrosse**

### **How to Hold a Stick**

Before teaching your players anything about throwing, catching, dodging or cradling, they must first be comfortable with a stick in their hands.

Odds are a first-timer will grip his hands too low (near the butt end), too high (thumbing the throat of the stick) or too close together.

- Instruct your players to position their hands hip-width apart, meaning the distance between their bottom and top hands is about the same as the distance between their hips.
- The stick head should be raised next to their ears, left or right, forming a “box” from which they will catch and throw.
- The bottom hand should grip the stick handle above the butt end, tight enough to stabilize the stick but loose enough to allow them to cradle. The top hand should hold the stick in its fingertips, not the palm. This too will help when it comes time to cradle.

### **Cradling**

Cradling is one of the most important skills in lacrosse. It keeps the ball centered in the stick pocket as a player moves about the field, allowing him to maintain possession and control the ball while doing so.

Cradling is also the basis of all other skills. It sets the ball on the shooting strings before throwing and absorbs the ball as part of its motion in catching. A Level 1 player must master cradling before moving on to other skills such as throwing, catching and shooting.

### **Teaching the Skill: Cradling**

Cradling is the motion of the stick head that creates a centrifugal force on the ball to keep it in the pocket – demonstrate these physics to your players. The force is created by moving both arms and wrists in unison, in a semi-circular motion around the ball.





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## **Cradling: Two-Handed Cradle**

Instruct your player to use a two-handed cradle in open field. This allows maximum control and stick protection, with little to no pressure from defenders on the ball carrier's hands.

Position the top hand 2 to 3 inches below the bottom of the head or throat of the stick.

The bottom hand should be relaxed and not disrupting that centrifugal force. The bottom hand is also responsible for protecting the stick.

Reiterating what was taught earlier in this course, the stick should be held not in the player's palm, but in the tips of his fingers and thumb for better control and wrist rotation.

With hands in position, your player should use his top hand to turn the stick in a semi-circular motion, creating the centrifugal force. He should use his top-hand wrist to curl the stick like a barbell in and out, while his bottom hand allows the stick handle to rotate around his palm.

Instruct your player to keep his elbow raised so that the stick is parallel to his body.

The two-handed cradle is not all in the wrist – it's in the arms too. Your player's arms should move backward and forward as he curls his wrist in and out, respectively, to generate force on the ball.

Allow more advanced players to experiment with variations – for instance, with the bottom hand controlling the motion and the top hand stabilizing. This will help with faking and on face-offs in a more advanced program.

## **Cradling: One-Handed Cradle**

At this level, if your player can move about the field cradling two-handed, you're already ahead of the competition. But once he is comfortable doing so, it's time for him to let go of that bottom hand and learn how to cradle with one hand. This skill is instrumental when a defender is in close and applying pressure to the ball carrier's bottom hand. It prevents the defender from dislodging the ball and, at the same time, allows the bottom hand to be used for stick protection.

When performing a two-handed cradle, the player releases his bottom hand but maintains the cradling motion of his top hand.





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His brings his bottom hand up above his waist, as it is now a shield with which he can protect the ball and absorb the defender's checks.

His top hand continues to curl in and out, with the stick rolling between the fingertips, to maintain the centrifugal force needed to keep the ball in the stick.

Arm movement is the same as when a player is running freely without the ball. When the arm holding the stick moves forward, so does the free hand protecting the stick.

Just as a two-handed cradle, the player's elbow is raised so that the stick is parallel to his body. However, with a one-handed cradle, make sure the ball carrier's elbows are not only up, but also away from the body – to allow for a quick transfer between hands. This also creates better stick protection and prevents him from warding off his defender with his free hand.

## Stick Protection

Cradling can leave a player exposed. One of the most difficult traits for a beginner to learn is stick protection. Teach it in conjunction with cradling, with the following precepts in mind:

- The ball carrier's body should be positioned between his stick and the defender, perpendicular to the defender.
- Instruct him to hold his stick at shoulder height and in a vertical position parallel to his body. His top hand should hold the stick about chest-high, near the armpit. This is called "box position," as the stick head is near his ear.
- The ball carrier should also keep his head up – just as his body is shielding the bottom of the stick, his helmet is shielding the stick head in the "box position."
- The bottom hand provides the main element of protection while cradling, especially with one hand. The ball carrier's thumb should be pointed down and out and, like the elbow, extended away from his body. This does two things: it forms a natural curve of the shoulders for protection and keeps the thumb and palm in ready position for bottom-hand returns to make a pass.
- Also when cradling one-handed, the elbow of the arm holding the stick should be up so that the forearm is horizontal to the ground. If your player's forearm is horizontal and parallel, his stick will be vertical and perpendicular, maximizing protection.





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## **Error Detection and Correction**

### ***Error:***

The player is dropping the ball when cradling.

### ***Correction:***

Make sure his mechanics are right. Is his elbow up and the stick perpendicular to the ground? Are his arms moving in and out in the same manner as if he were running? Review the elements of hand and body positioning to ensure that the stick is being held properly and the hands and wrists are moving in accord to create centrifugal force.

