

A PARENT'S INTRODUCTION TO BOYS LACROSSE

While Lacrosse is an ancient sport that has existed in various forms for centuries, for many parents lacrosse is a new game. Over the years we have heard from parents that it would help if someone would explain the basics to them so they could understand – and enjoy – what was happening on the field. So, as parents and coaches, we have created this introduction to the game that covers some of the basic questions we have been asked over the years. This introduction is meant to provide a basic introduction the game and some of its terminology to help you enjoy the experience as a parent. You can find much more at www.uslacrosse.org.

THE ORIGINS OF THE GAME

The game originated among Native Americans in North America. Variations existed among tribes, but the basic concept of the game played by Native Americans remains the foundation of the modern game. Teams of players used a stick with a webbed pocket to move a ball toward a goal and, upon hitting the goal, scored a point. Games could last days and, without defined boundaries, could stretch for miles and involve hundreds of players. The games could be used to settle inter-tribal disputes, for recreation, or as training for combat.

In the 17 century, French missionaries observed the game being played. One of them referred the game as “crosse.” Some attribute the use of the word “crosse” to the stick’s resemblance to the crooked pastoral staff carried by clergy, others to the French term for field hockey “le jeu de la crosse.” Regardless of the origin, the name carries on today in the modern game as both the name of the game itself, “Lacrosse,” and the formal name of the stick your child uses to knock things over in the house – the “**crosse**.” The rulebook calls it a “crosse” but most of us call it a stick. Still, you will hear the term “crosse” from time to time on the field. A “**Cross[e] Check**” in the boys game is an illegal check where a players hands are spread wide along the shaft of the crosse, and he extends his arms to shove the opposing players with the shaft of the crosse, or stick.

THE GAME IN A NUTSHELL

Without getting into variations for different age groups, the game is played on a field about the size of a football field (smaller for smaller players), with a midfield line and two goals at either end. The goals sit in a round circle called a “**crease**.” Only the goalie and defensive players are allowed in the crease. If an offensive player sets foot in the crease, it is a penalty. Within each half of the field is also a “**restraining box**” which is used during “**faceoffs**,” which will be discussed later.

The object of the game is as simple as it was at the time of its origin. Move the ball downfield and throw it in the opposing goal. Get the ball in the goal and you get a point. If you end up with more points than your opponent at the end of the game, you win.

There are four positions. The full game has 3 attack, 3 midfield, 3 defense, and a goalie. Generally speaking, the attack stay on the offensive half of the field, defense on the defensive half, and midfielders, or “**middies**,” roam the length of the field, playing offense when their team has possession, and defense when the other team has possession. Because middies do so much

running up and down the field, they are substituted often. A team usually has 3 “**middie lines**”, groups of 3 middies who replace the exhausted middle line ahead of them on the field during a break in play. Sometimes, the lines are replaced “**on the fly**” while the clock is running.

A team must have 3 players on the offensive side of the field and 4 players on the defensive side of the field at all times. When a team has less than this number on a given side of the field they are “**offsides.**” Generally, the three attackmen stay on their half of the field, and the three defensemen and the goalie stay on their half. There is no rule that defensemen or attackman must stay on their side of the field, however, as long as the proper number of players are on a given side of the field. You will see defenders, goalies, and attack cross the midfield line from time to time. For example, after a goalie makes a save, the defense attempts to transition the ball upfield to the offensive players in what is called a “**clear.**” The players who are opposing the clear are said to be “**riding**” the clear. Occasionally a defenseman will run the ball upfield and cross the midfield line while clearing the ball. You *should* hear a call of “**middie back!**” which tells a midfielder to stay on the defensive side of the field to avoid being offsides as the defensive player runs across the midfield line. When this works, and it works better as the kids get older, the defensive half of the field has four players – 2 defensive players, 1 middie, and a goalie – and there is no offsides penalty. After getting the ball to the offense, the defensive player returns to his half of the field and the middie rejoins his teammates on the offensive half of the field.

The game begins with a “**faceoff.**” Two opposing middies meet at midfield, flanked by middies down the midfield line near the sidelines. The center middies crouch or kneel and place their sticks with the pockets facing each other and nearly touching. The referee places the ball between the two sticks, quickly blows a whistle, and the players snap their sticks forward in an attempt to clamp and capture the ball (there are many techniques for doing this). The middies positioned near the sideline are free to run in and capture a loose ball. Whoever retrieves the ball has “**possession**” and the referee will shout “possession!” Once possession is established the defense and attack players, who are confined to a “**restraining box**” to start the faceoff, are free to leave the restraining box and roam any part of their half of the field. The restraining box keeps attack and defensemen from running to the loose ball on a faceoff until possession is established. **Faceoffs** occur at the start of each half and after every goal (at certain levels possession is given to the losing team after a goal when the lead is 6 goals or more).

GAME PLAY

From a game play standpoint, the game may remind you of soccer, hockey, or basketball. The ball is moved from one half of the field to the other in a manner reminiscent of soccer or hockey, especially during fast breaks. Once the ball is settled on an offensive possession, the game is reminiscent of basketball, with ball movement, cuts, picks, and screens. Like basketball, **assists** are an important part of the game, and you should see players cutting off picks or screens to catch a pass and score a goal within a step of receiving the ball. The passer gets the assist, the scorer the goal. Other times, a player will attempt to score by **dodging** an opponent and going to the goal, similar to an “iso” in basketball.

You may not see a lot of this starting out, especially with the younger players. A lot of the time the ball will be on the ground and the game will look more like a Rugby scrum. During “**ground balls**” you will also see some penalties that you will see throughout the game. A “**push in the back**” is exactly what it sounds like. Depending on the age level “**checking**” is allowed but it must be from the front and above the waist, much like a block in football. It also must take place within 3-5 yards of the loose ball, depending on the age level. You will also learn about the “**slash.**” A player is allowed to use his stick (“crosse”) to hit another player’s stick, which includes the gloves. This is usually called a “**stick check.**” Sometimes a player misses the stick and hits the player’s body, swings his stick with one hand, or swings recklessly. Depending on the severity of the blow or swing the referee may call a **slash**. A stick check to the head is almost always a penalty, regardless of severity. During ground balls you may (hopefully) hear a player yell “**man**” or “**ball.**” This is a signal to a teammate to let them know who is going to scoop the ball, and who is going to check an opposing player to free up the teammate to easily scoop the ball.

Penalties result in a trip to the “**penalty box**”. Penalties are usually 30 seconds or one minute (sometimes more) depending on the type of penalty. Some are “**releasable**”, meaning the offending player is allowed to return to the field if the other team scores during the penalty time. Others are “**non-releasable**”, meaning a goal does not end the penalty and the player must serve the full term. Multiple fouls can be assessed concurrently or consecutively depending on how many players are involved in the infraction. When a team has an advantage due to a penalty (such as 6 players to 5), they are said to be “**man up.**” The team missing a player is “**man down.**” Penalty situations provide great scoring opportunities for the offensive team.

You will sometimes see a referee throw a yellow flag without blowing a whistle to stop play. The flag is thrown when a penalty occurs while a team has possession. Play is allowed to continue until possession is lost, at which time a whistle is blown and the offending player is sent to the penalty box. This is referred to as a “**slow whistle situation.**” The purpose is to allow continuation of a play or possession that may result in a goal regardless of the penalty.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PLAYER

Lacrosse can be as difficult as any game for a newcomer. Kids who are new to the game will take some time to learn the fundamental skill of throwing and catching. It will take practice, much the same way throwing and catching a baseball takes practice. But with repetition and time, it will become second nature. If you don’t play lacrosse, feel free to put on a baseball glove and play catch while your son or daughter uses their stick. They will still get all the benefit of practicing their throws and catches. Like any sport, there is no substitution for repetition and practice.

It will also take some time to learn to “**cradle**”. This is the name of the skill you see when it appears as though players are twirling their sticks while running. The purpose is simple – the centrifugal force generated by the cradle forces the ball into the back of the pocket, making it easier to keep the ball in the pocket while running and taking contact. Practicing cradling is something that can be done sitting around the house. To avoid bouncing rubber balls and broken

lamps in the house, consider getting a cradle bean bag, which simulates the size and weight of a lacrosse ball without the bounce, at a lacrosse store.

Our primary expectation is for the player have fun, improve their skills, and end the season with a desire to play some more. People who play lacrosse tend to get the bug and remain passionate about the game for life. It's a sport that can be played well into adulthood, and club teams and tournaments exist for all ages. It is a fun mix of speed, agility, and contact that is unlike any other sport.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PARENT

We want you to have fun watching your child and his or her team play. It may take some time to get a feel for the game, but we are confident when you do you will enjoy it. The coaches will coach, the players will play, and the parents get to enjoy cheering for their athletes.

Lacrosse is now easy to find on TV or the internet, so take a few minutes and watch a college or pro game. It may not look exactly like what you are seeing on the field, but it will introduce you to the concepts of the game and show you how it's played at higher levels. It will give you some idea of what we are building for.

Please feel free to ask questions about the game. The coaches are happy to explain things to you, and you will find that some of the parents have played and can explain what is going on during games.

Thanks for participating in HYLAX and enjoy watching your child play.