



# SCHOOLS IN ... FOR GOALIES

FROM KNOWING THE RULES TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT STICK TO BEING MENTALLY STRONG, PLAYING GOALIE IN LACROSSE IS NO EASY TASK. HOWEVER, BOTH GOALIES AND COACHES CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT THE TOUGHEST POSITION TO PLAY BY WORKING TOGETHER AND CONSTANTLY PERFECTING THE CRAFT.

// By Laurent Gagnier | Excerpt from up-coming OLA Coach & Goalie Instruction Resource

**P** practice as you play — coaches protect your goalies with this philosophy! You should encourage your players to practice hard so they will play hard, they should shoot to score but if your goalie is involved in the drill the shot should come as it would in a game as well.

Warm up is not a time for shooters to tweak their sticks: that is what wall ball is for! Shooting practice is not a time to see how hard you can shoot with your toes on the edge of the crease: that is what wall ball is for! Learning under hands and side arms is not part of pre-practice loosening up: that is

what wall ball is for! (Are you seeing a theme?)

Younger goalies are easily taught to fear the ball, mainly because of getting hurt by a shot they did not see. Only through good floor management can you ensure your goalie does not develop a fear of the ball. Why? Because it is a hundred times harder to learn not to fear than it is to learn to fear! Have your shooters challenged a defender between the shooter and the goalie or have the shooter pursued as they would be in a game? Your goalies will improve and your shooters will know how to deal with game situations.

## RULE REMINDERS

There are three important rules every goalie must know:

- The five-second rule - once a player gains control of the ball in the crease, they have five seconds to get it out. Either by a pass or by stepping out of the crease.
- Back in, once the ball has left the crease it can not be passed back in to the crease nor can a player carry the ball back into the crease if they have possession of it outside the crease (some younger ages it is permitted to go back in once per possession.)

- 10-second rule - if a team is penalized, it has only 10 seconds to get to the opposing teams zone. If you use the whole five seconds in a. it does not leave a lot of time to get out of your zone.

## ON THE GOALIE STICK

A note on stick choice; this is really a personal preference and each stick type has advantages and disadvantages. Size, weight, durability and cost are all factors in stick choice. The classic wooden stick is my favourite as it is typically most durable, but also the heaviest and most difficult to tune and maintain. At the other end of the spectrum are composite heads with aluminum, graphite or titanium shafts, which are generally more lightweight and easier to maintain and tune.

The term "tune" your stick is in reference to how a player personalizes his stick set up. Goalies should spend as much time as players ensuring they can pass and catch. They have to ensure that they can make short, medium and long passes as effectively as any other player on the floor. This skill is critical if you want your goalie to become an offensive threat.

And one last point, always leave the shaft as long as possible! The butt end is good for one save a game!

### The Golden Rules of Goaltending

All lacrosse goalies should know these four Golden Rules:

- Stay on your feet, the game is played above your head.
- 90% of saves are positional, the other 9.99% are a goalies reaction, while .01% is the butt of the goalies stick.
- 1.5 steps from the cross bar is far enough out to cut down an angle, go further out and shooters will go over your shoulders.
- NEVER try to catch a shot with your free hand.

## THE MASS APPROACH

There are a number of different kinds of shots a goalie will face in lacrosse. Unlike any other sport a lacrosse goalie has to deal with the multiple angles of approach for the ball can come from over the players shoulder (top down), from a side arm (level) and underhand (bottom up). Incorporate a bounce and a spin and the number of different shots a goalie can face becomes staggering. Remember how I said you can't change your size? This is how a lacrosse goalie gets bigger: MASS:

- Move your entire body so the ball hits your centerline [i.e., the vertical line that is



drawn from your nose to your belly button to between your toes).

- Attack the ball with your body. Especially on bounce shots, a goalie moving forward on a bounce shot reduces the effectiveness of the bounce and spin.
- Shift between angles as the ball moves from one attacker to another
- Stay on your feet!

## ON PLAYING FAKES

As players skills improve, their ability to fake increases. Goalies tend to focus on the head of the stick and some with excellent reactions can do this with success. For the rest of us whose reaction time is not quite as good, we can focus slightly past the shooter. This puts the head of the players stick in our peripheral vision. If we trust that part of our sight we can

actually react faster to the ball as it exits the head of the stick and we are less likely to move on a fake. Train yourself to watch for the ball leaving the stick as opposed to the ball. Once it leaves the stick, then keep your eye on it!

## DEFENDING THE QUICK STICK

Quick stick is lacrosse's equivalent to a "one timer." This comes down to a goalie's agility and practice in moving from each of the base angle set positions to any other set position. You simply have to get there as fast as the ball. This where it is absolutely critical to stay on your feet! Shooters practice crease to crease passes all the time. So if a goalie drops to his knees on a crease to crease and that quick stick becomes a pass instead of a shot, that goalie just conceded a goal. If you stay on your feet, you have a chance to get back across.

Quick sticks (most commonly crease to crease) are not limited to crease to crease by the way. They can come from anywhere. Crease to top, shooter to crease — literally if you can think it, it can be done! I even had a shooter take a pass while cutting through the house. The pass was late, so he did a quick stick behind his back! I have only seen it once and it was once too often! The point is, if you get lazy or don't train on the five- set positions you haven't got a chance to make these saves.

## INITIATING THE OFFENSE

When a goalie recovers a ball following a shot, the goalie should look to make the pass that the teams break out scheme demands (i.e., short pass away from the bench, medium passes, fast breaker from the floor away from the bench or even fast breaker from the bench). If the goalie cannot find an open player to pass to within the five-second rule, they should step out the back of the crease behind the net. The crease is now the goalies shield. The shield comes from the rule

that an opposing player(s) cannot cross the crease to reach another player or shorten their route to the ball.

If a player pursues the goalie, the goalie can move around the crease keeping the opponent at the opposite side of the crease creating time and space for the goalie to find an open player. The goalie has to keep an eye up the floor for an open man because eventually a runner will catch up. This is also why a goalie needs to be able to cradle and pass while running (shuttle drills are for goalies too!).

## MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

Goalies are often referred to as the last line of defense. This puts the goalie in a unique situation where he can be labeled the hero or the one who let the team down. Many defensive errors can occur as a play develops from the attacking team's end into a goal against the defender. Most of these errors go unnoticed or without blame however everyone sees the goal that was let in by the goalie. A certain level of mental toughness is required for someone to stand between the posts and bear this amount of pressure.

Goalies are unique, they dress different, their role is different and are imposed a higher level of responsibility. Being a goalie can be referred to as an individual sport within a team environment as he/she is easily identified by the crowd for both the good and bad. Mistakes will happen; bad goals will be let in. Strong goalies are mature enough to maintain their composure in these situations and put it behind them. This is essential as the goalie plays the entire game and does not have the opportunity to take a break in order to reboot. The sooner he puts a bad goal in the past the sooner he will regain his focus and concentration in order to get back in the game. A goalie needs to be courageous, one for the extra weight that he bears on his shoulders, not necessarily from his equipment but mainly from the points mentioned above and also because it takes a certain breed of person to stand in front of a hard rubber ball travelling through the air at 100 miles per hour.

## ON HEAT MANAGEMENT

Box lacrosse goalies are always at risk of heat exhaustion. Make sure you have plenty of water breaks and ensure your goalies drink. On exceptionally hot days you can have your goalie participate in shuttle and running drills but have them drop off leg their guards and pants (make sure they have shorts). Always encourage your goalies to pass and catch with their uppers on because this is how we play! ♦

