

The 11 Commandments of Lacrosse

(Reprinted from Lax Mag for Kids)

1. You must be able to catch, throw and shoot both left-handed and right-handed.

From the first time you pick up a lacrosse stick, you must practice on both sides. You must work on your weak hand on your own. You should not be embarrassed if you make mistakes with your non-dominant hand. You will not suddenly wake up one day and have a competent, non-dominant hand. It takes practice.

2. The more time you spend playing lacrosse with your stick perpendicular to the ground (as opposed to parallel to the ground), the better player you will become.

If a player keeps her stick perpendicular to the ground, she can protect the full length of her stick with her body. To the contrary, if the stick becomes parallel to the ground, the head and stick become exposed to checks by an opponent. If the head of the stick is carried next to the ear (in the box), and the shaft is perpendicular to the ground habitually, no matter where the ball is caught, it will be returned to the proper position and be protected by the body. When the ball is thrown or shot, it should be done overhand from the box position. In order for this to be executed properly, a player must catch, throw and shoot with her wrists. Many players cannot do this because they have a whip in their stick. Sticks with whips force players throw the ball with their arms rather than their wrists. Adjust the pocket of your stick so that you can use your wrists and keep the stick perpendicular.

3. Do not hold the ball in your stick.

The less time the ball spends in your stick, the better player you will become. Players who carry the ball in their stick too long develop a horrible sense of the game. The ball can be passed over a distance at speeds faster than anyone can run. It is far easier to learn how to carry the ball in your stick after you have learned how to pass it. The reason for this is that defensive pressure becomes far less of an irritation when a player knows how to get rid of the ball.

4. Move the ball immediately upon gaining possession of a loose ball.

As teams scramble for loose balls, they get pulled out of position. If your team picked up a loose ball, it can capitalize on the opponent's misalignment only if it can move the ball before the opponent has time to adjust. You must look up field and get the ball out of your stick as soon as possible. You must make the pass to the first open player on your team that you see, whether in

front, across or behind you. Ideally, your teammates should be moving themselves into strategic positions to take advantage of the opponents' misalignment.

5. You must learn how to move without the ball.

Everyone – player's referees and fans – has a tendency to watch only the player with the ball. Players off the ball are disregarded. Thus, it is easier to get into shooting, catching or scooping position when you do not have the ball. Every lacrosse player plays 90% of the time without the ball. You must maximize your time without the ball so that you put yourself in a position to do something when you get it. You must realize that by standing still, you blend into the background and your teammate with the ball cannot see you.

6. You must move to the ball.

A player who is open and wants the ball should always move to the ball. This is particularly true when a player is (1) open on the backside (2) not being watched by a defending player in front of her and (3) receiving a pass to shoot. A player who is not being watched by a defender in front of her should move to the ball because she can run right past the defender and get open. A player receiving the pass to shoot must always move to the ball lest she catch it, turn and get run down by a sliding defender.

7. Look to a spot behind the goalie when you shoot.

If a player is in possession of the ball in shooting position, she usually is being pressured if not run down. You must therefore automatically look first to the highest percentage spot to shoot. This spot is 'behind the goalie.' A spot behind the goalie is a spot out of the goalie's momentum. Shooters must look first to a spot that is opposite to the direction in which the goalie is moving. If the goalie is moving to her right, a shot to her right is a shot into her momentum and flow. A shot to her left, however, forces her to change her momentum and go the other way. This is a difficult task even for the best goalie.

8. Shoot with a quick release.

Releasing the ball quickly when shooting on goal is an asset because (1) anyone in possession of the ball in shooting position is or soon will receive defensive pressure and (2) goalies move. Too many players develop bad habits, such as spinning their stick, taking more steps, or winding up before releasing the ball. All these actions use up valuable time that allows the defense to recover and the goalie to move. This is especially true when a player has just received a feed. If you develop the skill to release the shot at the moment that you receive the feed, you will shoot with

less defensive pressure and at a goalie who has not been allowed to focus on the ball. The proper method of developing the quick release is to give with the feed and actually catch the ball in a shooting position.

9. Defense must have stick skills as good as or better than attackers and midfielders.

Defense must be able to clear the ball. Broken clears put teams in their most vulnerable position possible. The only way to ensure that clears do not fail is to make sure the ball does not go on the ground. That requires flawless throwing and catching.

10. Defenders must play defense like boxers box.

Too many defenders stop moving their feet when they make a check or they make a check and leave their sticks in places that do them no good. Boxers never stand still with reference to their opponent. They use their footwork to gain position and advantage. Neither do they leave their arm extended after throwing a punch. A defender should not leave her stick or her opponent's hip. She must learn to move, check, and reload to repeat the process.

11. Defenders do not have to take the ball away to play good defense.

The purpose of all defenses is to reduce the opponents' scoring. Focusing on four factors and executing them accomplish that. The four are (1) prevent high percentage shots, (2) hinder passing that allows opponents into the prime shooting area, (3) gain possession of loose balls, and (4) begin the transition game. Too many defenders measure their defensive prowess by their ability to strip the ball from an opponent. A defender's primary concern should be to position themselves so that when the player she is guarding puts both hands on the stick, she can check the opponent's hands. The attributes that every defender must have are footwork, stickwork, anticipation and hustle.