

FUNDAMENTALS FIRST - Jimmy Quinlan (Edmonton Rush)

The biggest focus when coaching lacrosse at any minor level should be individual Fundamentals.

EQUIPMENT

The stick:

Players should be informed of stick regulations before the season. (The minimum length of the Lacrosse stick is 36" up to Bantams and 42" thereafter). New players are encouraged to play with shorter stick as it will be easier to control and use.

Also it is advised that beginning players at any age begin to learn the game with a very shallow pocket. This will stress the importance of proper passing, catching, and stick protection fundamentals when first learning the game. There are many different types of mesh available to players however when beginning the game players should start with a medium mesh - one that is not too hard (Difficult to catch) and not too soft (tends to hook for inexperienced players).

Gloves:

Lacrosse gloves should be used by all players beginning the game as they promote more wrist mobility than do hockey gloves. This will become very helpful when cradling, passing and catching.

FUNDAMENTALS

All players should try and have lacrosse gloves when playing the game as they provide more wrist mobility than hockey gloves which lends itself to better control of the stick when cradling, passing, and catching.

The following are positive habits coaches should look to instill in their players no matter how long or short they have been playing the game. These habits will allow your players an opportunity at maximizing success.

STICK/HAND POSITIONING

Hand Positioning (Cradling/Passing/Catching/Shooting)

Cradling - When cradling players should begin with their top hand at the throat of the stick and their bottom hand near the butt end of the shaft. This will allow for maximum control of the stick. As a player progresses they can slide their top hand down to a passing positioning to be better ready to pass or shoot.

Passing - When passing players should begin with their bottom hand at the butt end of the stick with their top hand a foot apart. This will allow players to create enough leverage to make passes of any distance. Hands too far apart make it difficult to throw longer passes, hands too close together make it difficult to control the stick.

Catching - When catching or receiving passes players should begin with their hands in the same position as when learning cradling (top hand at throat of the stick, bottom hand at butt-end). This will allow for better control when catching and cushioning the pass. As a player progresses they can slide their top hand down to a passing positioning making it easy to make return passes without adjusting hand positioning.

Shooting - When shooting players should place their hands in a similar position as when passing, however some players may want to have their hands a little closer to create more leverage.

HOW IT'S DONE

Cradling - Cradling is done using the top hand, the bottom hand simply acts as a guide.

Keys to cradling

1. Players must ensure their hands are in the proper position.
2. Top hand cradles the stick by rolling/breaking the wrists, bottom hand serves as a guide.
3. Stick should be carried near or just below the shoulder. This allows the player to pass or shoot without taking a lot of time.

The best drill when teaching players how to cradle is using the wall as it teaches proper stick movement and positioning.

Passing/Shooting - Passing and shooting begins with a player's lower body (legs) moving through their core and arms and finishing with their wrists.

Keys to passing/shooting

1. Stick begins on or near shoulder. (Primary focus with all minor level players should be the basic overhand shot)
2. Player takes aim at target (teammates stick if passing/mesh if shooting). Encourage beginning players to use their butts ends as an aimer, looking down their shaft at the target. Lead elbow should also be pointed at the target; left elbow for a right handed player, right elbow for a left handed player.
3. Player loads weight using legs (remember players must step with opposite foot). A right handed player steps with his left leg, a left handed player steps with his right leg.
4. Player twists through their core creating torque and power.
5. Player should draw his hands back away from their body (this is known as clearing their hands) with their stick now positioned hiding behind their back. Player should now be looking over their shoulder; right shoulder for a left hand player, left shoulder for a right hand player.
6. Player's top hand should push the stick while player's bottom hand should pull the stick. This will create force and a snap on the pass.
7. Players should finish their shot by snapping their wrists and stick pointing at the desired target. Bottom hand elbow should be pointing to the sky.

The best drill when working with a player learning to shoot or pass is having them work on the boards by themselves (wall ball).

Loose Balls - Players should always be low with their knees bent when scooping up a loose ball. Players should be encouraged to keep their feet moving when picking up a loose ball as it becomes harder for the defender to check.

1. Player must get low when approaching a loose ball. This should be done by widening stance and bending knees.
2. Player should try and get a position where any opposing player attempting to steal the loose ball is on their back.
3. Player should scoop through the loose ball keeping their feet moving as much as possible.
4. Once the player picks up the ball they should protect their stick if in traffic if not in traffic they should get their stick up to their shoulder as quickly as possible ready to pass or shoot.

The best drill when working with a player learning loose balls is having the player scoop the ball up off the floor while keeping their foot moving.

It is important that we stress the fundamentals of shooting, passing, catching, and cradling when doing any drills with our teams as they are truly the key to long term success for our players.

Ways coaches can make FUNDAMENTALS - FUN.

THREE C's

1. **Completion** - Team/player must complete a set number of successful repetitions before moving to a new drill or mini-game.
2. **Competition** - Make the drill a competition where points are only awarded if all skills are done correctly. If it is a shooting drill that is focusing on shooting without a cradle and the player cradles, shoots and scores, the goal does not count. Have players play versus a teammate with the loser being assigned running or some form of fitness.
3. **Creativity** - Encourage players to try and use their non-dominant hand to re-learn or re-practice the desired skill. This will stress the importance of fundamentals to any player no matter what their skill level or ability.

The best drill in lacrosse is the drill where the ball does not touch the ground. - Jimmy Quinlan