



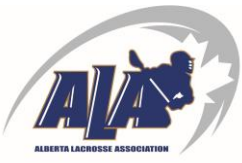
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# LACROSSE LITERACY

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Coach The Leader – Fundamental Skill Coaching

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## Lacrosse Literacy

### Coach The Leader

#### Fundamental Skill Coaching

##### *Ground Balls*

Ground balls are one of the most fundamental skills in lacrosse. We coach ground balls as the first skill in lacrosse along with cradling, because catching takes time to get the hang of, but everyone can learn to scoop the lacrosse ball and cradle it. Here are the keys to becoming a great ground baller.

- 1) **GET LOW:** This is the most important key to picking up a ground ball. We must get our stick low and parallel to the ground, as well as dip our butt down to get to the proper level. We need to bend at the knees, not the waist, and have our hands stretched low, to achieve this. We have a couple trigger terms we use to remind players of this, you choose which works best for you. “Poop and scoop” meaning you need to squat down like you are on the toilet. And “two butts down” which reminds players they need to get their physical butt down, but also the butt end of the stick down low, to have success.
- 2) **Hand Position:** Our hands should be spread wide on the stick. This allows us to have the most control over the stick that we can. We ideally want one hand up near the throat of the stick (where the head meets the shaft), and the other way down at the butt end.
- 3) **Feet Position:** Our feet are just as important, and even more so once we add defence. In lacrosse, we use our feet to shield the ball from our opponents, to give us time to scoop it. The easiest way to teach this is the same side hand and foot lead the ground ball. So, if we are right-handed (we hold the stick on our right shoulder with the right hand near the throat), we use our right foot to step right beside the ground ball, while staggering our stance with the left foot trailing (just like the hand), and then we can more easily scoop the ball.
- 4) **Scoop Through:** Once we get everything in position, this is where we need to get aggressive. We need to attack the ball with the head of our stick and drive through that loose ball, in order to actually get it to go in our stick. If we move too slowly, or are not aggressive, we either will not be successful in the scoop, or in a game, will get checked right away.
- 5) **Protect the Ball:** Lastly, we need to secure the ball in our stick and keep it protected from the opponent. This is partly done with the beginning feet position, as this will naturally shield our stick from the defender. But we also must make sure that we get the ball into our cradle quickly and effectively, and do not hang our stick out from our body, waiting to be checked. When we teach this, we add in an extra word to our original trigger, and say “poop, scoop, protect”. The other way I phrase this to older players is to have a plan. Do not just scoop the ball and think the job is done, your job is really just beginning. You need to plan out an exit strategy where you can sprint away from your defender, gain separation, and either make a pass or start running to the net.

In closing, these 5 keys to ground balls do not change, from beginner level players, all the way through professional lacrosse. Every team needs a player who is great on ground balls, and every team values that greatly.



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## *Cradling*

Cradling is a skill used to keep possession of the ball in our stick. It is an important skill, especially for beginner players, to master, in order to enjoy some success with the ball. There are two different types of cradles that we use, one for maximum protection when sprinting or in traffic, and the other we use when we are playing offence, attempting to make plays either passing, shooting, or dodging. The first will be called the “low cradle”, and the second we will call the “triple threat” cradle. The low cradle is best to be taught to beginner level players to start, but becomes less important as players advance in age and level of play.

## *Low Cradle*

- 1) First, we must make sure we possess the ball in the pocket of the stick. This requires either catching a pass, or scooping a loose ball. Once we get the ball in the pocket, it is best to turn our body to protect the stick. This means we put our body between the head of our stick (where the ball is), and our defender.
- 2) Next, we need to begin cradling in order to feel the ball in our stick, and keep the ball in our stick. This is a simple motion, best described as a bicep curl with the top hand on the stick (the hand closest to the head). When we make the bicep curl motion, we want the opening to the head to curl in a motion that turns it towards us, and away from our defender, then back down to a neutral position. Our top hand should be right near the head of the stick, to give us maximum control over the head and ultimately, the ball. Our bottom hand (closest to the butt-end), should hold onto the stick loosely and act as more of a guide and some stability for the cradle. The top hand does 80-90% of the work, and must be strong at all times.
- 3) Once we get the hang of the low cradle stationary, we should practice both doing so while running, and moving the stick around to avoid defenders. No matter where we move the stick, the motion remains the same, and the top hand must remain strong on the stick, the bottom hand can loosen and change angle as well, depending on the defender.

## *Triple Threat*

- 1) First, we must make sure we possess the ball in the pocket of the stick. This requires either catching a pass, or scooping a loose ball. Once we get the ball in the pocket, it is best to turn our body to protect the stick. This means we put our body between the head of our stick (where the ball is), and our defender.
- 2) Next, we will begin the triple threat cradling motion. This starts by putting our hands on the stick in the passing position, meaning the bottom hand is by the butt-end, and the top hand is just below halfway down the shaft, slightly closer to the butt-end, than the head. Once the hands are in the proper position, the next step is to position the stick on our shoulder, with the head being right by our ear (right ear for right handers, left ear for left handers).
- 3) Once the head is in position, this is good enough when we are not under pressure. But if you feel like you want to keep the ‘feel’ of the ball, you can make a gentle outward rocking motion with the top hand, which will make the opening of the head of the stick curl towards your body, similar to the feel of the low cradle.
- 4) We should practice moving our stick from low cradle to triple threat often, both stationary and on the run. As we get more advanced, we want to use triple threat as much as possible, and will only go to the low cradle in open floor to sprint top speed, or when we are under pressure from a defender, and forced to move the stick to keep the ball protected.



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## Passing/Shooting

Passing and shooting can be categorized in the same way, but have some slight differences to setup and delivery. We will break them down as two separate skills, but most translates to the other. It is important that our passing is incredibly accurate, there is a saying in lacrosse: “One good pass leads to another good pass, and potential scoring opportunity. One bad pass leads to another bad pass, and potential turnover.”

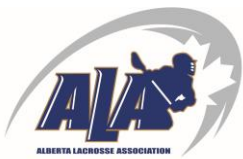
Shooting is a balance of power and accuracy. We need to be able to hit small targets on the net given the goalie size and skill, but we must be able to do so hard enough and quick enough that the goalie does not have time to react and make a save. Then as we progress, we add tactics to help us score, like faking, and deception.

## Passing/Catching

- 1) The first step to passing the ball effectively, is getting our stick to “triple threat” position. This includes making sure our hands are spaced correctly on the stick, with one near the butt-end, and the top hand slid down just below halfway (closer to butt-end than head). Once we have achieved this, we need to lift our front elbow (left elbow for rights, and right elbow for lefts). The elbow and more importantly, butt-end of our stick, aim for us.
- 2) Look down the butt-end of the stick, wherever this is pointed, that is where the ball will go. Aim small, miss small, make sure when you are throwing you have a target in mind, when passing that means we are looking at the head of the stick we are going to throw to. As we make our throwing motion, we always want to step with our opposite foot at the same time as we move the stick. Right handers step with left foot forwards, leftys use right.
- 3) As we prepare to throw the ball, it is important that we put enough power on the ball to get it there, but do not shoot it at our teammate. We want all our passes to be catchable, while also not giving the defence time to read. Lastly, we need to follow through as we throw with the head of our stick now pointing at our target after we release the ball. So, we start with the butt-end pointing, end with the head pointing at target.
- 4) The player we pass to should put the head of the stick up and give us a target, with their hands spread wide for extra control. Then they must cushion the pass as it comes, do not attack the ball. Once they catch, they go into one of the cradling techniques, and look for the next play.

## Shooting

- 1) The original setup for shooting is identical to passing, stick to ‘triple threat’ position on the shoulder. But then for stationary shooting, we want to put emphasis on stick and body position. We want an athletic stance, but turned sideways so that our lead hip (left hip for rights, right hip for lefts, same as golf) is pointed towards our target. This will help us generate more power when we rotate, keep the ball protected from defenders, and also help hide our stick from the goalie (deception).
- 2) The other two big differences between passing and shooting, are rotation, and extension. We want to start in that ‘triple threat’ position, but when shooting, in order to generate more power, we must reach our hands out and back away from your body, and then after we shoot the ball, we should be following through and rotating at our core, finishing with our stick pointed through the target, then low and away (again, similar to golf, but down instead of up). The easiest way to phrase the rotation and reach, is we start high and away with our stick, and we finish low and away.
- 3) When we add in shooting on the run, we still want to step with our opposite foot forwards, but must coordinate that while running, and also still get our extension and rotation. If we can still have our lead hip through the shot that is preferred.



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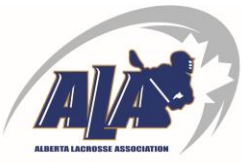
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## Defence

Fundamental defence is an important part of learning to have fun playing lacrosse. In environments where we have no equipment, we are limited in how much we can teach, or even do. We will focus on foot and body positioning, as well as some stick mirroring.

- 1) Footwork and body position are the most important keys to becoming a good on ball lacrosse defender. You can set yourself up for success, and make your job easier, with both. To accomplish the position and footwork we want, we teach the ABCs of defence (ABD for non-contact).
  - a. Approach – We want to approach the ball carrier positioned between them and the net, shading to their stick side. So, we play more lined up on their stick, than their body.
  - b. Breakdown – The breakdown is what we do when we get close to the person we are defending. Its how we stop our momentum from going forwards, instead concentrating on mirroring our checks movements. These must be short, choppy steps, that should come with some noise when done correctly.
  - c. Contact (Direct for non-contact) – If we are wearing equipment and playing defence, this is where we would be teaching cross-check first defence. Our first point of contact should always be a cross-check. If we are cross-checking, we want to spread our hands apart on the shaft, and use that length to control the offensive player. With no contact, we are looking to direct our check to low percentage areas with good body positioning, and with our stick we are going to mirror the offensive players stick so we can try to knock down passes or shots. If a clear stick check opens up on only the head of the stick, we may attempt to go for a takeaway, but it is not necessary.
- 2) Off ball defence is where we spend most of our time on the defensive side, so it is important that we do things well. We have a couple main points we focus on off ball. The first is called having your head on a swivel, and mid-pointing. This means that when we are checking our offensive player, I also need to have the ability to locate the ball quickly, as well as our check. This makes us able to help the on-ball defender, if needed.
- 3) Defending picks is another part of defence that is just as important, especially as we advance through the levels of lacrosse. The key to defending picks, and team defence in general, is communication. If we can effectively tell our teammate that a pick is coming, then they can prepare and adapt to where that pick is set, and what is required to keep the offence out, afterwards. The following terms are what we use in a pick scenario:
  - a. “Pick coming left/right/up/down” – Using directions, and names, if possible, makes it easier for the player being picked to react appropriately.
  - b. “Open” – This tells our partner that the pick is imminent and they need to adjust their positioning to make sure they are not picked out of the play, which would create a defensive 2 on 1.
  - c. “Switch/stay” – This last piece of our pick communication, is switch or stay. This can be called by either player, but preference is usually to the person being picked to decide if they can stay with their check, or need to switch. If stay is called, the defensive checks do not change, if switch is called, players will change who their check is from before the pick was set.



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## *Numbers (2/1, 3/2, 4/3)*

In a lacrosse game there is a lot of play in transition. This creates many opportunities when a team attacks in numbers and can use this to their advantage. As a general rule of thumb, it takes as many passes as the number of defenders to get a player open. For example, a 2 on 1 would require 1 pass and a 3 on 2 would require 2.

### *2 on 1*

Other than a straight breakaway, a 2/1 is the most advantageous situation a team can have. I mentioned that it normally requires 1 pass to get someone open on a 2/1 but there is more to it than that for sure. First thing is the ball carrier needs to be a threat to go to the net. If the defender doesn't come to the ball carrier, they can freely go to the net for a shot. If the defender commits to the ball carrier, then they can cut to the other open player who should be cutting to the net. Another strategy is the give and go. Where the ball carrier quickly passes to the open player to make the defender commit to them and then they quickly pass it back. The defender needs to act like they are letting the ball carrier shoot until they are close to doing so and then slide to them with their stick in the passing lane so they can block the pass.

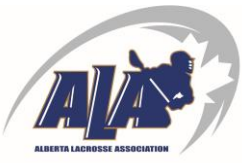
### *3 on 2*

A 3/2 happens very often in transition. The offensive players will either consist of two Righties and 1 Lefty (RRL) or two Lefties and one Righty (LLR). For this example, we will use RRL and can apply everything said but in the other direction for LLR. When running down the floor the offensive players are usually in an almost triangle shape with a Righty up top with the ball and a Righty and Lefty below them, slowly cutting towards the net at a 45-degree angle. Generally, the defense will be set up in an I format with one defender high covering the ball and the low defender splitting the two non ball carriers. The ball carrier first should be a threat and go to the net until a defender stops him. Next his first pass should be to the Left-handed player. This allows the Left-handed player two different options to pass the ball back to. The Left-handed player needs to attack the net and make the low defender step to him. This allows a final pass to the low open Righty.

### *4 on 3*

A 4/3 is not as simple as a 2/1 or 3/2 but can provide just as good of a scoring opportunity. As previously mentioned, a properly executed 4/3, should take 3 passes to get an open shot. A 4/3 will be RRL and in a box formation, in this scenario the ball will start with the top right player. The defense will be in a triangle with two defenders low and one high. The ball carrier as always needs to be a threat and go to the net until a defender steps to them. The defense should slide with the high player leaving the top lefty open. If they slide from either of the low positions, it results in an immediate scoring opportunity on the crease. When the Offensive lefty receives the ball he should look to the net and expect the bottom defender covering the other lefty to slide and the defender covering the righty now begins sliding to the middle of the floor to help. The low lefty now looks to shoot or pass to the now open low righty. This creates the final open shot after 3 passes. The defense will continue to rotate and recover in hopes of getting back to the final open player!

This covers the fundamentals on how to play 2/1, 3/2 and 4/3. You can eventually add picks and screens, especially to a 4/3 but this covers how to get an open shot in numbers and how best to defend them. Remember that the number of defenders is usually the number of passes it takes to get an open shot! On defense, always stop the ball carrier and then try to recover to the lowest open player!



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## *Pick Setting*

Pick setting is a basic principle and a key to the motion offence in lacrosse. It enables the ball carrier to create separation from his defender as well as creates a 2 on 1 with the ball carrier and the pick setter rolling to the net. There are many different types of picks that can be used but learning the fundamentals is the first and most important step.

- 1) Engage your defender (gap closure): For any pick to work, the ball carrier needs to engage their defender. This is very important because if you don't, the defender can jump over the pick and continue checking the ball carrier, making the pick ineffective. This is done by being a threat with the ball and ensuring we are making moves to the net like we are going 1 on 1. Finally when the pick setter is arriving you need to make sure you are making contact with the defender. Have your shoulder against the defenders stick so you can run topside once the pick is set.
- 2) V-Cut: The Pick setter needs to get to the middle of the floor before coming to set the pick. If you run straight across your defender's face (window washing) and down to the set the pick, your defender can easily talk to his fellow defender and tell him a pick is coming and they can step out of the way or switch the pick. The on-ball defender can also more easily see the pick coming. The two steps to a V-cut are 1. Cutting to the middle of the floor as you would any other cut. This makes the defender have to respect you as a threat and actively play defence on you. 2. Make a hard V-Cut towards where the ball carrier and his defender and finally go and set the pick. The whole V-cut process is helping set up the pick so the off-ball defender is worried about you and not able to talk to the on-ball defender.
- 3) Find a back: This step is heavily influenced by the V-cut. The V-cut ensures that we are setting the pick on the defenders back and not in his line of sight so he can easily see the pick coming and switch the pick or move out of the way. Finding a back does not necessarily mean right on their back put outside their line of vision. A pick is much more effective when the defence doesn't know it is coming!
- 4) Using the pick: We are going to talk about the most common pick, the "Top Pick" This is when the ballcarrier comes over top of the pick so his hands are free and ready to shoot. When this happens the pick setter wants to make sure he is picking on the top side and the ball carrier is coming the same way. If the ball carrier goes under the pick, it won't work. When coming over the top pick, we need to come off the pick with speed and shoulder to shoulder with our defender. This makes sure the defender runs into the pick setter and can't just jump over the pick. Finally come off the pick with speed and looking to either shoot or pass the ball (be a threat)!
- 5) Roll: Once the pick is set and the ballcarrier comes over the pick, there should be a 2 on 1 between the 2 offensive players. This can be achieved by the pick setter rolling after setting the pick. The pick setter should open up their hips towards the ball carrier so they can see where they are and start cutting towards the cage. Now the defender has to choose between the ball carrier and the roller!

These 5 key fundamentals are crucial at beginner level but are still needed at the professional level for a pick and roll to be successful. Each step is as important as the next and skipping any one of them can make a pick easy to defend. It is fun to teach and learn and once you get the hang of it, it makes playing offence way more fun and creative!