

Lacrosse Tips from Mark Millon

Attackman Extraordinaire for the Baltimore Bayhawks

Reprinted from elacrosse.com

Attack

Tip # 1

RIDING: Don't feel your job is done as an attackman when the goalie makes a save. Ride hard until the ball is cleared through the midfield line.

Riding Tips:

1. Be in shape
2. Know how to break down and play "defense"
3. Use the sideline to your advantage (force the clearing player in that direction)
4. Don't go for the clearing players stick head (check his hands)
5. Be relentless!!!

If you focus on these tips you will probably increase your playing time and you'll be surprised how many easy goals your team will score.

Tip # 2

Don't be intimidated about bigger defenseman. Usually the bigger the slower. If you have it use your speed to get around him. If you can't seem to get around, don't try, get some goals off ball in the crease area.

Tip # 3

When on a fast break as an attackman, it is important not to have a favorite place to pass the ball. You really need to read the situation and find the open man.

Midfield

Let's focus on Midfield play individual aspect of the game. Here are some things to work on:

- Shooting - During practice, focus about 90% of the time shooting on the run. That is really all you will use in a game.
- Face-off - Don't rely on the other guy all the time. Learn some moves and practice!
- Defense - Learn what it takes to be an individual "D" guy both on and off ball. Also learn the concepts of good team defense.
- Conditioning/Stamina - As a middie you need to be the most well conditioned player on the field. How else are you going to make a big stop on D and then go to the O side and stick a corner?
- Ground Balls - We all know they win games! Be relentless, and learn the proper technique.

- Between the Restraining lines- Just be smart, move the ball to a player in front of you and don't sell out. That means don't go for a check and get beat in this part of the field, your better off getting in the hole preventing unsettled play.

Defense

Tip # 1

The following are some skills that most **GREAT** defensemen seem to possess. Work on these tips to round out your game!

- Good body position is essential for one on one play and team defense.
- When playing one on one, break down in an athletic stance keeping your hips between your man and the goal. Shuffle your feet when moving. Do not cross your feet!
- Know your opponents strengths and take them away. Force the weak hand.
- When you slide, do it under control. Slide body on body.
- Communication is the key to good defense. Who has the ball, who has the slide, etc. Function as one unit!
- Take pride in the little things. Get after the ground balls! Start the offense!
- Attitude. I will not get beat!

Tip # 2

The key to playing crease defense is to make sure you always stay in between your man and the ball. You also must know how to play through picks. There are two ways. First you can play an area or zone and "switch" on all picks or you can try to stay with your man through all picks. I know that's a bit complicated, if it doesn't make total sense talk with your coach. The last thing you must do on the crease is talk with the rest of the D and be ready to slide.

Tip # 3

The toughest defensive players to go one-on-one with are the guys that keep an athletic stance, play solid position defense and throw constant poke checks, rather than trying to take the ball away. If you're a defensive middie or close defenseman, work on those concepts first and you'll be a tougher player to beat.

How can a defenseman stop the dodge?

My favorite dodge is a split dodge from the attack wings. If an attackman or middie can play with both hands it's a tough dodge to stop. However, the best way for a defenseman to stop this dodge is to force the attackman to his weak hand away from the front of the goal.

Tip #4

A key to playing defense is footwork. Try to get your hands on some plyometric and agility drills through your coach. The next key is being able to handle the big stick. Play off a wall constantly!

Tips for Everyone

General

Here's a few things to work on while getting ready for the upcoming season.

1. Stick work - You should have your stick in your hands at least 3-4 times a week during the off season. Spend about a half hour playing wall ball or catch with a friend. Dedicate 15 minutes to each hand! Also, if you have access to a goal spend a fair amount of time doing some shooting.
2. Speed and Endurance training- You should ask your coach or fitness trainer at school for a combination speed and endurance workout. You should also do this 3-4 times a week. You should spend time running long distance (approx. 3 miles is good) and different length sprints (100, 60, and 40 yards are good).

Playing other sports during the offseason will also make you a better lacrosse player

3. Watch lacrosse- Get your hands on a an NCAA game or a World Championship game tape and watch as much as you can. Don't just watch to be entertained, watch to learn. Focus on a certain player, watch his moves and than see if you can emulate those moves in your practice sessions . If you do these three things I guarantee you will be a better player at the start of the season, and way ahead of most of your teammates!!

Shooting

Tip # 1

Play games to shoot more accurately! The following are a few ideas to increase your shooting percentage in close and around the crease.

For extra control, keep your hands 12 inches apart, but slide them up about 10 inches from your butt end. Shoot high to low and off the goalies hip.

- Accuracy of shot is more important than speed in close.
- Use more wrist action in close.
- Make fakes with your shoulders rather than your stick!
- **Tip # 2**
 - Play games to shoot more accurately! A great way to challenge yourself, put the pressure on and add some fun to your practice sessions is to play some games while your out shooting. A couple my brother and I always used; tie some aluminum cans to the corners and take a ten shots each from all kinds of distances and angles. When we had a goalie we would have best of twenty competitions. Five bouncers, five on the run, five high and hard, and five mix. The other great one is a simple game of horse. Loser would always carry the goal home. Those are just a few ideas, be creative, it will make you a better shooter.
- **Tip # 3**
 - **How can I improve my shot so I can score from about twenty yards?**
 - There are a few keys to scoring from outside. First, take alot of bounce shots. They go in more frequently. Second, try to be deceptive. Try to hide your stick behind your body until the last second. Finally and most difficult shoot with the proper technique. Hands and elbows high and away from your body, hands 12 inches apart close to the bottom of your handle, turn your shoulders and hips and uncork like a golfer.

- **Tip # 4**
- The most important factors in having a fast and accurate shot are:
 - Setting your hands about 12 inches apart near the bottom of your handle. Keep your hands and elbows high and away from your body.
 - Turning your upper body about 90 degrees while cradling your stick in the same direction and uncork in the direction of the target. Good golfers use the same principle when hitting long and accurate drives. At the same time push off with your legs in the direction of your target like a pitcher does in baseball.
 - Shoot overhand never losing sight of your target.
 - Practice, Practice, Practice...
- **Tip # 5**
- One of the more difficult skills in lacrosse to master is shooting on the run. Here's a few tips.
 - Any time your on a goal practicing your shot (hopefully all the time) spend 85% of the time running full speed and shooting. Don't worry if you miss the goal badly the first few hundred times.
 - Your power will come from a big hip and shoulder turn while cradling your stick behind your body. Just as your ready to release your shot uncork your body (like a golfer) in the direction of the target.
 - Again, this is a tough skill even for top players. It is going to take a considerable amount of practice to master. Watch some high level lacrosse to see it in action!!

Sticks

Tip #1

There are a few things you should know about your stick and pocket. Believe it or not, stick knowledge can really help your game.

1. Figure out what a type of pocket will best suit your style of play.
 - Mesh vs. traditional?
 - How deep of a pocket?
 - Where do I want the ball to sit while carrying the ball?
 - Do I want a quick release?
 - How many throw strings do I need?

You can get answers to those questions by experimenting with your own stick or asking your teammates that may play with different pockets to try theirs.

2. Have a backup stick that plays exactly like the one you are currently playing with.
3. Take care of it! After you are through with a game or practice don't toss your stick in the garage or closet. If you play in the rain and mud, stuff some newspaper in the pocket so that when it dries it will keep its shape.

4. Know what makes a stick illegal.

Tip #2

With regards to my pocket, I prefer to have a deep pocket with almost no whip. I rely on a quick release and I can't accomplish that with whip. I personally use a Warrior Odyssey. I like the fact that it has a great front shape, is light, and stiff. More than anything else, the string holes are put in positions which allows me to string the pocket the way I like.

Ground Balls

Ground balls win games. Period. Here's a few tips to make you into the human vacuum.

- Use the proper technique. Keep your body low to the ground and in between the ball and your opponent, keep your hand nearest the butt end of your stick down, explode through the ball, and immediately cradle and tuck your stick. Look to pass right away or run away from pressure
- Go for loose balls passionately and with attitude. The player who wants a ball more gets it. Ground balls win games and will keep you on the field if you're good at it.

Stick Protection

Proper technique is essential! Here are some helpful tips:

1. Cradle the stick vertically keeping your elbow locked in on your stick carrying arm while cradling mostly with your wrist. Try to keep the head of your stick near your ear or just below. Your elbow should stay within 4 inches of your ribs. Don't swing your arm!
2. Your free arm should be kept in a comfortable protective position.
3. Try not to run on the same line or plane. Run in and out.
4. Keep your head up!!!!!!
5. Your goal should be to keep your body between the defender and your stick.

Dodging

Tip #1

Part of my ability to roll is natural and from the man upstairs and part is from technique and hard work. Not many players really practice their rolls. I would recommend it.

Tip #2

I like to run directly at my defender at 3/4 speed and when I get about 10 feet from him I try to change speed to a full out sprint and explode past him to the goal. The best places on the field to dodge from, for me are the wings - left and right and the middle top of the box. I feel its hardest to cut off angles from these spots.

Tip #3

Want to be a great dodger? Here's a few tips...

- Don't dodge with the intention of blowing by your defender. Your thought should be to make a move to get your hands free for a pass or shot, if only for a second or two.
- Execute all of your moves in a game at FULL SPEED. (Practice your moves this way too)

Learn to play lefty and righty equally as well. It does not matter how good you are at a dodge. If you make the move the same way every time, your defenseman will recognize this and you'll never get your hands free.

Size & Strength

Don't worry about your size if you're fast and quick. I am not a huge guy, at 5'8 and 175 pounds. You just need to learn to use your speed and not stop running all over the field. You are going to get hit once in a while but you can't think about it. You can also lift some weights under the direction of your coach, it won't slow you down.

Weight lifting programs can help you to become stronger and faster. Always make sure your program is designed by a coach or someone who knows the correct way to lift. The most effective exercise to increase the speed of your shot (although most of your velocity comes from technique) are wrist and forearm exercises. Something as simple as squeezing a tennis ball on a regular basis can help you out.

New Players

The best thing you can do is to play with a lacrosse stick as much as you possibly can. Find a brick or cement wall with no windows around and play catch a lot. You need to get good stick skills first and foremost. The next step is to get your hands on some lacrosse game tapes, maybe team USA and watch as much as you can intently. Finally go to lacrosse camp. It helps!

One-on-One

When going one-on-one, and you run out of options, what should you do if there's no one to pass the ball off to?

The best thing to do is pull away from your defenseman, get some room and go again as hard as you can.

Off-Ball Play

Off ball play is an overlooked and important part of the attackman and midfielder's game. 60-70% of the goals I score are assisted by a teammate.

To get these scoring opportunities however, you must know how to move without the ball.

Here are four tips:

1. After throwing a pass, immediately cut to the goal for a return pass (give and go), Most defenseman relax after you give up the ball...make em pay.
2. If the defenseman covering you goes to double or help a teammate, follow behind him and get in a passing lane.

3. Always cut to the ball as hard and fast as you do when you dodge. You'll be surprised how open you get just by cutting 100%.
4. Watch top level lacrosse and see how the mids and attackmen cut. Also watch and play basketball.