

## Overview of Lacrosse

With a history that spans centuries, lacrosse is the oldest continuously played sport in North America. The sport is rooted in Native American religion and was often played to resolve disputes, heal the sick, and develop strong men. To Native Americans, lacrosse is still referred to as “The Creator’s Game”.

Initially, lacrosse served as a substitute for war. Stories tell of as many as a thousand players per side, from the same of different tribes, who took turns engaging in a violent contest called baaga’adowe. Tribe members played on a field as much as 15 miles long and games sometimes lasted for days. Some tribes used a single pole, tree, or rock for a goal, while others used two goal posts through which the ball had to pass. The balls were made out of wood, deerskin, baked clay, or stone.

Although played throughout North America, the strongest, most consistent style of the game (with a large, single wooden racket) evolved in the eastern region of the continent, from Canada in the north to the Cherokee tribes of the south. When French missionaries to North America first witnessed the game at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the curved, netted stick reminded them of a ‘crosier’, the shepherds cross-like staff carried by clergymen. Hence the sport was named ‘la jeune de la crosier’: the game of the hooked sticks. Eventually the name evolved into ‘lacrosse’. From these early beginnings, lacrosse has developed into the ‘fastest game on two feet’.

In the mid-1700s the French settlers began playing the game with the Indians. They redefined aspects of the sport with set field dimensions, limited members per team, and some crude ‘rules’.

In 1867, the Upper Canada College in Toronto became the first college to play a lacrosse game, losing to the Toronto Club – 3-1. By the mid-1870’s the Ivy League of New England adopted the sport. In 1883, Philips Andover Academy of Massachusetts and Phillips Exeter Academy of New Hampshire became the first two prep schools to take up the game.

As an amateur mainstay of East Coast colleges and prep schools, lacrosse maintained a regional reputation until after World War II. The GI Bill exposed athletes from around the country to lacrosse, and the baby boom and increased mobility of the 1950’s accelerated the expansion of players & began the road to national exposure.

Current men’s lacrosse teams consist of ten players: a goalie, three defensemen, three mid-fielders, and three attackmen. The object of the game is to put a five-oz. hard-rubber ball (about the size of a baseball) into the opponent’s goal using a long-handled stick with a triangular pocket at the end.

A regulation men's lacrosse field is 110 yards long & 60 yards wide, with the goals 80 yards apart. This allows for a lot of play 'behind the net'. Like in hockey, substitutions can be made 'on the fly', and penalized players must sit out while their team plays 'man-down'. Lacrosse also combines the play-making strategy of basketball, the stamina of soccer, the hand-eye coordination of baseball, and (in the boys game) the physical contact of rugby or football.

Women's rules limit stick contact, prohibit body contact and therefore, require much less protective equipment. While there are significant differences in the rules, penalties, and field configuration, the women's game retains the characteristics of a fast-paced game of skill and stamina.

Lacrosse is rapidly gaining in popularity across the United States. Lacrosse is sporting a 15% annual growth in participation, with over 1,700 high school boys varsity teams currently playing, making it arguably the fastest growing sport in the nation. More than 600 of these high schools also have JV/freshman programs. Over 600 high schools currently have women's lacrosse teams as well. In addition, there are approximately 4,500 youth lacrosse programs in the U.S. It is estimated that there are more than 250,000 active lacrosse players in the U.S. today.

## **Philosophy of Lacrosse**

Lacrosse is the original, Native American pastime. As such, it has a rich history and exhibits many ritual as well as physical characteristics.

The physical characteristics of the sport are compelling to a wide range of potential participants. Size is not as critical a factor in lacrosse as are speed, agility, and stamina. In lacrosse, smaller athletes with power & skill can easily out-perform their larger opponents. Hand-eye coordination and mental 'vision' are key aspects of lacrosse, requiring the lacrosse player to be (or become) a multi-dimensional athlete. It's a true challenge – for both coaches and players - to maintain the patience, discipline and intelligence necessary to master lacrosse fundamentals.

Some of the rituals of the game include the devotion that players take to the unique challenge, style, and accomplishments of mastering such a demanding physical and mental game. Lacrosse also enjoys a strong tradition of amateurism, wherein the vast majority of participants play and support lacrosse solely for the love of the game.

## **Sportsmanship**

Lacrosse has a long tradition as a 'gentleman's sport', taught and played with dignity for its heritage and respect for anyone who accepts the game's complex

and rewarding challenges. Moreover, lacrosse stresses good sportsmanship by emphasizing conduct that “honors the game”. The essentials of this conduct are behaviors that reflect honesty and integrity. As the game is expanding throughout the country, US Lacrosse (the game’s national governing body) has taken great efforts to enforce and maintain the game’s unique characteristics and tradition of sportsmanship. Consistency in national rules for youth and high school programs are being encouraged, as well as reinforcing the emphasis on sportsmanship – beyond the rules.

Lacrosse rules have a unique emphasis on sportsmanship. Coaches, players, fans, and officials are held to high standards on the field of play and are expected to demonstrate exceptional sportsmanship at all times. If a player, coach, or fan’s conduct is not in line with these standards, that particular team may be penalized. In contrast with many youth sports today, good sportsmanship is an inherent part of lacrosse.

As a result of the unique traditions and history of lacrosse, and even though lacrosse has grown rapidly in the last few decades, there is little support within the lacrosse community for the sport to ‘turn professional’. For coaches, players and fans alike, lacrosse is a completely unique form of competition in which all participants show their respect for outstanding plays and players, regardless of the opponent. This evolves from a focus on the joy and satisfaction of playing the game, and letting winning & losing take care of itself.

## **The Code of Conduct**

The following Code of Conduct was adopted by the sport’s governing body, US Lacrosse.

Players, coaches, spectators and parents are to conduct themselves in a manner that “Honors the Game” and demonstrates respect to other players, coaches, officials and spectators. In becoming a member of the lacrosse community an individual assumes certain obligations and responsibilities to the game of lacrosse and its participants. The essentials in this “Code of Conduct” are HONESTY and INTEGRITY. Those who conduct themselves in a manner that reflects these elements will bring credit to the sport of lacrosse, themselves, their team and their organization. It is only through such conduct that our sport can earn and maintain a positive image and make its full contribution to youth sports in the United States and around the world. US Lacrosse supports the following behaviors for those participating or involved in any way with US Lacrosse in general:

- The essential elements of the “Code of Conduct” must be adhered to.
- Sportsmanship and teaching the concepts of fair play are essential to the game and must be taught and developed both at home and on the field during practices and games.

- The emphasis on winning should never be placed above the value of good sportsmanship, the concepts of fair play, or the skills of the game.
- Derogatory comments are unacceptable. Use positive reinforcement with players and adults alike. It should be remembered that criticism once made can never be retracted.
- The safety and welfare of the players are of primary importance.
- Coaches must always be aware of the tremendous influence they have on their players. They are to strive to be positive role models in dealing with young people, as well as with adults.
- Officials are expected to conduct themselves as professionals and in a manner that demonstrates courtesy and fairness to all parties, while exercising their authority on the field.
- Adults involved with the game must never permit anyone to openly or maliciously criticize, badger, harass, or threaten an official.
- Knowledge of the Rules of Lacrosse must be respected and adhered to by all who participate in the game of lacrosse, both in the letter and the spirit of the game. Attempts to manipulate rules in an effort to take unfair advantage of an opponent, or to teach deliberate unsportsmanlike conduct, is considered unacceptable conduct.
- Eligibility requirements, such as age and previous level of participation, must be followed. They have been established to encourage and maximize participation, as well as promote safety.

## **Play of the Game**

Lacrosse is a fast moving sport which features the goal scoring and checking of hockey, the offensive strategies of basketball, the throwing and catching of baseball, and the running of soccer.

### **Players**

Each team fields 10 players at a time: a goalie, three defensemen (usually with long sticks), three midfielders, and three attackmen. A team must always have three players in its offensive end of the field, and four (including the goalie) in its defensive end. A team failing to do so is OFFSIDES, which is a technical foul. Normally the midfielders are the ones who play at both ends of the field, but any member of the team may cross midfield, provided the proper number of players stay back.

### **Equipment**

All players must have helmets, shoulder pads, arm pads, gloves, and mouthpieces (the goalie is exempt from arm pads and shoulder pads). Failure to wear any required piece of equipments results in a one minute, non-releasable penalty.

The crosses (sticks) must be of the proper dimensions. Failure to have a proper stick results in a one to three minute non-releasable penalty.

### **The Field**

A regulation lacrosse field is 110 yards long and 60 yards wide. The goals are six feet by six feet and are surrounded by a nine foot diameter circle called the crease. The scorer's table is situated at midfield, just behind the penalty area and substitution area. Lines mark midfield, attack, defense, and wing areas.

### **Face Off**

Though there are exceptions, face offs begin each period and take place after a goal is scored. Two midfielders usually take the face off at center field. During the face off, the other two midfielders are confined to the wing areas and defensemen and attackmen are confined to their respective areas.

At face off, the two opposing midfielders come to the center field "X" facing each other. The ball is placed at center X and the two players come down together with their sticks parallel to the center line and the opposing heads of the crosse facing the ball, but not touching it. Players must have both hands on their stick, knuckles resting on the ground, and their entire bodies to the left of the head of the crosse. Once the official calls "set", the players may not move until the whistle is blown.

At this point, the MIDFIELD players are released from the wing and the face off players try to direct the ball or scoop it up. The defensemen and attackmen are confined to their respective areas until possession is attained or it crosses the defensive area lines.

If a team commits a violation during face off, the ball is awarded to the other team.

### **The Crease**

The crease area offers protection for the goalie. No offensive player may step on or in the crease area, nor may he interfere with the goalie while the goalie is in the crease. However, offensive players may reach into the crease with their sticks, provided they do not interfere with the goalie.

Once the defense gains possession of the ball in the crease, it has four seconds to run or pass the ball out of the crease. If they have possession of the ball outside the crease, they may pass it to a player in the crease, but they may not run into the crease carrying the ball in possession. If the goalie or defenseman drops the ball after gaining possession, a new count starts when he regains possession.

## **Advancing the Ball**

Once the defense gets possession of the ball, it has twenty seconds to move it beyond midfield. Players may run it out or throw it out of the area.

As soon as the offensive team has possession over the midfield line, it has ten seconds to get it into the attack area of the field. They may merely step on the line to satisfy this requirement. If they step back out of the area, they get a new ten second count.

In the final two minutes of the game, the team that is ahead is required to “keep it in”. This means that once they cross the midfield line, they have ten seconds to get it into the attack area and stay within that area. With the exception of a shot or deflected pass, if they fail to keep it in the area, the ball is turned over to the opposing team.

## **Restarts**

If the ball goes out of bounds, it is placed in play at the spot where it went out. On penalties where there is no time to be served, the ball is put in play where the foul occurred (with the exception of offside and goalie interference). If the foul occurs within the attack area, it is restarted at the nearest point outside the area.

If the ball goes out of bounds on a shot, the team closest to the ball when it goes out is awarded the ball on a restart. This is true even if the ball is deflected by another player, provided that he does not give it added impetus.

## **Stick Checking**

Players may attempt to dislodge the ball from an opponent by hitting the stick (or the hand on the stick). Players may not swing their sticks recklessly or viciously.

## **Body Checking**

It is legal to body check a player in possession of the ball or within five yards of a loose ball. The check must be delivered below the neck and above the waist and the checking player must have both hands on his stick. The check may be from the front or side only. The player being checked must not be touching the ground with any body part except for his two feet.

## **Stick Inspection**

Twice during the game, usually at the end of the first period and the third period, the referees conduct a random inspection of players' equipment. The officials select a player from each team, usually a player who has had an impact on the

game, and determine if his equipment meets the specifications outlined in the rules. After inspecting the players' helmet, mouthpiece, gloves, and shoulder pads, the referees take the players' crosse to midfield to determine if it is of the proper length and dimensions. The referees also determine whether the ball will roll out of the crosse unimpeded.

Coaches may also request an inspection of an opposing player's equipment at any dead ball.

## **Fouls and Penalties**

There are two kinds of fouls in lacrosse: technical fouls and personal fouls. Technical fouls are less serious; personal fouls often concern safety and consequently are penalized more harshly.

### **Possession Fouls**

If team A commits a technical foul and team A has possession of the ball, then the official will blow the whistle and award the ball to team B. In this case, there is no penalty time to be served. These are known as Possession Fouls, i.e. the fouled team gains possession of the ball as a result of the foul.

If team A commits a technical foul but there is a loose ball, the official will yell "Play On" and hold up his hand. If team B does not gain possession of the ball during play within the next few seconds, the official will blow the whistle and award the ball to team B. This rule, similar to that of soccer, allows the team that was fouled to maintain any advantage it had without disrupting the flow of the game.

No penalty flag is dropped for possession fouls.

### **Time Serving Fouls**

Time serving fouls occur when (1) a technical foul is committed against a team that has possession of the ball or (2) when a personal foul is committed. The offending team must play without that player for a specified period or time ("man down"). Penalty times for technical fouls are always 30 seconds; penalty times for personal fouls are one to three minutes, depending on the severity of the foul.

If team A has the ball in possession and team B commits a technical foul, the referee will signal the foul by throwing a yellow flag and calling out "Flag Down". Play continues until (1) the ball becomes loose, (2) there is a penalty against the offended team, (3) there is a goal scored, or (4) team A brings the ball out of the attack area.

If team A scores a goal with the flag down and the penalty is a technical foul, the goal counts and the foul is wiped out. However, if the penalty is a personal foul, the penalty is enforced.

When a time serving foul is called, the referee stops play at the appropriate time and signals to the scoring table the foul and the amount of time to be served. The offending player goes directly to the penalty area and takes a knee beside the bench to serve the penalty time. His team must then play "man down" for the time he is in the penalty area. The player is released from the area when his time expires or the opposing team scores a goal.

## **Personal Fouls**

### **Slashing**

Using the stick to hit any part of an opponent's body except for the gloved hand is considered a slash. It must be a definitive blow. However, swinging the stick in a reckless manner, even if contact does not occur can also be called as a slash. If the player moves in a way such that he causes his opponent to hit part of his body, it is not considered a slash.

### **Illegal Body Check**

Illegal body checks include the following:

- Checking an opponent who is more than five yards from a loose ball.

- Initiating contact above the neck or below the waist

- Checking an opponent who has any body part other than his two feet on the ground.

- Hitting an opponent from the rear.

- Initiating a check with one hand on the stick.

- Spearing

If a player turns just before he is checked, the check is considered legal.

### **Cross Checking**

Checking with the part of the stick between the hands, with positive outward action, is a cross check.

### **Unnecessary Roughness**

This involves any player making a particularly violent hold, push, or body check. It may also be a player, when he knows a pick has been set, intentionally running through a pick with violent contact to the screening player.

### **Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

Foul language, taunting, arguing with referees. These penalties are non-releasable and range from one to three minutes.

### **Technical Fouls**

As mentioned previously, technical fouls are less severe than personal fouls. They result in a change in possession or a 30 second penalty.

### **Pushing**

Pushing involves shoving an opposing player from the rear. Only equal pressure is allowed.

### **Holding**

It is illegal to hold an opponent with the stick, free hand, step on an opponent's crosse, or pin an opponent's crosse to his body.

A player may hold the opponent from the side or rear if the opponent is within five yards of a loose ball or is in possession of the ball. A player may also hold the crosse of his opponent with his crosse if the opponent has possession of the ball or is within five yards of a loose ball.

### **Warding**

An offensive player in possession of the ball may not use his free hand to try to direct the crosse of his opponent's stick check. He may hold it stationary to block the checks.

### **Illegal Procedure**

This penalty is a catch-all for several minor infractions, including face off violations, substitution infractions, etc.

### **Illegal Screen**

Offensive players may set screens as in basketball by standing motionless. The screening player must hold his crosse vertically and may not lean out to make

contact. To be an illegal screen, CONTACT WITH THE OPPOSING TEAM MUST BE MADE.

### **Interference**

It is illegal to block the free movement of players who do not have the ball or who are not within five yards of the ball. It is also illegal to interfere with the goalie while he is in the crease.

### **Withholding the Ball from Play**

It is illegal to keep the ball from play by holding a clamped crosse over the ball, standing on the ball, or holding the crosse against the body so the ball cannot come out freely.

### **Conduct Fouls**

Similar to Unsportsmanlike Conduct, only less severe.