

# 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.



Teams normally carry 15 to 30 players; substitution may be done “on the fly” through the area in front of the scorer’s table.

## Equipment

All players must have helmets, shoulder pads, arm pads, gloves, and mouthpieces. Failure to wear any required piece of equipment results in a one-minute nonreleaseable penalty. In particular, mouthpieces must cover all upper teeth and be in the mouth; biting on the corners is not sufficient.

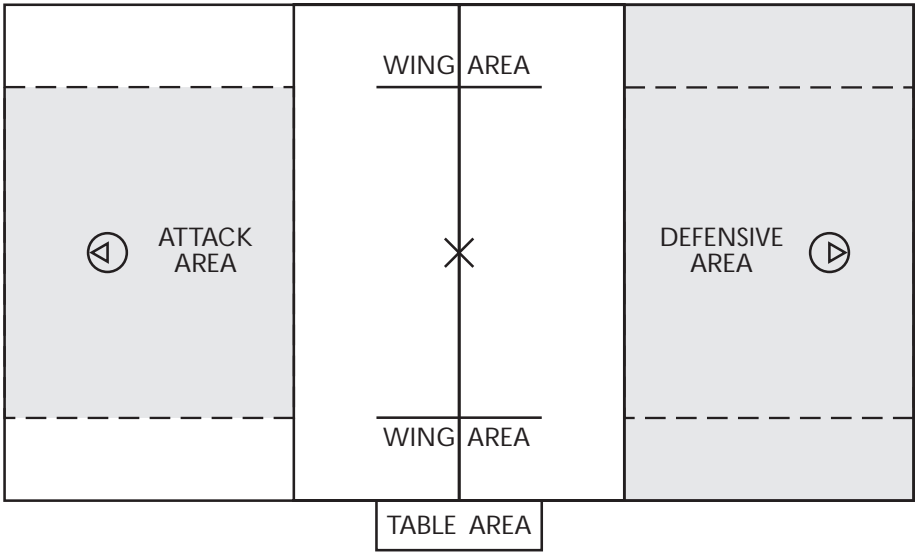
The crosses (sticks) must be within specifications. If the pocket is too deep, it is a one-minute nonreleaseable penalty. Crosses violating other requirements earn a three-minute nonreleaseable penalty.

## The field

A regulation lacrosse field is 110 yards long by 60 yards wide. The goals are 6 feet by 6 feet, and they are surrounded by a 9-foot diameter circle called the “crease.” There is a scorer’s table area (which also serves as a penalty box and substitution area), and there are lines marking attack, defensive, and wing areas.

## Face-offs

Though there are exceptions (which involve penalties or technical fouls), there is normally a face-off at the beginning of each period and



after each goal. During the face-off, all attackmen and defensemen must be in their respective defensive areas, and there must be one midfielder from each team behind each wing line.

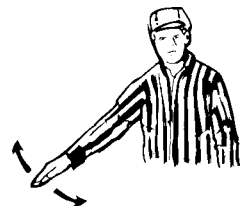
The two face-off men come down facing each other, with their sticks parallel to the center line and their bodies to the left of the head of their sticks. Both hands must be on the stick and touching the ground. The official calls “set” and then blows the whistle. At this point, both players try to clamp the ball or direct it to one of their midfielders (who are free to run in from the wing area at the whistle). The defensemen and attackmen cannot cross the defensive area line until someone gains possession of the ball or until the ball crosses either defensive area line.

If a team commits a violation (such as delay of game, having an illegal face-off position, moving before the whistle, or crossing a line before permitted), the ball is awarded to the other team.

## The crease

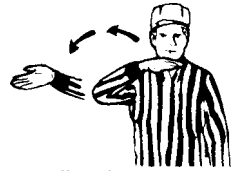
The crease area offers protection to the goalie. No offensive player may step on or in the crease area, nor may they interfere with the goalie while the goalie is in the crease. However, offensive players may reach into the crease with their sticks provided they do not interfere with the goalie.

If the offense steps in the crease while it has



Crease violation

possession or while there is a loose ball, the ball is awarded to the defense. If they do so while the defense has possession outside of the crease, it is a 30-second penalty.



Illegal re-entry

Once the defense gains possession of the ball in the crease, they have four seconds to run or pass the ball out of the crease. If the defense has the ball outside of the crease, they may pass the ball into the crease, but it is illegal to re-enter the crease with the ball by stepping back into it.

## Advancing the ball

Once the defense secures the ball, they have ten seconds to move the ball out of the defensive area. The ball cannot normally be passed or run back into the defensive area once it is brought out.

As soon as the offensive team has possession over the midline, they have ten seconds for either the ball or a player carrying the ball to touch inside the attack area. They may then bring the ball back out, at which time another ten-second count begins.

## Ground balls

When the ball is on the ground, players attempt to scoop the ball by sliding their sticks underneath it. (It is also possible to “rake” the ball by placing the stick on top of it and pulling back, but it is difficult to rake the ball and maintain possession since doing this requires being relatively stationary.) Like a good rebounding team in basketball, a team proficient in getting ground balls often has a good chance to win because they tend to have more possessions and hence get more shots.

## Cradling

When a player has the ball, he will “cradle” by rocking his stick back and forth to try to hold the ball in his stick. The force generated by cradling helps keep the ball from falling out or being checked out of the stick, and it keeps the ball in the proper position in the pocket for passing and shooting.

## Where the ball restarts

If the ball goes out of bounds on a shot, whichever team has a player closest to the ball when it goes out of bounds is awarded possession at the spot where the ball went out. This is true even if the shot is

touched or deflected *provided* that the momentum from the shot is what carries the ball out of bounds.

In other situations, if Team A is the last team to touch the ball before it goes out of bounds then Team B is awarded the ball at the spot where the ball went out of bounds.

If there is a violation resulting in a whistle, the ball restarts at the spot where it was when the whistle blew or—if it was in the attack box—outside the attack box. The offense will generally be required to restart from the side or the corner of the attack box since starting in the center would give them a free shot on goal.

### **Stick checking**

Players may attempt to dislodge the ball from an opponent's stick by "stick checking": hitting the stick (or the gloved hand on the stick) with their own stick. They may not swing their sticks recklessly.

### **Passing**

Though players may run with the ball, they can move the ball more quickly by passing it. Most passes are thrown overhand and in the air, although you will see bounce passes and behind-the-back passes.

### **Shooting**

Players will usually shoot overhand or sidearm, although some players will attempt underhand and behind-the-back shots. Sometimes a player will beat his defender to get open and get a shot, but often a pass from a teammate will result in a shot. In this situation, the attack player may try to "quick stick" the ball into the goal by redirecting the pass without cradling first.

It is legal to try to kick a loose ball into the goal or to flick a loose ball off the ground with the stick.

### **Body checking**

It is legal to body check a player in possession of the ball or within 5 yards of a loose ball provided the check is below the neck and above the waist, the check is from the front or the side, and the checking player has both hands on the crosse. The check may be in the form of a hit or a push. It must be applied with the shoulder or the hands, and the player being checked must not be touching the ground with any part of the body except the feet.

# Fouls and penalties

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

## Possession fouls

If Team A has the ball and Team A commits a technical foul, the officials will blow the whistle and award the ball to Team B. In this case, no one serves penalty time. These are known as “possession fouls.”

If there is a loose ball (i.e., neither team has possession) and Team A commits a technical foul, the referee will yell “Play on!” and hold one hand straight up. If Team A gets the ball or if several seconds pass, the officials will stop play and award the ball to Team B. However, if Team B gains possession within a few seconds, the official will lower the hand and play will continue. This improves the flow of the game by reducing the number of whistles, and it allows Team B a chance to press an advantage (e.g., a fast break) without allowing Team A time to re-group.

No penalty flag is thrown for possession fouls. To signal a possession foul, the official will usually give the signal for the foul committed and then point in the direction the ball will be going after the restart. If it was a loose-ball foul, this will be prefaced by pointing at the ground with both hands.

## Time-serving technical and personal fouls

If Team A has the ball and commits a personal foul, the officials will throw a penalty flag and stop play immediately.

However, if Team B has the ball and Team A commits a technical or personal foul, the officials will throw a penalty flag and allow play to continue. This gives Team B a chance to complete their scoring attempt. The whistle will blow to end the play when Team B brings the ball out of the attack area, loses possession of the ball, commits a technical or personal foul, takes a shot on goal, or stops attempting to advance the ball.

If Team B scores a goal during the flag-down situation and Team A's foul was a technical, the penalty is not enforced. However, if Team A's foul is personal, the penalty is served whether or not a goal is scored.

After the whistle blows, the official will signal the offending team, the offending player's number, whether the foul was a 30-second technical foul (by making a "T" with the arms) or a personal foul (by signalling 1, 2, or 3 minutes), and the nature of the foul committed.

Normally, all of a team's penalties—whether personal or technical—are released if the other team scores a goal, but unsportsmanlike conduct penalties are usually nonreleaseable, and some other situations result in nonreleaseable penalties as well.

## Personal fouls

More serious rule infractions are classified as personal fouls. Personal fouls always result in a time-serving penalty (one, two, or three minutes, depending on the severity). Personal fouls include slashing, illegal bodychecking, cross-checking, tripping, unnecessary roughness, and unsportsmanlike conduct.

### Slashing

Using the stick to hit any part of the opponent's body except for the gloved hand on the stick is a slash. It must be a "definite blow or strike"; contact itself does not constitute a slash.



Swinging the stick in an out-of-control fashion may also be called a slash, whether it hits the stick, the opponent, or neither. Hitting both the stick and the opponent simultaneously may also be called a slash.

However, if the offensive player turns at the last moment and causes what would have been a legal stick check to hit the body, no foul has been committed unless the stick strikes the head.

### Illegal Body Check

It is not legal to body check an opponent that does not have the ball and who is not within 5 yards of a loose ball. When a player is checked, it must be done with both hands on the stick and it must be above the waist and blow the neck. A body check that hits the chest and rides up to the neck or head is illegal.



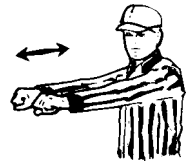
The check must be applied with the shoulders or hands. If a player leads with the head, this is called "spearing," and it results in a nonreleaseable penalty.

Body checks must be applied from the front or the side, but if a player turns just before getting hit so that a check that would have been from the front or side ends up being from behind, no foul has been committed.

It is illegal to check a player who has any part of the body (other than the feet) touching the ground.

### **Cross-checking**

Body checking the opponent using the portion of the stick between the hands, whether done by holding the stick extended or thrusting the stick into the opponent, is called cross-checking and is illegal.



### **Tripping**

It is illegal to trip an opponent by making contact using the hands, arms, legs, feet, or crosse at any point at or below the waist. However, if a player is trying to scoop a ball and an opponent trips over his crosse, or if a legal stick check makes a player trip over his own crosse, no foul has been committed. There are also times during the game when players' feet get tangled up and someone falls without one player tripping another.



### **Unnecessary roughness**

Unnecessary roughness may be called against a player making a particularly violent hold, push, or body check (even if the body check is otherwise legal). It may also be called on a defensive player who intentionally runs through an offensive screen.



### **Unsportsmanlike conduct**

Unsportsmanlike conduct includes foul language, berating officials, failure to wear proper protective equipment, using illegal crosses, taunting, and "showboating." These penalties are nonreleaseable.



Unsportsmanlike conduct can also be called for repeatedly committing the same technical foul or for deliberately violating substitution rules; in these cases, the penalties are releasable.

# Technical fouls

As previously mentioned, a technical foul can result in possession being awarded (if the team offended did not have possession) or a 30-second penalty (if the team offended did have possession). Technical fouls include pushing, holding, warding off, illegal procedure, illegal screens, interference, withholding the ball from play, conduct fouls, offsidess, and crease violations.

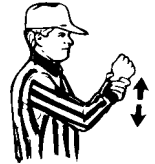
## Pushing

Pushing of a player who does not have the ball and is not within 5 yards of a loose ball is illegal. A legal push may never start from behind, but if a player turns his back to the opponent just before the push then there is no foul.



## Holding

It is not legal to hold back the opponent using the stick, to touch the opponent with the free hand, to hold the opponent with the portion of the stick between the hands, to step on the opponent's crosse, or to pin an opponent's crosse against their body.



Holding from the side or rear of a player with the ball or within 5 yards of a loose ball is legal provided that both hands are on the stick, that only the hand, shoulder, or forearm is used, and that only equal pressure is used: you can stop the player from advancing, but you cannot force the player out of position.

## Warding off

An offensive player with the ball may not use his hand or arm to try to direct the crosse of the opponent away from his own crosse. However, it is legal for an offensive player to put his free arm in a blocking position and hold the arm stationary.



## Illegal procedure

Illegal procedure is kind of a “catch-all” category for various rule violations. It includes delay of game (e.g., team not ready within 20 seconds of ball marked ready for



play), illegal touching of the ball (no player may hold the ball in his hand; no player but the goalie may touch the ball with his hand, and then only when he is in the crease), illegal timeout requests, illegal substitutions, violation of the rules governing face-offs, and many other situations.

### **Illegal screen**

Offensive players may set screens (or “picks”) as in basketball by standing motionless; this allows a teammate to get open by cutting so his defender runs into the screen. A screen is illegal if the player does not establish his position and stand motionless before contact occurs. The screening player may not hold his crosse out or lean in an attempt to block the defender.



### **Interference**

It is illegal to block the motion of players who do not have the ball and who are not within 5 yards of a loose ball (except by making a legal screen). It is also illegal to interfere with the goalie while the goalie is in the crease, and it is illegal to step on or kick an opponent’s crosse.



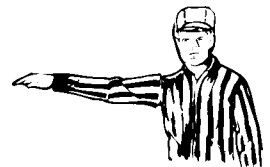
### **Withholding the ball from play**

It is illegal to keep the ball from play by keeping a stick clamped over the ball, standing on the ball, or holding the stick so the ball cannot come out (e.g., by holding it against one’s chest or by holding one’s thumb over the ball). In fact, it is illegal to even hold any portion of the head of the stick (the plastic part) since doing so makes it too easy to thumb the ball.



### **Conduct fouls**

It is illegal for coaches to come onto the field except at halftime, to tend to an injured player, or to warm up a goalie. Also, players may not enter the coaches box. It is illegal to object to the call of an official by arguing or gesturing.



Violations of these rules constitute conduct fouls unless they are particularly egregious, in which case they are penalized as unsportsmanlike conduct.

## Other technical fouls

Some other technical fouls have already been discussed. These include offsides, crease violations, goalie interference, and illegal re-entry of the crease.

## Officiating

Lacrosse games are typically officiated by a referee and an umpire. Each is responsible for one side of the field and one endline.

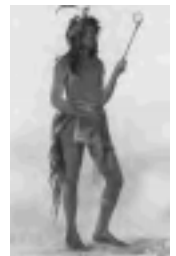
For youth games, the officials may be new and working just as hard as the players to learn the game properly. They deserve the respect of the players and fans for trying to learn a difficult job under heavy pressure and intense scrutiny.

Officials are taught to look for advantage and disadvantage when applying rules requiring judgment. For example, a slight push in the back at the center of the field might not draw a penalty if the offended player stayed on his feet and maintained possession of the ball. However, if the player was pushed just as he was about to shoot and that push affected his shot or carried him past the goal so he couldn't shoot, the official will probably throw a flag because otherwise the team being pushed has been disadvantaged by the push.

For youth lacrosse, officials are instructed to clamp down on dangerous play by liberally penalizing slashing, illegal body checking, cross checking, and other dangerous plays. No parents, coach, player, league organizer, or official wants to see players develop habits which might result in a serious injury.

## History

Lacrosse was invented by Native Americans, who were playing long before Europeans settled North America. They played with goals placed from a half mile to several miles apart, and they often had more than 100 players per team. It was considered more than just a game, and they played to settle disputes, for spiritual development, to help in the healing process, and to prepare for war.



Lacrosse has been played by college teams in America since 1877,

and there are currently over 200 men's and 200 women's college varsity programs in the U.S., with about half offering scholarships. The NCAA lacrosse championship is the second-most attended NCAA championship event.

## Minnesota lacrosse

In Minnesota, there are currently 10 college club teams for men and 5 for women, as well as two men's post-college club teams for men and one for women in the Twin Cities. In addition, there are 32 boy's and 25 girl's high school teams, with more being added every year. Girl's lacrosse became sanctioned by the Minnesota State High School League in November of 2001, and it is hoped that boy's lacrosse receives similar approval by November of 2002.

On the youth level, lacrosse is exploding. There are over 800 youth players between the ages of 7 and 15 playing in the spring indoor leagues and in summer field leagues throughout the Twin Cities.

For more information about men's and women's lacrosse in Minnesota at all age levels, check out the MLA web site at [www.mn-lacrosse.com](http://www.mn-lacrosse.com) or contact Mark Hellenack, the executive director of the Minnesota Lacrosse Association, at [mhellenack@earthlink.net](mailto:mhellenack@earthlink.net) or (952)938-2723.

The MLA is a non-profit organization and the Minnesota chapter of USLacrosse, the national governing body for men's and women's lacrosse. You can contact USLacrosse at (410)235-6882 or visit their web site at [www.uslacrosse.org](http://www.uslacrosse.org), which contains links to many other lacrosse sites.

### How you can help

One of the most pressing issues facing both the men's and women's game is finding officials and coaches. The MLA runs training clinics to develop parents, former players and others interested people into coaches and officials. The other issues are finding parents to organize teams and associations, funding the administration of the MLA, and funding the start-up equipment needs of new teams. Anyone interested in helping is encouraged to call the MLA office at (952) 938-2723.