



check out the coolest places to  
**SHOP FOR LAX GEAR ONLINE !**



ULTIMATE



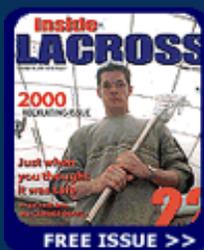
ADVERTISE  
CAMPS

CAMP  
POINTERS

TIPS AND  
INSTRUCTIONS

VIDEOS

ASK THE  
EXPERTS



SHOP  
ONLINE

LINKS

ABOUT US

SUBSCRIBE



## TIPS AND INSTRUCTION

### Moving as One

Takeaway checks are exciting, but solid team D and proper sliding can be more effective

by Ryan McClay

*Ryan McClay graduated from Cornell this spring as a four-time All-American and the Defender of the World at the 2002 World Games. He was the No. 5 selection by the New Jersey Pride in the MLL Draft as the top defenseman picked and will enter this spring as the new co-head coach of the Mahopac High varsity lacrosse team.*

There I was a Major League Lacrosse rookie playing for New Jersey in the semifinal game against the defending champion Baltimore Bayhawks. As many of you know, Baltimore's roster boasts some of the biggest names that have ever played the game.

It was early in the second half of a tightly contested game when I found myself covering the man adjacent to the ballcarrier. That man happened to be Gary Gait. Our defense is a near-man sliding defense, which meant that I was the "hot" man, or slide defenseman. Gait was covered by a shortstick defenseman and decided to take advantage of that matchup. He dodged his man and beat him, which meant that it was up to me stop him because I was the slide man. Here I am, just graduated from college with the chance to stop one of the best players to ever play the game, and what do you think I did? I went fishing for his stick. He tucked his stick, ran through my incorrect check and scored a goal.

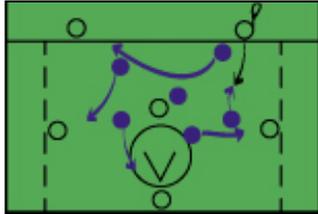
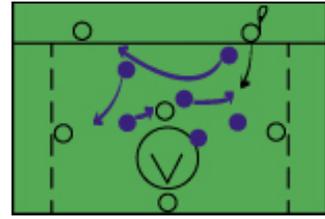
Sure Gait is the best player ever, but the reason he beat us on this play was because I didn't slide properly. I didn't correctly execute one of the game's fundamental basics and, as a result, our entire defensive system was compromised.

### The Foundation

From the day that I started playing defense I have always been taught that a team-oriented D is more successful than one that relies on the talents of a select few individuals. Some teams and coaches do not feel as strongly about this as all my former coaches, but I think if we were to look at the more successful programs in recent history we would find that they tended to play a team-defense style.

What does playing team defense mean? It usually means that players will slide to each other and not leave a defenseman on an island to play by himself. A sliding defense may not receive the oohs and ahhs from the crowd that an over-the-head check or a rusty gate might receive, but watching defenders slide and recover for one another and move as one is pretty special. And it's much more effective in shutting down an offense over the span of an entire game.

Teams will usually run one of two sliding defenses. The defense that I played until I got to MLL was one that had the slide man coming from the crease. Whoever was covering the crease attackman or midfielder would be designated as the slide man. It does not matter where the ball is located-up top or behind the goal-if there is an offensive player on the crease, his defenseman is "hot."



The other way a team can run a sliding defense is to make the man adjacent to the ball the slide man. This is the type of defense I played with the Pride this summer. Teams tend to play this way when the opponent has a crease player that is just too good to slide from.

In either defense a team cannot simply slide to the ball and stop play. It is essential for the defense to get that second and third slide to the right spot at the right time. In the crease-sliding defense, the second slide will come from the man farthest from the ball. His man is usually the least dangerous, so he can afford to be farther away from him. In a slide-adjacent defense, getting the second and third slide is a little easier to see-all you do is rotate into the ball. If the man in front of you slides, then you know that you are going to have to slide as well.

Before I get into the basics of sliding there are a few important points to remember about playing team defense. First and foremost, without communication a sliding defense will be extremely ineffective. If a team is going to rely on sliding to the ballcarrier, it is important for every other teammate on the field to know what he is planning on doing, and making sure that his man is covered when he does in fact have to slide. The other point to remember is TRUST. In order for a team defense to be successful, players must trust one another that they will get the slide to the ball when it needs to be there, and that the man covering the ball will force the ballcarrier to the correct place. Just remember that without communication and trust, a team-oriented, sliding defense will not be successful.

## When to slide

There are a couple of rules to keep in mind when sliding to the ball. The rules change, however, depending on the location of the ball. If the ball is coming from the top of the box, it is critical for the slide to arrive on time. If the slide is late, the ballcarrier will be allowed to get a decent shot off, and that is what our defense is trying to prevent. Twelve yards from the goal is usually a good distance to slide to. Most goalies will be able to eat up a shot from 12 yards, while shots coming from inside 12 tend to be a



little more difficult.

Obviously we don't want to slide every time a player is at 12 yards, so we need to establish whether he is a scoring threat. A good way to recognize a threat is if you can read the name on the front of his jersey. That will usually tell a defense that his shoulders are square to the goal and he can get off a decent shot.

Deciding whether to slide to the ball is a lot easier when the ball is coming from behind the goal. This is when trust plays a crucial role in the slide. In order for the slide to be effective, the player covering the ball must force the ballcarrier to inside roll. If he does not, and he allows the ballcarrier to beat him top-side there is not much a slide will do because the offensive player will be able to take a good shot. However, if I am the slide man and I know and trust that my teammate will do his job and force the inside roll, then as soon as I see the back of the ballcarrier I take off and double-team the ball. Sliding to this area of the field will most often cause a turnover and send the ball going the other way.

In my junior year at Cornell at the end of our game against Syracuse, I was covering the ball behind the goal and turned my man back. Just as I did that another defenseman slid to me and we knocked the ball to the ground. I picked it up and fed it upfield and we got a fastbreak.

## How to Slide

It doesn't matter how well you time up your slide on any part of the field, if you do not slide with the proper technique all you're doing is creating offense for the other team. When a player slides, the most important thing he has to do is keep his body under control. You don't want to slide out of control in an attempt to knock someone to the ground and have the offensive player dodge the slide. The other important thing to remember is that the slide man does not want to swing his stick when he slides to the ball because the offensive player can just tuck his stick and run right through the check-remember the Gait encounter. The proper technique when sliding is 1) always keep your head up, 2) lead with your stick in front and, 3) follow the head of your stick with your body and collide with the ballcarrier. Pride veteran Dave Stilley has really mastered the timing of sliding to the ball on an inside roll. And he gave out his fair share of solid hits.

## When Not to Slide

The timing of a slide is extremely important. If the slide gets there late, the result is usually a goal. It is important, however, not to slide too early. If a team starts sliding all over the place and is sliding on the first steps of a dodge, then the offense will have a field day picking apart the D. A team that slides too early is just creating offense for the other team.

## Practice Drills

I don't think there is any one drill that is going to help a team master sliding other than just repetition in practice. But there are two different ways I have worked on sliding. The first is during 1-on-1 sessions. Rather than just do 1-on-1s, we have a man waiting in front of the goal for the right time to slide. This is beneficial for both practicing the actual slide and for the man covering the ball, because he has to force the ballcarrier to an area of the field that will facilitate a

slide. Another drill we did at Cornell involved having a man dodge from different areas of the field holding a blocking bag to work on getting the slides to the man at the right time, while also working on slide technique-head up, lead with the stick and follow with the body.

[Tips and Instruction Home](#)