

# The USA Lacrosse Progression (tm)

*"DON'T MISTAKE ACTIVITY FOR ACHIEVEMENT. PRACTICE IT THE RIGHT WAY"*- John Wooden

Without a doubt, the game of lacrosse is entering an era of unprecedented growth and popularity. Fan attendance at NCAA Lacrosse tournaments has nearly tripled over the last ten years, while the number of lacrosse programs at high schools and colleges have more than doubled since 1973. As the game grows, we as coaches and players of all levels need to step up to the challenge of legitimizing one of the greatest sports on the planet. Thus far, lacrosse has been taught in a "hand-me-down manner." There are many great coaches with great ideas, but there is no method or system that organizes the game with consistency.

That was until Run & Shoot Lacrosse, an organization dedicated to teaching lacrosse clinics, camps and symposiums developed the game's foremost teaching method, the USA Lacrosse Progression. Created by Yale lacrosse coaches Michael Waldvogel and Jamie Munro, the sound fundamental concepts, techniques, and methods of the USA Lacrosse Progression enable lacrosse players and coaches to build a foundation of skills enabling players to reach their potential.

In the USA Lacrosse Progression, there are three guiding principles under which all of the drills and exercises are conceived and implemented. It's essential for each coach or player to understand and employ these concepts, especially during drill formulation. The first concept - overspeed - recognizes that every athlete has a certain comfort level, and that positive results can be achieved by raising that level. Overspeed seeks to do this by consistently training at game speed.

The second concept is the part-whole method, which takes a finished skill and breaks it down into parts to be taught separately. Once the parts are mastered, they are then pieced together to form the whole. The final concept is the idea of setting limitations and advantages on either the offense or defense in order to achieve the desired goal. For example, limiting ball possession five seconds is an excellent way to promote good ball movement. The USA Lacrosse Progression has five steps: Athletic Skill, Crosse Control, Ball Control, Off Ball Control and Field Control.

Athletic skill is the foundation of the USA Lacrosse Progression. While every coach looks for athletes to build a healthy program, athleticism and athletic skill are two different things. Athleticism is a gift, while athletic skill is something that can be developed and perfected. While there are many good programs out there to improve your athletic skill, the USA Lacrosse Progression teaches players to be quicker, faster and more powerful by emphasizing efficiency in movement. The result is the ability to "close on defense and create separation on offense."

Crosse control, or the mastery of fundamental stick skills, is the primary responsibility of the player who aspires to reach his potential. Consequently, the development of great crosse control requires a

lot of touches of the ball. Two important concepts to understand and commit to are that of "handedness" in conjunction with body position and stick position and protection. The ability to be a threat both lefty and righty while maintaining stick control is the essence of the complete player. The USA Lacrosse Progression teaches all components of crosse control: switching hands, the flip, the scoop, the catch, the throw and the fake. Small-sided games and keep-away drills are consistently used to develop this control.

The final aspect of crosse control, shooting, is one of the most difficult skills to master in the game. The USA Lacrosse Progression teaches the technical aspects of shooting while emphasizing the importance of shot selection and shot angle. Not only do we want to take shots from within ten yards, but we want to maximize our shooting angle with every step when cutting or dodging.

Ball control and Off/Ball control, the third and fourth parts of the progression, are taught in concert with one another. Stopping a man one-on-one is the same on the ball as it is off the ball. Likewise, beating a man one-on-one is the same with the ball as it is without it.

The progression of skills for a defensive player begins off the ball, focusing on footwork and control while maintaining a flat triangle between the defender's man and the ball. The athletic skills portion of the progression trains the athlete and his feet, now however he applies what they have learned in the ball control/off ball control section. At this stage players are taught to constantly maintain a position between their man and the ball not between their man and the cage.

The progression of skills on the ball begins with footwork and shades, moves on to hands, adds checks, and finally combines holds with checks. Again, athletic skill training will be the foundation of a player's footwork, which will enable them to maintain a shade relative to their defense. Applying physical pressure to one's opponent in the form of holds is stressed as an essential first step. The next step is pressuring your man with checks to disrupt his rhythm. Finally the USA Lacrosse Progression teaches players to combine holds and checks to further disrupt and punish the offensive player.

The offensive part of ball control/off ball control begins with the square up. Squaring up is the act of creating separation from the defender to just outside his stick's length with the timing of a slow two count. The square up allows a player on or off the ball to see the field and decide where to take the ball. It also draws the defense to the perimeter while giving the player space to make a move.

The USA Lacrosse Progression stresses an offensive sequence of four moves on and off the ball once the square has been set and executed: the speed move, the counter move, the pop out, and the turn. The first is the speed move, which teaches players to use their speed to beat their man, which will in turn set up other moves by selling the speed move. The counter move can then be used when the defensive player turns his hips to run with you or runs past your eyes. When the defender sags in on your speed or counter move, one can then execute the third move, the pop out which creates time and space to shoot or receive a pass for a shot. Finally, when the defender, the defense, or a lack of space forces a player to turn their back to the play, they should execute a turn.

The turn in the form of a roll, question mark or rocker is an excellent move, but is taught to be used only when necessary. When a player turns their back to the play they lose speed and vision but it can be effective in sealing one's man.

The first four parts of the USA Lacrosse Progression are vital fundamental skills. The fifth and final part of the progression is Field Control. Field Control is the team aspect of the game. Defensively, one must be in a help position at all times while maintaining a flat triangle. The further your man is from the ball, the farther you can be from your man. Offensively, the USA Lacrosse Progression teaches you how to play, it does not teach you plays. The more rules or structure you have, the less flexibility your offensive will have.

In the April edition of Lacrosse Magazine, you may have read Part I of Run & Shoot Lacrosse's article on the USA Lacrosse Progression. Run and Shoot Lacrosse, an organization dedicated to teaching lacrosse clinics, camps, and symposiums, developed the game's foremost teaching method, the USA Lacrosse Progression. Created by Yale Lacrosse Coaches Michael Waldvogel and Jamie Munro, the sound fundamental concepts, techniques and methods of the USA Lacrosse Progression enable lacrosse players and coaches to build a foundation of skills to propel to realize their potential. The USA Lacrosse Progression is broken down into five parts; athletic skill, crosse control, ball control, off ball control, and field control. In Part II, we will cover the last three parts of the progression.

We feel to stop your man one-on-one is essentially the same on the ball as it is off the ball. Likewise, to beat your man one-on-one is the same with the ball as it is without it. Therefore, Ball control and Off ball Control, the third and fourth parts of USA Lacrosse Progression, are taught in concert with one another. Of course on ball and off ball techniques differ with regard to stick position, checks and holds, but conceptually they are the same; you need to create separation on offense and "close" on defense. Ninety-five percent of the game you will either be off the ball or covering someone off the ball. Yet off ball control is generally a weakness in developing players. By combining ball control and off ball control, Run & Shoot Lacrosse attempts to turn weakness into strength. It is important to understand that the biggest inhibitors in the development of dodging skills is the ball in the stick, and contact. If you can eliminate the fear of dropping the ball and of getting hit, improvement in the utilization of speed will be the result.

From an offensive and defensive standpoint, in both ball control and off ball control, there are three overall concepts that must be taught and understood; shading your man, anticipation, and communication. Defensively, shading involves positioning your body or stick in cutting, passing, and driving lanes. Defensive shading may also be relative to your opponent's strength as a strong right handed shot or left handed shot. Offensively, shading your man away from where you want to go creates cutting, passing, and driving lanes. All players must use anticipation of ball movement, penetration, cuts, passes and tendencies in order to be in the correct position. Finally, communication is the glue that keeps a defense or an offense together. Without talk, you are on an island.

"Offense win games, defense wins championships." With this in mind, we teach defense first. The

defensive progression begins off the ball, focusing on footwork and body control while maintaining a flat triangle between your man and the ball. The athletic skills portion of The USA Lacrosse Progression trains you and your feet, but now you must apply it in live situations. Approaching your man with your hips low and under control is extremely important. Off the ball, you must constantly maintain a position between your man and the ball, not between your man and the cage. Indiana Basketball's Help & Recover drill is a classic in teaching these techniques.

As the defensive progression continues, the focus shifts to on the ball work. We stress footwork and shades, holds, checks, and finally the combination of holds with checks. Again, your athletic skill training will be the foundation of your footwork, but you must maintain a shade relative to your team's defensive concept. The drop step is a technique that allows you to maintain a cushion of space between yourself and your man. Applying physical pressure on your man in the form of holds is a must for any defensive player. There are numerous techniques with the notion being to push your man with your gloves on your stick and/or your fore arm out of threatening positions by applying equal pressure and using your opponent's own momentum and centrifugal force to slide him out of position. Remember to push and drop step. Likewise, pressuring your man with stick checks will disrupt his rhythm and force loose balls. It is important never to expect to take the ball away and to throw checks in combinations. Remember to "poke and drop." Finally, combine holds and checks to further disrupt and punish your man.

The offensive progression of ball control/off ball control begins by teaching the square up and implementing the shade. "Squaring up" is the act of creating space and time in an on ball or off ball situation. It involves the timing of a slow two-count, which allows the player to see what is happening around him, enables him to draw the defense to the perimeter, and allows the player to take a run at the defender covering him. At the end of the slow two count, the player then decides what to do next; shoot, pass, cut, etc. The player should also square up when the defense stops or impedes his progress. Too many players rely on the roll as a crutch in this situation. We must stress the square up in every drill we do, every time a player receives the ball he should square up; while a player is squaring up with the ball, his teammates should square up without the ball. The only time a player doesn't have to square up is when he is quicksticking a pass for a shot.

There is an offensive sequence of four moves on and off the ball that we feel are the basics of creating separation from your man; the speed move, the counter move, the pop out, and the turn. But first, you must realize that the defense will only go as fast as you do. Therefore, changing your speeds will be imperative.

The first move we teach is the speed move. You must push your man with your speed which will in turn allow you to threaten your man by selling your speed. Think of yourself as a wide receiver who sets up his out pattern by making the defensive back respect your deep threat. It was mentioned that your speed equals the defenses speed and that changing speeds is an effective way to beat your man. However, the defense can respond to a change of speed from slow to fast. The most potent way to beat your man is to run right at him, selling all out speed, pushing him back, and decelerating as you approach his stick length. When you slow, he will slow, giving you the opportunity to gain a

step on him with another burst.

The second move is the counter. When the defensive player turns his hips to run with you or runs past your eyes, counter your speed with a change of direction while remaining squared up to the play. When the defender sags in anticipating your speed move or counter move, execute a pop out. The pop out will create time and space to shoot or receive a pass for a shot. Finally, when your defender, the defense, or a lack of space causes you to turn your back to the play, execute a turn. The turn, in the version of a roll, question mark, or rocker is an excellent move, but should not be used unless it is necessary. When you turn your back to the play you lose speed and vision.

We use two methods of teaching ball control and off ball control; part-whole and limitation/advantage. We begin with a part-whole drill of 1v1 using an imaginary ball with the focus on speed for the offense and position for the defense. We limit the contact which further promotes speed and footwork for the offense and the defense. As the players learn how to get open and prevent openings, we teach stick position for the offense and holds and checks for the defense. Limiting what the offense can do controls what they learn. For example, at times we will not allow players to turns, which will force the offense to square up and use his speed. You will find that if the part whole method of 1v1 is not used, players will revert to tentative and slow moves because they are worried about losing the ball. The off ball two feeders drill is an excellent example of administering the limitation/advantage method. This drill involves 1v1 off ball with two feeders each with balls, which puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the defense. Finally, we mix on ball and off ball concepts and techniques in our 1v1 + 3v3 drill. Here, we have a live defender on the ball while three other player go 1v1 off the ball. We script the defense and do not allow them to slide to the ball. The players off the ball work to get themselves and each other open while creating space for the ball.

After we have taught the moves on and off the ball, we then teach the reads to be used in conjunction with the speed move, counter, pop, and turn. From a general standpoint, when your man plays you high, take him higher and cut low. When your man plays you low, take him lower and cut high. In off ball situations, we spell out your options: the jump cut, back cut, and pop out. A cut between your man and the ball is a jump cut. A back cut is a move behind your man to the cage. The pop out is cut away from your man to the perimeter. The most effective way to teach reads is to script the defense to overplay one of the offenses options. For example, if the defense overplays the jump cut, it will open up a back cut or a pop out.

The first four parts of the USA Lacrosse Progression are the vital fundamental skills of the game. The fifth and final part of the progression is Field Control. Field Control is the team aspect of the game. Defensively, you must be in a help position at all times while maintaining a flat triangle between your man and the ball. The further your man is from the ball, the farther you can be from your man. Offensively, the USA Lacrosse Progression teaches you how to play, it does not teach you plays. The more rules or structure you have with in your offense, the less flexibility your offense will have. At Yale we have five rules: 1) balance and spacing, balance to prevent fast breaks and back up shots, spacing of 8-12 yards from each other and from the middle of the field (lateral spacing); 2) square up on and off the ball; 3) know your reads; 4) move ball through "x" (behind) and "point" (out top); 5) no

two cuts to the same place, and do not cut to an occupied space.

If you are interested in learning the USA Lacrosse Progression first hand, look for Run & Shoot Lacrosse clinics and camps or call (203) 432-2122 for more information.