

By Tom Marechek
As Told To Mike Keegan

The Quarter-Turn Fake

To me, this is the only fake worth doing, for a lot of reasons.

First of all, it lets you keep your stick in close to your ear. You rarely have a lot of time and space to throw fakes, so letting the stick get too far from your head is a good way to get checked from behind. In fact, this is the first thing a defenseman looks for when he's been beaten—a careless attackman who hangs his stick. Second, since it's such a small, quick movement, you are always in a position to shoot. I often see shooters make big fakes, using their bottom hand to turn the head of their stick out and away from their heads. To take a shot after throwing that fake, you need to pull the stick back into shooting position. This takes time, and by the time you've recovered from your fake, so has the goalie. With a simple quarter-turn fake, by the time the goalie recovers, the ball will be in the back of the net.

It's actually a pretty simple move. Using my top hand (for me it's my right hand), which is about halfway down the shaft in good position to shoot, I simply roll my fingers and wrist in a quick, snapping motion. The head of the stick turns in toward my face. At the same time, I give a short, quick snap with my right elbow and shoulder which moves the stick forward just a couple of inches. As I do all of this, I let the bottom of the shaft twist in my left hand. I use a very light grip with my left hand; it barely moves at all.

I'm a firm believer that high-to-low is, and always has been, the best shot in lacrosse. So after a good quarter-turn fake at the top portion of the goal, snap your wrists and elbows and fire the ball into the bottom corner. A little push-pull motion can generate a lot of speed. Push with your top hand and elbow, and pull with your bottom hand. It's not necessary to get your shoulders and hips into it. From close range, you don't need to shoot hard, especially if you've thrown a good fake.

Body Language

This is every bit as important as keeping your stick in tight. Growing up in Canada shooting on 4-by-4 goals, stick fakes alone weren't enough to get the goalie out of position. You had to use deceptive body language. Outdoors on 6-by-6 goals, it makes a big difference too. By instinct, goalies tend to match the shooter's body language; they follow the head of a shooter's stick with their own stick. So you want your body language and stick position to lead the goalie where the shot is not going to go. Sounds simple enough, but shooters have instincts and tendencies too, and unfortunately sometimes they tend to look and lean where they're going to shoot.

So, practice the art of deception. Whenever you work on shooting—which should be often—look high, stand tall and shoot overhand or three-quarters when you shoot low. Dip your shoulder and look low when you shoot high. It's uncomfortable at first, but with practice you'll get used to it. And once you use it in a game, you'll love it.

You can see here that when I'm throwing the quarter-turn fake and shooting to the low corner, I keep my head and shoulders high. I almost exaggerate how tall I'm standing and I try to hold that even after I release the shot. If you stand tall and shoot low to the corners, even Greg Catrano will have a tough time stopping it.

The same goes for shots from farther out when you have time and room. If I want to bury one high, I dip my head and shoulders low. Most goalies will bend their knees and drop their hands and shoulder when I do this. I'll release a sidearm shot, which makes the goalie drop his stick as well. By the time the goalie realizes the shot's going high, it's too late. This is especially important for shooters who lack velocity on their shots. You can make up for that with deception. I can put some heat on a shot when I need to, but good body language is more important.

I remember one shot from last season with the Bayhawks. I had an open shot with time and room against Rochester's Tillman Johnson. I stood tall and threw a couple of head fakes high. I knew he was frozen high, so I released a low shot that scored even though it was only about 40 MPH. I almost felt bad. But it shows how much of a difference good body language makes.

The Shuffle Step

I didn't even realize I was doing this until people pointed it out to me recently: When going 1-on-1 with a goalie, I take a big shuffle step to the right across the front of the goal and then drag my left foot.

Now that I realize I've been doing it, I'm glad. And I'm sure other good shooters do it too. Whenever you're going 1-on-1 with the goalie you have to keep moving your feet and come across the goal. This gets the goalie to come off the near pipe and move across the mouth of the goal, which gives you more shooting options.

By taking normal, straight-forward steps across the crease, your legs and hips are pointed at the sideline. You need to turn your chest and shoulders toward the goal to shoot. The shuffle step allows you to square your entire body to the goal. You'll be in a more comfortable position to shoot, which should improve your accuracy.

Another advantage to a big sideways step is that it forces the goalie to move quickly. Taking a few normal steps across the crease will make the goalie follow you, but he'll do it in small steps. When you lunge across the front of the goal, the goalie has to do the same. Once his momentum is moving in one direction, it's tough for him to make a save in the other direction. Still another advantage is that it turns your back to most of the defenders. Outside of the cross-crease defender, anyone who hits you will be called for a push from behind.

If All Else Fails...

If the quarter-turn fake and some deceptive body language aren't enough to beat a hot goalie, then by all means congratulate him after the game. But before you give up and start throwing the extra pass instead of shooting, try these shots. Very few goalies can anticipate these.

Behind the Back

For beginners and more conservative players, this is a trick shot. But for a lot of us in MLL, it's not much more difficult than a regular overhand shot. With practice, you can become prolific with it as well.

First of all, I'd like to say that calling it a "behind the back" is a little misleading. To actually shoot behind your back, you'd have to wrap the stick around your body, almost sidearm. This makes it difficult to extend your arms and get any velocity or accuracy with your shot. A more appropriate name for it would be "behind the neck." You can see in the photos that when I complete this shot, my top hand and stick are right behind my neck. To get good power on the shot, begin with your left hand at the bottom of the shaft, and your right hand halfway up with the stick parallel to the ground. Extend your right arm out to the side, then use that push-pull motion I talked about before. Pull with your right hand so your right arm goes from being almost straight to completely bent with your hand behind your neck. At the same time, push with your left hand so your stick ends up parallel to the ground again. You'll have to turn your shoulders a little to do this, so your back should end up facing the target. It almost feels like a golf backswing.

I normally like to use this when the goalie has done a good job cutting off my shooting angle. Reaching back around my head is quicker than switching hands and still gives me a better angle. And, of course, sometimes I do it just for fun.

Photo: James Schaffer

Between the Legs

Speaking of shots to do just for fun, this between-the-legs shot is about as good as it gets. I'm not sure Trevor Tierney appreciates it that much, since I put one past him in the MLL Semifinals in 2003. And I don't think many high school coaches will like it much either if all of their attackmen start trying it in games. But in your backyard or before or after practice are good times to experiment. That's how I started it—just messing around. Then I got comfortable enough doing it so when the opportunity arose in a game, I took the shot. With time you can learn to shoot it high or low, and I once clocked mine at 57 miles an hour. So it's possible to put some good heat on it. First of all, you need to have some decent whip in your stick. If you're an attackman that likes to carry the ball with the pocket in the bottom of the head, this shot is going to be very tough. You really need to be able to lock the ball right under the shooting strings. I generally take this shot as I run across the goal from the goalie's left to right. With your left hand at the bottom of the stick and your right hand about halfway down the shaft, start twisting the stick with your left hand so the head rotates from your right to left. Your right hand just lets the shaft twist. As you're doing this, lift your right leg slightly to give yourself room to shoot. Quickly give your stick a good push-pull motion again, pulling down with your right hand and pushing out slightly with your left. You can see in the pictures that my left hand finishes close to my belly button and my right hand is directly below it. I actually hit myself in the leg with my stick sometimes when I do this, especially when I'm trying to shoot it hard.

This sounds like a lot to think about, but it really is all one motion. With a little effort, you'll get it down, and then you can show off to all your friends. But keep in mind, I do it in games because I'm a professional and I want to entertain the fans.

There is no good time for you to try it in a game. If the game is close and you pass up a sure goal to try it, then you deserve to be benched. If you're winning by a lot and you try it, then that's terrible sportsmanship. If you're losing by a bunch and you try it, then you aren't taking the game seriously.

So again, keep the crazy stuff for your backyard, and maybe summer league. For your real games, stick to the quarter-turn fake and some deceptive body language. Your teammates and your goal totals will thank you.