

KEYS TO COACHING LACROSSE

Basics:

1. **Players at every level must play every day with both hands.**

Both hands. No one can advance in lacrosse without playing with both hands. There are too many youth players who have played for three years and can't use their off hand. The longer we wait to teach them, the harder it is for them to catch up. It will cause teams to play less well to have players using their off hands. In the long term it will make better players. Each team at each practice must have off hand aspects of their throwing and catching skill exercises. This is especially true for players who will initially have the best chance to develop two hand skills.

Drills:

- All left hand triangle and passing drills.
- Single out players at each practice to play off hand all practice, include taping bottom hand to stick. Reward team every time off hand player gets goal or assist.
- Run all cut drills to both sides.
- Don't tell kids to play with their 'bad' hand. Just say "All Lefty!" It's easier to monitor when they are all using the same hand.

2. **The ball can outrun anyone. Lacrosse is about passing the ball not running with it.**

Too many skilled youth players are trained to carry the ball up the field themselves - through other teams if needed. This is a useless skill, and a hard habit to break. Especially when young players are encouraged to carry first, and only throw as a last resort. Our players must have as their first instinct moving the ball through the air. Like other basic skills, this may cause teams to do less well until they learn the skill. We must not let the skilled player and junior players develop the ball-hog habit. Many players will want to just run with the ball, because it is easier, and because they are not good at throwing on the run.

Drills:

- Running entire length of field passing back and forth with partner.
- Three man pass with center player running toward ball, catching, turning, running toward other player and throwing.
- Triangle passing drill in both directions
- Ultimate scrimmage. In this scrimmage the coach counts to 3,4, or five depending on skill of players, and players must pass in that time or the coach gives a new ball to the other team. The player who failed to pass must carry the ball all the way to the coach and hand him the ball. The coach has thrown another ball to continue the scrimmage. Coach counts loud. Trains players to pass and get open, or lose the ball.

3. **Strategy over individual skills.** Skills will come, strategy must be taught. For example, play 4 vs 3. It teaches defense how to slide, and offense how to throw and catch. Do this rather than spend practice time throwing only.
4. **Do all drills at full speed.** Players who jog through drills are lost when they have to play a game full speed.
5. **Don't chase balls.** Waiting for a player to retrieve a lost ball wastes 25 other players' time. Send players on a run after lost balls as break. Keep plenty at hand.

Specifics: Offense

1. **Our offense shoots and passes on the run.**

This is a real skill. Too many players stop to plant their feet and then throw. Try to point this out when they do it. Stop play and let player know he stopped.

Drill:

- The best drill is to tell the kids to run and concentrate on running, then throw without changing pace. This can be fun as a shooting drill. Encourage players to shoot no matter what. Most will miss goal by a mile. That's okay. Eventually they will start to get the shot to work. Better to let them miss than 'hit' the goal by stopping. It won't work in a game to stop, so learning to do it is not very useful.
- Players run from restraining line, catch pass and have one step to shoot.
- Triangle passing drills where players run and throw in a triangle or box instead of the straight line.

2. **Our offense knows how to fast break or go to X.**

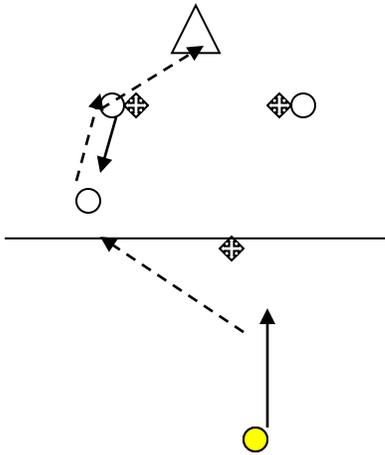
Fast Break or X. Too many youth middies run the ball to the goal every time. Our players must know that with a fast break we go to the goal (by passing). A fast break is when we have four players to their three. In all other situations we want the ball to go to X (behind the goal) to set up. We want this for two reasons, if we lose the ball we want the other team to have to clear from as far down the field as possible. Second, moving the ball to X forces the defensive team to turn around and face their goal. That makes it harder for them to watch players in position to score. Players must learn to feel the difference, and know when to push a fast break and when to settle.

Drill:

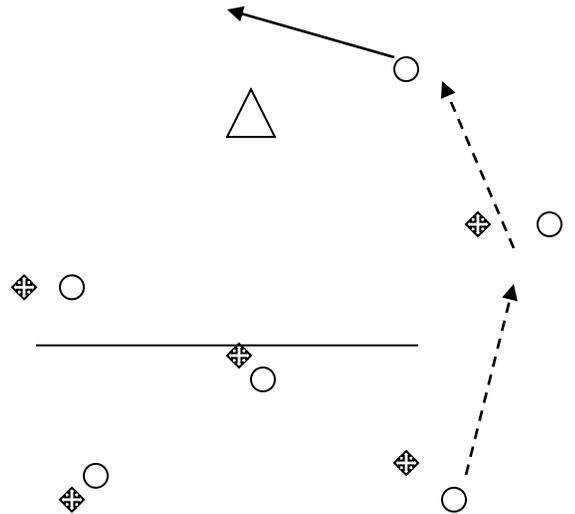
- Set up a fast break. Form six rows of middies at opposite restraining line. Half middies are defense, half are offense (pinnies). All odd numbers are offense, all even numbers are defense. Coach rolls ground ball and calls random numbers 1-6, sending

break down field in an unpredictable fashion. Coach can send a normal fast break down the field by giving an offensive player a big head start, or another formation.

(Fast Break pass to undefended player)

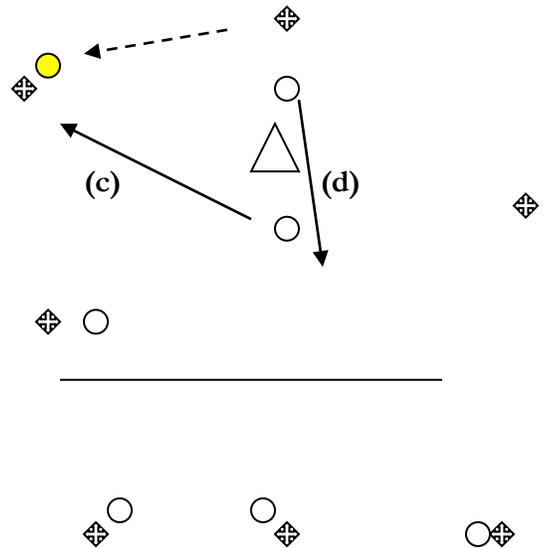
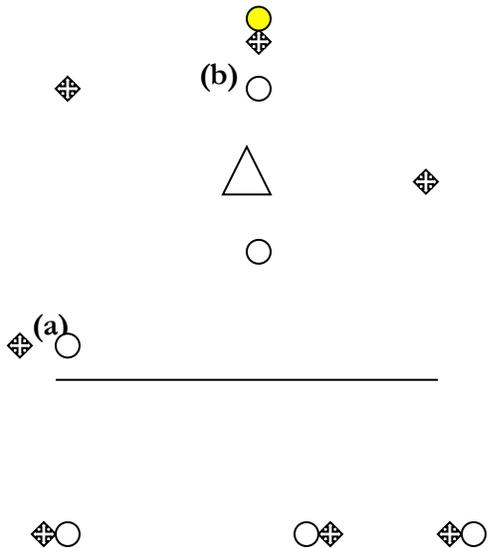


(No fast break get ball to X)



3. The I Ride on attack and M2M midfield ride.

I-Ride M2M. With the I-Ride the highest attackman covers the high defense (a). The other two attackmen split the goalie and two low defense. The first attackman goes for the ball (b), the second follows the pass (c). When the second attackman covers the pass, the first attackman backs him up to cover the next pass (d). They can switch back and forth endlessly, containing the ball and facing a long pass. At the same time the middies cover man to man as close as they can. This forces the defense to clear without middle help, and prevents fast breaks.



Drills:

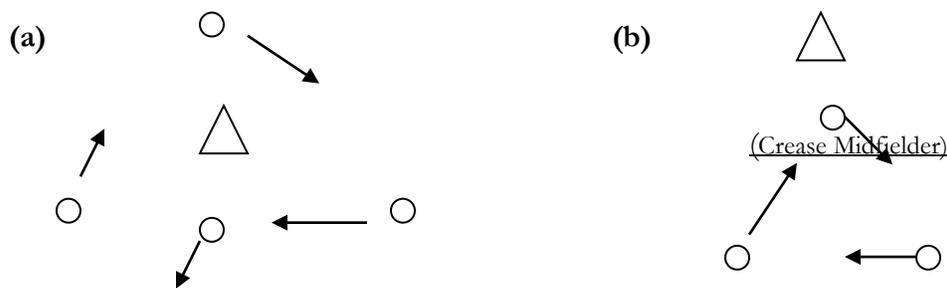
- Put 2 attackmen trying to take the ball from 3 defenders. One attackman goes for the ball. The other splits the two defenders. And they run hard. When a pass is made the attackman splitting the two goes for the ball, and the other attackman splits the defenders. This is a good drill for all involved. It teaches attackmen that they too must run fast.
- Simply run through the ride as a drill.

4. The triangle offense with a crease midfielder.

Offensive Triangles. All teams should be taught the concept of the 2-3-1 triangle offense. The attack triangle has a player at X and two wing attackers. The midfield triangle has a crease midfielder and two middies up top. When a wing attackman cuts across the crease he sets in motion a rotation of the triangle (a). When a middle cuts to the crease he sets another rotation in motion, with the crease middle cutting out to the top, the top middle sliding across to replace the cutter, and the cutter stopping and taking the crease position (b). This is the easiest motion offense to teach. It never leaves middies crowding the crease, and takes the long pole out of the crease area.

Drills:

- 3 on 3 with players cueing off each others cuts
- 3 on 0 to get players to do it right
- 6 on 0 to get players to do it right
- 6 on 6 with players cueing off each others cuts



5. The four steps of a dodge. Speed, change direction, step away, close. Too many kids start their dodge not with speed, but with stand still, and things go bad from there. Speed is their first tool, if that doesn't work, a change of direction, like a split dodge is tried, if that doesn't get rid of the defender, they can simply step away to free their hands, and if the defender pounces on them then, they can use their last trick, a close dodge like a roll dodge.

Drills:

- Get kids to memorize four steps and repeat back
- Get kids to move through and call out “Speed” and when the defender keeps up “Change Direction” then call “Step Away” then “Close Dodge”.

6. Offensive players carry their sticks up and down, and protect them.

Carry Stick Perpendicular: Too many youth players carry their sticks parallel to the ground. Players who have played for two years still carry their stick in front of them like a serving tray. They cannot throw, dodge or avoid checks. Our players must know how to carry their stick protected and perpendicular to the ground.

Drills:

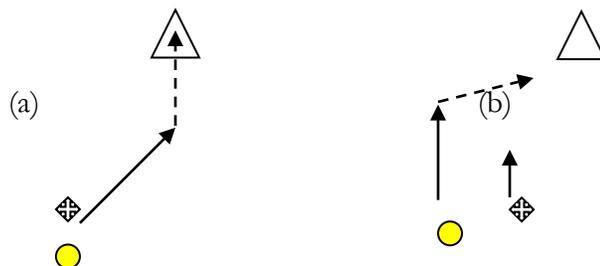
- One-on-one with proper carrying position. Stick protected by body.
- Run with ball and stick upright in jog drills.
- Gauntlet. Offensive player runs through three defenders spaced about 20-feet apart. Players will learn to ‘protect’ their stick.

7. Three basic plays.

Specifics: Defense

The purpose of this defense is to prevent shots, collect ground balls and clear. Not strip ball.

The principle function of the defense is to limit the opposing team’s good shots by keeping the ball out of the box. Too many youth players think their first task is to strip the ball, and against any good team this means a successful dodge and creates odd man goals. The defense’s second function is to win ground balls. Its third function is to clear. Too many youth programs teach defense to take the ball away. They rush at players with the single aim of getting the ball. This can work against bad players. They develop a habit, and against good players and good teams get beaten, and can’t figure out what they are doing wrong. We must not emphasize take aways, but rather forcing low percentage shots and getting resulting ground balls and clears. This also should stress defending the box as shown in the diagram. Too many youth players defend as in (a), they forget that by being ‘in front of their man’ they are leaving the path to the goal open. They should learn to defend almost beside their man, closing the door to the front of the goal, and forcing the player to a worse and worse angle on the goal, as in (b).



8. Defend the body not the stick.

To many youth players watch the ball and try to swat at it. What they need to do is watch the belly, and stay between the belly and the goal. When they do that they are in a position to check the player ready to shoot.

Drills:

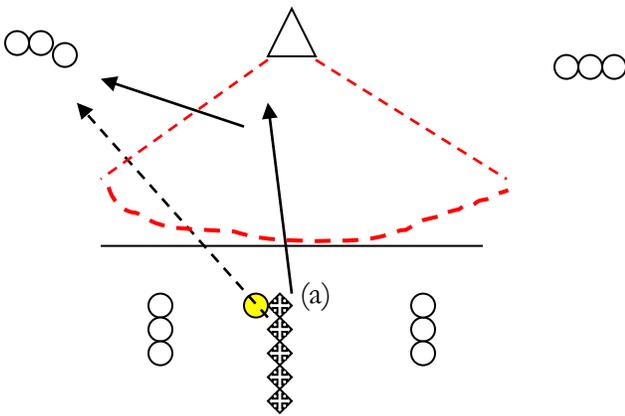
- One-on-one with defensive player holding pinnie instead of stick. Must move feet and body.
- Tell players not to watch stick and head fakes, watch waist and belly, and move feet.

9. Defend the hole not the man

Offensive players can't score from midfield. They have to be in or near what is called the box. (What it sounds like, a box around the front of the goal). Teaching defenders that the box is the main point helps them avoid chasing players all over the field. Better to run in a straight line back to the box and wait for the offense than chase the ball all over the field.

Drills:

- This is called a 4 v 1. As diagrammed. Four lines of offensive players. A single line of defenders. Coach throws ball on arc to any one of the offensive lines. Defender has to run first to the crease, and from there defend a one on one. Teaches how to defend from the front of the goal out.



- Teach players what “back to the hole” means. Call out in scrimmages to see which players get it, correct ones that fail to respond.

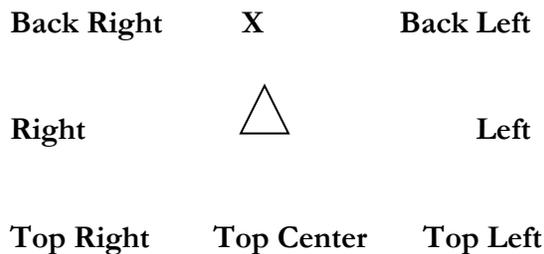
10. Goalies must run defense and clears, and also stop balls.

Many youth goalies spend their days as targets. Stopping shots is 20 percent of their job. They also need to know how to prevent shots, tell the defense what is happening behind their back, throw great passes, dodge, be fast with the ball, and run the clears.

Drills:

- Let goalies throw with defenders.
- Let goalies dodge with middies.
- Have many goalies so one does not end up in goal all day while offense practices plays. Extra goalies mean the main goalie can practice clears and passing instead. Try not to leave the goalie in the goal making saves all day while the offense works. Half the practice should be defense and clears.
- Half field scrimmage. Defense gets a point for every clear over the midline (must have possession of ball.) Offense gets three points for every goal. Play to a set score.
- Count clears attempted in games (every time your defense gets the ball) and clears made (every time your defense gets past midline). Make a big deal about success. Point out that when we have the ball the other team can't score. A good clear percentage is 85 percent. (Have a parent volunteer do this from the first game to show the defense you care about this number).

11. Goalies must say where ball is and call out hold.



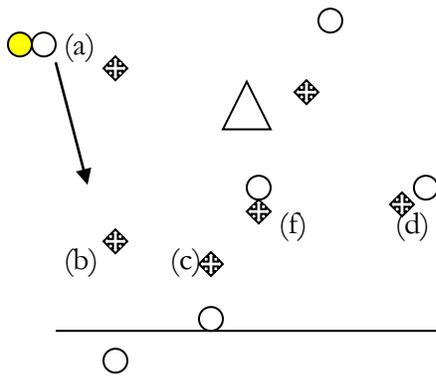
- Teach goalies to talk. The goalie needs to tell defenders where the ball is. Otherwise they have to turn to find it, and when they turn, a good player will cut, and sometimes score. If the goalie tells them where the ball is they never have to turn. In this drill, during any half-field situation, the goalie shouts out where the ball is, and every once in awhile shouts out a number. The defense, in unison, must shout the number back. This way the goalie gets comfortable calling out, has to call loud, and the defense has to listen. Goal is credited to the offense if they fail to shout back. When this becomes automatic it's a big breakthrough. Goalies need mouthguards they can talk through.

- Defenders with their back to the goal need to know when to stop a player with the ball from getting closer. The goalie calls “Hold” to tell the defender his player is close enough. Too many times goals are scored and the defender had no idea his player was on so close because the goalie never spoke up.

12. Defense has an adjacent slide and must talk, “hot” and “two”.

Offense succeeds when it ‘breaks’ the defense. The defense has to recover by sliding. Defenders need to plan slides, and know what they are going to do if the defense is broken. We do what is called an ‘adjacent’ slide in most games. If you get good at this, you can add the cross crease slide, but this should do. Adjacent slide sounds like what it is. The adjacent player slides to defend, and that continues down the line.

Player (a) has the ball and is driving to the front of the goal. Defender (b) shouts “I’m Hot”. That means if (a) beats his man, (b) will take over. (c) shouts “I’m two” meaning he will take (b)’s job. (d), who is far from the ball can expect to do (c)’s job. The first player to get beaten (a) runs to the opposite side of the action from where he was first beaten, and voila, lands up doing (d’s) job, and everyone is covered, hopefully faster than the other team can pass to the uncovered player. The crease defender, is out of this. He is told to never leave his man, as that would be an easy goal. The key here is to get the “I’m Hot” player to shout, and do it in every half-field situation.



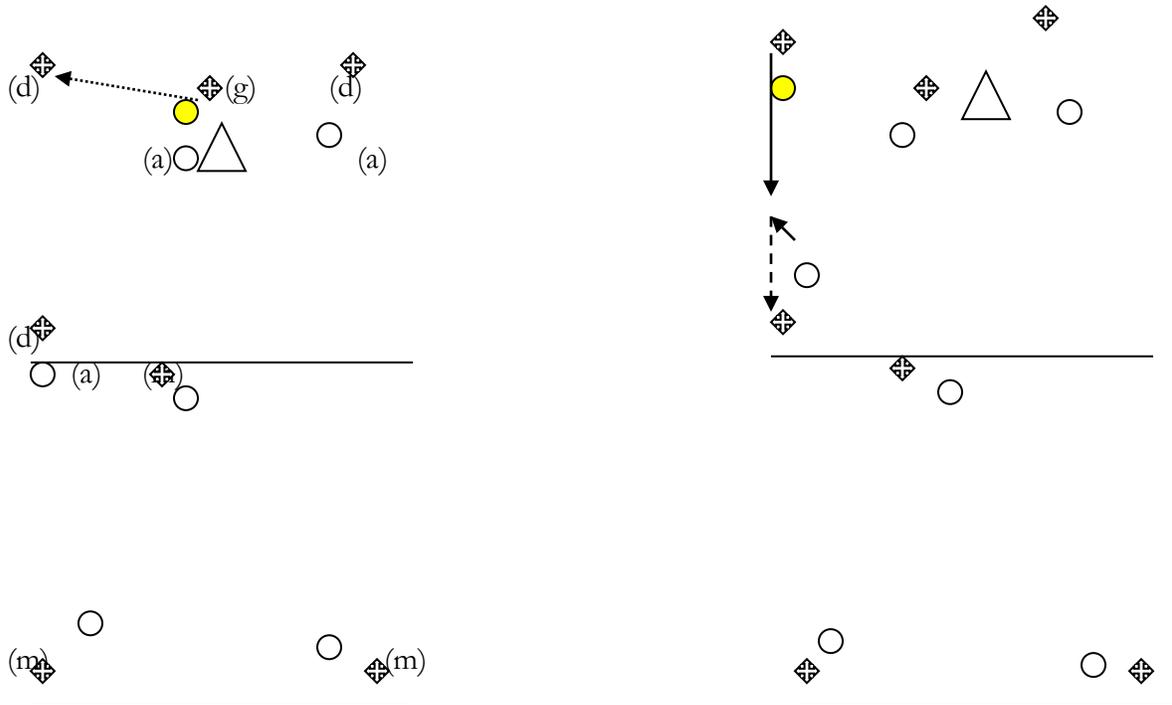
- Goalie asks Who’s Hot!, Who’s Two, and defenders answer.

13. Defenders have to be able to throw and catch long passes with confidence

It’s hard to remember that throwing 40-yard passes is a skill. Catching them too. Let defending players practice this. And do it on the run.

14. Defensive clears with a fast break first and then use an L Clear.

The goalie's first hope should be to get the ball to the other end fast. He should look up to find a breaking midfielder and we turn a clear into a fast break goal. If that is not possible, or we are bringing in a 'dead ball' from on out of bounds, we set up a short passing clear. The L takes one attack rider (a) out of the play, and lets us run short 2 vs 1 up the field either between the goalie and the back defense, or most usually between the back defense and the defense or middle on the restraining line. As diagrammed.

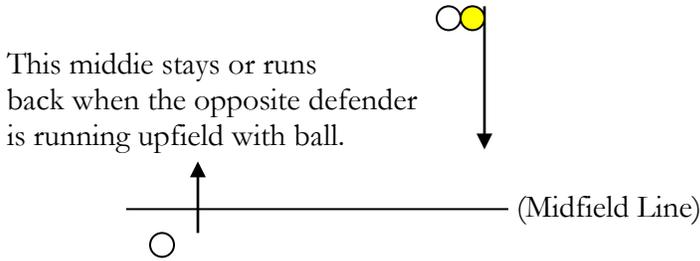


Drills:

- Teach defense to throw long passes
- Set defense in positions and throw passes
- Teach defense to spring to these positions while watching ball.
- When goalie makes save count One Two Three and tell him to look to all three middies up field to see if one is open. One Two Three means the three middies. If none are open then he looks back to the defense.

15. Offside on a clear is the opposite ball midfielder's fault.

Defensive players should keep going if they have a clear route to carry the ball up field. When they are not sure about being off sides they tend to stop at the midfield to check, and lose the ball. In scrimmages stress that the midfielder on the opposite side of the field needs to watch, and run back over if he sees the defender heading up, call "middie back" and hold his stick high. Remember that if the middie on the same side as the defender stays back it creates a jam of players around the defender crossing the line.

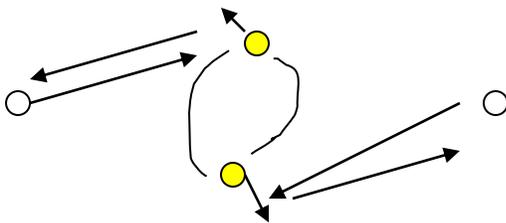


Dave Campbell's Seven Deadly Drills

Dave is the Connecticut College Coach, and AA goalie for the National Champion Middlebury team of 2000. He was an assistant coach at Notre Dame. His drills cover all aspects of the game. Most allow both offense and defense to learn at the same time, and teach the real basics of the game in realistic situations.

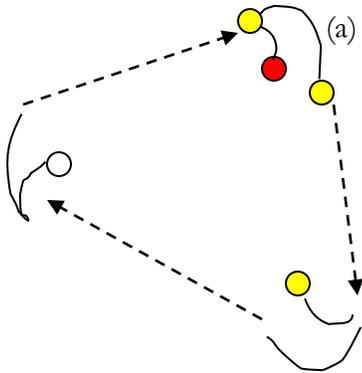
1. 'Four Man - Two Ball'

In this drill the two yellow players get in the middle. They step to their right, receive a pass, throw it back, then run to other yellow position, and repeat the catch and pass back. They then switch hands and step out to the opposite side and take a pass from the opposite partner. This drill is done with head high passes, ground balls and over-the-shoulder passes. It maximizes normal movement and reps, and is used in place of 'line drills' that are often more about line than drill.



2. Triangle Passing

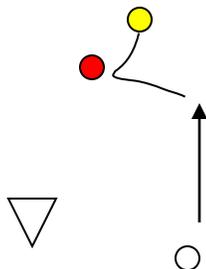
This drill also replaces an old line drill. Three players who play together get in a triangle. They replicate the stick protection of a pass from one angle and throw to the next player as the ball works in a normal game situation. In this illustration, the red player steps out right handed, catches the pass, turns to the outside of the triangle, (a) switches hands, and passes left handed to the next player.



3. Keep Away

A key drill, and fun. This is the best way we have ever found to teach players to spread out and get open. There is no objective to score, just maintain possession. In Dave's version it's full field, with a count to when the ball has to be passed. We can go half field, and include the passing count. If a team fails to pass by the count, seven seconds is a good place to start, the other team is awarded the ball. Count out loud how long each team keeps the ball. See what the record is. Warning: A dominant team can really frustrate the other group, especially when players are tired. Pitting the best attack and best middies the long sticks and second or third middies can make this a bad drill. Mix the players up, especially poles and attack.

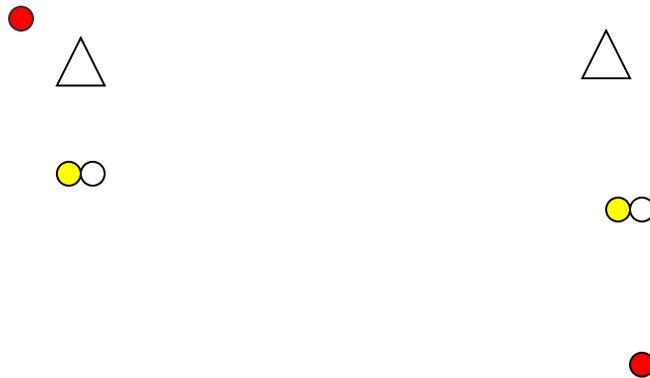
Note: This is a good time to remind players about the V cut. V cuts are an essential tool. Ball is with White player. Defender is Red. The V cut forces the defender to honor the attacker headed to the goal. When the attacker cuts back away, it creates the space needed to catch the ball. It places the defender behind the catcher, and the catcher's body is between the defender and his stick when he catches the ball. Any other cut and the defender can get a stick on the ball. Key to keep away.



4. Two on One

This drill works offense and defense through a typical situation. The defense has to know when to commit to the ball, and leave his man, and the offense needs to spread the defender, and keep a passing lane open. This can be set up from behind the net, and in front, as shown in the second diagram.

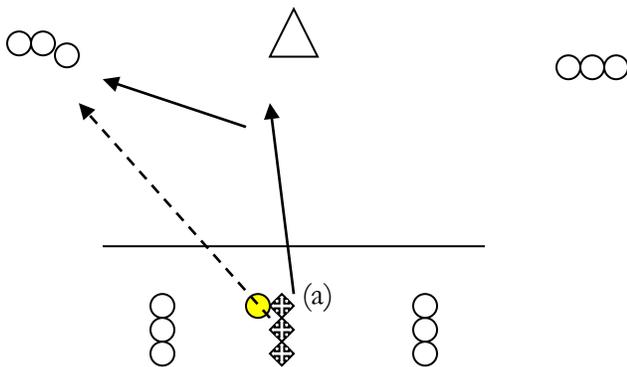
The Red player had the ball. The Yellow player is a defender. It seems like an easy chance to score, but with practice the defense learns how to force a bad angle shot. Use a goalie to keep the shots honest. Encourage the offense to move, and the defense to remember that the hole is the place to defend, not just the ball.



5. Breakdown Drill

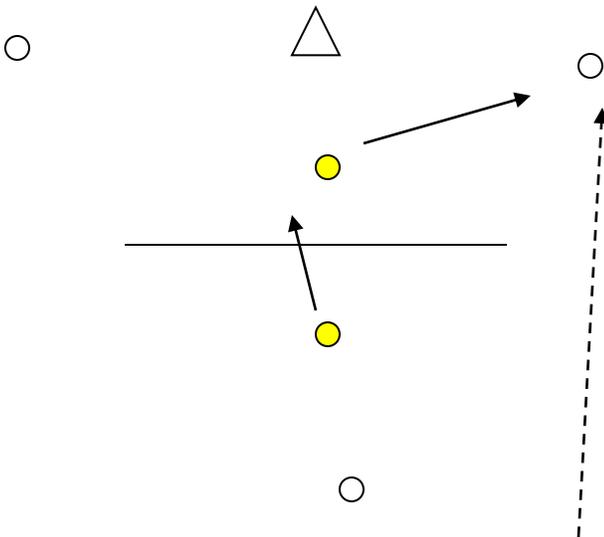
This is covered earlier in our 4 v 1. It's diagrammed again here. It teaches the defense what to do when the defense 'breaks down.'

- Four lines of offensive players. A single line of defenders. Coach throws ball on arc to any one of the offensive lines. Defender has to run first to the crease, and from there defend a one on one. Teaches how to defend from the front of the goal out.



6. Three on Two

Another great all-purpose drill. Most goals are scored in three versus two breakdowns on the field. The two Yellow defenders against the three White offensive players. The coach lobs the ball to any of the three offensive players. One defender must address the ball, while the other must split the remaining threats. The defense must communicate. "I've got ball!" The offense must learn to move off ball.



7. Pass and Shoot

Often forgotten, the art of catching and driving to shoot and score. This drill combines V-cut, passing to a moving target, and catching and shooting on the run. Stress that after the catch the shooter must drive back to net, and not fade away (red). Defense can shoot too.

