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Settled Defense in Boys Lacrosse

Good team defense is based on how individual players, with direction from the goalie, support each other to prevent the opposing team from scoring. You have multiple options for playing man-to-man and zone defense. Here we introduce general defensive concepts to use at all times on defense and for one man-to-man defensive option.

Communication

The most important aspect of team defense is good communication among defenders regarding where the ball is on the field, who is guarding the ball, who needs help when beaten by an attacking player, and who goes to help that beaten defender. The most basic rule of defense is to stay between your man and the goal and at the same time see the ball. The most vital aspect of functioning as a team is the act of communicating with each other so that you can truly function as a team.

The following are descriptions of ways that defenders should communicate:

- **“I’ve got ball!”**

The defensive player guarding the ball yells this to let his teammates know that he is covering the most dangerous player. (See Player D1.) It also lets his teammates know where the ball is on the field.

- **“I’ve got your help!”**

Defenders next to the ball carrier (see player D2) may also yell this to communicate to the defender guarding the ball carrier that this defender has help, should his attacker try to beat him.

- **“I’ve got two!”**

A defender who finds himself guarding 2 players yells this to communicate that he needs another defender to come help him to pick one player up.

- **“Help!”**

A defender who has been beaten by his attacking opponent yells this to let his teammates know that he has been beaten and needs someone to pick this player up until he can recover.

- **“I’m one!”**

The defender closest to the ball carrier (see player D2) yells this to let his teammates know that he will be the first to slide toward the ball carrier should the ball carrier drive towards goal. (See the next key defensive concept for an explanation of sliding.) This player may also yell, “I’ve got you back,” which means he will help if the defender gets beaten or if another teammate has to slide.





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- **“I’m two!”**

The second defender to slide after the first defender (see player D3) who has called “I’m one” should yell, “I’m two” so his teammates know that he will be the second defender to slide to cover the ball carrier driving toward goal.

- **“Slide!”**

If the defender guarding the ball carrier (see player D1) needs help, he can also yell this to let the adjacent defenders know they need to slide and cover the ball carrier.

- **“Switch!”**

To maintain balanced defensive coverage, the defender without the ball can call for a switch of man-on-man coverage.

Sliding

Whether a defensive disadvantage exists or not, all defenders must be able to recognize situations where they need to move or “slide” toward a player who is more dangerous. The most dangerous player is the ball carrier. The second most dangerous players are players adjacent to the ball carrier or are “one pass away” from the ball. In order for a team to function as a defensive unit, every player must know where his teammates are on the field – communication and sliding go hand in hand.

- The goal when sliding is to keep the player the farthest distance from the ball open. This is also the least dangerous player.
- When a defender has been beaten and calls for help, his teammate – the defender who has called “I’m one” (see player D1 in scenario A) – slides to pick up the ball carrier driving toward goal. This sliding defender steps toward the crease area (middle of the defensive box area) so that he is moving from the inside out; this cuts down the shooting angle for the ball carrier. The responsibility of the beaten defender (see player D6 in scenario A) is to leave his man when the slide comes and locate the open offensive player. (See player M2 in scenario A.)
- The defender adjacent to his teammate who has just slid (see player D2 in scenario A), should also slide to cover the attacker (player A2 in scenario A) that was left open when the slide occurred.





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- This sliding from your assigned offensive player to the potentially most dangerous player starts a chain reaction from all 6 defenders while the goalie directs the slides for all players.
- The defender who was originally beaten should recover to guard the least dangerous player; i.e., the player farthest away from the ball.
- At that point, all defenders are balanced with a new player to cover.

Defending and Playing Picks

Defensive communication is crucial:

- The defender covering the ball is focused on the ball carrier and may not see a pick coming.
- The defender playing the attacker setting the pick must communicate to his teammate who is being picked where the pick is by yelling “pick on your left” or “pick on your right.”
- He also must communicate if a “switch” is needed. If the pick is effective and the picked defender gets beaten by his attacker, the defender originally guarding the picker must now pick up the attacker running off the pick.
- By yelling “switch,” both defenders know that they must switch the men they are guarding to maintain balanced coverage of the attack players.

Playing picks above the goal line extended when a pick is set for the ball carrier:

- The best option for the defense to maintain balanced defensive coverage when picks are set above the goal line extended on the ball carrier is to have an automatic switch.
- The defender covering the attack player setting a pick on another defender guarding the ball carrier should call for a switch and leave the attacker setting the pick to cover the ball carrier.
- The defender who was playing the ball carrier should now cover the man who set the pick.





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Playing picks behind the goal line extended (i.e., behind goal) when a pick is set for the ball carrier:

- The best option for the defense to maintain balanced defensive coverage when the ball carrier is behind the goal is to allow the defender being picked to continue to guard the ball carrier.
- Once again, the defender covering the picker is the director yelling what the defender covering the ball carrier should do.
- The defender covering the picker should communicate where the pick is by yelling “pick on your right [or pick on your left] – go through.”
- “Go through” means the defender on the picker drops off the pick 2 to 3 yards, giving the defender covering the ball carrier space to go under or around the pick and get to the other side to continue to cover the ball carrier.
- The defender covering the picker is positioned off the pick, waiting to see what the picker and ball carrier’s next moves are.
- If the picker cuts around to the goal after the ball carrier runs off the pick, the defender on the picker stays on this man.
- If the ball carrier goes by the pick and his defender continues to cover him, but then the ball carrier cuts back using the pick a second time, a “switch” call may be needed at this point if the pick stops the defender covering the ball carrier.

Playing “off-ball picks” (i.e., playing picks when the attacker does not have the ball):

- Defenders may defend picks on attackers without the ball either by calling for a “switch” or calling for the defender to “go through” – this decision is up to the defenders involved in the pick.
- The defender guarding the attack player setting the pick should decide and react to whether his teammate – the defender on which the pick is set – can get around the pick or not.
- If the defender on which the pick is set cannot get around the pick, his teammate guarding the picker must call for a switch and pick up the attacker running off of the pick.
- If the defender can get around the pick, his teammate guarding the picker should yell “go through.”





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Key Concepts of Man-to-Man Defense

Good team defense relies on:

- Proper and effective communication
- Players accurately determining if an offensive player has beat his teammate, and thus when to help out
- Players effectively increasing defensive pressure on the offense to increase turnovers
- Individual players sliding to the open players at the proper angle to effectively maintain balanced defensive coverage and force poor shooting angles for the attack
- Individual defenders effectively seeing their man and the ball at the same time

Philosophies for Playing the Ball

1-vs.-1 coverage with slides when a defender is beat by his attacker:

The best defensive approach for beginning and less experienced players is to play the ball with 1-vs.-1 coverage of the attack, sliding only when a defender is beat. Young players need to learn how to play solid individual defense first. Playing this kind of defense may require fewer slides if players are able to stay on their players, therefore allowing players to develop basic defensive skills first. Using this philosophy toward playing the ball also reinforces the movement schemes in all situations; i.e., transition situations, team settle defense situations and extra-man defense.

- The goal for basic man-to-man defense is to prevent the offensive player with the ball from beating his defender.
- The defensive player should be concerned with proper defensive positioning – playing the ball square with his body always facing the offensive player chest-to-chest, and moving laterally by shuffling and always overplaying the strong stick side.





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- If an offensive player gains a step ahead of the defender, then the defender must turn and run hip-to-hip at an angle to get to the spot where the offensive player is heading. This gets the defender to the strong stick side quicker.
- A defender only slides when he determines his teammate – the defender playing the ball – has been beat.

