LACROSSE POSITIONS FOR THE BEGINNER

ATTACK
The attack position should be explained as the scoring position. In a lacrosse game, there are three attackmen on each team. The attackmen are the offensive players on the field and as such, they must always stay back on the offensive side of the field. This is the position that gets all the glory and all the stats, but it also takes the most skill. Emphasize to young players who aspire to be attackmen that they must work extremely hard at their stick skills. They must also spend a great deal of time watching high level lacrosse. This is necessary because attackmen must have the greatest feel for and knowledge of the game. The ball is going to be in their hands for a high percentage of the game and they need to know what to do with it.

Although many young attackmen feel that their only job is to score goals, help them realize that they are quarterbacks of the offense and that assists are as important as goals. The greatest skill that you could teach a young attackmen is to dodge his defenseman, draw a slide, and move the ball on to his teammate. Discourage players (even though it may be effective at younger age levels) from dodging through an entire team. This will make them much better prepared for advanced play and will allow them to mature rapidly as a lacrosse player.

MIDFIELD
Beginning level midfielders should be taught that they are the horses of the team. There are three midfielders per team in a lacrosse game. They must run up and down the entire field and play both offense and defense. For this reason, midfielders are usually the most athletic players on the lacrosse field. Young midfielders must learn all the fundamentals of playing lacrosse because they are all over the field. For this reason it is not a bad idea to look at everyone on a beginning level lacrosse team as a midfielder. The job of the midfielder is to get the ball down field and to the attack. This is why, just like the attack, they must learn to dodge their defender, draw a slide, and move the ball on.

On the defensive side of the field, it is very important for young midfielders to learn the importance of getting back “in the hole”. This means that when the other team gets the ball, the midfielder’s first objective should be to get back to the defensive side, within the restraining box and let the offense come to them. Too many young lacrosse players consistently slide up field. For example, Team 1 takes the ball away from Team 2. A Team 1 player has the ball in the defensive end and starts running up field towards the Team 2’s goal. At most beginner levels, the Team 2 midfielders will run at the Team 1 player and try to take the ball. This is called sliding up field and is the biggest mistake that an uneducated lacrosse player makes. Team 2’s midfielders should just run back to their goal, pack in tight, break down and get ready to defend. With the way lacrosse is played now, sliding up field rarely gets the ball back from the other team, and usually ends up in transition situations and scoring for the other team. A great lesson for young middies to learn is as soon as the other team gets the ball, get back on defense. It will help your team, and it will give your midfielders a good foundation for playing solid defense.
DEFENSE

Many times at the youth level, the defensive position is given to the worst athletes or the worst stick-handlers. This is inconsistent with high levels of lacrosse, where some of the best athletes and players are on the defensive side of the field. The most important thing with young or beginning defensemen is to not put a long-stick in their hands right away. They should first learn to play with a short-stick for a number of reasons. The first is that it will be easier for them to learn the fundamental stick skills with a short-stick. Many young players simply are not big or strong enough to handle a long-pole, yet they feel it is necessary to learn how to be a defenseman. Actually, the long-stick only hampers their growth as a lacrosse player. Once a young player can handle the ball, throw, and catch consistently, then he can start working on those skills with a long-pole.

The other reason that it is good for young defensemen to learn how to play with a short-stick is that they should be taught to play defense with their feet, not with their stick. Many young defensemen feel the need to wield their long-pole like a sword when they first start playing. Young defensemen have the notion that their goal is to check the ball away from the other player. However, the most important aspect to playing defense is simply being able to stay and run with the player that is being guarded. In other words, footwork is the most important part of playing defense in lacrosse, just like basketball, football and many other sports. Many times at high levels of lacrosse, coaches will have their defensemen use short-sticks or no sticks at all to practice their footwork. Having a young defenseman start off with a short-stick is putting him ahead of the game.

GOALIE

The final position that must be filled on a team is goalie. A lot of times coaches will stick their absolute worst player or athlete in goal. This is okay as long as that young player wants to be in the net. This is the most important quality of a young goalie. They have to want to get in the way of shots and they have to think it is fun. If a young goalie is deathly scared of the ball or cries every time that he gets hit, it is probably time for him to try another position. A young goalie, like a beginner defensemen, should learn to catch and throw with a short-stick. Many young players try goalie when they find that they are having trouble catching and throwing. If a player cannot catch a ball that is being thrown softly to him right at his stick, how is he going to catch a ball that is being fired down by his legs?

Although it is important for young goalies to get some work in the goal with a good warm-up and in some drills, it is also important for them to learn the game of lacrosse. In any drills that do not absolutely need a goalie in net, make them get their short-stick and participate with the other players. This is a good way for the young goalie to develop his stick-work and will also keep him from getting burned out at the goalie position. (Make sure he wears full padding and not just goalie equipment when he participates in field drills.)

BEGINNER POSITION SKILLS CONCLUSION

Clearly, teaching position specific skills at an early age is not the most important thing
for a coach to do. The most important things for youth lacrosse players to learn are basic stick skills, very general concepts, and having fun with the game. Allowing everyone to play all positions is a great way to achieve these goals. The most important objective for beginners is that the game of lacrosse gets more fun as they get better with their stick. Encourage them to cradle around their house and at school. Find them a neighborhood brick wall for them to throw against where they won’t get in trouble. They will quickly learn that the game is much more fun when the ball is in the air and in their sticks rather than being on the ground the whole time. They will also have the opportunity to pick whatever position they want when they get older because they will have a solid foundation of fundamental stick skills. The good thing about lacrosse is that you do not have to be 6’4”, weigh 235 pounds, and run a 4.4 second forty-yard dash to be a great player. However, you do need polished stick skills to be a standout player.