

The Ten Commandments of Stonethrowers Lacrosse*

Rule One: ***Every player on the team must be able to catch, throw and shoot left-handed and right handed.***

Start on day one. Practice with both hands in practice and on your own. You are not going to wake magically one morning with a left hand you have to practice it.

Rule Two: ***The more time you play with your stick perpendicular to the ground, as opposed to parallel to the ground, the better players you will become.***

This sounds simple, but gets complicated quickly. The premise is that if you keep your stick perpendicular to the ground, you can protect the full length of your stick with your body. To the contrary, as the stick becomes parallel to the ground, the head and butt are exposed and is susceptible to a number of checks. Play with the crosse next to your head (in the box position) and the shaft perpendicular to the ground and protect it with your body at all times. The second you catch the ball, not matter where it is thrown, adjust the stick so that the crosse is in the box position. The moment you scoop a ground ball, get the stick in the box position.

Rule Three: ***Move the ball.***

The less time the ball spends in your stick the better. You have to be able to move the ball from the defensive end of the field into the goal in a matter of seconds. The only way to do that is to force yourself to move the ball (which can always travel faster than any one player's two feet) all the time.

Rule Four: ***Move the ball off the ground.***

This is a corollary to Rule 3 and will improve our transition game dramatically. The premise is simple: as teams scramble for loose balls, they get spread out and pulled out of position. If we pick up a loose ball, we can capitalize on the opponent's misalignment only if we can move the ball before the opponent has time to readjust. You should throw every ground ball you scoop to the first open man on our team that you see – whether behind, across or in front. Ideally, our players off the ball are moving into strategic positions and surveying the game situations as our teammate scrambles for the loose ball.

Rule Five: ***Move without the ball.***

All lacrosse players, fans and referees have a tendency, if not a habit, of watching the player with the ball. With everyone watching the man with the ball, it's difficult for him to do anything without drawing attention. The players off the ball, however, are to some extent disregarded. Thus, it's easier for a player to get into shooting, catching or scooping position when he does not have the ball. Moreover, every player plays without the ball 90% of the season. It is imperative that we make the most of this time. When you do not have the ball you should be moving and analyzing so that the second you receive the ball, you can comply with Rule 3: MOVE THE BALL.

Rule Six: ***Move to the ball.***

This may be the most important and least observed of all the rules. A player who is open and wants a pass should always move to the ball. This is particularly true when you are (1) open on the backside, (2) not being watched by a defenseman in front of him and (3) receiving a pass to shoot.

Rule Seven: Look at a spot behind the goalie as you shoot.

A lacrosse player who shoots without thinking or looking at the goal will only score about 10% of his shots. You must have a shooting theory, and you must look at the goal as you shoot. If you are in possession of the ball in shooting position, you are usually being pressured, if not run down. You simply do not have time to adequately evaluate the goalie's positioning and make an accurate shot. A spot behind the goalie is a spot out of the goalie's momentum. Shoot at a spot in the opposite direction that the goalie is moving (i.e. behind the goalie). If the goalie is moving to his right, a shot to his right is in his flow. A shot to his left, however, forces him to change his momentum and go the other way. This is a difficult task for the best goalie. Also, train yourself to watch your shot until it hits the net. This will help you stay focused on the goal, the goalie and the shot.

Rule Eight: Shoot with a quick release.

If you have the ball in shooting position, you will be receiving defensive pressure. Too many players develop the habit of twirling their sticks, taking two steps, or winding up before they shoot. This means they are usually shooting under defensive pressure and the goalie has time to pick up the ball. You need to turn your body as you catch the ball so that you are prepared to shoot the moment you catch it.

Rule Nine: Play defense like a boxer boxes.

Too many players stop moving their feet when they make a check or make a check and leave their sticks in a place where it does them not good. A boxer does not box with his hands by his waist. He keeps them up, ready to punch. You should not check and stop you've got to keep moving. A boxer does not throw a punch and leave his arm extended on his opponent's nose. You should not check your opponent and leave your stick on your opponent's hip. You must check and return the stick to a checking position, so that you can check again. In short you must learn to check and reload.

Rule Ten: You do not have to take the ball away to be a good defenseman.

John Wooden taught that a defense's goals are to: (1) prevent the other team from getting a high percentage shot (especially one where a player receives the ball to shoot moving towards the basket, rather than away from it) (2) gain possession of loose balls and (3) begin the transition game. The exact same goals are applicable to lacrosse, yet too many players measure their worth by their ability to strip an opponent of the ball. While this is a valuable skill, it is by no means required. Your job is to be in position when the player you are guarding puts two hands on this stick so that you can check that player's hands. You need never strip an opponent of the ball to be great. On defense the most important skills are footwork, anticipation and hustle.