

How Can I Help My Son Practice?

We are glad you asked! Practices are going to become more frequent as the season gets going... but even with the boys getting together a few times a week we still need your help in getting them out a couple more times and going through some drills. These drills cover the very basics but they are the skills that need to be mastered to make our team practices more effective. We can't be running through plays when players can't catch and throw. Lacrosse is a game where (to use some football analogies) EVERY player needs to play quarterback, receiver, running back and defender.

So you don't play Lacrosse? It doesn't matter; these drills can be conducted with a baseball mitt. Everyone can catch and throw a ball. These drills cover some of the same fundamentals as the line drills we start every practice with do.

But before we get started a few things: ALWAYS have the players performing drills WITH gloves ON! The stick feel is different with vs. without gloves and there will never be a situation in a game or at practice when they will not have gloves on. Helmet and mouth guard are also a good idea for safety sake... cup wouldn't hurt either for that matter (getting hit by a missed catch there is an eye opening experience).

Ground Ball pickups:

Skill: Picking up a ground ball. It may sound simple but being able to quickly execute this skill is how we win games. You'll hear the coaches yelling "ground balls win games" and it's true!

Execution:

- Approach the ball at full speed. You need to explode through the ball. The player should be yelling "*BALL*" as the begin the pickup.
- Get low and get the stick low. Bend at the knees and lower the bottom hand on the stick. If you come in with the stick at too steep an angle you will not effectively scoop the ball into the stick head.
- Try to emphasize making sure the butt end (back hand is low to ground) to avoid stabbing or shoveling at the ball.
- Scoop the ball and immediately bring the head of the stick up toward the player's eyes. The entire motion should be fluid and not stabbing.
- The player goes back to an upright position and is immediately cradling the ball with the stick near vertical and the stick head (with the ball) near the players head (the box).
- Once the player has the ball and is running with it in the cradle he should yell "*RELEASE*".



Words of Encouragement:

- "Ground Balls win Games!"
- "Explode through the ball"
- They should be yelling (loudly) BALL and RELEASE as this exercise is being carried out. Parents Note: Have them explain to you why they are yelling these terms.
- "Stick Protection" Get that stick head up near your helmet. When you have it out to the side opponents will slash at it and that ball will be lost before you know it. If the stick head is near the helmet opponents cannot slash at it since it will draw a penalty.
- "Two hands on the stick" no one handed pickups (no matter how cool they look).

Cradling:

Skill: Keeping the ball in the stick... it may sound easy but it's not. Cradling can be one of the most difficult essential skills to master.

Execution:

- The Grip: The bottom hand should be loosely gripped around the shaft while the upper hand will be near the head of the stick and will provide the cradling motion.
- The motion will come from the wrist of the upper hand and that motion should be controlled and smooth. If the ball is jumping around in the pocket the wrist is moving too quickly or the range of motion is too great. If the ball is just falling out the motion may be too slow.
- The wrist motion is to curl it toward the body and then extend it away from the body while the bottom hand is loosely grabbing the shaft and controlling the angle of the stick. The stick should be able to turn freely in the bottom hand... in fact, you can (and should) cradle using only one hand.
- Keep your head up, keep the stick near vertical and keep it close in near your body.
- Practice cradling stationary and running at full speed. Practice in both hands, practice with one hand, practice switching hands stationary, running and while executing a dodge.



Words of Encouragement:

- "Stick Protection" Get that stick head up near your helmet. When you have it out to the side opponents will slash at it and that ball will be lost before you know it. If the stick head is near the helmet opponents cannot slash at it since it will draw a penalty.
- "Have you cradled your stick today?" In all seriousness, this is something the kids can do alone and something they can do EVERY day for a few minutes (or 10-15 😊).
- "Lacrosse is a game of possession" if you can't hold onto the ball you can't play effectively.

Passing and Catching:

Skill: Learning to pass and catch efficiently.

Execution:

- The two previous drills could have been done by the players alone... but getting out there with them only helps encourage them and keep them motivated. For the passing and catching drills you will need to get involved. As I mentioned earlier you can get your own stick or use a baseball mitt.
- NOTE: You can buy a LAX Wall (pitch-back return wall) or take your son up to one of the schools that has a large brick wall to pass and catch against. LAX walls are not cheap but Play-it-Again sports may have a used one or you may be able to find one in Bargain news (being sold by a family whose son has gone on to college with a full lacrosse scholarship). But when it's all said and done the best and cheapest method is to get out and practice with our son.
- By now I hope your son knows the technique of how to throw so I'll only cover a few fundamentals here: The top hand is grabbing the shaft near the head and the bottom hand is near the butt of the stick. Your chest/front side should be almost square to the target when you are releasing the ball. You want to "throw from the box" so the head of the stick should be near the players head (the box is the area around the head). The throwing motion is to push the top hand forward in the direction of the

pass while pulling the bottom hand back (providing the power for the pass). That bottom hand will act as a hinge and will move back in toward the body. As in throwing a ball you will step forward with the opposite foot (left foot if passing righty). Finish the pass by following through.



- Emphasize the follow through... many of our kids are pushing the ball and not passing the ball (this is one of the biggest problems we need to overcome).
- Catch by giving a target to the person passing. That target should be "in the box" slightly forward of the players head and off to the right (or left). As the ball comes into the head bring the stick back slightly to cushion the catch and rotate the shoulders slightly toward the side the ball is on. This will put the player into a position to cradle, pass, dodge or shoot. The player should be shouting (loud) "Here's your help"

The Drill:

- This drill we do as a line drill at almost every practice and doing it one-on-one is possible. The idea is to get the player's proficient at using both hands. The sequence will be to catch with one hand (let's say right). After the catch, switch hands and throw lefty. KEEP the STICK in the LEFT HAND! Receive the next pass (throw) lefty and switch to the right side and throw right. Repeat...
- The switch is shown below but the basics are to keep the stick head in the box. Turn the head toward your face and bring up that lower hand while almost simultaneously dropping the upper hand. As this motion is carried out the stick will change hands and you should be ready to pass or cradle from the opposite side.



Words of Encouragement:

- "Pass from the box"
- Switch hands. If right becomes good go only left for a while to change things up.
- "Here's your help" The player needs to be shouting this. If you are playing catch you also need to be shouting this so the player gets accustomed to hearing it and realizing it means someone is open for a pass.
- Pass "on a rope". The passes don't need to be shots (and shouldn't be) but they need to be straight and made with a purpose. No lolly-pop lobs.
- Follow Through! Pass the ball; don't push it out of the stick head.
- All passes should be made "stick side" to the person receiving it. If you are playing catch hold the glove to either side of your body and have your son hit that glove.
- Make up games to keep it interesting. See how many consecutive catch/passes you can do without missing, go all lefty or all right, have them catch, execute a V-Cut and then return the pass.

Dodges:

Skill: The dodge is a quick movement by a player to get to open space, attack toward the goal or shake a defender.

Execution:

- There are a few dodges we have taught the players and typing them out will take more time than I have right now... so for now I would suggest asking your son

about them and have them explain them to you and practice a few on you. In the next week or so I'll post some examples.

So until next time... get out and practice!