

# Lacrosse Tryout Secrets!

Picking the best team from your tryouts!

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The cuts can be tough; you have to make a decision between a tough, agile defender and a playmaking attacker with a little bit of an edge. Tryouts are one of the most difficult times being a coach – you have to decide the athletic futures of some of the players that are coming out for your team.

Further, what makes this decision so demanding is that the players you select now are going to be the players that make up your team for the course of the season. This is for all of the marbles. You may not get a chance to change your roster until next season.

That's why it is important to do it properly now!

**Lacrosse Tryout Secrets** is designed to help take some of the gamble and guesswork out of selecting players for your team. No one ever really knows what kind of potential a player will actually have on a team, but our system helps you eliminate many of the intangibles.

To help you along in the selection of your team, I have provided the following resources:

- A strategy on choosing the right players for your team and the characteristics that make great team players.
- A **Selection Matrix** that is going to help you decide which players have to go and which players to keep. It also gives you an opportunity to provide players who are on the cusp, a little coaching direction to help them over the top.
- In the spirit of **Lacrosse Drills and Practice Plan**, I have included a few different practice plans that you can use for your tryout camps.

Coaching isn't easy – especially at tryout time. You have to end up crushing a few dreams while making others come true. This plan is going to aid you in making the best overall decision for your team.

**Best of Luck!**

## Building Your Team

OK, how many players? This is subjective in many cases, but I can offer you a few ideas on coming up with the numbers on your team. You need 10 players on the field at any one time in lacrosse, so you need to keep that in mind.

- How many players came out to tryouts
- How many goalies will you carry, and will they play 'out' when not playing goal?
- How many players do you want on your roster that are 'projects' and you are building for future years?
- Is your team reliable in making practices and games?

Taking into account all of these questions, I would suggest that a good sized team is between 17 and 20 players. If you have too many, then everybody is always splitting playing time (which no one really likes), and if you have too few players, then you risk not having enough to play. Players aren't always the most reliable, and other things like vacations, homework, and other occasions get in the way of lacrosse – leaving you short handed.

## Documenting the tryouts

Many teams have attempted to equalize the playing field and have adopted a strict 'documentation' process for the coaches to follow. This attempts to ensure that everyone gets a fair shake on the field during the tryouts, and forces the coaches to be accountable. Why did you make the choice to cut one player and keep another?

It will all be down in the documentation. That's why I have come up with the **Selection Matrix** – it provides a great opportunity for you to evaluate the players that have come out for tryouts – and it provides you with the necessary documentation to make sure you are selecting the right players.

## The Team Selection Matrix

I have put together a system that allows the coach to make fact-based decisions on their team. Here's how this system works:

- List all of the tryout players from top to bottom on the Matrix
- Decide on the 3 or 5 most important selection criteria for your team (I have examples below)
- Apply a different weighting to the selection criteria, based on what you think are the most important traits.

- Each criteria is scored between one and 10. These scores are multiplied by the weighting percentage.
- The scores after the weighting will be added together to come up with a final tally that is used to choose the team.

You may come up with different selection criteria on your own, but here are three areas you can start with:

- Player skills and positions
- Attitude and coachability
- Athleticism and potential

## **Players and their positions**

In lacrosse, you will have your skill players and your role players and you are going to have to decide which ones are going to make up your team. You will also need to figure out how you want to mix your lines, and what combinations are working in practices.

Sometimes ball control, shooting or defending talent is apparent, but the actual scoring ability is a little lacking. Or, it might be the other way around – your team has great touch around the net, but they aren't the best transition team. This is when you need to make different decisions to field the top 10 players on your team that are going to give you a chance to win.

I have also included a short piece on what you might want to look for in each position player on your team. This is just a guideline and may not apply to your coaching philosophy.

### **Attackers:**

Your attackers are going to be stuck down at the other end, waiting for the transition game to take place – from defender to midfielder to attacker.

The attacker's primary responsibility is to score goals. They need to put pressure on the other teams defenders in order to create turnovers and generate offensive chances.

The attackers need to have one major thing – aggressiveness and scoring touch. They need to be willing to get into the action to try and score the goals that their team relies upon to win.

A good shot, exceptional passing, and quickness are good traits to have.

## **Midfielders**

The midfielder is the transition player that a team relies upon to help on the defensive side of the ball, but then to get the ball to the attackers in their zone. Because of the amount of movement between the different zones that takes place, your midfielders should be some of your most conditioned athletes.

They should be good, quick passers, with a little bit of an offensive edge – to help the attackers in the offensive zone when the time comes.

## **Defenders:**

Once again, you are going to need a combination of player types here as well. You want a few big, lumbering defenseman to clear out the front of the net and to absorb the attack of the oncoming attackers. But, you also want to balance it out with a couple of skilled players that can move the puck up from the defensive zone, and use great passing skills to get it to the midfield.

The defenders need to have a keen sense of where the ball is in the offensive zone. They also need to be aggressive – in order to match the aggression of the opponent's attackers. Fighting for the ball in the defensive zone is going to be a challenge on the best of times.

So, when you are selecting your defense, you may have to give up some size for a little bit of skill. It would be a big bonus if you could find a defenseman or two with a combination of both.

## **Goaltenders:**

My impulse response would be to say that you want anyone that can consistently stop the ball. But really it is much more than that. First, size can be important. If you want a goalie that can cover a great deal of the net, you don't want the pint sized player with cat like reflexes. But, if you don't want a goalie that can't make it from post to post a quick pass, then you need someone that can.

Skills I think are essential for goalies (that make the decision easier) are:

- Rebound control or shot deflection
- Recovery skills (rebounds and tips)
- Communication skills (especially with their defenders and the midfielders)
- Concentration on the game

Your goaltender is the last line of defense on your team and ultimately you want someone that is going to give you the best chance to win on a given night.

**Note:** In my selection Matrix, I have weighted players and skills as 60%

## **Attitude and coachability**

If I am the coach this is one area that I place a great deal of importance on. While you can have a player with average skill and a great attitude – and they can improve their skills with practice, the player with good skill and a bad attitude is hard to change. That's why I might lean towards players with good attitudes.

A good attitude sets an example for the rest of the players on the team. The best players usually have the best attitudes. It is that simple.

Since lacrosse is a team sport, everyone needs to be working together when they are at the rink. If you have a few players who think they are above the team, or they don't need to put out the same effort as other players on the team, they can affect an entire lineup.

You can select players who have a questionable attitude in the hopes that the others with a good attitude will sway them. You can also keep a close eye on these players so that they don't become a distraction to the other players. A big attitude problem isn't something I would take on my team.

The players with good attitudes are great motivators for the players that do have the better skills and they can be valuable in pushing those players to greater heights.

When I am putting together my roster and I have the final positions to fill, I fill it based on attitude over skill every time. Attitude and coachability get a **30%** on my Selection Matrix.

## **Athleticism and potential**

This can be hard for some coaches to gauge, but I think it is important. All you have to do is think of the players that can fire the ball from the restraining line at blinding speeds, but can't hit the broad side of a barn. Or, the big time hitter that has hands of stone when they get the ball.

Athleticism is an important tool in determining the quality of a player. Some players have skill, but very little overall athleticism. You are going to have to do a balancing act – in my experience, there is more potential in players with excellent athleticism and lower skills than with skill and little athleticism.

Potential is a funny thing. But, identifying it can be a gold mine for a coach. Uncovered talent is all over the place, but some players need a little more coaching than others.

Every coach wants to find that diamond in the rough – so-to-speak. Especially if it is your job to find the next big star for the local feeder team. So, put some stock in potential and see if you can cultivate a new player or two every year.

I place **10%** on athleticism and potential in the selection criteria.

### **Making your selections**

Well, after the three main areas that we have talked about, you could add some more of your own to make the process more specific. But, this will get you started.

Now, following is an example of how the **Selection Matrix** works. You may alter it and adjust it, but I find that this works for me. I have included one sample matrix, and then a blank matrix that you can use for your next try out.

**Note:** The key to making the **Selection Matrix** work is if you are honest about a player's skills. Don't count anyone out unless they are really not up to par in the three skill areas. Some players may surprise you – others may not. But they all deserve the same chance. **You do want the best team, don't you?**

Player Name	Pos.	Positional skill score 1 to 10	Positional skill weighted (x60%)	Attitude Coachable 1 to 10	A and C weighted (x30%)	Athleticism and Potential 1 to 10	A and P weighted (x10%)	Total Score (all weighted scores)	Decision	Comments
Brent Young	G	6	3.6	8	2.4	3	.3	6.3	Yes	Great attitude, can work on being in shape
Arvid Kalen	D	4	2.4	5	1.5	8	.8	4.7	No	Big D, but not mobile enough
Peter Hughes	MF	9	5.4	4	1.2	6	.6	7.2	Yes	We can work on his attitude
Dave Franks	D	3	1.8	9	2.7	9	.9	5.4		Diamond in the rough?
Al Perlman	Atk	8	4.8	8	2.4	6	.6	7.8	Yes	Could be our star player
Steve Player	D	5	3.0	6	1.8	6	.6	5.4	Yes	Great transition passing
Pablo Baker	G	9	5.4	2	.6	6	.6	6.6	Yes	Poor attitude – can it change?





## Practice Plans for Tryouts

Here are three basic tryout practice plans that you can use for your lacrosse tryouts. These plans are based on the drills included in **Lacrosse Drills and Practice Plans**:

### Tryout Practice Plan #1

0 to :10 - Warm up, scoops, passes, ball control, shooting on goalies

:10 to :15 - Stretching

:15 to :20 – Warm up jog around the field

:20 to :35 – **Diagonal Passing (23)** – Passing skills are key

:35 to :40 – Water break

:40 to :50 – **Shooting Gallery (21)** – Work for shooters and goalies

:50 to 1:10 – **Perimeter pass and shoot (25)** – Great quick shooting and passing drill

1:10 to 1:20 - Conditioning

1:20 to 1:30 – **Combination drill (14)** You get a lot of different looks at players in this drill

1:30 to 1:45 – **Five on four (34)** – A good drill to see player combinations

1:45 to 2:00 – Cool down and end of tryout practice talk

## **Tryout Practice Plan #2**

**0 to :10 - Warm up, scoops, passes, ball control, shooting on goalies**

**:10 to :15 - Stretching**

**:15 to :20 – Warm up jog around the field**

**:20 to :35 – Around the world (32) – Quick passing and shooting**

**:35 to :40 – Water break**

**:40 to :50 – Slide stack drill (32) – For defensive communication**

**:50 to 1:10 – Inside out with defender (22) – Great drill for quick movement**

**1:10 to 1:20 – Scrimmage**

**1:20 to 1:30 – Conditioning**

**1:30 to 1:45 – Scrimmage – use scenarios that you might find in games**

**1:45 to 2:00 – Cool down and end of tryout practice talk**

## **Tryout Practice Plan #3**

**0 to :10 - Warm up, scoops, passes, ball control, shooting on goalies**

**:10 to :15 - Stretching**

**:15 to :20 – Warm up jog around the field**

**:20 to :35 – 3 on 2 to goal (29) – This is a great team drill**

**:35 to :40 – Water break**

**:40 to :50 – Four corner passing (20) – Great heads up drill**

**:50 to 1:10 – Four corner slide (33) – Great for communication**

**1:10 to 1:20 – Rapid Fire (24) – Good for shooting and goaltending**

**1:20 to 1:30 – Circle dodge drill (30) – works on dodges to the net**

**1:30 to 1:45 – Full field fast break (31) – Great for passing and seeing who can get the ball going down field.**

**1:45 to 1:55 – Passing triangle – (18) watch for good technique, outside catch and good ball control**

**1:55 to 2:00 – Coach wrap up and cool down**