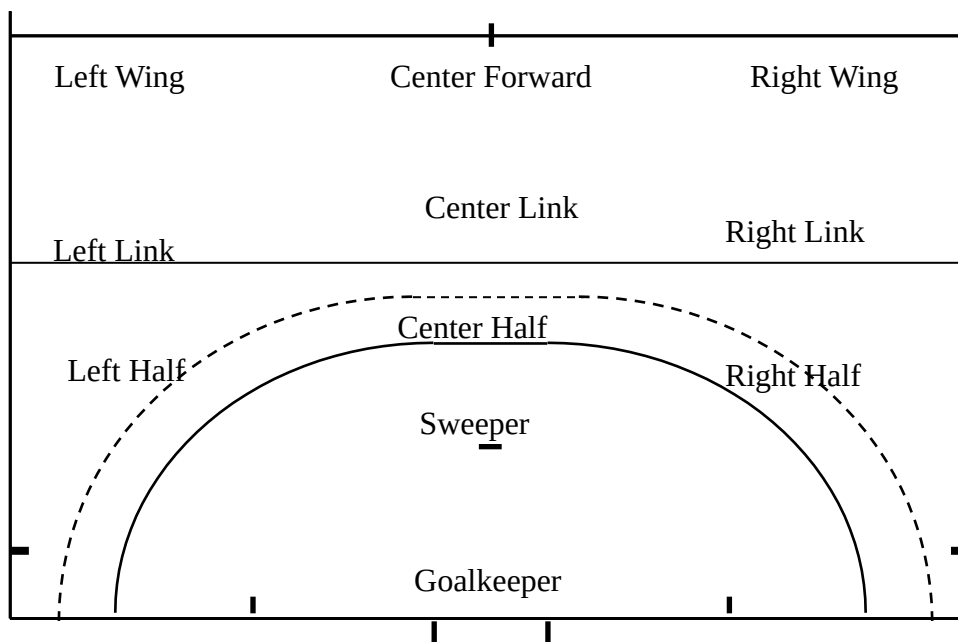


## Formations (or Systems) and Basic Tactics

There are several ways to organize the players on the field, but no system can be rigidly adhered to if a team is to be flexible enough to master all challenges that may arise in a match.

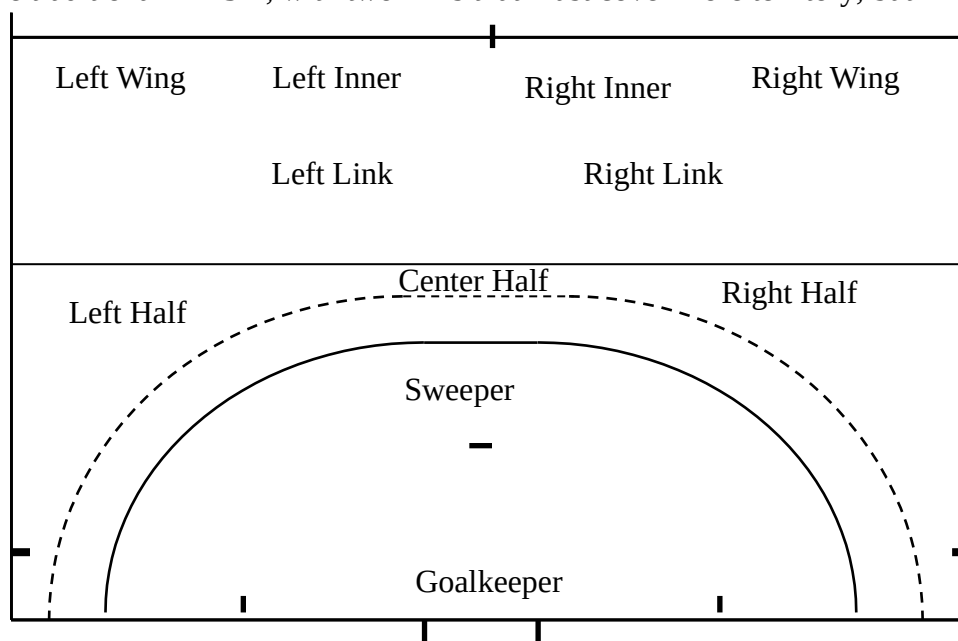


Above the modern 3-3-3-1 system is shown, with a sweeper anchoring the defense in front of the goalkeeper. Advantages of this system include an even workload demanded of all players, and a supporting player behind every one of the front nine field players (if the sweeper ranges right and left to support all three half backs).

Shown right is the traditional 4-2-3-1, with two links that must cover more territory, but providing for one more attacking player on the front line.

Many high school teams use this formation.

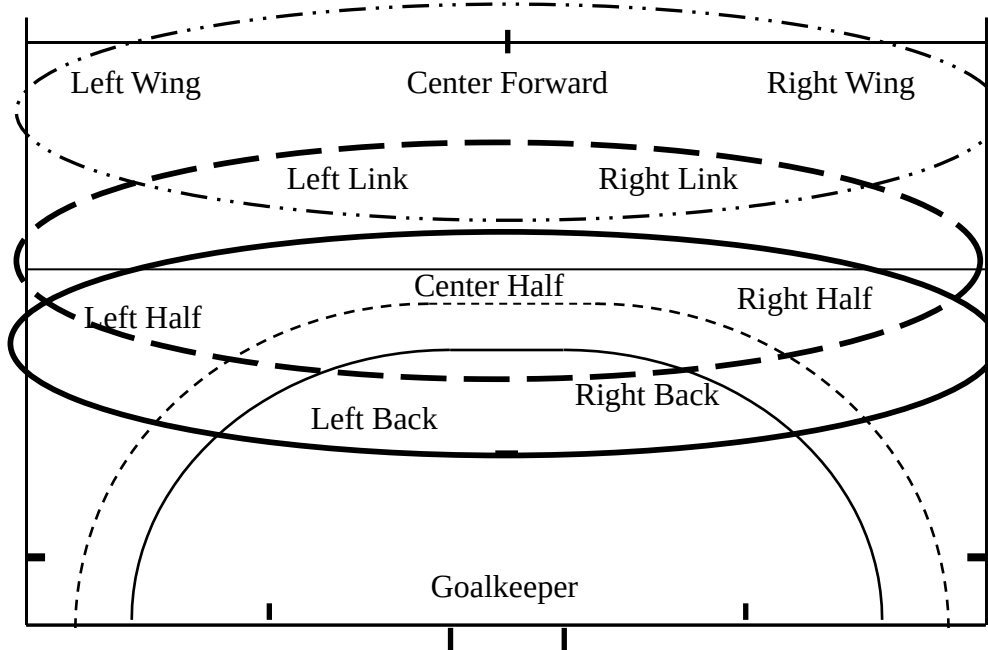
A simple variation is to have the Center Half step up between the two links and create a 4-3-2-1, but such a



formation relies heavily on good defending midfielders. A more popular variation is to have both the Center half and the Sweeper step up, creating a 4-3-3. Although this has the

drawback of reducing the number of lines of defense to only three, it does maintain the advantage of four attackers and three mid-fielders.

One of the oldest known systems is the 5-3-2, which has made a comeback in recent years in two variations: the 3-2-3-2 and the 2-3-3-2 (or 2-3-2-3 with three defenders). Since the elimination of the “off sides” rule (1996 in NCAA play and 1997 by the NFHS), the demands on the defense have increased, and this system offers one more defender than any of the systems utilizing a sweeper, or a three-player backfield supported by a three-player midfield.



In the old system, the forwards and the Links (some times called “midis” or inners) all occupied the same line. But variations on the “W” formation, with either three forwards and two links, or more recently two forwards and three links have become more popular. Advantages include: removing pressure on one defender (sweeper) to patrol alone the high percentage scoring area in the “D”, providing another defender against strong opposition, creating four lines of multiple defenders and attackers, spreading the players out on the pitch to create room for both passing and the occasional long run with the ball, and creating opportunities for the halfbacks to overlap with the forwards (or the backs to overlap with the links) to create unsettling counterattacks against the opposition’s defense.

In the old system, the forwards and the Links (some times called “midis” or inners) all occupied the same line. But variations on the “W” formation, with either three forwards and two links, or more recently two forwards and three links, are possible. Think of it as having a minimum of five attackers (see the circles above), five mid-fielders, and five defenders: that’s fifteen field players! 15 vs. 11 :-). Another twist on the 3-2-3-2 is advancing one of the two backs up to the CH position on attack, thus pushing the center half up between the two links (to center link or mid), or even higher (next to the center forward), creating a 3-3-3-1 or a 4-2-3-1 when attacking. Exploring such variations can make players more comfortable with “switching” positions briefly (in both attack and defense), and also more aware of areas on the field where their “help” may be briefly required at key moments.

We will play the 3-2-3-2-GK. Please think about the answers to these basic questions:

- Who can each of the five backfield players overlap with if they go on the attack?

- Note what passing options each player has. Draw them on the diagram for your position. After you pass to a nearby teammate, where can they then pass the ball?
  - How far do most diagonal passes go compared to most “through” passes?
  - If defenders deny a through pass to the Right Link, where can the Right Back carry the ball for a “better” through pass? Who is this “better” pass to? How about the Left Link?
  - What free hit combinations can you see that do not involve first hitting the ball forward?
  - If the opponents play a 4-2-3-1, or a 4-3-3, or a 3-3-3-1, who marks whom? No one should be without a job when the opponents have the ball. Match up, or double team.
  - Who should take most of restarts near each sideline (including long hits at the 25)?
  - Are there situations where the “wrong” person should immediately restart these balls?
  - Who should defend the sideline on a side-in by the opponents? Who should **not**? Why?
  - If you are more than one pass away from an opponent’s side-in, what space should you cover, while not losing sight of the player it is your responsibility to mark?
  - What “supporting” players might you have to “cover” for (switch with) if they get caught out of position (or overlap on attack)? Do you know all the responsibilities of those positions in case circumstances force you to play there for even a few minutes?
- You can't fake defense – KNOW what your friends must do in case you must help them.

There are many more questions, but this will get you thinking about the responsibilities and infinite possibilities within this system of play. It encourages all field players to be creative on attack, but provides for organized stability on defense.

**Note for 7-a-side play:** Drop the wings and links from the formation, and just play with the center forward and the five field players in the back field. The CF must be joined by at least two of the three halfbacks in attack (the situation will determine which two, but whomever trails, if all three cannot help on attack, must be ready to form a defensive triangle with the two remaining defenders should there be a change of possession and a counter-attack). Whenever possible, the backs should either take restarts, or make overlapping runs into space when the halfbacks restart any dead ball (also useful in full sided matches). Although full field overtime matches require more space to cover for each player, by maintaining your defensive formation the players should feel more comfortable when attacking, knowing that the defensive assignments, both individually, and in groups, are already known to all. The reality of playing with fewer players, but not wanting to weaken your defense, shows how crucial it is that every player understands how to defend not just your position, but the position of your teammates in case you find yourself in their spot during a counter attack. Both ability to execute individual defensive skills, and an understanding of how to use these skills in cooperation with your teammates are necessary if you want to play in overtime.

### **Tactics in Defense and Offense**

The strength or weakness of any system will depend on both the ability of the players to focus on their own role on the field, and their knowledge of the roles of the players around them, and also the degree to which they work together as a unit. Players must trust their teammates to do their job, while being flexible enough to switch roles with a teammate when it becomes necessary (on defense) or appropriate (on offense). This will require switching positions with teammates. Offensive examples in the 3-2-3-2 could include switching in width (e.g. the right wing and center forward swapping positions temporarily), and switching in depth (e.g. the right half overlapping with the right wing for a through ball). For this reason it is very important to understand the roles of **all** the players around you. A defensive example might have the Left Back stepping up to cover an attacker who has beaten the Center Half, while the CH recovers to the position formerly occupied by the Left Back. This

would require that the CH know what area to cover while in the LB's position, and to be comfortable working with whoever is playing Right Back. When there is a stoppage of play, or the ball has moved over midfield, the players can comfortably switch back to their original positions.

Always remember these three tactical keys to defense:

1. Deny the direct path to goal (for the ball). This may require diagonal backwards channeling of the ball before a **block tackle**, or a double team, can be executed.
2. Then deny options to move the ball sideways: the attack will look to go around the defender(s) blocking forward progress in search of a different path to goal. There are two "sideways" directions in terms of space: towards the nearest sideline (the smaller space) and towards the farthest sideline. Although as an individual defender you generally wish to protect your non-stick side, tactically you want to force the ball into the smallest space possible (towards the nearest sideline) or towards the nearest defender(s) who can help stop the ball. Use footwork to maintain the block tackle position with your stick to discourage any forward movement (dodge attempt) by the attacker. Make your stick appear "fat" to the ball: if they try to go forward you can stop the ball; if they try to go sideways, they may run out of bounds or into your teammate's block tackle.
3. Try to **stop the ball dead**. A motionless ball cannot move itself into the goal cage. Do not reflexively try to hit/sweep the ball away; just **stop it dead** -if you swing or jab at the ball in the "D" and miss, your team has a serious problem...just **STOP** the ball **DEAD!** The use of almost continuous footwork is required to maintain a block tackle in the "D" so that you can move with the ball if the opponent tries a reverse pull away from your stick- step up to their reverse pull, and maintain the block tackle even further from your goal (NEVER try a reverse pull after a block tackle in the "D"- that is towards your own defensive goal!).

Note that only when you get to #3 on this "defensive" priority list is there anything remotely close to "getting the ball." First you must contain the attack (deny rapid forward progress), then you attempt to suffocate the attack (deny, with the assistance of one or more teammates, sideways movement of the ball; preferably to the smaller lateral space), and then you can kill the attack (stop the ball dead, then, and only then, attempt to gain complete possession of the ball). Although it is true that the opponents can pass backwards if you are successful with #1 & #2, there is a limit to how far back they can pass backwards on the field. If all ten field players move as a unit, they can deny the necessary lateral ball movement (a pass or a dribble) that eventually must follow one back pass. If you and your teammates are patient, frequently you will find yourselves deep in your offensive end when the ball is finally turned over to your team. Deny space in which the attack can possess the ball, and then you will eventually be able to deny them clear possession of the ball.

The opposite of this is the attack. An attacker must always be looking for space to possess the ball. There are only three ways to maintain possession of the ball for your team:

- Pass the ball (to someone who is in a position to pass again, or who is "more open" than you are). Note: If you successfully pass to goal, you lose the ball.....but that's OK ☺
- Dribble the ball into space- in search of a pass (note #2 for the defense above). Passing on the move with a strong push is very effective here (release the pass quickly, with NO backswing, before the defense can react effectively to pressure your dribble).
- Restart (get a foul, a side-in, or a long hit). This is a last resort if the attack had clear numerical superiority during the "live" attack, since it can give the defense time to

organize and possibly increase their numbers. Although a restart is a dead ball, which is usually advantageous to the defense, with the advent of the “self-start” rule a “restart” can be only a temporary interruption in a “dribble”. This tactic can also be used if it is necessary to **change the tempo of the match** or **maintain possession** deep in the offensive end of the pitch when there are many more defenders than attackers.

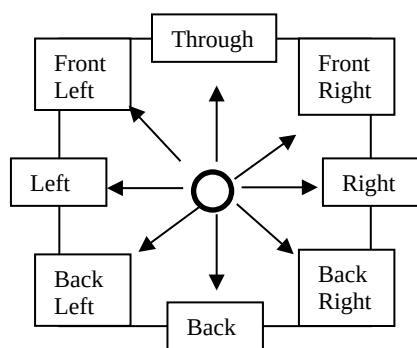
Usually two-thirds to three-quarters of your team’s attacks should be up your right side of the field, but do not neglect the left side if the defense over plays to your right. It is technically easier to attack any one player on your right- but if the opponents overplay your team’s right side, then it is tactically easier to attack on your left where there are obviously fewer defenders. If you start to attack one side of the field, and the opponents over react by running too many defenders where you move the ball, reverse the side of attack and go against the smaller number of defenders. If you do this quickly, sometimes you can create a space right up the middle of the field if some attackers react faster than their teammates when you switch fields. Remember to attack space whenever possible, regardless of the side of the field.

Let the five backfield players take as many restarts as possible, or use “small” passes back or flat to them as a “two-man restart” to quickly move the ball away from the spot the defense is pressuring and give your team **better** options: #1 and #2 above can now be executed from a different angle than where the restart was originally placed (leaving the defense little time to react to the new position of the ball). By creating more options on restarts you can make defense more complicated for your opponents. The more complicated it is, the more likely they are to make a mistake from which your team can profit.

For any restart, to hit the ball hard is merely option #1, but sometimes that is the **very best** option. If there is space to pass into, sometimes the “old-fashioned” free hit is the wisest choice (the fastest way to get the ball to, or through the space...). It is true that the self-start **allows** you to initially dribble a restart, but it does not **require** you to do so. Look and see where the opponents are. Recognize space. Find your teammates. Then make the best decision that will result in quality possession of the ball for your team.

Remember that a shot on goal is nothing more than **a pass to the back of the net**. Simply play the ball towards goal in the manner that will lead to a successful “pass” (the ball completely crossing the goal line). This may require a hard drive, but it could also be a strong push, or a lifted push, a “rainbow” aerial (over the GK), or even a dribble (the equivalent of a lay-up in basketball). Approach a shot as you would any pass to a teammate, and you will be successful more frequently inside the “D”.

### **Further Thoughts on Restarts**



Restarts are a marvelous opportunity to maintain possession of the ball. Therefore, it is curious that so many restarts result in the opponents gaining possession after only two or three touches (or sooner if you commit a foul while putting the ball into play...).

Prepare to take each restart quickly- but **do not** rush every restart. It is important to have the option to restart the ball quickly, but there is no requirement to take every single restart as fast as possible. Often restarting the ball too quickly leads to unnecessary turnovers (either poor decisions, or sloppy technique).

Make the best decision on where, how, and how fast to play the ball. Sometimes

this can be done quickly, and other times it will take several seconds. Never delay the restart to intentionally waste time. You can be carded for this (and lose possession), which is much worse than the opponents merely regaining possession.

Grab the ball with your hand if it is necessary to move it before the restart and put it down (make sure not to casually drop it or roll it to a spot -on grass, it will inevitably *roll into a hole*- and you will raise the hit, or waste time picking it up...again). **Never** use the flat side of the stick to move the ball to a teammate so they can restart the ball (the umpire can say that your touch with the stick's flat side was the restart...and allow the opponents to steal the ball while you and your teammates are "still getting ready" for the restart!). Use the round side of the stick, or your foot, to move the ball short distances to position it for the restart. Immediately put your hands together, and take your back swing as if to hit the ball hard, pointing the stick away from the direction you intend to play the ball. This preparation allows a quicker release of the ball (only a forward swing is now needed to play the ball). Also, by taking the back-swing immediately, defenders may be less likely to encroach on the five yard space prior to the restart being taken. If a push pass is desired, it is very easy to slide the right hand to the middle of the stick (from the hands together and "back" hitting position) while moving the stick towards the ball. It is possible to change your mind from a hit, to a push pass, and back to a hit. Put the appropriate pace on the ball to complete the pass to your teammate. Deliver the ball to the stick side that your teammate requires (depending on the space available to the receiver, and the proximity of opponents).

Look for the killer through ball first, and then look to the right (move your feet a little to open up the "front-right" pass first, and then if necessary, the flat-right pass...). If neither of these appears to be a good option, take the time to look left and also behind the ball (**NEVER** play the ball "back" with a **reverse-stick touch**! **You will quickly lose possession!**). By moving your feet to change the angle of your hips while looking at each possible direction to hit the ball, you prepare yourself to play the ball cleanly (and immediately) in line with your vision, and you can also encourage the defenders to move with you. If defenders do move to block up your "new" option(s) (left and/or behind), the "old" ones (through and right) may open up.

Know the eight directions you can play the ball....

- ❖ Know how to "say" them in a game ("call" for the ball – just call the four basic directions...).
- ❖ Know what the options are for your team each time you play the ball in any of these directions (where can your teammate pass after they receive the ball...).
- ❖ Share with your teammates what you see during the match. Talk to them during stoppages. No secrets!

Other tactical considerations to look for on restarts:

- ❖ Teammates who potentially can carry or pass into the "D" (only pass into the "D" to an OPEN teammate). Look to the offensive corners of the field (more space away from the defenders in front of goal...).
- ❖ Space to get the ball into (may take two passes, or a **lateral** dribble and then a pass).
- ❖ Proximity of opponents (if six defenders are five yards from a restart, a two man restart might not be a very smart option...the other four defenders cannot cover the remainder of the pitch- so look to transfer the ball away from the six: switch fields).
- ❖ Avoid going straight towards goal if that is where all the opponents are **waiting**. LOOK UP! SEE! KNOW! Do not guess....

Examples of different styles of restarts (free hit, side-in, long corner, center pass).

- ❖ Instant- through, right, left, back (push or strike the ball more than five yards).
- ❖ Self-start- dribble to space (forward ONLY if a BIG space, or into the “D”).  
Generally you want to dribble the self-start flat-right to keep the ball on your strong side, attack the opponent’s weak side, and to keep the forehand hit available as an option for a long pass. Of course, if there is space to do so, and it is a better choice, you can dribble flat-left, but remember to have a tight dribble, and keep your center of gravity low, in case you choose to make a firm pass to an open teammate, or are forced to make any sudden changes of direction by approaching defenders.
- ❖ Two-man: **one meter** push: back (for an aerial), forward (reverse touch) for drive or dribble, left (to teammate’s front stick) or right (across receiver’s body when near left sideline) for dribble, push, drive or aerial. NOTE: ONLY attempt an aerial pass if there is a minimum five meter space to lift ball clearly over opponents. If you do not **SEE** five meters between you and the nearest opponent, do NOT lift ball in their direction. ALSO: Only attempt these “little” two-man restarts outside your offensive 25-yard area (inside the 25, everyone must be five yards from the restart, including your teammates).
- ❖ Two-man: give and go (minimum three yard passes), with each player reserving the right to pass “out” or dribble, as the situation requires (available space and the reaction of the opponents). Keep your stick near the ground. This can be used inside your offensive 25 yard area IF you and your nearest teammate take care to be a minimum of five yards apart on the initial restart, and the receiver is unmarked when they step towards the initial pass (the pass can be three yards while the receiver steps the to two remaining yards to play the ball...).

What to look for **after** the first or second touch by your team (how to react to the defenders’ reactions to your team’s restart):

- 1) Do they pressure the ball? How?
  - a) Individually?
    - i) Look to pass around them, making sure to “**see**” any “**second**” defender(s) - so as not to give the ball to them. See “through” the first defender. Use X-RAY vision.
    - ii) Dodge this player, while looking for an immediate pass after the dodge: FIRST KNOW if there is a “second” defender (if you dodge into the next defender, you will lose possession). Be careful not to dodge into “tiny” spaces and run out of bounds with the ball. Know where you are on the pitch. Look up and see.
  - b) Or as a double team?
    - i) Look first for the split dodge or pass (through) if it is a “weak” double team, or go around if they are too close together.
    - ii) If the double team is solid, get the ball out of danger with a lateral or a back pass. It is crucial that your teammates also see the danger the ball is in. One player cannot pass alone. This is where the players “off” the ball need to “speak” the four basic directions (“through”, “left”, “right”, and “back”).
- 2) Do the opponents “contain” the dribble (without attempting to tackle the ball)?
  - a) Is the defense “flat” while containing (with space behind the defensive wall)?
    - i) Look for a strong split pass if there are spaces in the wall, or an aerial over the wall (this will require a back pass of five or more meters to an “open” teammate).
    - ii) If the wall is “tight”, then transfer the ball laterally so a teammate can go around the wall. It is best for the receiving teammate to pass the ball through and past the wall as the defense could chase down any attempt to dribble past the wall...
  - b) Is the defense “layered” (several lines of supporting players)?

- i) If the layers contain more than five defenders (say two rows of three), then they have overplayed that area of the field; pass back and transfer, or start with a long back-left or back-right pass (more “flat” than straight “back”...) to attack the remaining four field players...
- ii) If the layers contain five or fewer defenders, does a small flat pass, or lateral dribble, open up a split pass, or cause the defensive lines to collapse into a “flat” line (sometimes the second line will step towards the ball on a lateral dribble while the first line moves sideways)? If so, look for the strong split pass (hit the ball with your hands together), or an aerial (a back pass may be required to gain sufficient space- five meters- to safely lift the ball over the heads of any onrushing defenders).

All of these themes also occur in open play. If you can study the variations from the snapshot of a restart (whether taking the restart, or defending it), you can become a better decision maker during open play. There is no reason your team cannot use any of the passes, or passing combinations described above, anywhere on the field during play. All that is required is to match the correct technical move (skill) or combination of moves with the correct tactical situation (wherever the space is, and whatever the defense allows you to do).

### **Roles of the Players in a 3-2-3-2**

**Forwards:** Left Wing, Center Forward and Right Wing (LW, CF and RW)

- Be prepared to play defense in place of the halfback directly behind if they overlap you on attack. Be more patient on defense if covering for a back than you would at forward. Remember- when you are not on the forward line, there are fewer teammates to cover you if you fail on a tackle attempt.
- Take direction from supporting teammates on which side to force/channel the opposing attack towards in preparation for a potential double-team tackle. NOTE: When you are the “forcing” player, you will be facing the sideline more than your attacking end line, and you will NOT be the defender that initiates the block tackle- your job is to deny the lateral space to get around your teammate’s block tackle.
  - Be comfortable pressuring the ball with your stick **parallel** with the sideline when directed to by a teammate (deny lateral escape space away from the sideline). If a supporting teammate “talks” (communicates with you), the two of you can work to steer the ball carrier out of bounds, or into a double team (your supporting teammate block tackles perpendicular to the sideline, you stay close to her with your stick parallel to the sideline). Also, do not bother blocking the sideline on opposing side-ins: deny the direct path to goal first (step three or four yards away from the sideline). If the opponent can actually hit the ball into the small space you present near the sideline without it going out of bounds, your halfback can cover the sideline and have more time, and space, to cleanly stop the ball.
  - Be prepared to replace either link if you retreat to receive a flat pass and they run through for a possible return pass (a short through pass to the link, or a much longer through pass to another forward, or flat or through to the CH ☺, who suddenly runs into open space before the defense realizes what is happening...).
  - Mark the opposing defenders when not helping to double-team an opposing midfielder in possession of the ball (be perpendicular to your teammate when double-teaming; for forwards this usually means being side-on or slightly diagonal to the ball carrier when teaming up with someone other than another forward).



Forwards should be prepared to quickly take restarts **if** there is a brief opportunity for a **killer** attacking pass, a short dribble into the “D”, or a supporting player is approaching in an ideal setting for a two-man restart (a small back pass to a very open and very aware teammate- especially inside the attacking 25 yard area, where the receiving teammate can immediately play the ball into the “D”- just make sure the receiving teammate is at least five yards away on your initial touch of the restart...).

A Wing should be up field of the other two forwards (and sometimes halfway between the sidelines too) if on the far side of the field from the ball (weak-side is the non-ball side of the field). The forwards should never be “flat” for more than a few seconds.

- **Always** consider attacking the “D” with a **dribble** when in possession of the ball **inside the 25-yard line**. Only pass into the “D” when it is smart, wise, or necessary:
  - 1) Smart - superior numbers inside the “D” or a teammate in an excellent position to “pass to the back of the net”, or
  - 2) Wise - defensive pressure (a double team or second defender makes a dodge too risky), or
  - 3) Necessary: **time** pressure requires a shot or penalty corner before time expires.
- Be comfortable with over a dozen types of shots on goal, and understand both **where** and **when** is the optimal time to use each one. How many shots can you describe? List them.
- Do your best to keep the ball **“alive”** in the offensive “D”. A stationary ball is less problematic (and less stressful) for the defense. The more decisions you force the defenders to make, the more likely they are to make a mistake, which you can profit from, if you have already thought about the possibilities.
- Understand when and where to take “more” risk than a forward would “normally” take.
- Have supreme confidence in your stick work. Develop several dodges to both the right and left. Learn the four types of dribbles, and become comfortable combining them. Learn when to lift over the stick, when to dribble backwards and sideways, and how to dribble one handed for short distances. How can you change the pace of your dribble?

**Links:** Left Link and Right Link (LL and RL)

- Maintain “triangles” in attack with the forwards, and in defense with the halfbacks.
- Be **relentless** with your footwork when tackling back if you lose possession of the ball.
- Give verbal directions to the forwards on defense, when setting up potential double teams and when defending restarts. Listen to your defenders when they direct you.
- Be willing and able to run back to cover for the defense (both halfbacks, and the full backs) if they are “down” numbers on a quick change of possession.
- Be able to firmly push the ball (left, right **and** straight forward) off either foot when dribbling. Velocity (from hitting the ball) is often the LEAST important element in a successful pass. Minimizing the release time (eliminating any backswing) is key.
- Be able to quickly dribble off in any of the eight directions of the “Australian X”.
- Recognize opportunities to run ahead of the forwards to receive through passes.
- Use the halfbacks for quick two-man restarts when the opponents are stopping restarts.
- Encourage the halfbacks to consistently be an integral part of the offense.
- Be aware of the tempo of the match, and when to increase or decrease the tempo to your team’s advantage. Also be aware of the time remaining (two-minute drill...).

### Halfbacks: Left Half, Center Half and Right Half (LH, CH, and RH)

- Help organize the forwards and links to deny the path directly to goal (especially when the play is “live”- e.g. do not help organize your teammates only on restarts).  
Verbal communication is much more important to successful defense than on offense.
- Be patient when pressuring the ball. **Drop step** RIGHT and then **STEP LEFT** to protect your non-stick side in almost all defensive situations.
- Hold the middle and work closely with the fullbacks (Center Half).
- Play defense with your feet positioned outside the “D” whenever possible (reduces unnecessary penalty corners). Only stand in the “D” when marking, or required to.
- Stop almost all balls **completely dead** inside the “D”. This is extremely important. Then look for the most “open” sideline to move the ball towards.
- Cover your sideline on opposing side-ins (outside halfbacks).
- **Outside** (or **Wing**) halfbacks: Take, or receive, all side-ins and long corners not **immediately** taken by forwards or links. Be prepared to receive quick back passes from the attack as restarts (you can receive the ball away from the sideline, and then drive the ball up field much more successfully than someone on the sideline can).
- Take as many of the restarts not taken by the two full backs as possible, including restarts inside the offensive 25-yard area. Join the fullbacks in two-man restarts when possible (for give-and-go plays).
- If a quick restart is not prudent, still have hands together and back swing completed **before** scanning the field for a place to play the ball (it is infinitely **faster** and **easier** to slide your hands apart and bring the stick head down to push the ball from a “hitting” position than it is to successfully get from “push” to “hit”).
- Look for opportunities to overlap with your forward (especially the RW and CF).
- Have confidence in your ability to dribble quickly; either to get the ball safely out of your defensive “D” before passing, or to attack the offensive “D” when close to the offensive 25-yard line. Half backs who dribble into the “D” are almost always unmarked, and therefore open for your favorite pass- to the back of the goal cage 😊
- Sneak into the top of the “D” for long rebounds while everyone is focusing on goal-line play. A solid push pass from inside the top of the “D” can accidentally **score!** YES, defenders can, and SHOULD, occasionally score goals for their team.

### Fullbacks: Left and Right Back (LB and RB) (also called “Full Backs” or “Sweeper Backs”)

- Never let the ball pass between the two of you unless directed to do so by your GK.
- Hold the middle to mark/defend in the central part of the “D”.
- Work with the CH to deny the opponents possession inside the triangle formed by the CH, the LB and the RB. This is the most key defensive area outside the “D”.
- Play defense with your feet outside the “D” whenever possible.
- Stay off the goal line (unless marking an opponent) to avoid being an “assistant” GK.
- Be **patient** when pressuring the ball. Encourage your teammates to do the same.
- Stop almost all balls **completely dead** inside the “D”. This is **crucial** for success. A stationary ball cannot move over the goal line and into your goal. This is a true fact.
- Dribble the ball safely out of the “D” when there is no safe pass to a teammate. Often the best place to dribble is towards the nearest sideline, and sometimes even across your open goal. Just dribble with the ball tight to your stick, and move your feet quickly.
- Look for opportunities to overlap with your halfbacks and (more rarely) with your links when your team is in possession of the ball and a huge space presents itself for you

to run into unmarked. Choosing the correct times to do this can give your team a huge advantage in the match. Your sudden presence on attack can create excellent scoring opportunities for your teammates, and for YOU! Remember: do not rush your shots.

- Direct your teammates in front of you when you are near midfield or higher (out of range for the GK to communicate).
- Know whom the halfbacks and links are theoretically marking in case they are failing in their defensive responsibilities (they may need actual help, or just a helpful reminder).
- Protect your GK from stick and body contact by the opponents.
- Never panic, and do not let your teammates panic, even when defending close to your goal line.
- Be aware of the score and time remaining to tailor your risk taking to the match situation.
- When completely sure that neither your GK, nor another teammate, can legally prevent a score, calmly take a penalty stroke (kick the ball, fall on it, etc.), taking care not to risk injury to yourself (reaching for a ground ball with your hand can be dangerous when attackers swing hard at the ball).

**Goalkeeper:** Note the singular noun (GK). Since only one can play at a time, it is very important to balance “supporting the GK” against “getting in the GK’s way” (although it is not a foul to obstruct your own GK, it is quite dumb to do). The field players must fulfill their defensive role in the field, stay out of the GK’s way, and trust the GK.

- The GK has sole responsibility to mark the ball inside the “D”. This is especially true when there is a two-on-one plus the GK. Why? Explain your answer (in writing).
- Position (and constantly reposition) themselves between the ball and the goal. The GK needs **no help** doing this **unless requesting it** (they direct you to a position near goal, or you are **marking an opponent** moving near goal), **or the ball gets between the GK and the goal** (the defender can take the initiative and STOP the ball). Occasional “assistance” is very much appreciated. “Assistant” goalkeepers are not (they basically assist the opponents in scoring a lot --instead of marking one of the unmarked opponents shooting on goal).
- Verbally “call the ball” when intending to play it, or letting it pass over the end line (this “call” is as much to direct your teammates as it is to distract the attackers who may look up for the GK and away from the ball, or may give up completely trying to play the ball). Using the same verbal command for a “clear” and a “sixteen” is wise. Why?
- Direct the defense to hold the middle (deny high percentage shots), to allow a line of sight to the ball, and to mark any opponents the GK believes need company.
- Assist the defense in making good decisions with restarts.
- If appropriate restart the ball with a one-meter push with your stick when (as in indoor). This can be done near the spot the ball went out, or **anywhere** in the “D” for fouls.
- Make sure the defense is organized on defensive penalty corners (each player clearly understands their role). The GK can call the corner defense if the team has several.
- Clearly communicate **immediately** with your captain if there is a “problem” with the awarding of a goal in your “D”. The captain should be the one to approach the umpire with the question. At a minimum you are hoping the umpires will confer with each other. If the umpires agree with you, that is a bonus, but sometimes there is no justice in life. If you have been wronged, do not lose your cool. You must focus on the

next potential save or clear. You cannot change history after play restarts after a “bad” call.

- When absolutely necessary, risk a penalty stroke being called to prevent a sure goal (but try your best not to get a yellow or red card in the process).

Answer to 2-on-1 question: If the defender attempts to mark the attacker with the ball in (or near) the “D” while the GK lines up for the potential shot, who is marking the other attacker? The other attacker, who is unmarked, who can receive a pass, and have an open, un-pressured shot (while the GK is scrambling to cover the open player shooting on a new angle to goal)?

### **A Successful Player’s Approach to each Match**

There are only two things (which you have direct control over) that can go wrong in any Hockey match.

- 1) You can fail to properly execute a skill (technique): bad hit- either dangerously high or a flub, or a high stick, or a lifted push on a restart, or a bad stop that pops up into your shin pad, or swinging at a ball you should just stop, or missing the ball on a reverse pull, or not lifting an aerial clearly over the heads of opponents, etc.
- 2) You can make a bad decision (tactics): dive for a tackle when you are the last defender and outside the “D”, swing at a loose ball in the “D” (even if you hit it, it could go to an attacker in a position to shoot and score), dribble when there is a pass open, pass when there is no one open (you should have dribbled), dribble diagonally to goal when the only space open is straight to the end line, hit a ball hard to a teammate five yards away, push a ball soft to a teammate thirty yards away, attempt an aerial pass when marked tightly, shooting to the near post when the GK is already at the near post, shooting from the end line when the GK is at the near post, etc. etc.

That is all. It is either bad technique, or bad tactics. It cannot be anything else. You cannot control the opponents, the umpires, the field conditions, the weather, or your teammates (you can encourage your teammates, but you cannot control them). Therefore you must concentrate on your technique and your tactics. These are the only two areas you can improve in. These are the only two things you can work on in practice. These are the only two things you can adjust during a match. Everything else doesn’t really matter.

When something does not go correctly during a match, you must identify whether it was a technical mistake (bad skill) or a tactical mistake (a dumb idea). Then decide what would make the situation turn out better if you get a second chance. Then get on with the game. You must practice this thought process during training so it is easy, and quick, during a match. Do not worry about past mistakes in a match. There will be so many mistakes by so many players on both teams that in five or ten minutes almost everyone beside yourself will forget your previous mistake. Plus an inability on your part to focus on how to do the next “thing” in the match correctly, will lead to more mistakes on your part. Do not compound one mistake into many mistakes by obsessing about the last time something went wrong.

Every player makes mistakes in a Hockey match. They will make both types of mistakes, technical and tactical. The best players do not play a perfect game. They might not even be the “best” athletes on the field. They are the players that do more things correctly than incorrectly at key points in the match. They achieve this through mental preparation in training (quickly classifying their errors and identifying how to correct them), and also through a pre-match mental warm-up, and when necessary, employing mid-match mental

“resets”. These successful players, whom their teammates look to the most, and are the happiest players, do not strive for perfection in Hockey. Neither should you. Strive for improvement. Set achievable goals.

- 1) Mental training leading up to a match.
  - a) Routines in practice- imagine possible game situations related to drills you are doing. Classify and correct mistakes, and then move on to success. Demand success of yourself if you want to experience it.
  - b) Mental imagery on the field- can you close your eyes and “see” yourself doing a new skill or tactic correctly? This “seeing” actually improves your physical “doing”.
  - c) Mental imagery **off** the field- Before going to sleep, imagine yourself executing different skills and strategies in a match. This will also improve physical performance (the Russians have proven the actual physical benefits of “mental training”).
- 2) Match day mental activities.
  - a) Make a routine; focus on specific skills and tactics you want to use in the match.
  - b) Incorporate your routine into your physical warm-up where possible (think while stretching, jogging, etc.). Do not rush your routine, but do not delay your physical routine with your mental routine. This will take planning and practice to perfect.
  - c) Brief mental imagery session before taking the field (20-30 seconds maximum).
  - d) **Post match mental cool down** (if you do not do this part, just skip all of #2)
    - i) **Just as your muscles need to cool down to be better prepared for the next competition, so must your mind cold down too. Otherwise you risk being less focused (and less successful) the next time you pick up your stick.**
    - ii) Recount what went “right” in the match (there has to be at least one thing), and then review what, and how, you might do two or three things differently if a similar opportunity arises again. If you cannot identify one specific thing that you did “right” in the match, there is little chance that any evaluation you make of the game can improve your performance. Your evaluation must be honest, and it must recognize success, no matter how insignificant you think that success is.
- 3) Mid-match mental “resets”.
  - a) Regain your mental balance (pick your “Fortress of Solitude”) by focusing on a “home”. This “home” can be any physical object around the field. Use it as a personal “time-out” any time you need one by focusing on it for two or three seconds.
  - b) Set “tiny” goals to regain confidence and momentum when you feel mistakes are “snowballing” around you. Skill goals, as simple as “stop the ball”, “play the ball right”, and “mark the attacker with my front stick” can not only improve your individual performance, but also help position your entire team for tactical success.
  - c) Simplifying the match situation to get a handle on the game.
    - i) The same opponent has beaten me several times in a row. What one or two things can I legally do to make it less likely for that to occur again (such as step left and drop step before even contemplating a tackle attempt- that is two simple things)?
    - ii) Their best player has the ball again. Are we repeatedly trying to play our restarts in the direction of that player, or dodge them (where they steal the ball or we foul)? KYO- Know your opposition. Make your teammates look good, not theirs.
    - iii) I seem to be running into my teammates. Am I looking up? Am I communicating effectively with them? Am I aware they are trying to communicate with me?
    - iv) Does my team have possession? If not, are we desperate to get possession (know the score and time remaining)? What level of risk must I take to get the ball?
    - v) Where is the ball on the field (in relation to the nearest goal cage)? What is my number one job at this moment? Am I even standing in the right place?

- vi) If we have possession, are we winning? If yes, how can we control the tempo, and if possible possession, at the same time? If no, what is needed to create scoring chances, and what is the time pressure? How many players on my team need to pressure the ball.

Remember, Hockey is a game, and it is supposed to be fun (most of the time). Have a plan on how to approach the different situations you will encounter in Hockey, actually rehearse those plans as much as possible, and have fun playing (and hopefully you will enjoy the results too). By reviewing your plans after each match, and evaluating them in writing (in your notebook), you can improve your performance, and increase your enjoyment of the game.

### **Basic Penalty Corner Tactics**

#### **Primary Goals in Corner Defense**

1. Disrupt the first shot. Pressure subsequent shots (per your GK's directions).
2. Mark attackers tightly in the high percentage scoring area (the dotted rectangle).
3. **Stop** the ball **DEAD** when possible- **DRIBBLE** to **space** when not possible.

If you are not sure you can "clear" the ball outside the "D" to a teammate, then **dribble** to space, and if necessary, put it over the nearest sideline (the second best place to lose the ball).

#### **Special Defensive points:**

1. Fly and trail should run ALL the way to their positions with only the RIGHT hand at the end of their stick. Start with the stick high, then lower it to the ground as you approach the ball – keeping the stick in the RIGHT HAND ONLY! You will be FASTER, you will be safer (thus fearless), and most importantly, you will not screen your GK's view of the ball.
2. The defender marking the injector must prevent them from receiving a return pass.
3. Giving up another corner is better than allowing a good shot.
4. Giving up a penalty stroke is better than giving up a sure goal (make a legitimate effort to play the ball, or you will be carded (sent off), and your team will be down a player after the stroke is taken...).

#### **Primary Goals in Corner Offense** (the ball MUST leave the "D" before a shot)

Control the ball and look for an appropriate shot on goal (hit, push, or flick).

1. If no shot available, attack open space with a pass or dribble (see #1 above).
2. If no shot or open space is available, play SMART (possession) Hockey. That is....earn another corner – never shout "get a corner". Urge your teammates to maintain "Possession!"
3. Avoid taking a "bad" shot. Don't do it! Possession (another try) is infinitely better than a wasted opportunity.

#### **Special Situations** (you must be aware of these on both offense and **defense**)

1. The ball is hit directly in from OUTSIDE the "D", with an offensive tip or deflection of any height (a tip is not a "hit" on goal) inside the "D" planned for the score.
2. The ball leaves the dotted line area: the penalty corner is now "over"- meaning the first "hit" on goal can now be higher than the boards (subject to the "danger" rule).
3. The "first" shot on goal is stopped by the flier- subsequent hits on goal can now be raised higher than the goal boards.
4. When defending multiple corners in a row, consider changing who flies (she may tire a bit...).
5. If taking successive corners on attack, consider a secondary pass to beat the flier.