

How to Cradle a Lacrosse Ball

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Co-authored by **39 contributors**

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It takes practice to cradle a lacrosse ball. The technique comes very naturally to some people, while it takes a bit more time for others to get it down. The basic concept is to keep the ball in the pocket as you run using a combination of centripetal force and efficient stick positioning. Your cradling technique will vary depending on the depth of your pocket—in general, men's lacrosse rules call for deeper pockets, while women's rules enforce shallower pockets.

Things You'll Need

- ☐ Lacrosse stick
- ☐ Head with legal pocket
- ☐ Ball

Method 1 of 5: Creating a Pocket for Cradling



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1 Make sure that your pocket is deep, but not illegal. When you place a lacrosse ball into the net of your stick, it should not sink completely below the uppermost plastic rim of the pocket. If the pocket is too deep, it will be unfairly easy for you to keep the ball in your net, and your stick will violate game regulations. In a game situation, a referee will not hesitate to penalize you for a non-regulation pocket—so make a habit of checking your stick before you play. If your pocket is too deep, you can untie and adjust the strings.[1]

- For men's lacrosse: Make sure that the pocket is not too shallow. When a ball is in your pocket and you hold the stick perfectly horizontally, the ball should not be visible above the rim of the head. If the pocket is too shallow, you will not be able to control the ball when you cradle, pass, and shoot.
- For women's lacrosse: As opposed to men's lacrosse, no pocket is allowed. The pocket of the ball must protrude from the top of the wooden or plastic rim when you hold the stick horizontally. This shallow pocket rule makes it easier for other players to dislodge the ball from your control—and it also means that you will need to cradle differently to keep your ball in the stick.



2 Adjust your pocket. Untie the knots that protrude from the head where it meets the shaft. Pull the strings slightly further from the head of the stick, then retie the knots so that the pocket is shallower.

- Ask a coach or a teammate for help.
- Be aware that you may need to adjust and readjust the pocket several times until it feels right.

Method
2

Method 2 of 5: Performing Basic Cradling



1 Use your dominant hand to control the stick. Hold the shaft of the lacrosse stick just below the head. You will slide this hand up and down the shaft to catch and throw the ball—so think of your cradling position as an intermediate step between those actions.[2]



- 2 Use your non-dominant hand to loosely support the bottom end of the shaft.** You should feel the weight of the ball in the stick.^[3]
- Always cover the butt end of the stick with your bottom hand so another player cannot hit it and knock the ball out of the stick. If you leave your "tail" hanging out, you are giving another player the perfect opportunity to disarm you.



- 3 Hold your stick parallel to your body with your shaft resting near your hip and the head near your ear.** Keep your stick at a 45 to 60 degree angle with the ground, and try to keep the head of the stick about a foot in front of your face. The open side of your net should face forward.



- 4 Use your dominant hand to curl the stick toward you, then back, in one smooth rhythm.** The motion is neither full twist nor full rotation. Twist the shaft by curling your wrist while rotating the whole stick about your elbow. The centripetal force created by the rotation of the stick will keep the ball inside the pocket.^[4]
- Try to keep your technique as tight and efficient as possible. Do not cradle widely or wildly. Be conscious of how stable your cradle is, and try not to leave the head of your stick hanging for a defender to strip the ball away.



5 Practice cradling while you run. You will need to run the ball down the field at some point, so it is important that you are able to cradle in motion as well as when you are standing still. The most important aspect of running with the ball is to cradle in cadence with your natural running motion. Say you cradle at a rate of 7 times in 10 seconds, but you take another running step at a rate of 10 times in 10 second—it will be much more difficult to control the ball in the pocket. Since you'll need to be running at varying speeds, you'll need to be able to cradle at different cadences to match your body's motions.

- Make sure that whenever you run at practice, you run with your stick cradling. If you run around your neighborhood, consider cradling a lacrosse ball as you go. Practice this until running with a stick is just as natural as running without.
- At first, practice cradling while you are standing still. As you improve, try to cradle while you run. Learn to switch sides, cradle the ball one-handed, and perfect the shooting cradle to become an even more effective player.

Method 3 of 5: Switching Sides



1 Plant your feet wide and bend your knees slightly. Hold the stick with your dominant hand, near-vertically, so that the open rim of the head faces you. Leave a few inches of space between your dominant hand and the head of the stick.^[5]



2 Swing the stick low between your knees in a V-motion, and fluidly place your non-dominant hand above your dominant hand on the stick. Pull the stick up to a cradling position on your non-dominant side, letting your dominant hand slide to the butt of the stick.^[6]



3 Cradle with your non-dominant side. Work on using the same techniques you use to cradle with your dominant hand. It may feel awkward at first, but with practice it will become more natural.

- As you grow as a player, it is very important that you can switch your cradle between your dominant and non-dominant sides. If you are right-handed, for instance, you probably tend to cradle with your right hand on top and your left hand near the butt of the stick. If a defender attacks from your right side, it can be extremely useful to quickly switch your hands—you can dodge to the left or avoid the defender with your left hand on top and your right hand near the butt of the stick.^[7]

Method 4 of 5: Cradling with One Hand



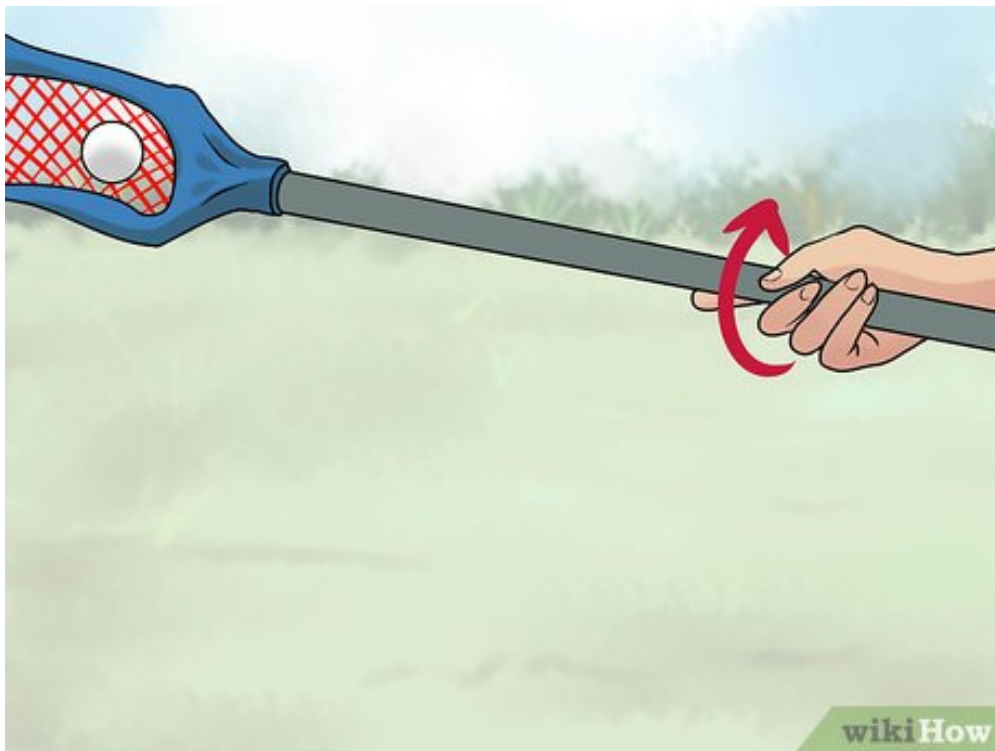
1 Position your body between the ball and the defender. One-handed cradling will allow attackmen to move at full speed and use their body to shield the ball from defenders. However, it will take longer to pass or shoot as you must move your free hand back in position before you will be able to do either.[8]



2 Grip the stick just below the head. The stick should be nearly parallel to your torso. Use your free hand to create room from the defender. Hold your arm out with your hand pointed to the ground while you run to keep defenders from getting too close.[9]

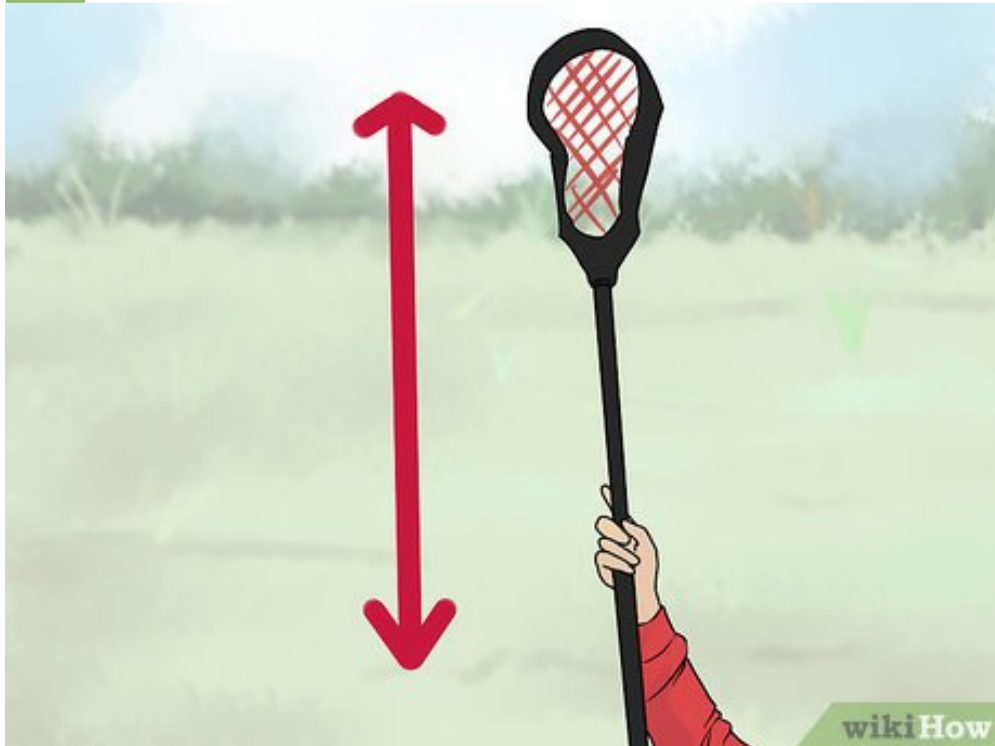


- 3** **Swing your stick arm back as your stick side leg steps forward.** Keep your elbow bent. Make sure the face of the stick head faces your chest at all times.



- 4** **Flex your wrists to keep the ball in the pocket.** The side-to-side motion generated will generate the same kind of force as the up and down motion of the two-handed cradle technique.

Method 5 of 5: Passing and Shooting the Ball



1 Turn your stick vertically to catch the ball. Slide your dominant hand up to the "throat" of the head. When the ball sails into your pocket, pull your stick back a little bit so that it doesn't bounce out.



2 Start cradling as soon as the ball hits your pocket. Bring your stick back down to its 45-60 degree cradling angle, curl the stick, and cradle close to keep the ball in the pocket while you run down the field or look for a pass.

- Practice catching—have someone throw the ball to you, or throw it to yourself against a pitch-back or brick wall.



- 3** Curl the stick out of the cradle so that the head faces straight up to throw or shoot. Slide your top hand down the shaft until it is directly above your bottom hand. [10]



- 4** Pull your stick back over your shoulder, directly out of the cradle. Whip the stick forward in the direction that you want to throw the ball. Make sure to look in the direction that you plan to throw. Practice this motion while you are standing still, then while you are running. Keep working at it until you can fluidly transition from cradling the ball to passing or shooting. [11]



Tips

- This sport can be extremely frustrating but just keep at it. You should try to practice 4 times a week for at least 20 minutes.
- Self-correct as you practice. Try to catch yourself swinging the head wildly, and always be aware of how consistently you are cradling.
- Practice picking up ground balls. Throw a few balls on the ground, lock your elbows, and scoop the ball up. Be sure to bend your knees deep and bring your stick nearly parallel to the ground to pick up the ball. Don't stop when the ball is in your stick—push through the ball, then drop your bottom hand down to the butt of the stick in order to keep the ball inside.
- Watch other experienced players cradle, and try to mimic their technique. Exaggerate their movements, at first, so that you can work on the general flow of cradling. If you are playing lacrosse on a team, watch your teammates and your coaches as they cradle. If you are new to the game, do not be embarrassed to ask other players for tips. Ask someone to watch you cradle and give you constructive criticism.
- If you do need to swing your stick widely—perhaps you are dodging an opposing player or switching your cradle to your non-dominant side—try to restore your balance as quickly as possible.
- Cradling will come naturally after a while, as you run. Don't try to force it or you will be more likely to lose the ball.
- Try holding the stick loosely with your hands, and start a slow jog with the ball in your stick. As you run, the stick should start gently rocking back and forth. What you are trying to do is simulate this motion by using your hands to control the stick.
- Girls tend to cradle differently than men because of the different sizes of the pocket. Girls tend to have more shoulder movement and tend to move their stick from one side of their head to the other side of the head.

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