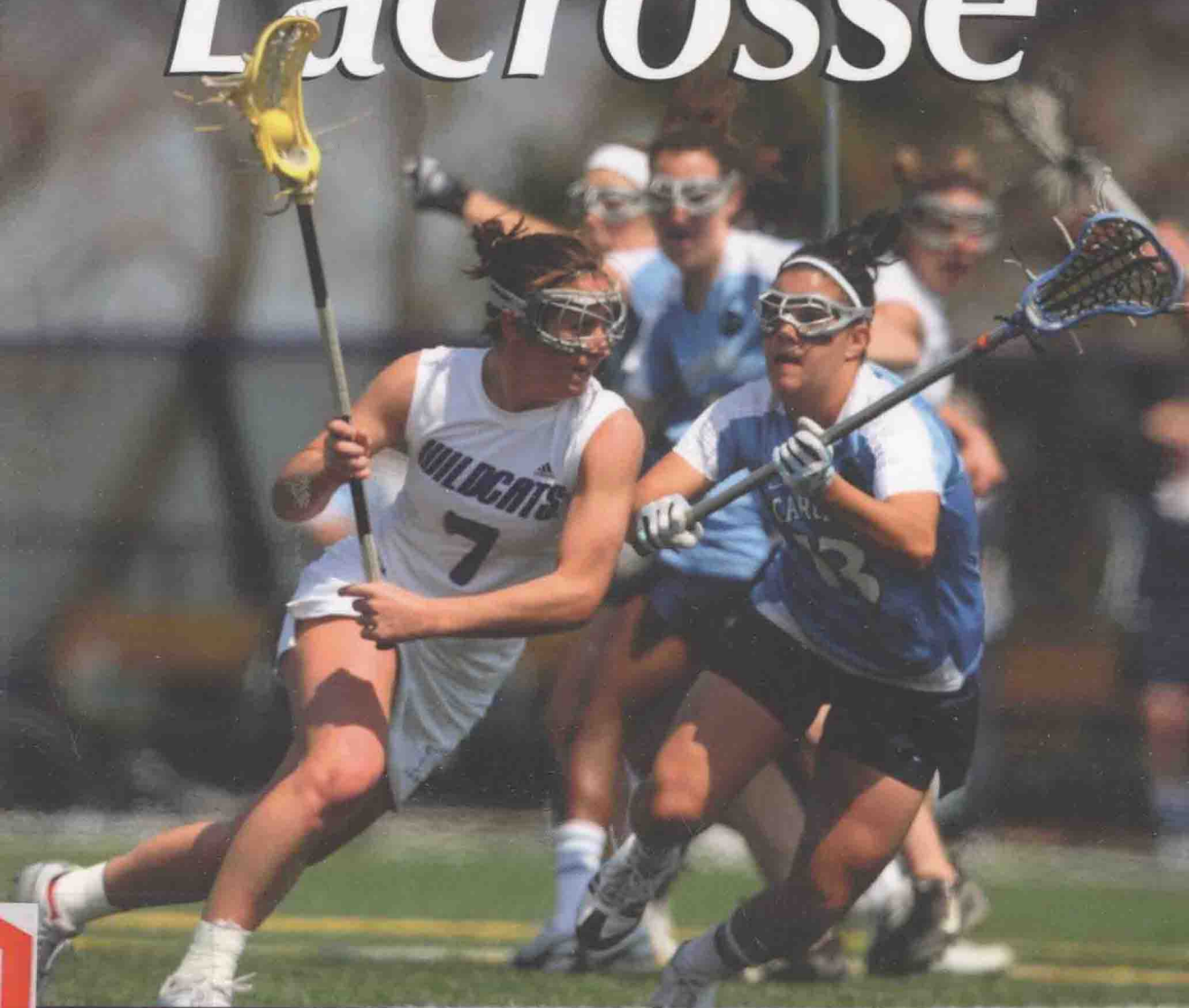


Winning Women's Lacrosse



Kelly Amonte Hiller
with Ashley Gersuk and Ann Elliott

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Human Kinetics

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To Lewie, aka The Captain



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Introduction

Attitude and Focus of a Champion

Coaches and players tend to focus on the physical components of the game of lacrosse. Physical skills—stick skills, positioning, attack and defense concepts, conditioning, and others—are certainly essential to success on the lacrosse field. Those skills are the primary focus of this book. Champions and true championship teams, though, evolve when those physical skills are coupled with a focus on the mental components of the game.

Attitude and mental focus are truly x-factors—the differences between a good team and a great team, between a good player and a great player, between making it to a championship game and winning that championship. Following are a few key ideas to help a good player become great and a good team become a championship team. Attitude and mental focus can take all physical skills to the next level.

Positive Attitude

Confidence, beginning with the individual and fostered by the coach, is one of the most fundamental attributes a player at any level can possess. Confidence is the true metric of a great player and of a great team, and it can very quickly spread from individual to team. When a player has confidence, it tends to perpetuate itself and can create a domino effect: That player is more likely to achieve or master something new, gain more confidence, and begin to project that energy on those around her. In turn, a confident player is more likely to support her teammates and foster their confidence.

A great team consists of confident individuals, from starting players to the end of the bench; individual player confidence can quickly become collective team confidence. When players or a team have confidence in themselves, they are more likely to believe in themselves and in their team. A player who believes in herself and in her team can be nearly unstoppable. A team that believes in themselves will be able to accomplish things they may have never thought possible.

It is the coach who initially sets the positive tone and continues to foster this mentality. Every coach has a style and unique approach to imparting knowledge to players. However, an overall positive coaching style is the most effective. Positive attitudes foster confidence and belief in self and in teammates, especially among female athletes.

Ultimately, however, positivity, confidence, and belief must come from players. In a game, the players have ultimate control over what happens on the field, and a teammate is one of the most influential people on the field. Positive reinforcement and encouragement from a teammate on the field can be every bit as effective as from a coach. Coaches must reinforce how essential it is for the positive attitude to be exercised and perpetuated by players. A successful team is made up of players who can maintain a positive, confident attitude throughout the natural trials of a given season.

Team Unity

Team unity evolves from players who share a common attitude and belief, something unique that defines them and sets their team apart from others. An effective way to spark team unity is to develop and define a team theme. The theme can be simple, but it will bring to mind what the team stands for. The theme has a specific and deeper meaning to players and can serve as a constant source of motivation. Players will identify with the theme as their personal and collective purpose for playing—and for playing harder. A team theme facilitates the development of common attitudes and beliefs and serves as a reminder that players are a part of a united group of individuals with a specific purpose.

Here are a few questions that will help in developing team themes:

- What are your team's core values? Outwork the opposing team? Make smart decisions on the field?

- What makes you different from every other team?
- Is there something that defines this particular season? Is your team young? Are you all veterans?
- Do you have a specific goal? Improve on last year's record? Earn a league championship?

Team themes are often secret and are something only the team understands. The theme can be in a different language, coded, or initialed—something that an outsider would not understand.

Using What You Have

Every team is different and every season is different. Personnel changes and coaches change. Players and coaches need to acknowledge from the start that changes will occur from year to year.

Each year, coaches and players need to figure out what is unique about that specific team. This year's team will be different from those in years past: Graduating players will move on, new players will join the team, and new players will step up as leaders. If coaches and players are able to pinpoint the team's uniqueness from the beginning, they will be better able to create an environment and a game plan that uses and maximizes the specific resources of the team.

With that said, certain little things can be developed and emphasized with any combination of personnel. These little things are assets that can be controlled and amount to a much greater importance: hard work, effort, 50–50 balls. Every person on the team directly controls her own effort and hard work. These little things are attributes that should be emphasized on a team regardless of any season-specific variables: skill level, experience, win–loss record, point in the season, and so on. Hard work and effort transcend personnel, skill, and experience level.

Appreciation

Above all else, the goal of lacrosse is to have fun, regardless of players' level of skill—youth, high school, collegiate, or international. A team that has fun is far more likely to achieve their potential.

A team plays a limited number of games throughout a given season, and there is only one championship game. There are far more practice and preparation hours than game-time hours, and players need to appreciate this time as well. A team that truly enjoys their time playing lacrosse will become more united, more energetic, and more determined.

Here are some keys to help create a fun and energetic team environment:

- Change up team practices. It is helpful to do new drills rather than the same ones over and over.
- Use competition to get a team energized and having fun. Nearly any drill can incorporate a competitive element. Players will get excited if they are able to scrimmage every once in a while as well.
- Listen to the team. Every team typically has captains or specific leaders; coaches should be in tune with these leaders and aware of when team members may be tired or in need of an extra spark. It is normal for a team to get tired at certain points throughout the season, and these times can provide opportunities to spend practices doing something fun or different.

Preparation for Competition

Preparation is a key to success on the lacrosse field because it gives players the tools to succeed in a game situation. The more prepared players are when they go into a game, the more familiar they will be with the elements of the game, and the more equipped they will be to respond and execute. Players will eventually reach a point at which various skills and situations are second nature to them.

Here are some key elements of preparation:

- Game speed. Practice drills need to be executed at game speed. Anything that can be done to simulate a game situation will increase players' preparation. For example, drills should be done on the move, shots should be executed at game speed, and defensive communication should have the same urgency as it would in a game. If a coach is able to create a gamelike environment in practice, players will be physically and mentally prepared to execute the same skills and concepts in the game situation.





- Repetition. Practice makes perfect. When players correctly execute the same skills and concepts over and over, they become increasingly comfortable and more likely to execute in game situations.

- Visualization. If a player can imagine executing a certain skill, concept, or game situation correctly, she will be more likely to execute it when the actual opportunity arises. For example, a shooter should visualize a situation in which she cuts through the 8-meter area, receives a pass, sights the goalie's position in the net, finds an open spot, and shoots the ball into the space for a goal. If a player has imagined this sequence numerous times, it will feel more natural when the scenario presents itself in practice and ultimately in a game.

- Extra work. A player can directly control how much extra work she puts into her game. Extra work can and will take any player's game to the next level. Playing wall ball, emphasizing fitness, and watching game film are examples of extra work that a player can do to contribute to her game. No matter how skilled a player becomes, there is unlimited potential to how much higher she can raise the bar with extra work.

These are just a few ideas and concepts. No matter whether a coach chooses to follow some of these ideas, or others, it is essential to address, foster, and emphasize ways for individuals and the team to maintain mental toughness. Doing so will make the difference between being good and being great. There is no single recipe for success in the game of lacrosse, but a positive attitude, team unity, use of team resources, appreciation, and preparation are key ingredients of success.

Key to Diagrams

A	Attacker
D	Defender
G G	Goalie
M M	Midfielder
P	Passer
S	Shooter
X or ①-⑦, 1-7	Players
Xo or  , 	Players with ball
	Player movement
	Ball movement
Numbers indicate order of movement	



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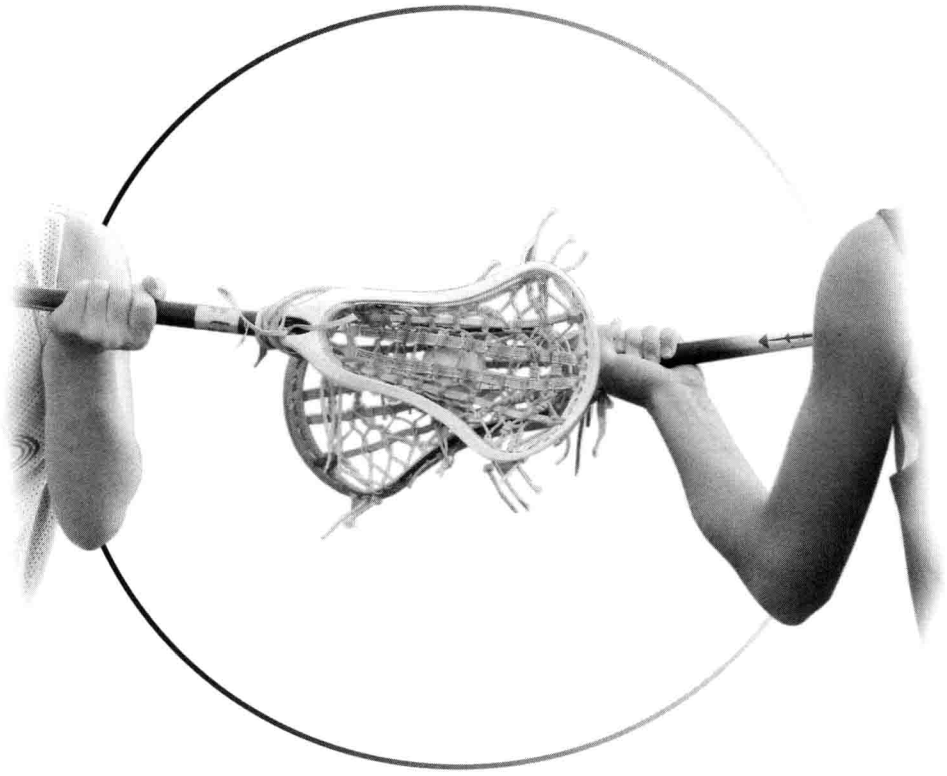
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PART I

Individual Skills

Profile of a Successful Player

A lacrosse field is broken into three zones, each of which is covered by a group of position-specific players: attackers, midfielders, defenders, and the goalkeeper. In each of the three zones, position groups possess specific and unique responsibilities. An understanding of each position and the respective zone responsibilities will set a solid foundation upon which to build an increased understanding of lacrosse as a whole. This chapter will provide an introduction to common and favorable lacrosse player characteristics, field setup, and the positions covered by each player on the field.