

4-CORNER LACROSSE OFFENSE

LACROSSE coaches are constantly exhorted to create unsettled situations and relentlessly push the ball toward the goal.

The theory is sound. Most scores come out of unsettled situations. So, if you're coaching a top team, by all means "run it down their throats."

If you're not coaching a Cornell or Maryland, however, you must ask yourself whether your players are talented enough to consistently push the ball to the goal.

If they're tyros, a fast break or free-lance offense could force them into many errors. And nothing can demoralize your defense faster than an offense that gives up the ball too quickly.

If you have that kind of offense, you had better not push the goal.

Remember, too, that lacrosse is a game of momentum. All of us have had the experience of watching it slip hopelessly away from us. At such times, even coaches with a highly polished offense may want to change strategy in order to slow the tempo.

Another unfortunate predicament we've all had to face is not having enough midfield to run with the opponents. Slowing the offense movement may be wise here, too. Basketball coaches are always trying to slow down the great running team and force them into a slower, more deliberate game.

So, obviously, although it's statistically sound to constantly push the

By **KEVIN SHEEHAN**
Asst., *Oceanside (N.Y.) High School*

goal, it may not always be the wise thing to do.

One alternative is a patterned attack, based on the "Four Corners" offense devised by basketball coach Dean Smith. His North Carolina team uses it to control the game tempo, protect a lead, and force defensive mistakes.

The lacrosse version offers the following advantages:

1. Slows the tempo of play—a must for most beginners.
2. Reduces the number of players handling the ball to four, though keeping all six men in scoring position.
3. Produces offensive movement and eliminates uncertainty by giving each player a definite assignment.
4. Enables the offense to retain possession for longer periods than with a free-flowing offense.
5. Forces opponents who'd rather play a sagging man-to-man defense into covering farther from the goal.
6. Teaches your team to anticipate and react to back-ups.
7. Creates a pattern—which presents an additional advantage: When you break the pattern, you can often catch the defense flatfooted.

The offense is simple enough to install in one day, yet complex enough to build on throughout the season. The

basic formation (Diag. 1) involves four cornermen (A1, A2, M1, and M2), plus a high and low crease men (HC and LC).

The cornermen are the most consistent stickhandlers. The high crease man should have a strong outside shot. The low crease man should meet all the requirements of a normal crease man. All six should set up in potential scoring position.

The offense starts with a pass from M1 to M2 (Diag. 1), anywhere from the restraining line to the midfield line. For safety, M1 and M2 should be moving toward each other. Though the pass need only cover five yards, it shouldn't be rushed. The players shouldn't be afraid to draw out the defense.

After passing, M1 breaks in three to four yards, as if cutting to the goal. Then he breaks down to pick A1's man. A1 cuts sharply off the pick, up to M1's original position.

M2 now passes to A1, observing the same safety precautions as in the M1-M2 pass. He then fakes a cut to the goal (for three-four yards) and sets a pick on A2's man. A2 cuts off the pick, up to M2's original position.


The pattern continues similarly with a safe pass from A1 across to A2, A1 then faking a goalward cut and picking M1's man, with M1 breaking off the pick and up to A1's former position.

With one simple pass, we've already

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generated considerable movement. Note: It's obvious that the movement requires an interchangeability between attack and mid players. To avoid confusion, we let our players know that if we lose the ball, the corners then at the restraining line and the high crease (HC) become midfielders.

This pattern can continue indefinitely. It produces movement and builds the players' confidence. But where does the "offense" come in? That depends squarely on how the defense reacts to your "Four Corners."

Vs. Man-to-Man. Against a tight man-to-man, the most obvious counter is the dodge. The pass receiver is in an excellent spot to dodge because the defender is moving toward him. If he finds an overzealous defender right on his back, he can turn and cut to the cage—a take-off on basketball's backdoor play.

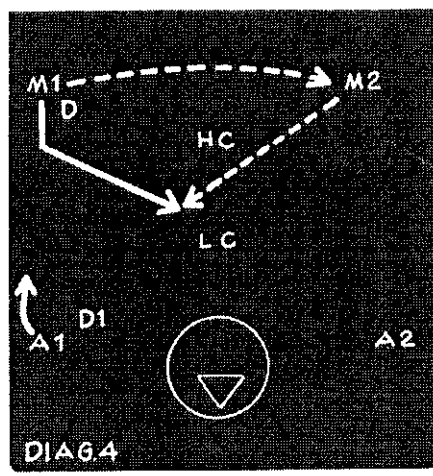
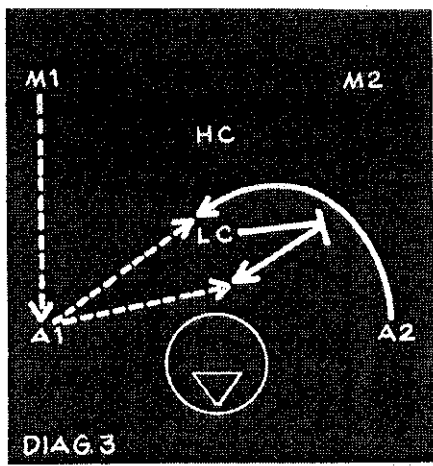
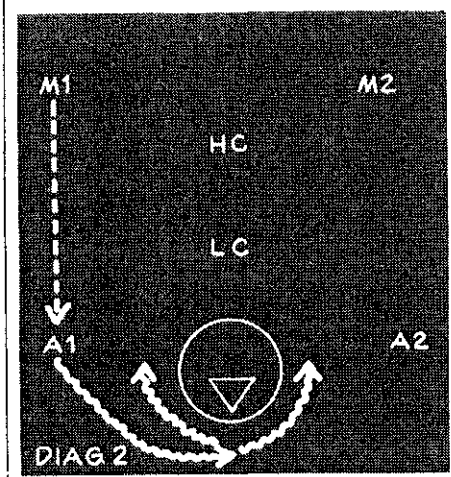
If the defense attempts to deny the pass, they become susceptible to a quick redirection of the ball into the attack area. You've now broken the pattern to your advantage. You have the element of surprise on your side.

Whenever the opponents try to deny the pass, have the man with the ball turn and pass to the near attack man. This pass will create a temporary unsettled situation.

If your attackman is a strong dodger, you can have the midfielder call "One!"—to signal a set play based on the dodge. As shown in Diag. 2, A1 receives the pass and immediately forces behind, either continuing all the way around or forcing back to the same side. He can then shoot or dump off to a teammate, depending upon the defensive reaction.

The dodge offers three excellent advantages:

1. The attackman receiving the pass



is far enough out to allow him to take a wide arc on his dodge.

2. The opponents' midfielder, who's normally the back-up man, has been pulled out to the restraining line by the flow of the offense.

3. The broken pattern can often catch the inside defender unprepared for the sudden movement. Midfielders are often caught in the defenseman's position—a spot foreign to them.

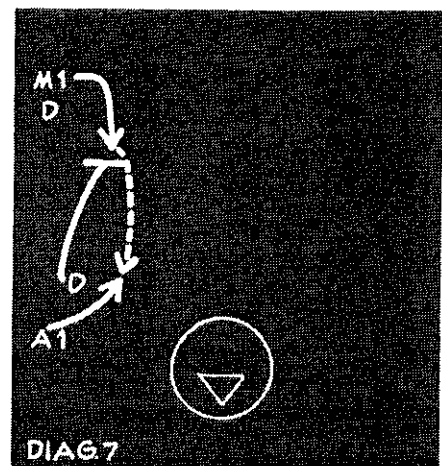
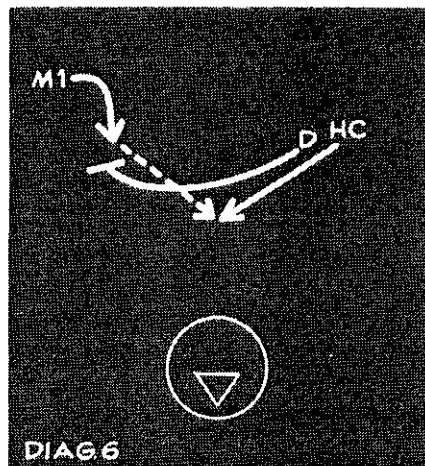
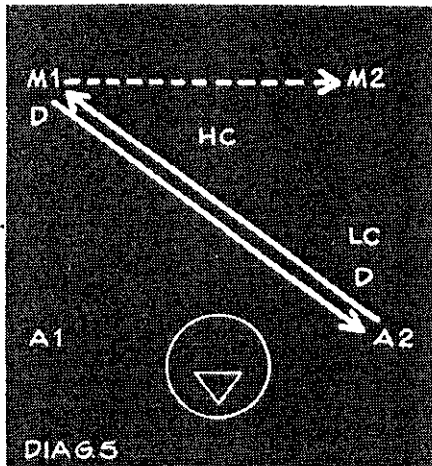
If your offense is more suited to a cutter, have your midfielder call "Two!" as a signal for a cut play. As shown in Diag. 3, the middle again passes into A1, but this time the low crease man sets a pick for far attackman A2. The latter cuts hard to the ball while LC rolls and also cuts to the ball.

The players shouldn't rush! If nothing develops, they can return to the outside exchange pattern.

Vs. a Zone. The opportunity to force a mistake is even greater against a zone. You may employ several options. The most obvious is for M1, after passing to M2, to cut three steps and break to the goal before D1 can pick him up (Diag. 4).

(Continued on page 56)

“For the experienced team, a patterned attack may restore momentum and equalize midfielders”



Another option is the opposite-corner exchange, as shown in Diag. 5. This will totally confuse the zone and leave a man open directly in front of the cage.

Until now, we've totally ignored the creasemen. Their play is vital to the offense. Normally, the high crease stays midway between the attackmen and midfielders, opposite the ball.

On a midfield dodge where the high crease's defender jumps to stop the dodge, the high crease must find the open lane and call for the ball (Diag. 6).

If the defensive back-up comes from the close defense area, the inside attack should sneak to the open lane and call for the ball. (Diag. 7).

Everyone must be alert for holes created by back-ups and become adept at finding the open lanes. This requires practice and repeated drill.

For example, you might create a quick opening by having the high crease sneak down and pick for the low crease, with the latter breaking up for the ball (Diag. 8). With practice and a little imagination, the play of the high and low crease men can make this offense go.

Summing up: The offense is simple. The options are unlimited. It can be run from the side or from behind, depending on how much you want to experiment.

By running the offense from the side (Diag. 9), you produce constant cutting in front of the goal. By running the offense with the exchange behind the goal (Diag. 10), you set up continuous crease-cutting options.

We cannot cover all the possibilities here. But once your players master the flow of the offense, they'll adapt to any changes quite easily.

If nothing else, the Four Corners will pay dividends in confidence and morale. It involves many players, not one or two, and forces them to look for and react to defensive back-up movements. Most important, it allows you to maintain possession.

Too many inexperienced teams try to freelance. The result? One player is dodging and the other five are watching. By the time the defense stops the dodger, the other players' offensive instincts have gone numb. They can't help.

For the experienced team, a patterned attack may restore momentum, equalize midfielders, or simply get more players involved in the offense. However you use or modify it, you'll find that, at one time or another, it will pay to run a pattern.

