

Tom Worstell's

First, I want to remind everyone that the game of lacrosse can be played at a high level by anyone...yes, I mean anyone! The best thing about this sport is that you can be an incredible lacrosse player whether you are big or small, tall or short. It just does not matter. Look at some of the greatest players in the game today. Mike Powell, 5'10" and 165 pounds. Mark Millon, 5'9" and 184 pounds. These are two of the best players the sport has ever seen, but certainly not the largest. This is what separates our sport from others like football and basketball. You do not have to be 6'6" and 230 pounds to be one of the best. It all comes down to what you do with what you have. Speed, agility, quickness, dexterity, coordination. Athleticism is the benchmark for greatness in lacrosse, not size.

With that said, it is all up to you. You can play lacrosse at a high level if you want to, but you have to make a decision early in your lax career to be dedicated to becoming the best lacrosse player you can be. You have to be willing to practice constantly on your own or with a friend. Going to your team's practice every day in the Spring is just not enough.

Please remember practicing on your own is very important, but practicing properly on your own is the key to success. As you can imagine, you can practice any number of lacrosse skills on your own. An example of one exercise that I firmly believe in is spending many hours throwing and catching against a wall with your weak and strong hands. This enables you to take advantage of each and every scoring, feeding, ground ball and clearing opportunity during the game. Having solid stick skills with both hands is at the core of any good lacrosse player's success. The key point to remember is that you can not expect to be a solid stick handler without putting the time in and practicing properly on your own.

With practice in mind, I have three basic tips to assist you when performing any lacrosse skill or technique. I am sure you have

heard these before, but in my eyes it is worth reiterating them because only some of you actually do these things and they are the key differentiators that could make you a great player, as opposed to just a good one. The more effective you are when you practice, the better prepared you will be in game situations. I can not stress this enough.

Tip # 1 - Use Proper Technique

The first thing to remember when you practice on your own or with a friend is make sure that you understand the specific details behind the skill that you want to work on. Always practice using the proper technique. If you do not, I guarantee that you will develop bad habits which will limit your overall potential.

When you practice, work on each phase of the technique step by step until the complete skill can be demonstrated with the

proper form and overall proper technique. Practice the technique slowly at first (even without a ball if you need to) and increase the intensity as you feel more comfortable. For example, when working on your passing skills against a wall, do not just line up in front of the wall and start throwing the ball at the wall. Do not make weak passes and goof off because all you are doing then is wasting your time. Practicing against a wall should be hard work, so treat it that way.

Start out by working hard right off the bat and concentrate on the little things first, such as keeping your feet

moving at all times and stay on the balls of your feet. Also, focus on making sure that your stick is always in your finger tips when making a pass at the wall. You should never have a bear grip on the shaft when making a pass or a shot. The shaft should at all times be rolled up in your fingertips. This enables you to be more of a threat by putting more velocity on your shots or passes. Plus, you can enhance your stick fakes (i.e. the "box fake") because the shaft is easier to control when it is out in your fingertips.



Tom demonstrates proper form when practicing against the wall. Note that he is practicing with gloves on. You should always practice wearing your gloves so that you are comfortable playing with them on in games.

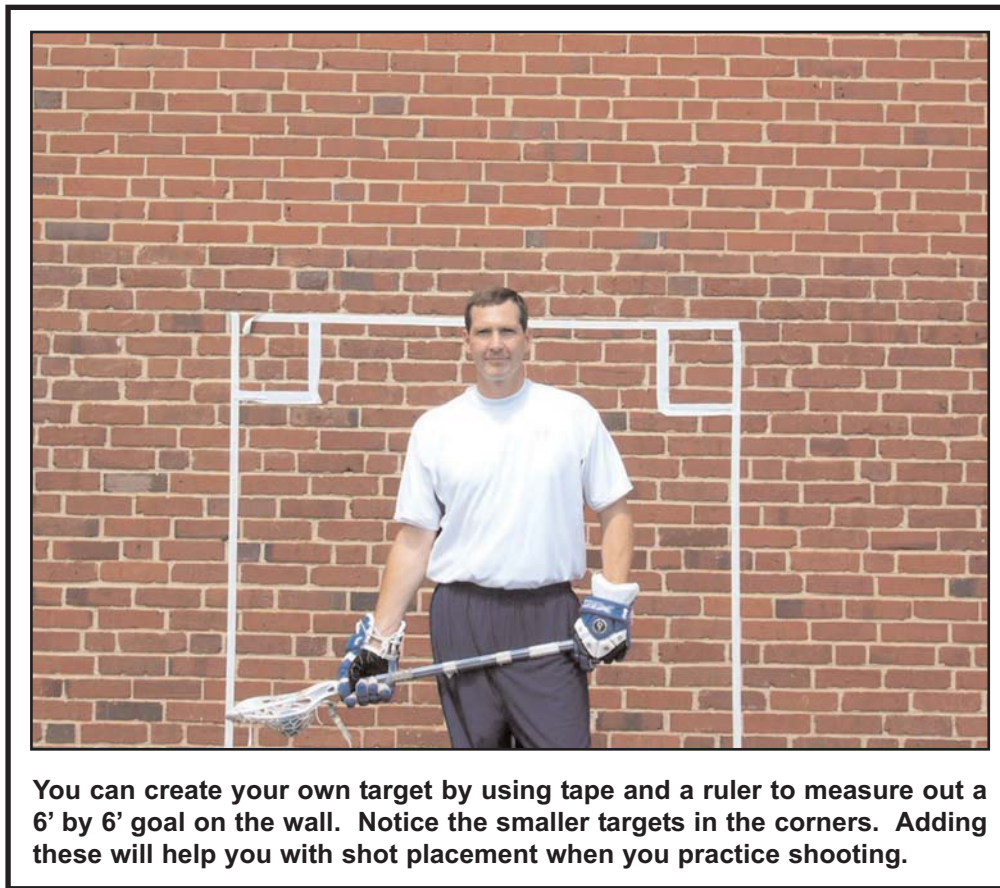
Practice Tips

Again, this is just an example of one detail within stick skill technique that you need to remember when practicing. Far too many players just go up to the wall haphazardly, throw the ball against it for 15 minutes and think that is all it takes. Remember, when you practice, focus on the details of the technique first and master them by always working hard!

Tip # 2 - Pick A Target

Another point to remember when practicing against the wall is to always pick a target to shoot at or to pass to. For example, if you are going to practice your stick skills against a brick wall, do not just walk up to the brick wall and start throwing at it randomly. Pick a specific brick out on the wall, aim for it and hit it, all the time!

You want to practice as if it were a game-time situation. Your passes should be made to a target at all times when playing in games. This target should be your teammates box area (around his stick) and nowhere else. You should apply this concept to your practice time where all of your passes or shots to the wall should be made to a specific target, in this case a single brick. Make sure your passes and shots are firm and precise. Remember, you are going to play like you practice, so make sure you practice hard and with the proper fundamentals. This is your opportunity to develop positive muscle memory.



You can create your own target by using tape and a ruler to measure out a 6' by 6' goal on the wall. Notice the smaller targets in the corners. Adding these will help you with shot placement when you practice shooting.

own against a wall will only help you if you use your weak hand in the game. You are wasting your time if you do not try to catch a pass in the game with your off stick for the first time. There are specific situations in lacrosse where you have to catch a pass on your weak side, and if you do not try it and experience it, you will not be able to help your team. This could mean scoring a goal or making the next pass with your off stick hand to a teammate who scores. This game can only be mastered if your stick skills are ambidextrous, and the only way to get there is to first put the practice time in and apply it in the game.

Any good coach would rather have you attempt to catch a pass with the proper hand (either strong or weak) in the game, even if you drop it. Once you catch one in a game with your weak hand, your confidence level will rise and you will be much more of a threat than

you were the day before you caught that pass. I can not tell you how many players I have seen over the years that practice all sorts of skills on their own (i.e. using the wall and working on their weak hand stick skills), but never have the guts to try those skills in the game. This not only hurts you individually, but it hurts your team as well. Give it a shot!

So many students these days have the potential to be great lacrosse players. If you focus on the details of the technique that you are practicing, master them and fight the temptation of just going through the motions, then the sky

is the limit! Take your game to the next level by practicing hard on your own, and use those skills in the game.

Tom is a three-time All-American at Maryland, a member of the ACC's 50th Anniversary All-Time Top 50 Team and was named the ACC Player of the Year in 1986. He is Director of the Worstell's Wall Work Lacrosse Clinics and VP of National Scouting at Lax Scout.

Tip # 3 - Apply What You Practice

All players need to keep in mind that they should not be afraid to apply what they practice to game situations. Every lacrosse player has a weak hand, some less noticeable than others, but in the game of lacrosse your goal should be to reduce the difference between your weak and strong hand stick skills. The only way to achieve this is to work on it in practice, on your own time and use it in the game.

Working on your weak hand for hours upon hours on your