

□ CHAPTER 13 □

PENALTY CORNERS

Penalty corners in attack and defence are some of the most obvious of all the set play alternatives. Many skills and movements required for set plays are relevant only for penalty corner execution. Penalty corners and your team's execution of them in attack and defence can make all the difference for your team on the scoreboard. They provide an excellent opportunity to score if you have players on the team with reliable specialist skills. A solid and reliable corner defence is worth its weight in gold too. Devote significant time and effort to thinking through and practicing your penalty corners at both ends of the field, according to the particular opposition you are facing and your team's strengths in this area. In attack, use traditional plays as well as some imagination for rebounds, passes, deflections and signals to create scoring opportunities, and plan the use of your personnel for penalty corner attacks and defence.

ATTACKING PENALTY CORNERS

Attacking penalty corners present a good opportunity to score, and you can plan for their precise execution before the game and according to the particular opposition. Make sure your penalty-corner combination practices together often and that each player works hard at getting his contribution right. Time spent on technique development for penalty-corner skills will ensure that you get a good result for this offensive move.

Your team might develop as many as 50 different attacking penalty-corner variations with the ball pushed into the field from the left or the right of the circle (as you look at it from the circle top), but it is likely you will only use a handful on a regular basis. You will increase your repertoire as you attempt to outsmart specific opponents by taking into consideration their various defensive strengths and weaknesses in combination with your attacking strengths. The premise is to keep your variations as simple as possible. The fewer moves involved in the variation, the simpler the execution and the lower the likelihood of error and wasted scoring opportunity.

The basic components of all attacking penalty corners are very similar in nature, so work hard to develop the basic skills such as pushing the ball into play, trapping and hitting at goal. If your team gets these elements right, then you will create opportunities to use your more complicated variations that develop from this solid foundation. Also, in most situations you will have two or more field players in defence (covering the central area of the field) plus the goalkeeper as shown in figure 13.1.

The push-out and the trap components provide the foundation of almost every penalty-corner variation. Get these components right, and you will give your team the best possible chance to convert attacking opportunities.

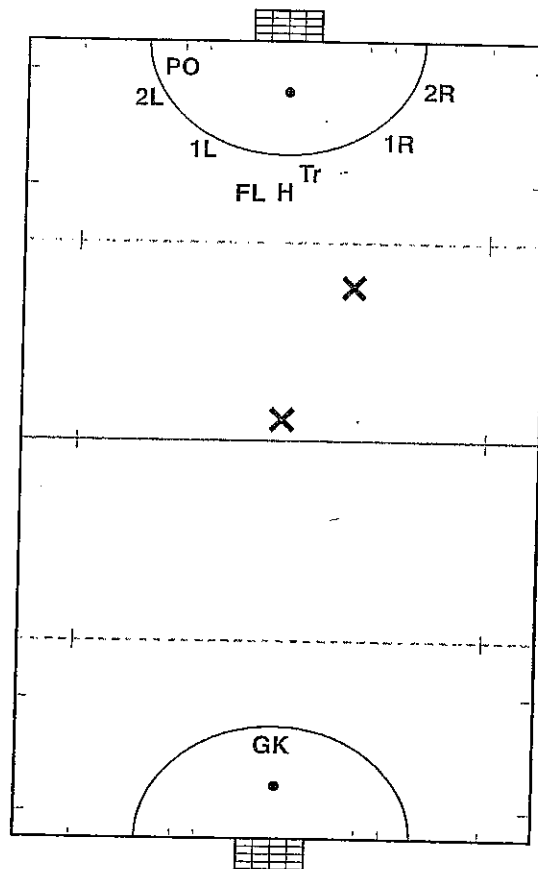


Figure 13.1 Basic positions for penalty corners.

The Push-Out

This seems a relatively simple, closed skill because very few physical variables can interfere with the execution. However, it is one of the most critical skills because it brings the ball into play and gives your team a chance to get the rest of the variation right. It is a thankless task because very rarely will you get direct recognition for a good push-out, but when you make a mistake you will certainly hear about it!

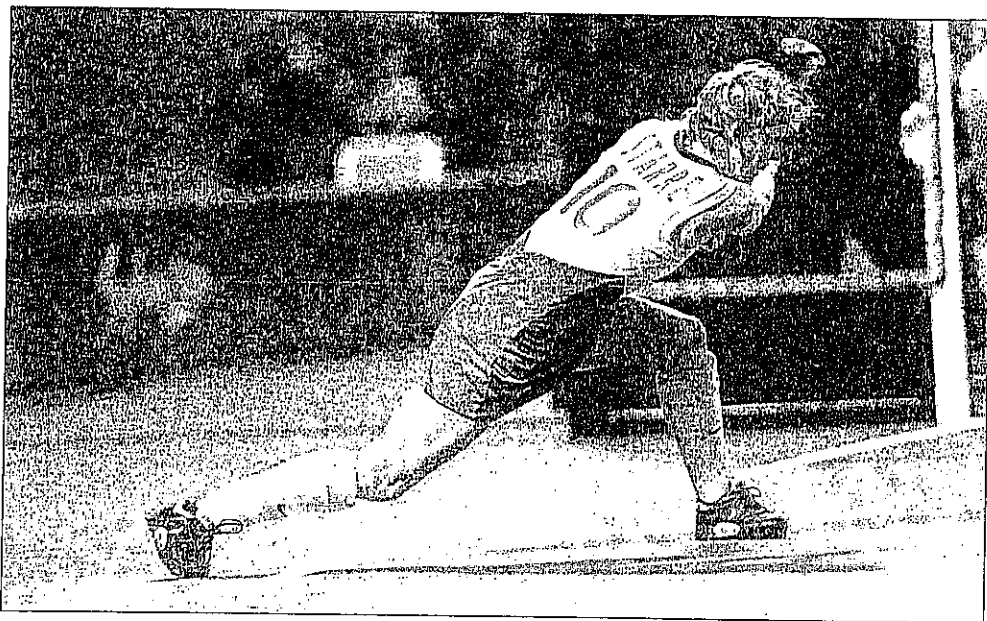
Once you have pushed the ball infield, your job is not done! Your next role is to make good position to pounce on a rebound or receive a pass for a deflection or to make another pass to a team-mate. Similarly, your role might be to lead and call for the ball as if to receive a pass, and in so doing distract the defenders. The ability to implement all of these roles for the 'pusher-outer' is important when it comes to maximising the outcome of the penalty

corner. Slick execution of this skill sets the tone for the rest of the variation. You need to be able to disguise the direction of the push-out according to the selected variation.

The push-out is not the traditional 'push' pushing technique that you would use in general play. The ball has to stay in the crook of the stick, and the stick face is pointing down towards the ground for as long as possible. It is more of a drag from behind than the typical pushing technique.

Kate Starre, two-time Olympic gold medallist with the Hockeyroos and now a coach in the United States, is a player who was excellent at the push-out in these plays. She outlines the following tips for pushing the ball into play on the left side of the goal:

- Ensure that your right foot is behind the line.
- Line your feet up so that if you were to draw a line from one foot to the other, it would point in the direction of the trapper (your target).
- Position your feet more than shoulder-width apart and get into a squat position. Get low and make sure your weight is on the back foot.
- Both arms are straight (the left may be slightly bent) with the ball in the crook of the stick. The ball should be about a foot in front of your body.
- The stick is parallel with your feet and fairly low to the ground.
- From the starting position, slowly move the ball forward in the crook of the stick. The initial movement doesn't have to be quick. Keep the ball in the crook of the stick and pull the stick through in a straight line towards your target.
- Increase the stick speed as you get the ball moving, but keep the ball on your stick for as long as possible.
- Transfer your weight from your back foot to your front foot to maximise the power you can generate.
- Use a little rotation through the hips at the end of the pull for extra power.
- Keep your head down throughout the action.
- Move into position for rebounds and the next play. (See figure 13.2a-d.)



Kate Starre, one of the best-ever exponents of the penalty-corner push-out, demonstrates this skill at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

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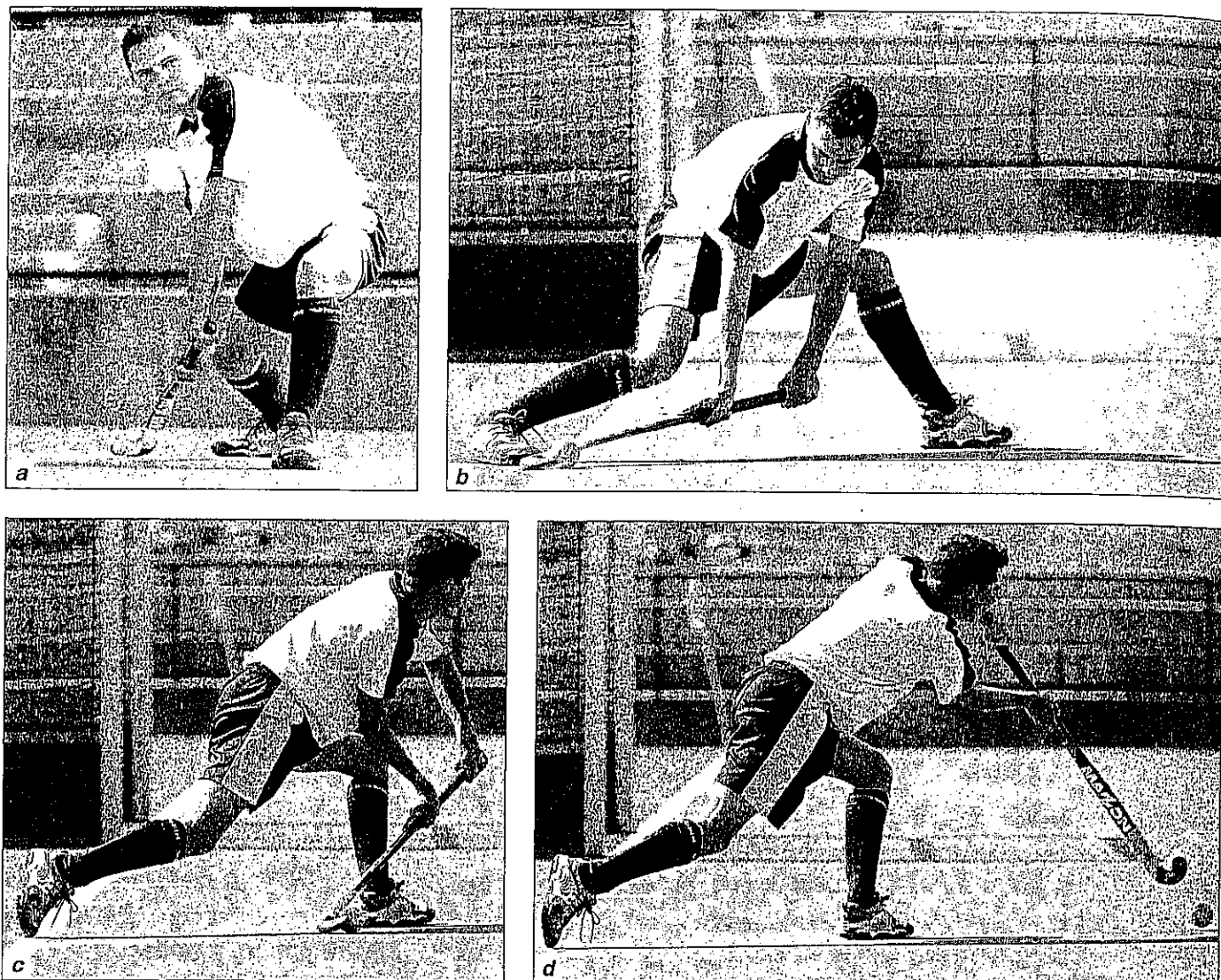


Figure 13.2 (a) Line your feet up with your target. (b) Get low, have the ball in the crook of the stick and transfer your weight from your back foot (behind the line) to your front foot towards your target, keeping your eyes on the ball all the way. (c) Drag the ball in the crook of your stick towards the target with your weight now on your front foot. (d) Follow through towards the target.

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PUSH-OUT REPETITION

Purpose

To become comfortable with the pushing technique and to achieve accuracy and speed.

Procedure

Repetition is the only way to get better at the push-out. At the top of the circle set up a target (using cones or a car tyre) that represents the trapper. In sets of five, aim for the target. Count the number of hits, rest, and then try again. Once you have the accuracy, have someone time how long it takes for the ball to leave your stick and hit the target. If you have access to a speed gun, use that to measure the speed of your push-out. The idea is to be accurate and powerful and to push the ball flat along the ground.

You can push the ball from the right of the circle too (as the attacking team looks at goal from the circle top). You might choose to do this if the conditions of the surface cause the ball to bounce out from the left or if you think your opposition has a particular defensive weakness that is vulnerable to this alternative tactic. It is more difficult to generate the same power from this side. Kate Starre outlines the following key points for the push-out from the right:

- The ball is in the crook of the stick in the same manner as for pushing out on the left.
- Place your foot directly behind the ball, ensuring it (your right foot) is behind the line. Your foot position relative to the ball is the biggest difference from pushing out on the more traditional right side. The ball is close to the right foot instead of being out in front of the body. The ball and the right foot are very close together. The ball is between the right and left feet but towards the back foot.
- Line your feet up towards the trapper.
- Position the feet shoulder-width apart and get into a squat position. Get low with your weight on the back (right) foot.
- The arms are closer to the body than when you push out on the left, and the left hand ends up very close to the left knee. The action feels a lot more cramped than it does when you're pushing out from the left.
- The stick is not quite parallel with the feet because the left foot is slightly to the left of the right foot. The stick needs to be lined up facing the target so that you can pull it in a straight line towards the trapper.
- From the starting position slowly move the ball forward in the crook of the stick. The initial movement doesn't have to be quick. Keeping the ball in the crook, pull the stick through in a straight line towards the top of the circle. Increase the stick speed as you get the ball moving.



Figure 13.3 (a) Push out from the right and get low with your weight on your right back foot which is positioned behind the ball and the stick. (b) With the ball in the crook of the stick drag the ball towards the target, leading with your left elbow. (c) Follow through in the direction of the target allowing your momentum to take you inside the field of play.

- Transfer your weight from the back foot to the front foot to gain power. It is more difficult to get rotation on this side, but you should try to get as much as possible. (See figure 13.3a-c.)

Penalty-Corner Trap

The penalty-corner trapper was often my role in the penalty-corner play. It is a difficult skill to learn, and there are no particular rules for its execution. Sometimes the push-out will be off line, so you need to be mobile and ready to move to the left or the right according to the trajectory of the ball. If the ball is pushed perfectly, you won't need to move your feet at all, except if you choose to step into the ball (down the line as the ball travels towards you). Rest assured, however, that this is another role that largely goes unrewarded when you execute it well, but everyone will notice when you make a mistake!

If you are the penalty-corner trapper, you also need to develop skills other than the basic trap. You need to learn to bunt the ball to another player, dummy as though to bunt, and be ready to 'pick up the crumbs' when and if the penalty corner breaks down. Also, you need to be ready to pounce on rebounds that come to the top of the circle.

When the ball is pushed wide, sometimes you will have the opportunity to trap the ball on your flat stick and have a shot on goal directly. But on most occasions you will be wiser to win another penalty corner and give your team another opportunity to get the set-play execution right.

When you are practicing penalty corners, allocate some session time to playing them out until the ball is out of play. As a team, you need to be proficient at recovering untidy situations that have come about because of occasional skill errors. Be prepared for every eventuality.

Give a target to the player who is pushing the ball into play. As a general rule you will position yourself in the line that you expect and want the ball to travel, allowing one or two steps forward to walk into the trap if that is comfortable for you. You will not need to change your position much if the push-out is accurate.

Many trappers like to stay low to the ground when they are waiting for the ball to arrive, but I always chose to stand up and bend to get low to the ground only once I knew the line on which the ball was travelling. The benefit of staying upright for as long as possible is that you are more mobile than your crouched counterpart, so you can react to a push that is off line more quickly. The benefit other trappers have by starting in the crouched position is that they are prepared earlier for the trap when it is on target. When trapping the ball on a penalty corner, use whatever starting position is most comfortable for you.

As is the case all over the field, concentrate on one skill at a time. First, be very clear early about which variation you and the set-play team are planning to execute, because uncertainty will distract you from the task at hand. Also, if there is a misunderstanding between the trapper and the hitter, it could be a painful experience because in this role your hands are often very close to the hitter's target! Watch the ball as it approaches, and execute the trap and bunt (the skill) before preparing for the next play, just as you would be sure to make a good trap in general play before turning your attention to the next move.

Your decision regarding hand positioning should also come down to personal preference. I liked to start my preparation with my hands apart. My left hand started on the head of the stick, and my right hand was about halfway down the handle, with the hook of the stick pointing towards the ground.

Remember that the palm of your left hand faces the direction from which the ball is travelling and at least your left thumb points towards the hook of the stick. Your fingers can point in this direction also, or you may choose to point them to the ground. Make

sure the fingers of your left hand are not wrapped over the top edge of the stick which is the natural thing to do for beginners. (See figure 13.4.) However, many trappers choose to keep their hands together midway down the handle throughout the preparation and skill execution or at least have their hands together (or close together) when the trapping process is underway. (See figure 13.5.)

- When you execute the trap, your stick will be virtually parallel with the ground.
- Angle your stick slightly forward so that the top edge of the stick is forward of the bottom edge as you move with the momentum of the ball. (See figure 13.6.)
- Position your stick so that when you begin to stop the ball (first make contact with the ball), the line on which the ball has travelled is square (at a 90-degree angle) with the stick. (See figure 13.6.)
- If you do these things, (have your stick horizontal and square with the line of the ball with the top edge forward of the bottom edge) you are likely to minimise the extent to which the ball spins as it is controlled and the extent to which it deflects to the side on impact.

In order to have correct body position, line up on the circle so that you trap the ball in a central position that suits the player executing the next skill, such as a hit at the goal. This will give the player taking the shot from the top of the circle the best angle from which to shoot. If you are central, your penalty-corner variations can go to either side of the circle without compromising the eventual shooting angle. You may need to trap the ball slightly to one side of that central position according to the penalty-corner variation that you execute, but be careful not to move too much from the norm, as this will give clues to your opponents regarding your play intentions.

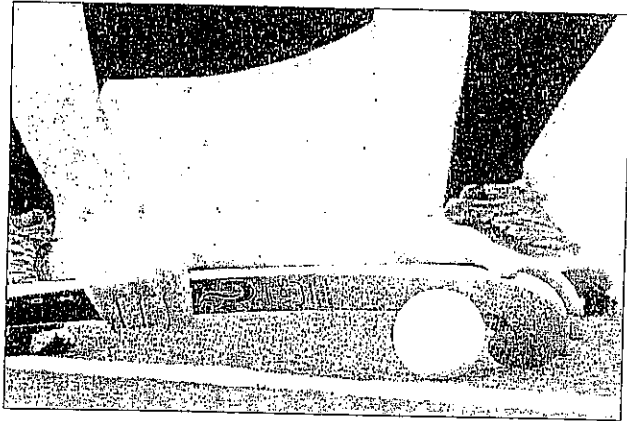


Figure 13.4 Thumb points towards the crook of your stick and your fingers are not wrapped around the top of the stick. Your left palm faces the direction from which the ball is travelling.

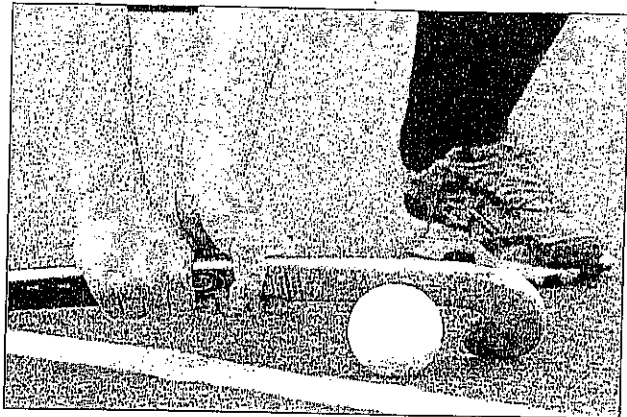


Figure 13.5 Hands together for the trap.

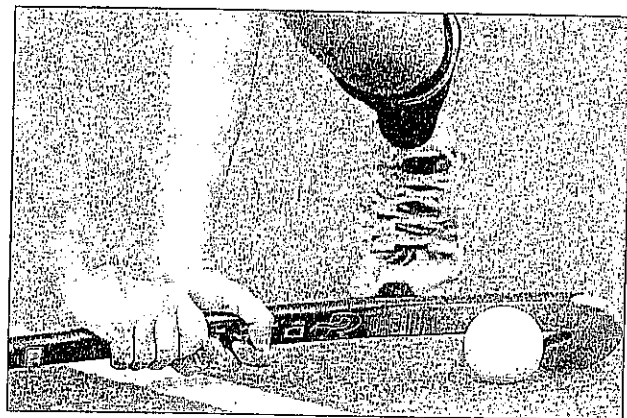


Figure 13.6 The stick is parallel with the ground but angled slightly forward and square with the line of the ball at first contact.

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Bunting Options

Trapping the ball is only one of the roles for the designated trapper and the subsequent bunting skills are some of the most difficult to get right. The player who traps the ball for penalty corners is usually also the player who bunts or rolls the ball for the next action, such as the hit or the flick. You may bunt the ball over small (5-10 centimetres) or large (3-4 metres) distances, and with varying power to the right, left or straight ahead. You need to also consider the importance of disguising the bunting option that you are going to use.

The Trap and Roll

This is the hard part! Your technique is similar to what we have already discussed in regard to trapping in general play. The idea of catching the ball so as to allow your hands to 'give' as the ball approaches is the same. The only differences are that ultimately your stick will be horizontal for the penalty-corner trap, not vertical as it is in general play, and your hands will be in opposite position (left hand to the left or nearer the head of the stick than the right hand, which is closer to the handle end for this technique). (See figure 13.7a-d.)

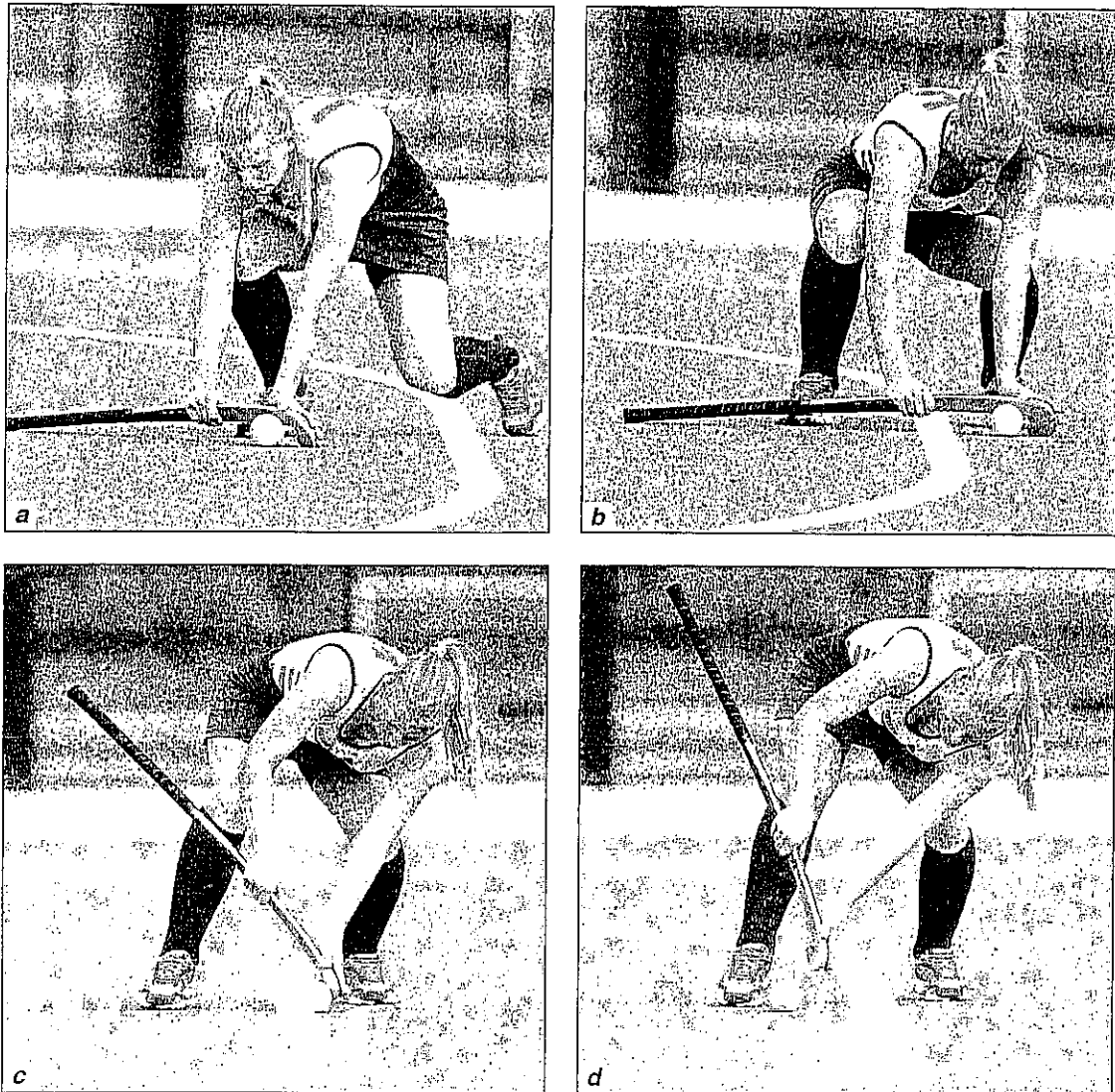


Figure 13.7 (a) Meet the ball inside the circle. (b) Move with the momentum of the ball until the ball is controlled just outside the circle. (c-d) Roll the ball into the circle for the hit or next play.

If you 'give' with the ball as it approaches, it will not bounce off your stick as it would if your stick were simply blocking the ball. You will have better control of the ball once it makes contact with your stick if you move with the momentum slightly, and you will be well placed to execute the next skill. Remember these points when catching the ball on the penalty-corner trap:

- Try to meet the ball with your stick before it reaches the top of the circle. This means you may need to step inside the circle for better balance.
- Move your hands and stick backwards with the movement of the ball, until the ball is just outside the circle. The distance that you carry the ball inside the circle may be as much as 30 centimeters (12 inches), depending upon your preference.
- To make the trap and roll as quick as possible, stop the momentum of the ball as close to the outside of the circle as you can after meeting it inside the circle. As you control the ball outside the circle (it does not need to be stopped dead), and if your technique is quick, it may be (depending upon your particular technique) that your stick will not remain square with the line of the ball as you control it because there may not be enough time for your body position to change to accommodate this. Rather, the handle of your stick will likely ultimately point towards the backline and the head away from goal as the ball is stopped (see figure 13.8a). On the other hand you may be able to keep it square which will make the skill easier to execute, but either way, as soon as you have controlled (caught) the ball, roll it back into the circle for the hit or bunt, according to the particular variation of the moment. As you roll it forward for a straight hit variation, your weight may move backwards as you get out of the way of the hitter. Try to increase the speed with which you can catch and roll the ball in a controlled manner. You can practice rolling the ball away from formal training sessions on most surfaces to get the technique right.

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MEET AND ROLL

Purpose

To become comfortable with the hand position, meeting the ball early and the roll of the ball into the circle.

Procedure

To begin, have someone at close range roll the ball towards you gently. Practice meeting the ball early, controlling it and rolling it forward. Do this repeatedly until you feel comfortable catching the ball and rolling it forward. Increase the distance from which the ball is rolled towards you. Gradually increase the speed of the trap and roll so that it becomes a quick movement.

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PUSH AND TRAP

Purpose

To put the skills developed in the Meet and Roll drill into practice with a real push-out.

Procedure

Work with the player pushing the ball out, and catch the ball as described in the previous drill. At first, simply make a trap and then add the roll as you feel more comfortable. Repetition is the only way to get better. Increase the speed of the trap and roll as you get better.

The Bunt Left

Bunting, or rolling the ball into the circle for a direct hit or flick, is something that you will need to practice diligently, and again you will need to work with the specific players to whom you are bunting so that you get the angle of the bunt spot on. The players receiving the ball from the bunter (who is also the trapper) can then formulate a routine for their move and fine-tune their timing according to the end position of the ball.

Make sure that the forward bunts into the circle are of a consistent length and angle so that the player executing the next skill can accurately time the hit or flick that follows. This is also the case when bunting the ball to the side for a longer pass. The bunt-pass angles differ according to the specific variations, and each one is important. You can bunt to the left and the right in a number of ways.

The key to bunting left is making sure you control the ball first! Be careful not to be distracted by the second move (the bunt) before you have completed the first step (the trap), in the same way that you make the trap in general play before turning your attention to the next pass or goal shot. Bunt the ball by using the crook of the stick after you control the ball with the trap. (See figure 13.8*a-b*.) It sounds simple, but usually when a bunting error occurs, it's because you've paid insufficient attention to the detail of the initial trap.

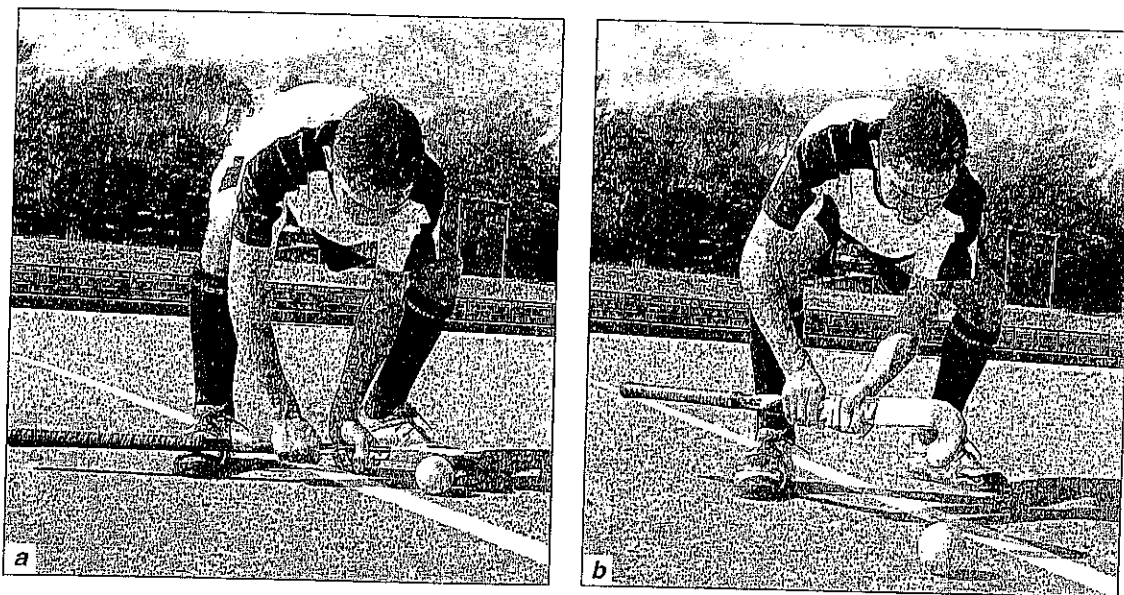


Figure 13.8 (a) Control the ball and (b) use the crook of the stick to bunt the ball.

Sometimes, depending on the variation you have chosen, the later you leave the bunt after you have made the trap, the better. This commits the defensive players to the top of the circle if the hitter executes a convincing dummy at the same time. This gives the player who ultimately receives the bunt more time to execute the shot on goal. Remember that the trap is an important foundation piece for every penalty-corner variation because the ball needs to be controlled before your team is allowed to shoot at goal.

Long Forward Bunt

Another way to bunt to the left is to knock or roll the ball forward into the circle first as though for a 'direct-hit' variation (slightly further forward than for a direct hit). The hitter dummies the hit, and the trapper (confident that the dummy hitter will remember to miss the ball and their stick!) allows the ball to travel forward about a stick length before

knocking the ball to the left with the top end (handle end) of the stick. You need to rotate the stick so that it is almost flat on the ground for this part of the skill. It doesn't matter which way you turn the stick—I preferred to have the round side of the stick flat on the ground while others prefer to have the flat side facing down, but the important part to remember is to keep the stick moving close to the ground at all times during the bunt and the follow-through. The bunt usually travels behind the hitter who has followed through as if to execute the hitting motion, towards a player to the left of the battery. (See figure 13.9a-d.)

After the trap and roll forward, rotate the stick so that it is facedown or faceup, depending upon your preference. This allows you to get the stick parallel with and lower to the ground, because the hook of the stick will not raise the stick above the line of the ball. You will get better control and power as a result. Make sure you bunt the ball further into the circle than you would for a normal bunt. This way, you can make contact with the ball

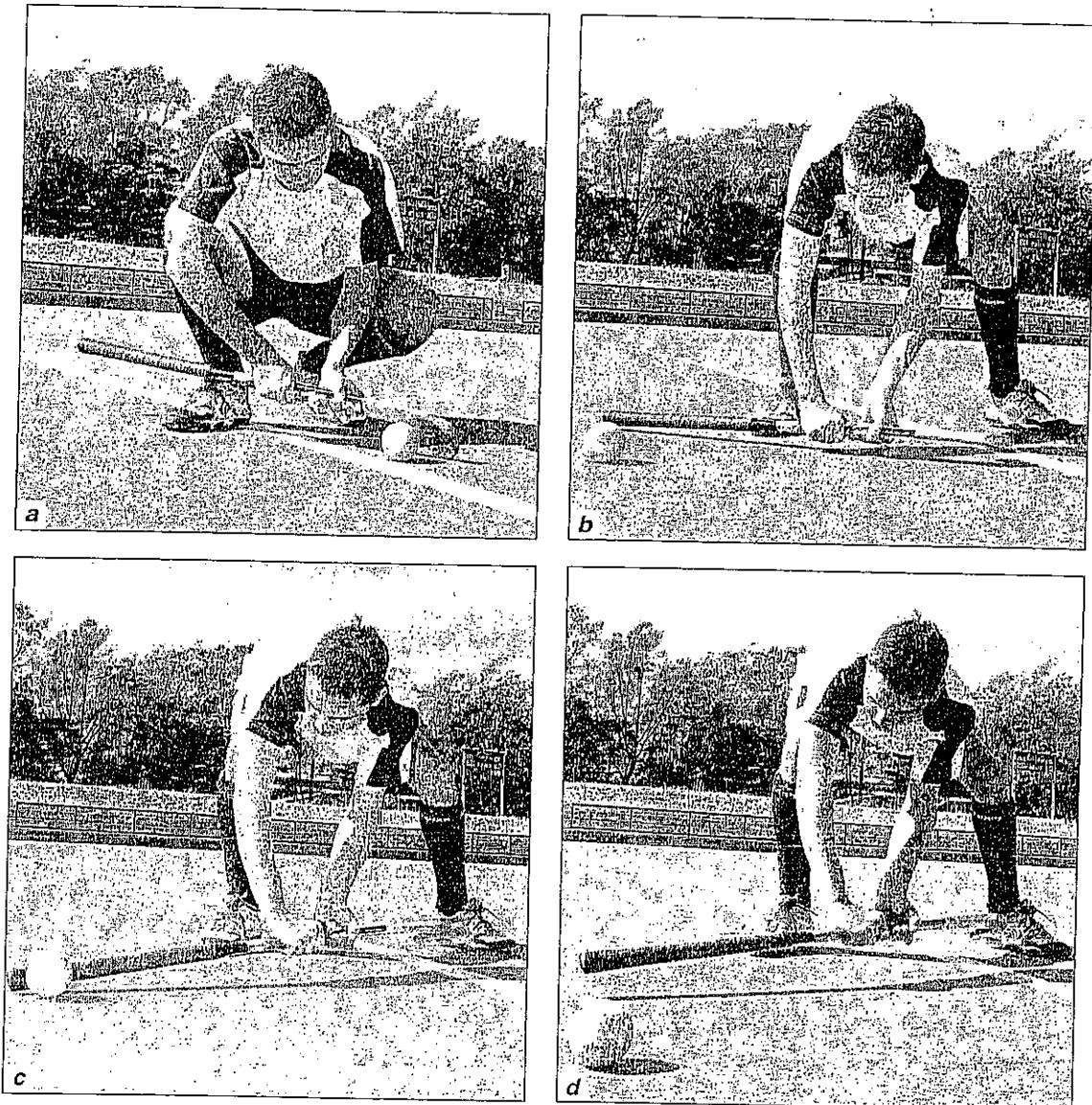


Figure 13.9 (a) Knock the ball into the circle as though for a direct hit variation, but slightly longer. (b) Rotate your stick so that it is flat on the ground. (c-d) At the end of its roll (about one stick length from the trapper), knock the ball with the top of the handle of your stick to the left of the battery keeping the stick flat on the ground.

with the handle of your stick late enough so that the players running out in defence are committed to the ball being hit from the top of the circle. This will make it more difficult for the players running out from the defensive team to make an interception. Your bunt pass will be more effective if you can delay the bunt in this manner. This is a difficult skill, and it takes lots of practice with all the members of the specific set-play combination to get the ball moving on the best angle for the next move.

The Bunt Right

Bunting to the right of the battery is a bit tricky! One way to execute this skill is to pass the ball behind you through your legs. You can dummy over the ball as if to bunt to the left, before knocking the ball behind you and through your legs to your right to be hit by the hitter or the player in the 1R (1st position right of the battery) position. You can also knock the ball to the right across your body using a modified reverse-stick pass.

Hitting off the Trap

Along with the push-out and the trap, this skill provides one of the foundations of the penalty corner. One of the most important things to get right is the timing of the hit with the bunt, so you need to rehearse this with each of the trappers you are likely to play with. You need to develop a routine that is the same every time, no matter which variation is ultimately implemented. This will help to make your skill execution more reliable and will serve to disguise the option that your team elects to use on each occasion.

The hitter needs to practice firing the ball accurately at both corners of the net and also disguise the hit at times so as to make a softer pass for a deflection by a team-mate. This may be in the form of a deliberate 'mis-hit' designed to create a rebound opportunity for the attackers. Not only will this mis-hit give the other offensive players an opportunity to make a deflection, it will also throw off the timing of the goalkeeper, who will expect a full-powered hit from the top of the circle and will move to anticipate this. Matthew Wells is the penalty corner hitter for the Kookaburras. He makes the following points about this important skill:

- Players will differ regarding the position that they want the ball pushed to at the top of the circle. The other thing that will differ slightly from one hitter to another is the length of the bunt from the trapper. Hitters need to rehearse this transition with each combination.
- The stick trappers are the ones who set you up for the strike, so they need to know exactly how long you want the bunt to be.
- I find that the best position for the ball to be delivered at the top of the circle is slightly to the right of the penalty spot so that my hit down the postman side (the right post as I look at it) is straighter and the angle is more open and hasn't been cut down. It also opens up the sideboard on the keeper's stick side (the left as I look at it) and gives me a good-sized target on that side.

Wells describes the key elements to work on with this strike shot:

- Stay relaxed. If you tense up you are likely to mis-hit the ball.
- Know where you want to hit the ball before you hit it.
- Don't try to smash the ball too hard. It's all about the timing and the rhythm that you develop.

One of the hardest skills to develop is the ability to hit the ball over the goalkeeper's stick while at the same time keeping the ball under the 18-inch backboard limit. Hitting

down the stick side (the left of the goal as the hitter looks at it) means there is generally no postman in this position because the stick of the goalkeeper is covering that space, so it is all about placement and slight lift or elevation (a couple of inches) rather than power. Like most skills, the hit on the penalty corner requires much practice and repetitive hitting into the corners of the net. Once you build up a rhythm and develop consistent accuracy, you can gradually incorporate more power into the shot and refine the skill.



HITTING AT A TARGET

Purpose

To develop a routine and consistency so that you hit with accuracy and power.

Procedure

Place a tyre or a cone in each corner of the net and have a player roll balls into play as the trapper will in a game situation. Before you begin, decide how many balls you will hit into each corner, and aim to do so. Keep your score for 5 or 10 hits, rest, and then begin again. If you have a speed gun, have a coach or a player measure the speed of your hits. Repetition is the only way to improve this important skill. If you are trying to loop the ball, place a small obstacle such as a stick bag in the area where the goalkeeper's stick would be, and try to squeeze the ball over the top, keeping the ball below the backboard.

The Drag Flick

This is an important skill for your team's penalty-corner repertoire. It can be used either off the top of the battery or to the left when the ball is bunted in that direction. Stuart Morgan is a sport scientist at the Victorian Institute of Sport who works with elite hockey players to develop this difficult technique. He makes the following recommendations for the penalty-corner drag flick:

- Grip the stick as though to push the ball.
- Have your left foot approximately level with the ball and your right foot behind the ball.
- Make sure that you are low to the ground (perhaps with your knees bent close to a 90-degree angle) and your stick almost parallel with the ground.
- Place your stick behind the ball and lock your left hand into your right forearm so that your knuckles are touching your forearm and the handle of the stick is pointing behind you.
- Without moving the ball, cross your right leg behind your left leg, then plant your left foot forward of the ball. Only then should you begin to move the ball towards the target using a flicking action.
- Keep your stick on the ball for as long as you can as the ball moves towards the target. This way you are almost 'throwing' the ball from your stick.
- Follow through towards the target.
- The ball should travel to the position that the face of your stick is pointing.

You will generate power for this technique through the momentum of the stepping action in combination with the rotation of the hips and body towards the target. (See figure 13.10a-e.)

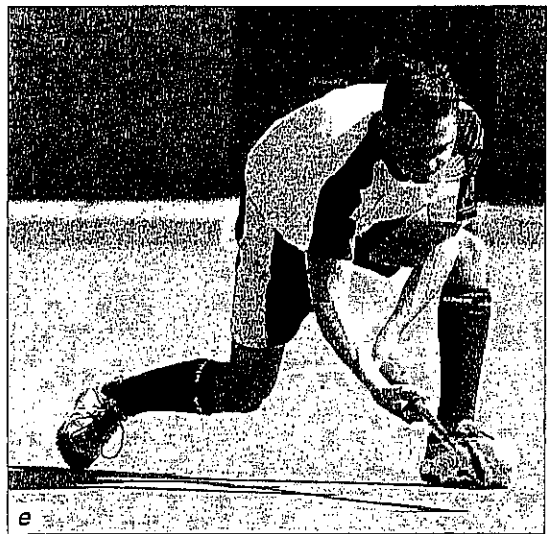
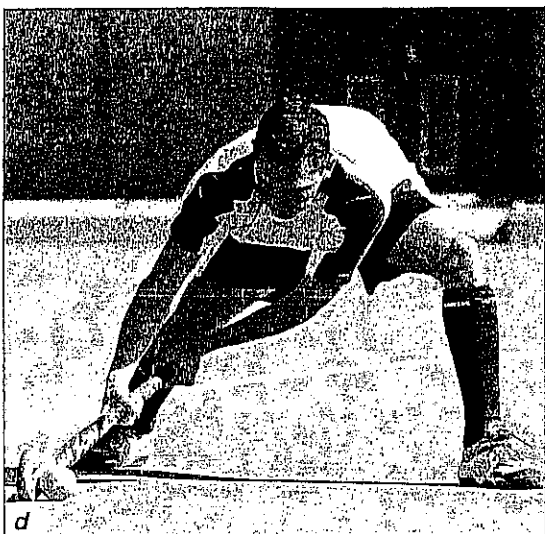


Figure 13.10 (a) Have your left foot approximately level with the ball and your right foot behind the ball. Get low to the ground, lock your left hand into your right forearm and the handle of the stick is pointing behind you. (b) Without moving the ball, cross your right leg behind your left leg. (c-d) Plant your left foot forward of the ball and then begin to move the ball towards the target using a flicking action. (e) Keep your stick on the ball for as long as you can as the ball moves towards the target.

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REBOUNDING ON PENALTY CORNERS**Purpose**

To become comfortable with the likely rebounding angles and to practice timing your run from the top of the circle to be in position to pounce on the ball.

Procedure

Start your run from the position on the circle that you will come from in a match situation, and time your run according to the position you want to get to. A player hits the ball at a goalkeeper or a rebound board (count one for the push-out, two for the trap and three for the hit to get the timing right), and the rebounder gets to rebounding position as quickly as possible beginning her run once the number 1 is called. To make your run more realistic, you can put obstacles in the place that you think defenders will be. Practice this skill with the player who will make the original shot in the game so that you can get the timing right according to his technique and the speed of the shot. When possible, practice with a real goalkeeper to get the rebounding angles right. The best practice is a full penalty-corner attack against a full defence.

Deflecting

This skill is important in penalty-corner situations. A deft touch from a hit or a push at goal or a pass into the attacking circle can be enough to beat even the best penalty-corner defence. Players who can deflect the ball well become critical to completing the penalty-corner set-up. These players usually make a beeline for a position in front of the goalposts or even across the face of goal, and they can sometimes serve to distract the defenders enough so that the initial shot on goal is effective. Often these sneaky players change the line of the ball travelling towards the goal or wide of it, just late enough to prevent the goalkeeper from reacting in time.

Deflecting is a difficult skill because the pass needs to be fast, flat and accurate, but sometimes this does not happen. If one of these variables is off the mark, you will have very little time to react and change position, or a defender may get to the ball first.

The circle is a crowded area during a penalty-corner play, and often it is difficult for the player on the receiving end of the pass to see the ball perfectly. As a deflector placed deep in the attacking circle, you may be unsuspected when up to 15 players at any given time (attacking and defensive players) set up in a congested area. Therefore, you need to be particularly alert.

Get as close as you can to the perfect position as soon as you can, but remember that you will be better served if you are balanced as the ball approaches than if you are closer to the goal and unbalanced.

By *balanced*, I mean that you are no longer moving quickly, you have a wide base because your feet are spread comfortably, you have a low centre of gravity and you can focus your attention on getting the stick to the ball. A wide, low base also gives you strength over the ball and makes you less vulnerable to the push of a defender. Hold your ground! Give the player passing the ball a clear target and you can adjust your position according to the set-up of the penalty-corner defence.

Practice getting to position and receiving the ball from the player who is likely to make the pass in the game situation, because as is the case for all set-play variations, success will come when all players have a good understanding of the movements and positional preferences of all the players involved.

KEY NOTE

A player ready to make a deflection can widen the goal for the attacking team.

KEY NOTE

Practice distance for balance when positioning to make a deflection on a penalty corner.

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DEFLECTING ON PENALTY CORNERS**Purpose**

To get your timing right for the approach to the deflection.

Procedure

As soon as the ball is pushed into the circle (if you don't have the 'pusher-outer' and a trapper, have someone call 'Push out and trap'), get to your deflecting position as quickly as possible according to those calls. Then set up a target for the player passing the ball. Keep your back to the sideline and make the deflection. Do this from both sides of the circle. To begin, just position yourself in the circle without running in, and have balls hit at you to practice getting a touch on the ball.

All contributors within the corner battery have their idiosyncrasies in the ways they like to receive the ball and position their bodies as they do so. As a result, each passer and deflector has slightly different timing issues and techniques that will make a difference in the exact execution of the variation.

Deflections can be made on both sides of the goal. If you are deflecting from the right of the goal, allow the ball to hit your stick on your flat side, presuming the hit is accurate and in front of you. If you are running in from the left of the attacking-circle, you have two options:

1. Make the deflection on your flat stick. I think this option is preferable for a basic deflection on the left post, because you can connect with the ball in front of your body and watch the ball all the way as it approaches. It is the safest and simplest technique for executing the deflection with precision, but it requires perfect position and perfect delivery of the ball. (See figure 13.11.)
2. Make the deflection on your reverse side. If you make a deflection with your reverse stick on the left post, you can lose sight of it at the last moment as it travels across your body from the top of the circle. It is more difficult to make good or 'thick' contact with the ball in this instance. However, you will need to use this technique if you are late getting into position, you need to reach or dive for the ball, or if the hit is more central (closer to the centre of the goal) than you expected. Be aware that you will make contact with the ball later than you would for the first alternative, which reduces your choice of angles for the deflection. (See figure 13.12.)



Figure 13.11 Flat stick-deflection.

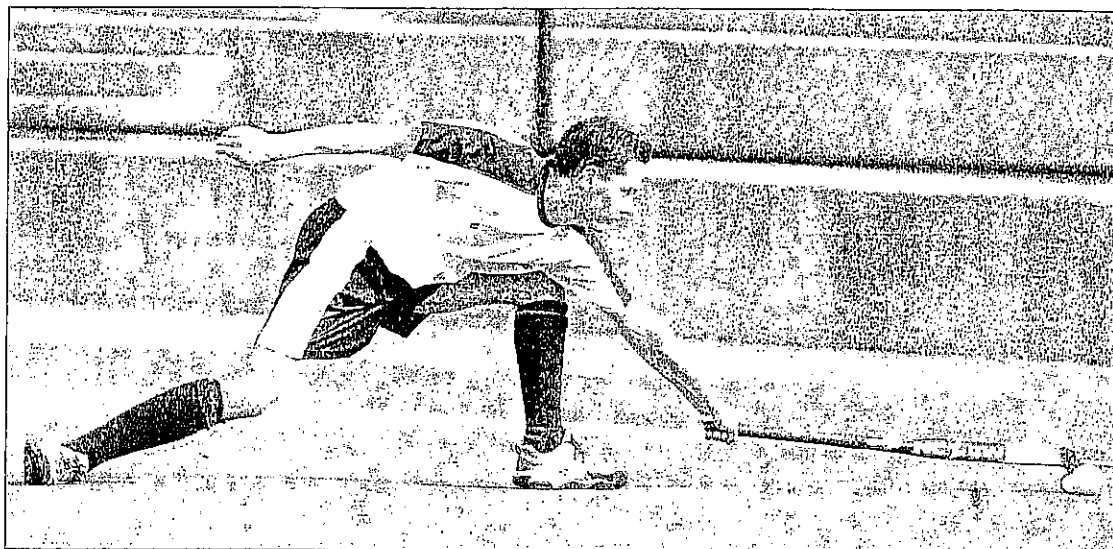


Figure 13.12 Reverse-stick deflection.

On other occasions the ball will be deliberately hit towards the centre of the goal, and in this instance you need to deflect the ball from both sides of the goal with your stick outstretched. In this situation it is likely that you will look to deflect the ball over the goalkeeper, who has gone to ground. This can occur from both sides, but the technique will differ so that on the right side you deflect the ball on your flat stick and on the left side you have the option of the forestick and reverse-stick techniques. In both instances you will place your stick in the line of the ball and angle it slightly to achieve the desired elevation—usually to deflect over a goalkeeper who is lying down.

Using Signals

It sometimes makes sense to nominate the people who play one particular role in an attacking penalty corner as the designated players to read the signals from the bench. This will eliminate confusion and conjecture about the options, and it frees up the other players to concentrate on their upcoming roles in the corner.

For example, perhaps only the trapper looks for the signal, and the other players focus on preparing for the execution of each skill. It doesn't matter which player takes this role. Similarly, it doesn't matter which personnel are on the field at the time because there will always be one player or another who is assuming the nominated role.

The coach or another nominated player might use his hands to touch his head, feet, the chair next to him, or some other body part or object to give signals. You will need to change the signals, the objects, or the person giving the signal regularly so that your opponents don't start to predict your signals.

DEFENDING PENALTY CORNERS

The defending team uses five players for the penalty-corner defence. All players must remain behind the goal line until the attacking team pushes the ball into play, but the defending team can set up in any position on the back line. This will vary according to the playing personnel on both teams and the likely attacking options that will be used. Be careful not to break (the defensive runners take off before the ball is pushed into the field

NOTE
best penalty-
defence is
did giving
away at all!

of play) as the umpires may eventually penalise your team with a penalty stroke although you are likely to be warned before this happens.

If you tackle outside the defensive 25-yard area when possible, you will limit the number of corners you give away. An untidy or deliberate foul within this defensive area will result in the umpire's awarding a penalty corner, whereas a tackle outside the 25 will probably not be punished so harshly.

Penalty Corner Defensive Options

The chosen method of penalty-corner defence will depend largely on the strengths and weaknesses of the attacking team in combination with the strengths and weaknesses of your defensive unit. You can vary the details of these methods of penalty-corner defence. Generally, your team has two options in the defensive penalty-corner set-up:

1. **1:3**—One fast runner and three field players holding back. This variation involves the first runner going straight to the battery at the top of the circle to try to block the direct shot. The second runner trails behind the first to an area level with the penalty spot mark but outside the line of the left post. The third player from the right comes out to a position that is goal side of the penalty spot, again outside the line of the post. The fourth defender lines up level with the goalkeeper's feet on the left post and is responsible for making a save on the line or clearing the goalkeeper's pads. The second and third players are responsible for stopping opposition players getting in close to the goalkeeper for deflection and rebound opportunities.

The goalkeeper also has the option of running to the top of the circle. This is becoming an increasingly popular option with the improved ability of players (particularly in the men's game) to drag-flick the ball from the trap. Alternatively, the goalkeeper can stay in the net and lie down or stand up to defend a raised shot on goal.

This type of defence is mostly used when the opposition has one good striker at the top of the circle, if it uses several variations, or if it has players who are good at deflecting on penalty corners. The 1:3 style of defence leaves the position to the left of the battery (1L) quite vulnerable. (See figure 13.13.)

2. **2:2**—Two fast runners. The first two runners go directly to the top of the circle—usually one to the battery and the other to the 1L position. The other two defenders stay back closer to the goal. The player on the left post is level with the goalkeeper, and the player on the right post is slightly forward of the goalkeeper. Both these deep players need to be aware of opposition players lurking for deflections, and they are also responsible for clearing the goalkeeper's pads. The 2:2 defence is used when the opposition team has two good striking options at the top of the circle (strong batteries). The vulnerable area is to the right of the circle in the deflecting and rebounding positions. (See figure 13.14.)

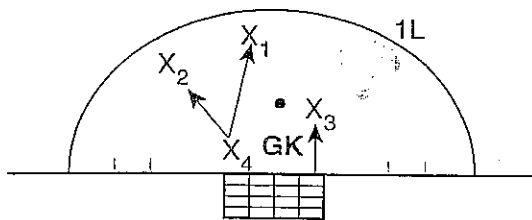


Figure 13.13 1:3 defence.

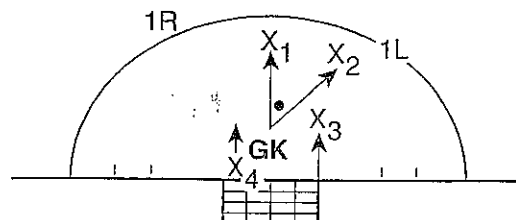


Figure 13.14 2:2 defence.



PENALTY-CORNER DEFENCE REHEARSAL

Purpose

To rehearse and evaluate the exact positioning of the players in the penalty-corner defense.

Procedure

Set up the defence without an attacking team. The coach calls the push-out, and the players assume their positions according to the particular variation that is called (1:3 or 2:2, for example). Everyone is stationary by the time the ball would reach the top of the circle and the relative positioning of the players is assessed. Do this for the two basic defensive penalty-corner variations we have discussed and any others that you come up with. You can vary the starting position of the players as you wish.

Goalkeeper's Role

Decide early which defensive structure your team will assume in order to defend the penalty corner. This means that as a goalkeeper you will either stand up to make the initial save, lie down to block the first shot on goal, or run to the top of the circle to block a likely flick from the top of the circle. Justine Sowry recommends that unless you are playing at the highest level, it's best to stand for the initial shot because at most levels of the game there will be very few players who can hit past you. In this situation you are more mobile for the next save. If you lie down to make the initial save, do so from one knee (one knee on the ground) or from a standing position, but only once the hitter is committed to the shot. Once you are committed to going to ground, it will be difficult to react successfully to a high ball. So you should get back to an upright position as quickly as possible once the ball is cleared from the pads. The goalkeeper should try to read the variation early and call it to the other players if there is time. The rebound should be directed into a safe position for the defensive team (preferably out of the circle).

Postie Role

Hockeyroo Katie Allen is an expert in defensive penalty-corner trapping (on the post), just as she is very good at trapping in general play. She says that the principles for trapping in the field apply for the penalty-corner trap, but she outlines the following additional points for the important penalty-corner 'postie' role:

- Be ready and want the ball to come to you. Uncertainty or hesitation will hinder your ability to make a clean trap, and it may result in a goal to the opposition. One coach I had likened post trapping to fielding in the 'slips' position in the game of cricket. As is the case for goal shooting, you can go an entire day and may only have one chance, so you need to expect that every ball will come to you so that you are ready for when it does come your way.
- It may help to have a routine you learn to follow every time. That may mean counting the number of steps off the goal line that you take each time you assume your position, and then getting balanced in the same place each time. This allows you to have a single focus on the ball because the process becomes instinctive and limits the possible distractions.



'Most of our hockey is played on synthetic surfaces these days, so we often take it for granted that the ball will be delivered to us flat along the ground. We assume that the trap will be made, and we consequently begin planning our next move (a pass, dribble or elimination skill) before we actually have control of the ball. Neglecting to pay enough attention to the trap is a common cause of the ever-frustrating and genuinely costly "mis-trap."

—Katie Allen

Penalty corners are important elements of the game; but so many variables can go wrong, which can be very frustrating. You need to practice each attacking skill as individuals, then combine them to develop successful attacking variations. The push-out and the trap are particularly critical because, until these are completed successfully, the remainder of the variation cannot come into play. On occasion you will score from a 'mucked-up' corner, but you need to develop a coordinated corner battery to maximise your chances. Similarly, the defence of corners is critical and requires much coordination and practice as a unit.

It is unlikely that each player would be expected to be an expert in more than one or two positions on each of the attacking and defensive corners, but a general awareness of all the skills is still useful and will make you a more flexible and useful player. So many different skills are involved, so there is something for everyone. Remember, the more skills you can offer the team, the more valuable you will be as a player.