Inverting: The whys and hows of the offense of the 90's

by Dave Cottle

After the 1989 season, the NCAA Rules Committee decided that the game of college lacrosse had become too specialized. The committee felt that teams were using six specialists on offense, and five long sticks and one short stick on defense.

Not only were teams specializing both offensively and defensively, but they were using the clearing game as a tactic for stalling or to control the tempo of the game.

In the committee's eyes, midfielders, who at one time played the signature position of lacrosse, did most of their running going to and from the substitution box. The game, which was heralded by bumper stickers as the "Fastest Game on Two Feet," was no longer living up to that billing.

That summer, the Rules Committee, chaired by Gene Corrigan, changed the speed and tempo of the game. To speed up clearing, they installed a ten-second count to force teams to quickly move the ball up the field after gaining possession in their defensive zone. They limited the number of long poles on the field from five to four. And they eliminated the substitution horn on the endline so that players who were in the game were better served staying in rather than getting out.

These changes were hard for all coaches to swallow because they drastically changed the game from the way they were used to coaching. Since the changes were enacted, the game has gone through a transition period, especially on the offensive end.

The role of midfielders, specifically, has been greatly affected. Before the rule change, offenses were designed to draw the defense's short sticks out top or possibly to the wing. Since the rule change, more and more programs are having success with inverting their midfielders, that is putting them behind the goal in a traditional attack role.

There are several advantages to inverting your midfielders:

- Defensive players with short sticks are easier to dodge against. So if the defense keeps its long sticks on the attackmen, two midfielders will be covered by short sticks behind the goal, where opposing midfielders are less comfortable playing defense.

- Defenders off the ball are less likely to pressure the passing lanes because they are too busy worrying about helping the short sticks that may be getting beaten.

- Most teams' defensive personnel don't handle the ball as well as their short sticks. Inverting to draw the opponents' short stick defenders behind the goal disrupts their transition game and, in many cases, causes the long sticks to handle the ball.

- A team that doesn't have great depth at midfield can convert some attackmen to midfielders, which puts them behind the goal where they are used to playing and allows for offensive mismatches.

- To invert successfully, your midfielders must be able to dodge *and* feed, making them more complete players and, naturally, more valuable to your team. This, in a roundabout way, also serves the Rules Committee's desire to limit specialization.

Some disadvantages include:

- Inverting means that attackmen will sometimes be forced to play on the defensive end if the offensive midfielders get caught behind the goal during a change of possession.

- Inverting hurts your ride because your midfielders are forced to run the entire field, instead of mostly covering the area between the restraining lines where they have traditionally played.

- Your best ball-handlers (the attackmen) now

take on midfielder-like roles – cutting, picking, screening, waiting for feeds from behind the goal.

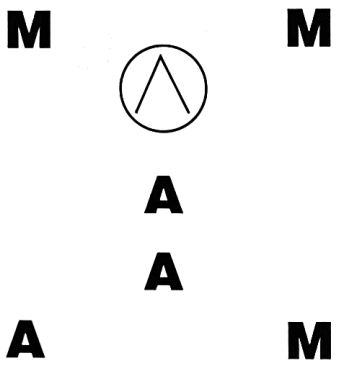
- ❑ Inverting can cause an offense to become predictable because the defense knows that the play will always start from behind the goal.

By and large, inverting allows a team to put pressure on their opponents by causing mismatches. It is easier to control the tempo of the game, and can even allow an inferior team to stay in the game with an opponent that is more talented.

And, undoubtedly to the delight of the Rules Committee, inverting makes players more complete and less specialized.

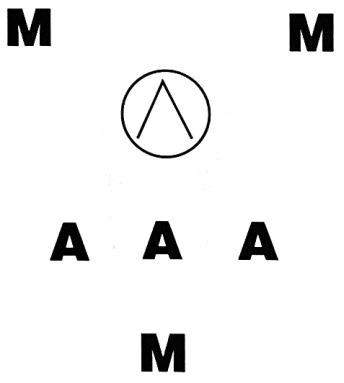
Dave Cottle is the head lacrosse coach at Loyola College and a former All-American attackman at Salisbury State.

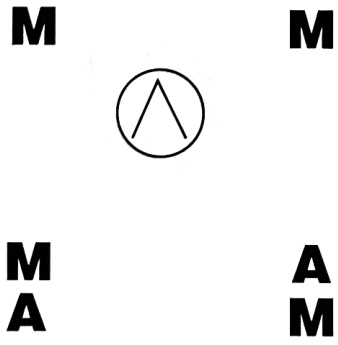
• Formations for Inverting Midfielders •



2-2-2 Alignment which puts your most dangerous players in sliding positions. If the defense slides your attackmen are generally open.

2-3-1 Alignment where the two offensive midfielders work together while the three attackmen in front of the goal are moving and cutting to open spots.





2-4 Alignment with each stack working together and the two middies behind working together.