

Ten Movements in a Tenth of a Second

How all-pro goalie Brian Dougherty turns 100 miles-per-hour shots into mincemeat

By Matt DaSilva



He's the biggest trash talker in lacrosse, but when Brian "Doc" Dougherty talks goalie tips, you listen. You sift through some of the self-aggrandizement because he takes his craft seriously.

"I can talk; you take notes," Doc says.

I've lost control of the interview.

"You're doing a lot of [things] in a short amount of time," he later says. "But if I break it down and you think about it, it's not that difficult. If I threw nuclear physics out there, and you never studied it before, you'd say 'Oh my God.' [Goalie play] sounds really overwhelming, but it's not."

Dougherty, the 2006 MLL Goalie of the Year for the champion Philadelphia Barrage, breaks down into 10 movements the secrets to his shot-stopping success. Take a deep breath.

1. Locate the ball.

Facing the shooter, find the ball in his stick as early as you can in his shooting motion.

2. Choose your arc.

Doc defines three types of arcs you can choose, based on the shooter's position.

■ A flat arc is a three-step arc, and is the one most commonly used by Dougherty. Draw an imaginary line from pipe to pipe with your stick and plant your feet at the midpoint, fashioning a semicircle in between you and the outer fringes of the crease. From this position, you can step at 45-, 90- and 135-degree angles to approach the shooter.

"The advantage of a flat arc is you have the most time to react to a shot. The disadvantage is you're giving up most



the angles," Doc says, adding that it's best to use a flat arc when shooters are forced down the alleys or behind the cage. "The farther it goes down the alleys or the sides, that's where I'm going to get creative. That's where the shooter has less of an angle and I kind of become on the offensive."

■ A five-step arc gives you more options, and is useful when shooters are in point-blank range. Again, your feet are set at the midpoint of the imaginary semicircle you've drawn, but your stepping points have expanded to include five angles of 30, 60, 90, 120 and 150 degrees.

"Picture a three-point shootout in basketball, where the stacks of balls are, and take five steps in those directions from the center of goal line extended. That's how you establish a regular, five-step arc," Dougherty says. "When the shooter is directly in front of me, that's when I'm playing a regular arc, when the ball's in that paint and the shooter has the advantage."

■ A high arc is high risk. You have to be convinced the shooter is going to shoot. It's an aggressive angle-cutting stride that has just one step, and that's squarely



in the direction of the shooter. While it can be useful in stopping bounce shots, Doc says, "I don't play a high arc anymore. Any fake or side-to-side movement and you're left completely out of position."

3. Position your body and stick.

Your feet are in place and you've determined the angle of your step. Now you need to minimize the exposure, specifically if you've got a shooter in the alley. At this point, Dougherty says: "I take away the near side of the goal by putting my leg, shoulder and hip on the post. It's stupid for you to shoot to that side of the goal. Now I know where you're gonna shoot; now I'm on the offense. If you bait me, you might score every once in a while. But one time I won't bait, and you'll shoot right into my stick. Then one time I will bait."

"As soon as I get you thinking while running full speed as a middle cross checks your arms, I win. You shoot 20 yards above the goal."

You get the point.

4. Draw a line to the shooter.

For practice purposes, put a lacrosse ball on the ground in front of you to mimic the shot's path. It should be in your peripheral view as you spot the ball in the shooter's stick. Draw an imaginary line from the ball to the shooter.

5. Step wide with your lead foot.

If the ball is released to the left of that line, step with your left foot. If released to the right of that line, step with your right foot. While practicing this movement, step wide of the ball placed on the ground. When a real-time shot hits that spot, you'll be in position to intercept it in motion.

6. Drag your trail foot.

As when a pitcher drags his hind leg, this movement offers stability and balance. (Notice that movements 2 through 5 all pertain to your feet. Practice these so that they are second nature. If possible, set up cones at the various points on your chosen arc, and practice rapid stepping and recovery.)

7. Punch your top hand.

Whether you are a lefty or a righty, your top hand should move in accordance with your lead foot, a simultaneous motion. "They take me to the shot," Dougherty says.

8. Lift your bottom hand.

As a goalie, you want to catch every ball, minimizing the opportunities for a rebound or put-back. By lifting your bottom hand as you punch your top hand, you're creating a basket for the ball to land in, with your stick parallel to the ground.

Dougherty suggests the "Doc Drill" to practice this movement. It's a 20-minute wall-ball variation in which you use a short stick. Throw the ball low, so it ricochets off the wall and the ground, and returns like a shot. The focus is catching the ball as you would with a goalie stick, lifting your bottom hand. It'll be easier to do, then, with a larger goalie pocket.

9. See the ball into your stick.

"I over-exaggerate it and watch it completely into my stick," Dougherty says. "That's called being in my zone. I can see the little lines on the lacrosse ball moving in slow motion."

10. Sweep both hands away from your body.

Practicing this last movement, while trite, will do for goalies what Huggies do for infants – it will help insure against any embarrassing trickles.

Brian Dougherty is the goalie school director for Lacrosse Evolution, based in Exton, Pa. For more information or to register for clinics, visit www.lacrosseevolution.com.