



“Giving the other team an odd man rush against us through the neutral zone or just over our blue line is like handing the other team a power play for at least several seconds or more – why would we ever do that?”

ALL ZONES – PREVENT ODD MAN RUSHES

For the purposes of this TIP, an odd man rush is when the other team has the puck and they have more players than we have coming over or just over our blue line (not counting our goalie): usually a one or more player breakaway, a 2 on 1, a 3 on 2 or a 4 on 2.

I don't think any stats are kept in the NHL as to what percentage of odd man rushes end up in goals on the same possession, but every coach and player knows that these situations provide the other team with an exceptional scoring opportunity because they have the puck going to our net and we are outnumbered. Breakaways and 2 on 1's are particularly dangerous. If the players with the puck on the other team position themselves well, and pass and shoot well, they will get a great chance to score on us.

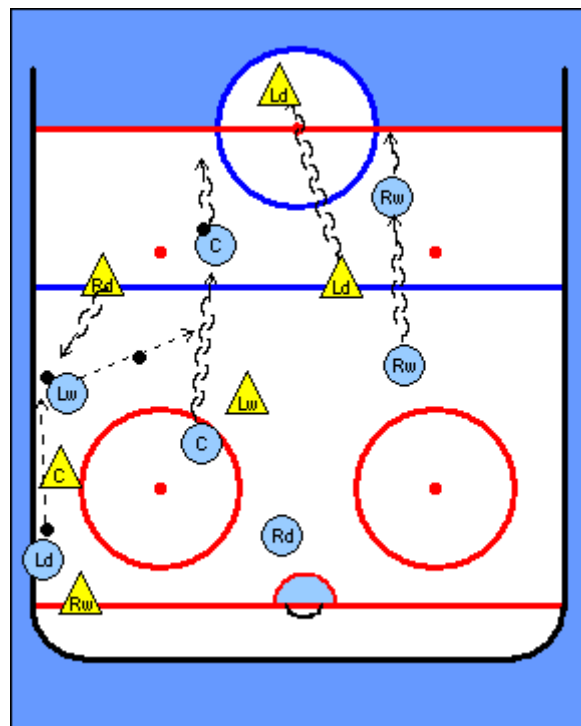
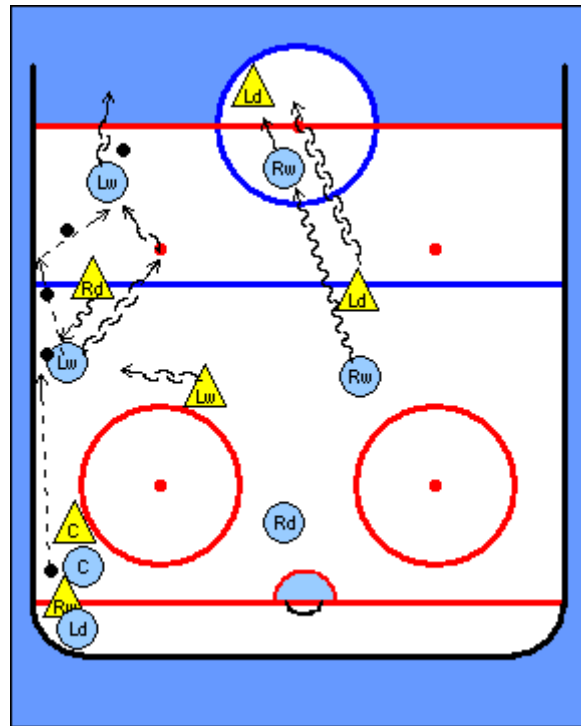
How do odd man rushes come about, where and why, and how do we prevent them from happening?

1. Our Defenceman Pinching At Their Blue Line

Around their blue line when their forward has the puck or where there is a loose puck just inside their blue line, our defenceman may “pinch” or try to win the puck with a stick check, or try to keep the puck in their zone, or try to bodycheck their player.

In stead, their forward may win the puck, and skate past our defenceman at the their blue line. Or, their forward may pass the puck past our defenceman off the boards, in the middle or across the ice to one or more of their forwards, without any of our forwards coming back to support the “pinch” at all. Or, as happens in many cases, our forward may be just too late in getting back into a proper defensive position after our defenceman has committed to the pinch. Or, when our defenceman tries to keep the puck in their zone, he hits the pads of their forward and the puck rebounds past our defenceman and their forward picks it up skating fast past our defenceman in the neutral zone.

See the diagrams below. We are yellow and they are blue. Our right defenceman pinches and in both situations without forward support it's 2 on 1 against us.





It is extremely difficult for our forward to react fast enough getting back to cover up for our pinching defenceman if the loose puck results from a battle at the ½ boards or closer to their blue line and their player suddenly wins the puck skating hard towards their blue line or if our defenceman hits the pads of their forward trying to keep the puck in their zone.

The statistic of importance if kept and I don't think any team does, is what percentage of times do we score when we successfully pinch at their blue line against the number of times they score when we unsuccessfully pinch at their blue line creating an odd man rush against us. Having played and coached hockey for decades and even without the stats, I can assure you that the other team scores on us many more times than we score on them under these circumstances because lots of times the above "pinches" produce 2 on 1's or breakaways and our keep the puck in play still is 5 on 5. So, why ever pinch? Good question, and the answer is we shouldn't very often. So, when should we, and when shouldn't we?

The answer is we want to pinch when we are 100% sure we will succeed or 100% sure our forward will get back into the proper defensive position so the other team doesn't get puck possession handed to them easily when they outnumber us. If we can't, we can't, simple as that, our defencemen shouldn't pinch. Our defenceman should back away and play smart containment defence. It's a lot safer that way – make them beat at least 2 of our players coming back playing defensive positional hockey all the time. It is very frustrating for the other team's forwards to be carrying the puck over centre all the time and not ever out numbering us. Ask any forward.

100% is a very high risk standard but believe me it's worth it. Offensive minded defencemen and coaches have a lot of trouble with this because they believe hockey should always be played aggressively, and if they are successful say 7 or 8 out of 10 times on a pinch, that's OK, not understanding that statistically on a goals scored vs. goals against basis, it is not an advisable tactic. An exception is when we are losing by say 2 goals, it's getting late in the game and we need to take greater risks.

When our defenceman on the other side of the ice from the "pinch"(the weak side) sees his defenceman partner pinching he should back off their blue line immediately and fade a little bit into the middle in case the pinch doesn't work to prevent a possible breakaway.

So, to pinch or not to pinch is a question of risk and judgment on our pinching defenceman's part – be conservative when the result of being too aggressive could in many cases be a goal against us. Make them earn their good scoring chance, rather than just handing it to them.

If our defenceman who has pinched is an extremely fast skater or if one or more of our forwards are, they may have enough time to catch their forwards going up ice on the odd man rush. Few defencemen have this capability, but some do.

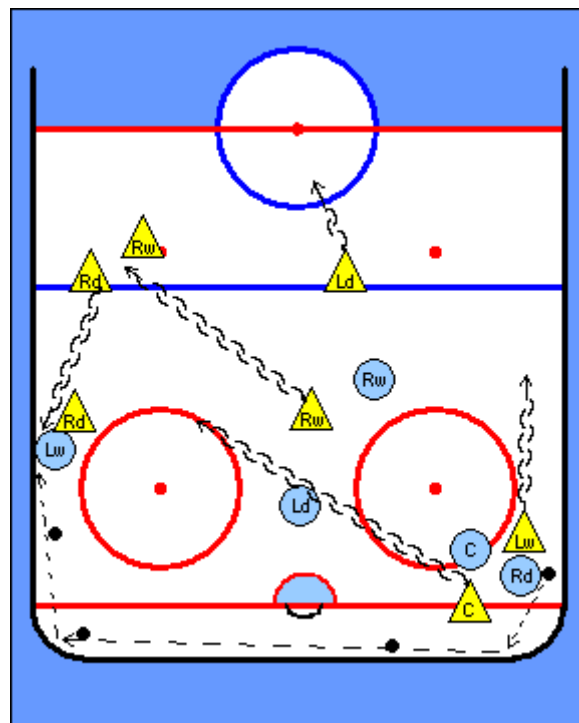


This analysis is assuming that our defenceman can think fast enough and read the play well enough at high speeds to make quality decisions all the time on whether to pinch or not. The reality is no one really can all the time. Understand the talent level and age of your players and where they are in their understanding of the game. Some defencemen just react instinctively and pinch, so again if you want to keep goals against down, when in doubt, teach the instinct not to pinch at their blue line unless sure and expect some trial and error as they find out what they can and cannot do successfully – they will learn to play more containment defence when they understand certain overly aggressive play is too risky.

2. Our Defenceman Pinching Further In Their Zone At 1/2 Boards

A second pinch may occur further inside their zone along the boards when the other team who had the puck in their corner or along the boards reverses the puck behind their net around the other side to a winger on the boards. Our defenceman on that same side sees the puck reversing behind their net and skates hard to their winger on the 1/2 boards to win the puck or keep the puck in their zone. Here one of our players who is high on the forecheck should have the time to see our defenceman skating to complete the pinch and assume that defenceman's position protecting against the possibility of an odd man rush.

Our defenceman again must be very sure he can reach their winger in time to make the play or it will not be worth the gamble.



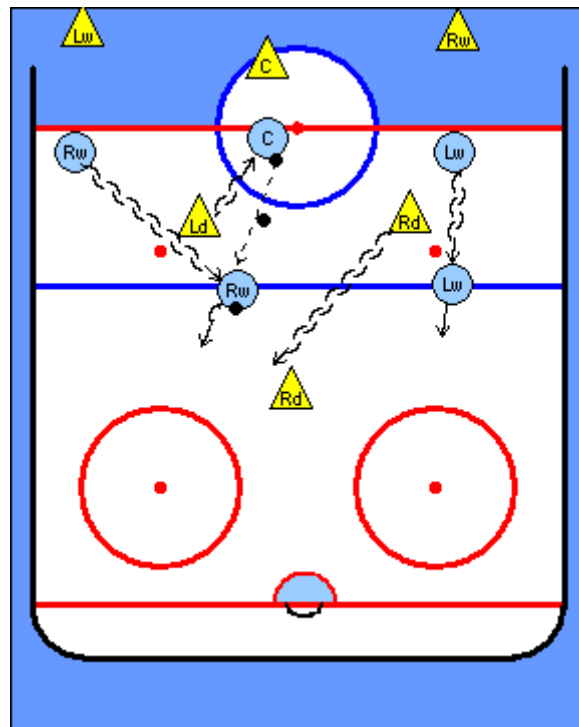


This is a much less risky pinch by our defenceman because our forward (the high player on our 2 – 1 – 2 forecheck) has a much longer time to see the play developing and to get back to cover up for our pinching defenceman, but if our forward who is supposed to get back decides to challenge their winger on the boards as well, it's a problem.

3. Our Defenceman Pinching In The Neutral Zone

A third pinch may occur in the neutral zone when one of their forwards has the puck coming at our defencemen 2 on 2 or 3 on 2, and one of our defencemen decides to step up and try to either body check or strip the puck away from their puck carrier. Their player with the puck either passes off just before the lunge or hit or skates by our lunging defenceman creating an odd man rush.

In the diagram below, our left defenceman in yellow pinches on a 3 on 2 against us and it ends up as a 2 on 1, a far better scoring opportunity for them.



Again the same risk principles as above apply. Why do this in instead of playing containment defence unless there is clear forward support right there to fill the gap left by our lunging defenceman or unless our lunging defenceman is 100 % sure he can win the puck or at least dislodge it from their forward. Many good forwards will purposely create this situation to try to “sucker” our defenceman into the lunge so he can pass off whether he gets bodychecked or not.



4. Our Defenceman Pinching Just Inside Our Blue Line

A fourth pinch may occur just inside our blue line just after the other team has crossed it and is exactly the same as the neutral zone pinch in an attempt to “stand them up at the blue line”. This is a great play protecting our zone if executed properly again with forward support coming back in case the pass off occurs, or if we can dislodge or win the puck but it is disastrous if it fails as they are now in our zone with the puck outnumbering us and there is very little recovery time left for any of our players to assume our defenceman’s position.

5. No Forward Backchecking

A 3 on 2 or a 4 on 2 can of course happen without any pinches occurring anywhere and with our defenceman making all the best decisions at their blue line or in the neutral zone. If all our forwards are caught down low in their zone either on a 3 – 2 forecheck or when there is a quick turnover down low in their zone when we have the puck, we might get caught in a 3 on 2 or even a 4 on 2 odd man rush. One of our forwards has to always be aware of this possibility while forechecking and even when we have the puck. And all forwards have to backcheck hard because many odd man rushes slow down inside our blue line and our forwards can catch up to the play.

TRY TO MAKE THEM HAVE TO BEAT TWO OF OUR DEFENCEMAN ALMOST ALL THE TIME

GET ODD MAN RUSHES AGAINST YOUR TEAM DOWN TO ZERO AND SEE HOW MANY MORE GAMES YOU WILL WIN – SOUND UNREALISTIC? ... IT ISN'T REALLY ... IT'S A LOT EASIER THAN SCORING ON ONE OUT OF EVERY 9 OR 10 SHOTS!