

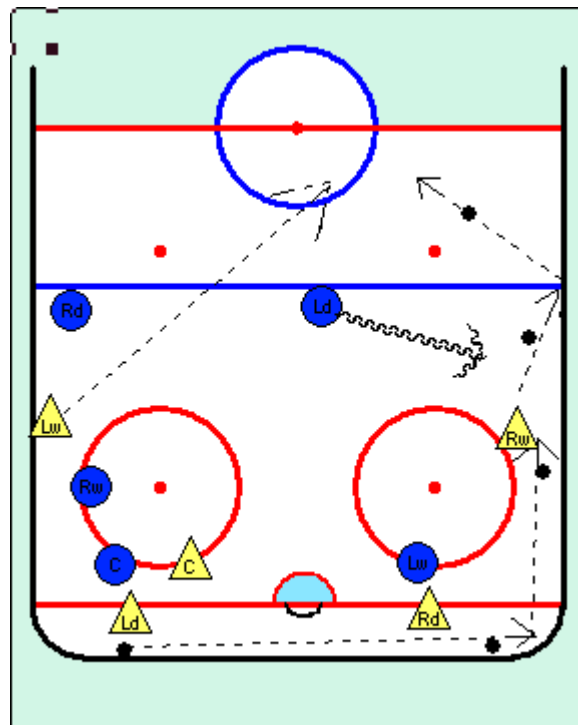


“If they can stop us before we get started in our own end, it’s a real problem. But if we can defeat their forechecking plan, they’ll have the problem”

DEFENSIVE ZONE – DEFEATING STRONG FORECHECKING

Some teams will commit 2 or 3 forwards into our zone to try to win the puck when it is in our corner in our end.

Imagine they shoot the puck into our corner and they send 2 players low into our zone, one to check our defenceman with the puck and the other to cover our other defenceman positioned in the opposite corner in our end waiting for the D to D pass (see diagram below). Their 3rd forward is backing up their forward who is going deep on the forecheck where they puck is. Their two defencemen are holding our blue line prepared to come up and challenge our winger who may be receiving a pass.



What is our defenceman who is going to the puck in our corner supposed to do?

First of all, our defenceman must get there quickly, at top speed. If he hesitates and allows the speed of their forward to take time and space away from him in the corner he will not be able to either win the puck first, make a move to beat their forechecker or pass the puck to one of our players. **The slower our defenceman goes, the easier a target he is to body check.**



Second, our centre, or our first forward back must go down low so they don't outnumber us down there 3 on 2.

Third, our wingers must get to their post positions at the hash marks fast to be able to pick up any release pass from our defenceman, get the puck out, or pass it to the other winger crossing over or on the boards in the neutral zone.

Now what options do our defenceman have:

- Get the puck, and beat their forechecker with speed, faking one way and going the other, going one way and sharply reversing and going the other using the net as a blocker, making the pass up to our forward, or leading the rush, or
- Take the hit from the forechecker and give the hit winning the one-on-one battle, then passing off opposite the flow to our open winger or centre, or
- If the forechecker is right on our defenceman and he has no time or space, without taking possession of the puck, slap the puck hard and high behind our net past our other defenceman and their player to our winger at or below the hash marks on the opposite side on the boards. This is by far the safest play.
- Our winger should anticipate that their defenceman will charge in from the blue line to beat our winger to the puck or body check him as the puck gets there. Our winger should position himself a little below the hash marks so he can take the pass before their defenceman gets to him.
- If the puck and their defenceman get to our winger at the same time, our winger should take the body check and at the same time chip the puck past this defenceman off the boards or deflect or pass the puck past this defenceman to our centre cutting across the blue line, or
- Eat the puck by holding it against the boards with his skates for a whistle or for help to come from our centre, or
- Pass the puck to our centre behind our net or on the other side and cycle the puck until we have time and space to move it forward to a winger

If they win the puck from our defenceman, our centre must be there to body check their player before he has a chance to make a play. Heavy body checking may make some teams a little more hesitant coming down low in our end.

The play under these circumstances in our end is very physical. Players who aren't prepared to play that way will hurt the team a lot unless their skating and puck handling is at such a superior level that they can maneuver out of one-on-one situations down low in our end with raw skill and still have the puck.

If we can beat this aggressive forechecking system this way we may be able to catch them with 3 of their players down low in our end and get a 3 on 2 rush, or catch their defenceman pinching or hit a long pass behind their defencemen.



Remember defencemen,

**GET TO THE CORNER IN OUR END FAST, AND GAIN THE TIME AND SPACE TO
MAKE A PLAY OR LEAD THE PLAY OUT OF OUR END**

And centres,

**GET BACK FAST TO COVER ONE OF THEIR FORWARDS DOWN LOW AND BE
PHYSICAL**

And wingers,

**GET INTO YOUR HASH MARK POSITIONS FAST TO RECEIVE THE FAST HARD
RELEASE PASS AND GET THE PUCK PAST THEIR DEFENCEMEN IF THEY
PINCH**

PRACTICE DRILLS:

1. Run 5 on 5 unit drill with “offensive” forwards and their defencemen starting at the red line in a line across the ice with the centre shooting the puck into the defensive zone. The “defensive” forwards and their defencemen are lined up on the defensive zone blue line so when the puck is shot in they have the advantage in getting to the puck and their positions before the “offensive” 5 player unit.

The “offensive” unit forechecks and tries to score, and the defensive unit tries to breakout. Keep score.

Give feedback including whistling the play dead in the middle of it having the players freeze in their positions, and then give feedback.

When the puck is out of the defensive zone or a goal is scored, repeat the drill.

Make sure each unit is wearing different coloured jerseys, and each player in each unit has the same coloured jersey, as we want high speed instant peripheral same team player recognition and it is almost impossible to accomplish this without jersey colour recognition.

Vary the starting positions of the offensive and defensive units and players (closer together or further apart) to reduce or increase the time the defensive defencemen will have to get puck control in their defensive corner or to go D to D behind their net. This will replicate “real” hockey conditions.

If we are teaching breakout or forechecking systems to players who are not familiar with the options, show them the options off ice on a hockey board, and walk them



through the options on ice. Then run this drill with no resistance, then 1 player, then 2 player, then 3 player, and eventually 5 player resistance.

Keep running this drill at every practice so the options chosen both defensive and offensive become second nature depending on offensive and defensive positioning and “time and space”.

2. Run 5 on 5 unit drill facing the puck off in the defensive zone with all players in their regular faceoff positions to practice breakouts and forechecking from more of a standstill start – much different from when the puck is shot in.

The “offensive” unit tries to score, and the defensive unit tries to breakout. Keep score.

Give feedback including whistling the play dead in the middle of it having the players freeze in their positions, and then give feedback.

When the puck is out of the defensive zone or a goal is scored, repeat the drill.

Make sure each unit is wearing different coloured jerseys, and each player in each unit has the same coloured jersey, as we want high speed instant peripheral same team player recognition and it is almost impossible to accomplish this without jersey colour recognition.

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