



*“The strength of the wolf is in the pack”*

## **COACHING LEADERSHIP – RIGHT 5 PLAYER UNIT**

Once you decide which players have the best physical and mental skills to play the forward positions and defence, and which forwards should play together, you will have to decide who plays with whom on the 5 player unit.

These are very delicate and difficult decisions because for some reason forwards with seemingly equal abilities play better with certain defencemen than others ... their games seem to fit together, they seem to know where each other are without always looking, communicate better on an off the ice and seem more motivated with some defencemen than others.

There are many considerations to take into account in your 5 player unit decision making but here are some to consider:

- Stay flexible, try different combinations at the start of the season but don't constantly change throughout the year as 5 player units need the time to work and learn to play together so when it comes to playoffs they are humming together
- If you have one great scorer on a forward line, make sure you have other players on the 5 player unit who can get him the puck in scoring positions
- On defence, put a stay at home defenceman with a more offensive minded defenceman who likes to rush or join the rush and take more risks than his defensive partner
- If you don't have the skills on the team for three balanced “scoring” and “forechecking” and “defensive” 5 player units, match the offensive and defensive systems for each of the three 5 player units to the available physical and mental skills sets. Create one 5 player unit that can execute the most sophisticated systems, the next unit that can execute the next most sophisticated systems and so on.
- There is nothing wrong with having “role” 5 player units, such as offensive, defensive, bodychecking, forechecking units if this helps the team
- For example, if you see you will be having trouble scoring goals if your best goal scorers/forecheckers/passers are on separate forward lines, put them on the same forward line for one power offensive forechecking and scoring forward line. Give them your weakest most conservative defensive pair who can pass well to support them saving your best all around defensive pairs for other weaker scoring/forechecking lines. The theory here is that the best scoring/forechecking line will have the puck more than the other team and play more of the time in the offensive zone, execute the 3 on 2's and the 2 on 1's and require less defensive support in our zone. Conversely, the weaker scoring/forechecking lines will require more defensive support in our zone and more



offensive support with the defencemen joining the rush while still having the ability to get back fast if we lose the puck

- Ask the players who they would like as unit mates. They will feel more comfortable and be more motivated that way. Try their way. But you make the decision if you feel they are way off base and explain your thinking to them
- Combine big and strong, like to body check, with fast and weaker and less physical players on both forward and defence
- Make sure you have players with better shots on each 5 player unit both on forward and defence, not all together on one 5 player unit. This will help goal scoring and getting out of your own end
- If you don't have an abundance of "physical players" have one "physical player" on every forward line and defensive pair on opposite sides of the ice, if possible, and I don't mean a fighter, just someone who can give clean hard body checks. This will make their forwards less inclined to carry and pass the puck without concern for contact on both sides of the ice. Their forwards will anticipate the bodycheck before it happens and throw off their timing a little
- Notice who are friends with whom and try to fit them together in 5 player units. Then ask them to talk off ice about getting better together by learning systems and discussing on ice movements. If they get along well off the ice this will tend to happen more
- Practice as 5 player units in controlled scrimmages and adjust positions based on performance