



“Sometimes the smartest play is to pass the puck back to our open defenceman, reorganize and then move forward as a five player unit”

NEUTRAL ZONE – 4 REGROUP PLAYS

There are a number of situations where our player has or suddenly gains control of the puck high or low in the neutral zone, is about to get checked, and has no good option to “go forward” further in the neutral zone or into their zone:

- It could be our forward gets the puck right off a faceoff just outside our blue line, off a faceoff at centre, or off a faceoff just outside their blue line and is about to get checked
- It could be that our forward with the puck is just outside their blue line almost at a standstill, and neither of our other forwards are going full speed at their blue line to make a shoot in effective, or our forwards are covered by their players
- It could be that our forward with the puck is not in full motion and is about to be checked on our side of the red line with no open forward to pass to, and if he shoots the puck in, we will be called for icing

In all of these situations, we do not want to give up puck possession. So, what’s our best play?

Our best play is to pass the puck back to one of our defenceman, if open, either in our end just inside our blue line or just outside our blue line in the neutral zone if our forward with no good options is further up in the neutral zone. This will give our 5 player unit a chance to “regroup” or reorganize with puck possession. There are several good plays that can develop as a result including:

1. **D to D Pass and Centre and Winger Rotation** - The pass back to our D is made and then our D to D pass is made with both our D backing up slightly and separating more if needed to create more time and space. There may be 2 D to D passes to allow more time for the regroup to develop. While the above passing is happening, our forwards read the developing play and use the time to do the following.

Our centre skates back towards our defencemen (how much can vary) and then curls towards the boards picking up speed and staying wide close to the boards (see diagram below with our centre going up the right side boards) while the winger on that same side (right winger in the diagram) sees our centre starting to do this and rotates into the centre position crisscrossing with our centre and also picking up speed using hard cross over skating. The other winger (left winger in diagram) skates fast up ice close to the boards or crisscrosses also with the winger coming from the other side. The puck movement, crisscrossing and speed may cause their players to miss defensive coverages.

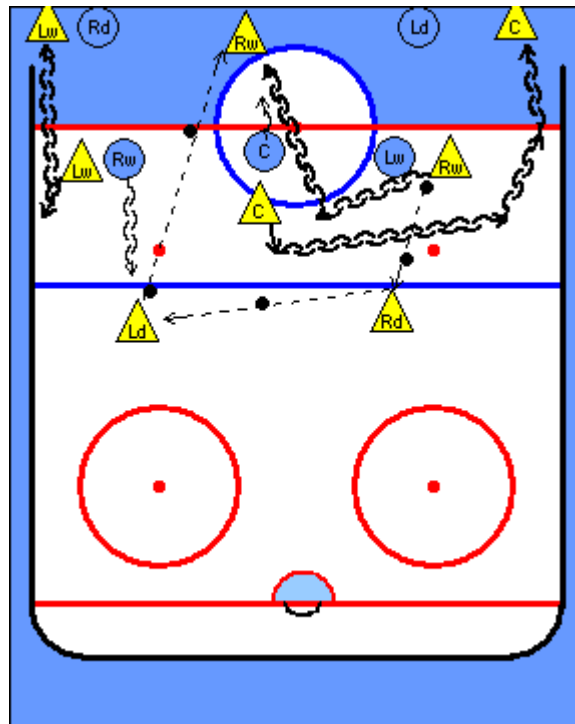
All forwards are looking back with their sticks on the ice ready to receive a pass keeping one eye on their D. Our D (left D in diagram), after receiving the D to D pass steps up forcing one of their forwards to challenge him and passes an on the tape crisp pass to one



of our open forwards in full flight (right winger in diagram). Both our D move up with the play, but back a bit in case we lose puck possession.

(Play in diagram below going from bottom to top of diagram)

Rw to Rd to Ld to Rw

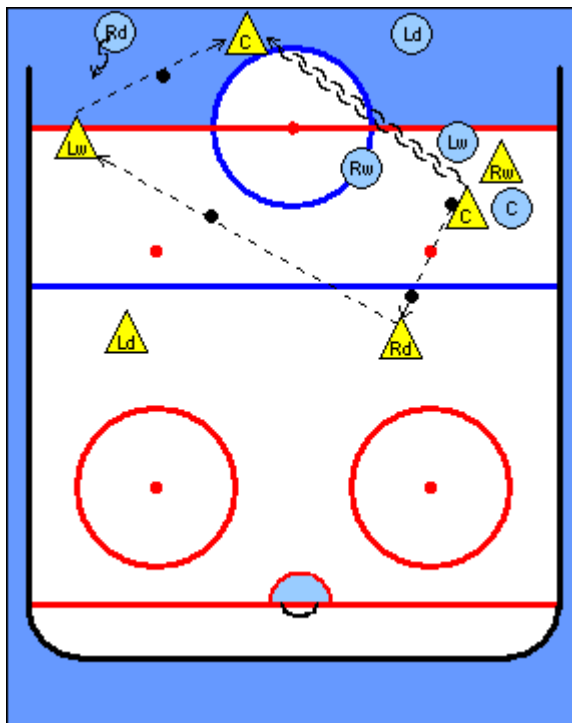


2. **To D Pass, To Weak Side Winger Pass, to Centre Pass** – The pass back to our D is made by our centre in traffic from the strong side of the ice where their right winger has drifted over to. Our left winger reading the pass back to our D is happening skates wide to the far boards to receive a crisp cross ice pass from our D. At the same time as the pass is going back to our D, our centre reads that our left winger is open and skates full out right up the centre of the ice expecting our left winger to receive the pass from our D and draw their right D towards him opening up the middle for our centre taking the return pass from our left winger



(Play in diagram below going from bottom to top of diagram)

C to Rd to Lw to C

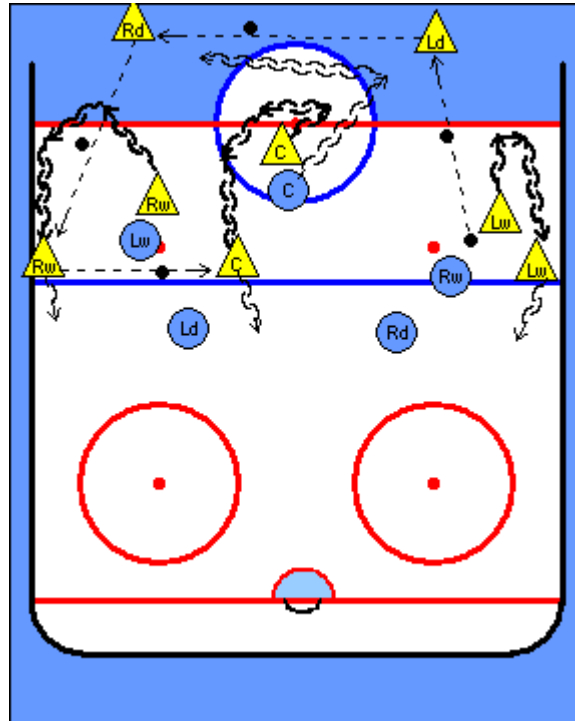


- D to D Pass and Centre and Winger Straight Up Ice** - The pass back to our D is made and then our D to D pass is made with both our D backing up slightly and separating more if needed to create more time and space. While all this is happening, our forwards see a possible regroup developing. Our centre skates back angling slightly towards one of our defencemen and then makes a quick pivot and turns fast straight up the centre of the ice angling slightly to the most open side. The two wingers skate fast up ice staying close to the boards. All forwards are looking back with their sticks on the ice ready to receive a pass keeping one eye on their D. Our D, after receiving the D to D pass steps up forcing one of our forwards to challenge him and passes off to one of our open forwards (our right winger in this diagram). If one of the wingers gets the pass just before their blue line, the centre should be open in the middle accelerating over their blue line for what is called an underneath pass. Both our D move up with the play, but back a bit in case we lose puck possession.



(Play in diagram below going from top to bottom of diagram)

Lw to Ld to Rd to Rw

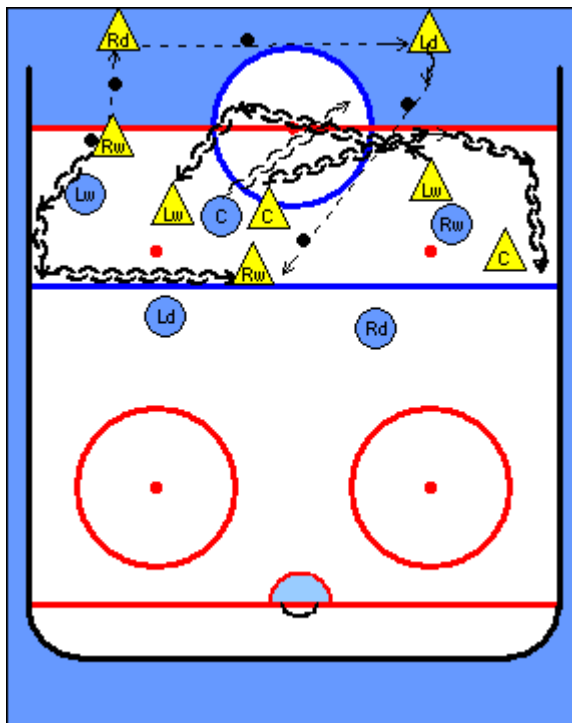


4. **D to D Pass and D Carries the Puck** – If our D has the time and space after the D to D pass, our D can carry the puck over the red line with the wingers and the centre using either of the above two plays, all at full speed. Our D can either shoot the puck into their zone hard around the boards to be picked up by one of our forwards, or pass off to one of our forwards (to our right winger in this diagram) cutting in at their blue line after forcing one of their players to challenge him. If he passes off to a forward, our D should continue over their blue line looking for the possible pass back in the very deep slot if this opportunity develops. Our other D plays back a bit in case we lose puck possession.



(Play in diagram below going from top to bottom of diagram)

Rw to Rd to Ld to Rw



BE PATIENT ...DON'T GIVE UP PUCK POSSESSION ... TAKE THE TIME TO REORGANIZE AND GET SOMEONE OPEN FOR A PASS

PRACTICE DRILL

5 player unit (3 forwards and 2 D), with 3 forwards lined up across the red line facing our blue line, and 2 D just inside of our blue line facing the red line and our forwards. On the whistle, our centre passes the puck from the centre face off dot back to one of our D and all players execute one of the above 4 regroup plays and go in and try to score unresisted using a 3 on 2 play after crossing the blue line going into the offensive zone. Only one shot and one rebound allowed.

On the second whistle, the puck is returned full speed to the centre face off dot for the next regroup play variation with all players stopped waiting for the whistle to start it again. Run all 4 regroup plays with the same unit.

Then gradually introduce 3 player (2 forwards and 1 D) resistance and then 5 player (3 forwards and 2 D) resistance, the defending forwards starting from their usual positions standing beside their respective checks and the two defending D on their blue line as the



puck is passed back to the D for the D to D pass. As soon as the offensive play is stopped the whistle is blown and the puck is returned to the centre dot to try again.

At the other end the remainder of the team can do a shooting or other drill going no higher than the top of the faceoff circles.

When you get to 5 on 5 you can run this drill off a real faceoff at centre and practice getting the puck back to either D for the regroup off faceoffs.