



“ The skills of each player on your 5 person unit compared with the opposition’s will determine only to a some extent which forechecking system to use”

OFFENSIVE ZONE – FORECHECKING – WHICH SYSTEM?

Many coaches have a forechecking system for the team, the very aggressive 3, 2 or the fairly aggressive 2, 1, 2 or the most conservative 1, 2, 2.

When I get asked which forechecking system I prefer for the teams I coach I say it depends on:

- The situation - how far away is one of our players from the puck compared with one of their players – what is the % opportunity to win the puck?
- The skating, checking and puck handling skills of the players on our 5 person unit, especially the forwards
- The skating, checking, passing and puck handling skills of the players on the 5 person unit we are facing, especially their defencemen
- The type of break out system the other team uses to try to get out of their zone
- Whether we are winning or losing
- The time left in the game

The key to which forechecking system to use under normal circumstances is for our forwards to understand the % chances of success instantly as they go into their zone. If we have at least a 75% chance to win the puck it is worth the risk to use a more than a one player fore check down low in their zone. Making the wrong decision here can produce odd man rushes or easy breakouts for them.

When the puck goes into their corner, and one of their players has or can easily get clear puck possession, there is no point in rushing 2 players at him in the hope of blocking or deflecting a pass. The overwhelming % is that he will be able to pass the puck by these 2 players. So the 1, 2, 2 would be the best system to play under these circumstances (see previous 1, 2, 2 Tip). Get into position to intercept the pass he is about to make and have one of our players skate hard at the passer to try to make him make a bad pass in his zone.

If, on the other hand we have at least a 75% chance at getting to and winning the puck first because of our skating, puck handling and checking skills, we should commit 2 players to help make this happen with the other forward backing the play up on the same side in case we don't win the puck or if we do, so he can get into good scoring position (see previous 2, 1, 2 Tip).

If it's late in the game and we need a goal, or if we are on the power play, we might commit 3 players to the puck under these circumstances and have our defencemen get into scoring position when we win the puck (see 3, 2 previous Tip).



If it's late in the game and we are protecting a lead, we probably will play conservatively and play the 1, 2, 2 not wanting even a small chance of getting 2 forwards caught down low in their zone.

If our forechecking players are better and faster skaters than their defencemen and forwards, and are good checkers, we may decide to play the 2, 1, 2 almost all the time putting pressure on their defence and stopping them before they get started. But if the reverse is true the 1, 2, 2 would be better.

If our forechecking players are about equal in ability to their defencemen and forwards, and are fairly good checkers, the 1, 2, 2 would probably be more successful.

If their break out system is the house system with their centre covering the points and the wingers on either side responsible for down low if help is needed, 2 player forechecking pressure on their defence and their winger in the corner will often encourage them to pass the puck up the same side boards to our defenceman at the blue line just beside the boards because there is no other better outlet pass. It is very difficult for their centre to get over far enough and fast enough to cover our defenceman.

If their defensive zone system is for their wingers to cover our defencemen at their blue line and their centre helps out down low, we can expect the puck up the same side boards or opposite side boards so a 1, 2, 2 forechecking system will be effective as we will have our same side winger covering their winger at the hash marks and our other winger expecting the puck around opposite the flow to their other winger. That leaves them with only a pass up the middle to the centre or a shot off the glass or for their defenceman to try to beat our one forechecking forward, a dangerous play in their own end.

If you notice a weakness in the size, skating ability or overall skill of one or more of their defencemen, this should affect your decision as you are going into their zone to fore check especially if he doesn't have possession of the puck yet. Putting pressure on him can produce coughing the puck up the boards or in the middle or losing it in the corner.

So, teams may have different forechecking systems for different 5 person units (us and theirs), different game situations, and different opposition defensive zone systems, not just one forechecking system for the team.

UNDER ANY SYSTEM HAVING OUR FIRST PLAYER IN THE CORNER HARD TAKING THE BODY IS THE KEY