

Checking the Right Way for Youth Hockey

A Publication Of The USA Hockey Coaching Education Program





Coaching Education Program

CHECKING THE RIGHT WAY FOR YOUTH HOCKEY

A Coaching Clinic Curriculum For Five Instructional Lessons

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Cover: Dana Ausec
Edited: Dan Brennan, Dave Fischer, Ken Martel, Mark Tabrum
Illustrations: G.A.S. Productions
Photos: Dave Reginek

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Session I

Introduction



Session I

Introduction

THEORY SESSION In Classroom (30 minutes)

Expected Outcome for the Participants

- Checking is a series of skills
- Checking skills are needed to successfully play defense and offense
- Body checking is only one of four elements of checking skills
- Poor checking techniques can jeopardize the safety of the players
- There are three parts to the right way of checking
- Checking is one of five core hockey skills
- TV, media and marketing influence our view of youth hockey

Equipment

- Handout

CONTENT

1. Welcome to “Checking the Right Way for Youth Hockey”
2. The Defensive Skills of the Game – the other half of success

WELCOME TO CHECKING THE RIGHT WAY FOR YOUTH HOCKEY

This manual is intended for all who coach hockey. The purpose is to use it as a resource on how to teach and apply checking in the best tactically, technically and ethically responsible way. Developing sound checking skills for all players is a necessity. Not only does our team's defensive ability largely rely on each individual's ability to check effectively, but the safety of our players is directly dependent on how well they are trained to protect themselves. In addition, the safety of the opponent is also jeopardized if our players are not trained to check the right way. The right way includes physical ability, technical skills and ethical judgement. Shortcomings in any of these three areas can be very destructive to our team's results, and it can be dangerous to all players on the ice.

Making sure all of our players know how to check the right way gives us added control. As coaches we feel good about the game, our team and ourselves when we are in control. On the other hand, losing control is very frustrating. We sometimes say, "things get out of control," but in reality, it is we, the coaches, who let it slip. Blaming the referee, the other team or their coach, is just a sign of resignation, and a confirmation that **we** have really "lost it."

**There are three parts to checking:
physical ability, technical skills
and ethical judgment.**

Improving your players, and teaching them how to check correctly, begins with developing a code of conduct. Consciously, or subconsciously, we all have a code of con-

duct, but when leading and fostering young people, we must make sure our code is ethically correct and is based on all the values we want our children to learn. When you work through the "Safety and Ethics" chapter of this manual, we hope you'll confirm and commit to the responsible code.

Poor checking techniques and an unethical code of conduct can be hazardous to the safety of the players.

In the following chapters, we will work on the right techniques of angling, stick checking and body contact. We will also work in depth on the right body checking techniques, and demonstrate some appropriate drills. The purpose is that we, as coaches, will improve our skills of instructing players and develop their skills to be the right way of checking.

**The Core Hockey Skills are:
skating, stickhandling, passing,
receiving, shooting and checking.**

Checking is not an isolated set of skills. They are intertwined with all other hockey skills such as skating, stickhandling, passing and shooting. While skating skills form the foundation for all other hockey skills, it is important to develop all core skills simultaneously. In addition to physical skills, developing awareness on the ice so you know where opponents and teammates are on the ice is equally important. A well-balanced training regimen that focuses on core skills will be very beneficial and give your players the best opportunity to improve.

THE DEFENSIVE SKILLS OF THE GAME – THE OTHER HALF OF SUCCESS

As much as hockey is based around creating plays to score goals, it is as important to disrupt plays to prevent goals. The defensemen and forwards are expected to check, contain, box out, pin, block shots, and work as an organized team to prevent the opponent from scoring. Traditionally, this part of the game has always been prioritized among the coaches while swift skating, surprising stickhandling moves, deceptive passes and powerful shots fascinated the fans. Playing defense became labeled as boring hockey except for the hard and heavy body checks. Fans were excited and entertained by watching two players collide and body checking became a marketable product.

People who grow up watching hockey on television are often left with the idea that body checking equals the defense of the game. Effective checking means being brave, tough, solid and strong. Talent and skills are rarely used to describe a player's checking efficiency. Good checkers seldom get credit for their agility, timing, balance, stability, arsenal of checking techniques, ability to anticipate the game and fair play. Instead, the ability to intimidate, play with an edge, push the envelope, get under one's skin, and do anything for the team are commonly used to describe a checker's value. These perceptions make it very challenging for us as coaches to build the right checking skills.

Do you think that media and TV coverage influence our view of youth hockey?

In today's hockey, teams have systems for aggressive and passive (contained) forechecking schemes. Each of those systems is only as effective as the player's abilities to execute. Aggressive forechecking demands exceptional skating, body checking and stick checking skills. A more passive (contained)

forecheck requires smooth skating skills, the ability to anticipate and steer, a quick stick to cut off passes and great communication. If you want to transition between the two strategies you will need to challenge your players to develop all of these skills.

Skills of Checking

Skating
Stick Checking
Containment
Screening Out
Boxing Out
Pinning
Taking a Check
Body Checking

In this manual we will describe proper execution and explain the best way to help our players develop and master these skills. We will methodically build the separate pieces, preparing the player to play the complete checking game in all three zones. But checking skills are not restricted to the defensive plays. The player carrying the puck or battling for a good scoring position also needs skills on how to protect himself and how to avoid being checked.

Checking is a skill that can be learned, trained and developed.

Developing our players to check the right way will give us the tools we need to make our teams more successful. Setting up and scoring goals is one half of the game, while preventing the opponent from scoring is the other half. We would say that our team's ability to play without the puck determines fifty percent of our chance of success. All players need the right checking skills and, as any skill, they can be learned, trained and developed.

Session II

Safety & Ethics



Session II

Safety & Ethics

THEORY SESSION In Classroom (60 minutes)

Expected Outcome for the Participants

- Knowing the potential risk for injuries
- Knowing the general construction of the body and the differences between children and adults
- Knowing how to prevent injuries and the basic rules for risk management
- Understanding the function of protective equipment
- Knowing the rules and their purpose
- Being aware of the responsibilities of coaching youth in a contact sport
- Committing to the principles of respect for your opponent, sportsmanship and human values

CONTENT

USA Hockey is Leading the Way

Mature Enough to Body Check?

A Child's Body is not a Miniature Version of an Adult Body

Risk Management

Protective Gear

The Role of Some Rules is to Protect the Players

One Game – Two Sets of Rules

What is “The Right Way”?

Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct

Reflections on Body Checking in Youth Hockey

Heads Up Hockey

USA HOCKEY IS LEADING THE WAY

USA Hockey is the National Governing Body for the sport of ice hockey in the United States. One of USA Hockey's roles is to enhance the development of its players, and to make the game safe and fun. USA Hockey began restricting body checking in 1978 by eliminating body checking for players under the age of 10. By 1983, the organization had added all girls'/women's age levels to the body checking restriction. In 2011, USA Hockey's Board of Directors passed the Progressive Checking Skill Development Program which encourages and teaches more body contact at the younger age levels and allows for legal body checking at the 14 & Under and 16/18 & Under age levels. This program also tightens the standard of play for intimidation hits in the legal body checking age categories and prohibits any check that comes in contact with the head or neck. The program will enhance skill development consistent with the American Development Model and its long-term athlete development principles.

The development of checking skills is a focal point for USA Hockey. USA Hockey's Body Play Committee has developed a program confronting issues such as rule interpretations, age specifications and educational courses. This manual is a part of USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program.

The core of the program is the gradual introduction of checking skills. During the first years in hockey, beginning with our Red, White and Blue Hockey Program for 8 & Under through 12 & Under, the players should learn and develop the skills of:

1. Positioning and Angling
2. Stick Checking
3. Body Contact

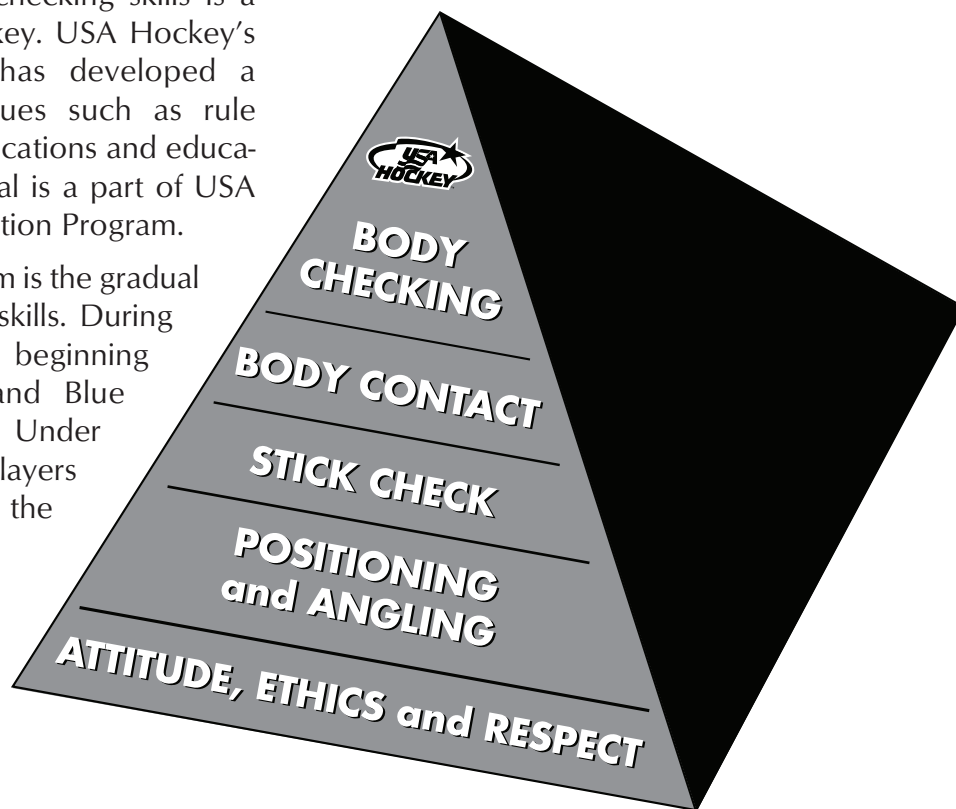
Body checking will be phased in during practices at the 12 & Under level, and during games at the 14 & Under level.

Additional Resources from USA Hockey

USA Hockey has developed several resources that teach the correct checking techniques and provide guidelines for our coaches.

1. Online Age-Specific Modules
2. Officials Checking Video
3. USAHockey.com/bodychecking

More information on all of USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program materials can be found on USAHockey.com.



ARE MINORS MATURE ENOUGH TO BODY CHECK?

Body checking is an integral part of hockey and with body checking comes a potential risk for injuries. Each time children are on the ice to play or practice, as coaches we are well aware of the risks. The players themselves, however, often have the feeling that they are invincible. A lack of experience, an egocentric view of life and a low degree of appreciation of others are common characteristics of young people. These traits combined with the armory of equipment, and the fact that those who continue to play most likely did not get injured, combine to create a potentially dangerous and fearless player who is willing to take risks with his own and others' safety.

Who is responsible for a player's actions?

- ☐ The Coach
 - ☐ The Player
 - ☐ The Referee
-

Is it safe for a 13-year old to body check?

The risks of body checking do not disappear on the child's eleventh birthday. Nor does the mere fact that when someone turns 13, it makes him a more responsible individual. Growth and development literature tells us that around this age, we can expect children to be mature enough to be reasonably coachable. This provides us coaches with the prerequisites to teach our players how to body check the right way.

In the United States, children 12 & Under are not permitted to body check. We don't think they have the fundamental skills to deliver and, more importantly, to protect themselves against body checks. We also know that they do not have the maturity to

execute the body checks in a fair and safe manner. Finally, we believe that body checking would dominate the game and hamper the development of all other essential skills.

So, to answer the initial question. "No!" The players just are not mature enough to body check at that age, however, they are mature enough to learn checking skills. This makes it necessary to ask the question, "Are we mature enough to coach?"



Are you ready to choose the right way of body checking in youth hockey regardless of what players, parents, referees, opponents, and professional athletes say?

If you are, great! Go out and do it because we want our children to take part in a stimulating and developing program, and we don't want anyone to get hurt. If you feel you're not ready, this program can assist in you taking the first step in becoming ready. We need you. Our children need you to lead them in a safe and fun structure and thereby help them get the utmost out of their talent.

**Only we, the coaches, can be
expected to be in charge.**

A CHILD'S BODY IS NOT A MINIATURE VERSION OF AN ADULT BODY

Every parent experiences the incredible development a child goes through and how the body and skills transform from one stage to another. Parents with more than one child also experience how different the development paths can be. Some children mature faster. Others learn new skills faster. Although children reach the development stages in different orders and at different times, we know that by the time the children reach the ages of 20 to 22 years, they will be fully developed adults.

Some stages of the development are hard to see. For example, in order to grow, the skeleton of a child is softer than that of an adult. This characteristic makes it more flexible. It can form, or deform, depending on exterior influences, and it is less likely to break. In addition, a child's bones heal more quickly. Some coaches might draw the conclusion that this is perfect for a tough game of hockey, thinking, "The bones don't break easily, and they heal quicker. Great! Let's crash and bang!"

A human's bones do not harden until the person is finished growing. Soft bones do not protect the internal organs.

Which organs should be protected by the:
Skull? Spine? Thorax? Pelvis?

In reality though, the opposite is true. Because the bones are softer, they don't protect the vital parts of the body nearly as well as bones that have hardened. The softer, flexible skull for example can't protect the brain from even moderate impact. If a blow is made to the head, the bones of the skull will bend inward and the brain itself will absorb the impact. As soon as the impact is over, the skull "bounces back" to its original shape. You can't see anything on the outside, but the

brain might be injured, and if not attended to correctly, there could be irreparable damage. An adult skull would have withstood the impact of the blow, and the brain would have been protected.

The functions of the two different skulls could be illustrated with the characteristics of a tennis ball and a coconut. If you throw the tennis ball into a wall, it will temporarily flatten and then bounce back without any visual damages to its surface. The coconut, however, won't flatten nor bounce. Now ask yourself, would you prefer a helmet made of a tennis ball shell or one made of a coconut shell? Our children have no choice. They are equipped with the "tennis ball helmet."



This lack of protection also applies to other body parts, such as the spine, the pelvis and the thorax. Moderate force is harmless to these areas of an adult's body, but a child could suffer severe injuries including lung puncture, heart trauma, torn nerves, or spleen and liver damage.

Since the developmental stages come in different orders and at different ages for all individuals, there is not a "magic age" where everyone's bodies are strong enough to justify a higher tolerance of the impact of body checking. In fact, nothing justifies exposing a child's body to excessive blows, and all players in youth hockey are children.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The most important responsibility for all coaches in youth hockey is the safety of all players on both teams. Teaching the right techniques about how to receive a body check is only one part of this duty. Continuously keeping the players in line with the right ethics and respect for human values is the bigger task.

The leader has his mind set on where he wants the players to go. The follower gets affected by the players and follows them wherever they go.

The momentum of a game shifts back and forth, and so does the mental stages of a player. A tired, frustrated, and hurt player is more likely to “step out of line” than a well-rested and balanced player. It is our job as coaches to evaluate our players and act before someone loses their focus. What makes this task particularly tough is that when your players are getting frustrated, you are more likely to be frustrated yourself. This is where the character of a leader versus the lack of character of a follower comes into play. The leader has his mind set on where he wants the players to go and can lead the way. A follower gets affected by his players’ reaction and follows them wherever they go, even if it’s down hill.

Being a strong leader and taking charge will prevent many children from being injured.

USA Hockey recommends that team staff members be trained in First Aid. If an accident happens and someone gets hurt, we, the coaches, need to know the ABC’s of First Aid. The very first treatment, or lack thereof, will decide the seriousness of the injury in many cases.

This course is not authorized to teach you the first aid skills, so we strongly recommend

that you and all your staff members attend a special first aid clinic as soon as possible. It is not enough that just one of the staff members has this certification. When an accident strikes, there could be more than one injury and your first-aid expert might be occupied attending someone else, or he may have already left the arena to go to the hospital.

It is wise to plan every game and training session as if an accident will occur. Here is a checklist of things to do prior to each activity. Even in your home rink things change, so go through this checklist every time. It will only take you a minute once you’ve got into the routine.

First Aid Checklist

1. Who is trained in first aid?
2. Is any attending parent a doctor or a nurse?
3. Is anyone from the visiting team a doctor or a nurse?
4. Will they stay throughout the entire game/practice?
5. Could they commit to being responsible for first aid?
6. Where is the first aid kit?
7. Where is the first aid room?
8. What is the phone number for the hospital?
9. Who has a cell phone?
10. Where is the ambulance entrance?

***Always remember:
Prevention is the best treatment.***

PROTECTIVE GEAR

Protective equipment is continuously being improved. Today's helmets, shoulder pads, elbow pads and knee pads are built to absorb much higher impacts than those made 10 or 20 years ago. In addition, new types of protective gear, such as mandatory mouth guards for 12 & Under and above, are now commonly used whereas 30 years ago practically no one wore a facemask or a shield. USA Hockey's Districts and Affiliates may require even more stringent mouth guard rules than the national standard.

With improved protection, the safety, in relation to certain types of impact, has considerably increased. However, since the checker is better protected as well, he has become more fearless and is checking with increased impact. At the same time, tolerance levels seem to have increased. A shoulder check to the face gives the illusion of being less dangerous now that the players wear facemasks.

Do you think that modern equipment has made the game safer?

In some cases, the new gear actually increases the risks for injury. As good as helmets and face masks have become in absorbing and protecting against the blow from a puck or a stick, they still cannot give any support to your neck and vertebrae. Rather, the risk of neck injuries has increased since the pure weight of the helmet/facemask combination puts more strain to your neck muscles and makes it tougher to protect yourself against the whiplash effect.

The same can be said about the shoulder pads, but in the opposite relation. The new shoulder pads give the checker so much protection that he can unload much more

force without hurting himself. But the player receiving the blow does not have the same increased protection, especially if the blow is targeted to the chest or ribs.

Finally, the development of the rinks with rock solid boards and tempered glass has increased the level of impact that can be generated with contact to these playing surfaces. Practically all other sports have gone the other way by increasing the padding on any object that could make contact with the athlete. Downhill skiing has whip posts and safety nets. Car racing has sand pits and walls of tires. Football and basketball has thick padding on the support beams to the goals and baskets, but hockey has tempered glass. This type of construction make hits from behind, boarding or any contact where the head gets squeezed in between the glass or boards and the opponent, much more dangerous. No equipment can ever protect against excessive impact of this kind. And, most vulnerable of all, are children, our youth hockey players.



RULES ARE IN PLACE TO PROTECT THE PLAYERS

If there are no rules, how do we know who wins?

Rules are the basis for all sports. Before any game can start, one needs clear directions about the purpose of the game and how to get there. The rules set the parameters for which actions are allowed so everybody clearly knows what to expect before entering the game. If you agree to play hockey, you also agree to the fact that the opponent may try to body check you, or you might get hit by a puck. If this happens you cannot complain, since you have already given your consent.

The rules also clarify what not to expect, and to what you have not given your consent. For example, if I agree to play hockey, I will not get a stick in my face, a crosscheck to my throat or a check from behind. All these actions are banned by the rules and should not happen.

Why do you think the following actions are not allowed?

Slashing
Boarding
Cross Checking
Roughing
Checking from Behind
Charging

Still, some players allow themselves to play “outside the rules” and some coaches encourage their players to “cross the line,” as long as they do not get caught by the

referee. This is not acceptable. All coaches need to address this behavior whether or not a penalty is called. If the line that was crossed concerned an offside or an early line change, there is no major impact. But many rules are there to protect the athletes. Playing outside these rules can be hazardous to the safety of the players and is not acceptable under any circumstances.

The sole purpose of the following rules is to protect children in youth hockey:

1. Charging
2. Boarding
3. High sticking
4. Elbowing
5. Slashing
6. Tripping
7. Cross checking
8. Butt ending
9. Spearing
10. Roughing
11. Checking from behind

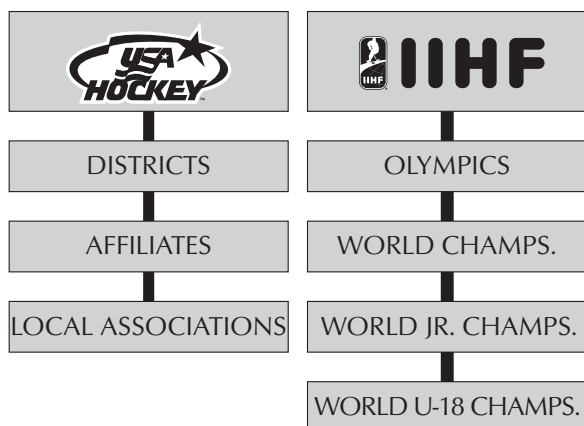
Playing outside these rules can jeopardize the safety of children. Since our primary responsibility is the safety of all the children, how do we make our players play safely?

If you agree to play a game of hockey, you also agree to refrain from all of these actions. If you agree to coach a team in hockey, you also agree to restrain all your players at all times from committing any of these actions. These actions are not meant to be a part of hockey and certainly not a part of youth hockey. If you allow them to be carried out, your team is not playing hockey and you are not a hockey coach.

ONE GAME – TWO SETS OF RULES

As we all know, there are differences between the USA Hockey, National Hockey League (NHL), National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) rule books. The good news is that the differences are becoming fewer and the tolerance for fouls that infringe upon the speed and skills of the game are not tolerated at any level.

When it comes to youth hockey in the United States, the rules are established to set the tolerance level so they enhance the development of the players and create a safe and fun environment for all.



The basis for youth hockey rules is the IIHF rulebook, not the NHL. USA Hockey is a member of the IIHF, and plays its highest level of competition under the IIHF rules.

The World Championships and the Olympic Winter Games are IIHF tournaments. In the U.S., all registered USA Hockey players are members of the IIHF. The NHL is not an IIHF member and youth hockey associations are not members of the NHL.

Hockey tournaments like the Under-18 and Under-20 World Championships, the Men's and Women's World Championships and the Olympic Winter Games are played under the IIHF rulebook, which includes the IIHF tolerance level for body checking.

The differences between the youth hockey rules and the NHL rules are sometimes confusing, since what might be a good clean check on TV is likely to be an illegal and hazardous action in a youth hockey game. Spectators, players and sometimes even the coaches are unaware of these differences and act aggressively toward the referees. The solution, however, is not to adopt the NHL rulebook since those rules are intended for adults and are hazardous for children. **How would you solve this problem?**

Other contact sports also have one set of rules for amateurs and another set for professionals.

WHAT IS THE “RIGHT WAY” TO CHECK?

Whenever you are responsible for children, there is always one priority that overrules all others: “Safety First!” In other youth activities, it goes without saying. We fully expect that the instructor or coach will guarantee our children’s safety if we enroll them in scuba classes, wall climbing, swimming or even a physical education class at school. This means that the right way must be the safe way.

Secondly, playing efficiently means being responsible and accountable within the team to compete in hockey games. This means that the right way must be the efficient way.

The right way is:

*the safe way
the efficient way
the controlled way*

Finally, the purpose of body checking in youth hockey is to separate the opponent from the puck. The purpose is not to intim-

idate, grind out or “make ‘em pay a price.” And it is certainly not to hurt anyone. This means that the right way also is the controlled way.

All youth players are under the supervision and leadership of adult coaches. This makes coaches responsible for everything our players do. The role of the officials is to determine the severity of the players’ actions, not to control the players. Even though some exceptionally good referees find a way to do both, the coach alone is responsible for the consequences of his players’ actions.

The main goal for any good leader is to take good care of his personnel. For a hockey coach, that is the players. Since the game requires the participation of another team, the coach also becomes responsible for the welfare of the opposing players. No victory can ever justify the injury of any single player on either team. True success is never at someone else’s expense.

CODE OF ETHICS AND CODE OF CONDUCT

Code – A set of principles

Ethic – Distinguish right from wrong

Conduct – The control of your actions

Whether or not we have given it a thought we all have a code of ethics and follow a code of conduct. Our personal code of ethics is made up of the values we believe in and often reflect the way we have been brought up and the experiences we have had. However, the code of ethics is useless without a code of conduct. The code of conduct controls our actions. Conducts that don't correspond to our ethical beliefs would be the same as saying: "I know it is wrong, but I'll do it anyway."

Is it okay to:

Yell at a child?

Hurt a child?

Jeopardize a child's health?

Berate a child?

Applaud a hard body check in a youth game?

Tell a child to play through a serious injury?

We hope you answered "No" to the first three questions above. This would indicate a responsible code of ethics. If you answered, "Yes" to any of the last three questions, it would indicate some inconsistency between your code of ethic and your code of conduct. It also proves that it is very difficult to "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk."

Children however, are not nearly as affected by the "talk" as they are by the "walk." What we say has less influence on the child as how we conduct ourselves. Consistency

between words and actions will form the base on which our players judge our credibility. If we want them to believe us when we talk about forechecking and power play, we need to have a straight line between our code of ethics and code of conduct.

Take a minute to reflect on your code of ethics when it comes to body checking in youth hockey. Then answer the three questions below and try to justify your answers.

Are you of the opinion that:

1. The referees lay down the law, and whatever they allow is correct?
 2. Any penalty is a fair trade for stopping an opponent from scoring?
 3. Regardless of whether the referee allows it or not, there are actions you will never accept?
-

**Who has had an impact
on your code of ethics?**

You now know your answers, and the reasoning behind them. Why do you think you answered the way you did? From whom do you think you've got your code of ethics? Do you think that your answers had anything to do with the people who formed your code of ethics? Finally, is your code of ethics different in hockey than your code of ethics for the rest of your life (values in the family, conduct towards your colleague at work)?

"A successful coach is not always a good leader. A good leader's values never change. The codes of ethics and conduct are consistently in balance."

HOW OUR CODES APPLY TO YOUTH HOCKEY

Checking the right way for youth hockey allows the use of adequate force to separate the opponent from the puck. Any excessive force beyond what's necessary to achieve this objective is illegal and should be penalized. We know the referees will not see every infraction and will not call every infraction they see. This is where the young players need our strong leadership. This is where the

referee's way is overruled by the right way. Our code of ethics and code of conduct must strongly provide that the acceptable tolerance level of youth hockey is sustained.

As leaders, we must condemn all infractions against the ethics of the game. Since we also represent USA Hockey, all our actions are expected to support our core values.

Will you remove your players from the game if they commit any of the following infractions?



Contact With Head



Blind Angle Check



Jumping



Hitting From Behind



Crossing Arms



Low Check



Extend The Arms

MY PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS AND CONDUCT

Code of Ethics

1. It is wrong to use excessive force
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Code of Conduct

1. Always bench a player who is violating the code of ethics
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

USA HOCKEY'S CORE VALUES

Sportsmanship: Foremost of all values is to learn a sense of fair play. Become humble in victory, gracious in defeat. We will foster friendship with teammates and opponents alike.

Respect for the individual: Treat others as you expect to be treated.

Integrity: We seek to foster honesty and fair play beyond mere strict interpretation of the rules and regulations of the game.

Pursuit of excellence at the individual, team and organizational levels: Each member of the organization, whether player, volunteer or staff, should seek to perform each aspect of the game to the highest level of his or her ability.

Enjoyment: It is important for the hockey experience to be fun, satisfying and rewarding for all participants.

Loyalty: We aspire to teach loyalty to the ideals and fellow members of the sport of hockey.

Teamwork: We value the strength of learning to work together. The use of teamwork is reinforced and rewarded by success in the hockey experience.

Session III

Developing Checking Skills I



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THEORY SESSION In Classroom (150 minutes)

Expected Outcome for the Participants

- Be familiar with the four-step progression for teaching checking
- Know the definitions of body contact and body checking
- Be able to teach:
 - 12 positioning and angling skills
 - 6 stick checking skills
 - 7 body contact skills
 - 6 body checking skills
 - How to safely take a check
- Understand the importance of awareness and orientation
- Understand the body's contact areas

CONTENT

Developing Checking Skills

Positioning and Angling

Skating skills
Defensive and offensive side
Covering lanes
Strong and weak side
Steering and driving
Closing the gap

Stick Checking

Poke, lift and tap
Sweep, press and pry

Body Contact

Protecting oneself
Rubbing out and pinning
Screening and boxing out

Body Checking

Front and side checks
Parallel and confront
Awareness when approaching from behind
The respect zone
Receiving a check or strike first

REFLECTIONS ON BODY CHECKING IN YOUTH HOCKEY

Youth hockey fulfills many needs and functions. Activating children in sound physical activities is an important investment in the future of public health. Learning to work as a group and appreciate the achievements attained through teamwork are vital experiences that prepare young people for life ahead. Building life-long friendships improves the spirit in the community in an immeasurable way.

*Youth hockey in the United States improves public health, fosters teamwork, builds life-long friendships, prepares youth for life as an adult and prepares players for higher levels of hockey. **What other benefits do you think hockey provides to kids?***

Youth hockey also prepares players for hockey at a higher level, and since hockey is a contact sport, the young players have to be taught how to body check and how to protect themselves properly. When practicing body checking, always keep these two goals in mind:

1. Learn how to check.
2. Learn how to take a check.

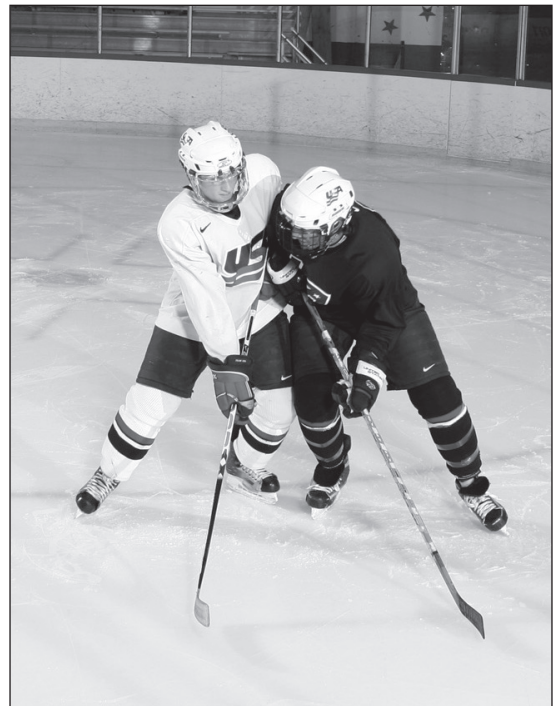
The importance of learning how to take a check far outweighs the importance of learning to deliver a check. All players do not need to be good checkers, but every player is a potential target and will receive body checks. Therefore all body checking drills must emphasize how to receive and protect oneself, rather than how to apply a body check.

To ensure that our checking drills meet these objectives, the players have to work in pairs and work on these goals together. The checker must commit to a code of conduct that directs the relationship between checker

and receiver. Through this code, the checker will restrict the impact of the check to a level that is suitable for the receiver to develop his receiving skills. Think about checking drills the same way you think about goaltending and scoring drills. The shooter needs the goaltender and the goaltender needs the shooter – one can't get better without the other. The checking practice works the same way. The checker and the receiver work together to help each other improve.

Youth hockey is not a man vs. man competition, it's children playing a game.

The players should commit to the same code of conduct for games as they do for practices. Everyone in youth hockey should have the opportunity to have fun and develop as hockey players. They can only do so if the code of conduct is reinforced.



DEFINITIONS

Youth hockey identifies two different streams, body contact and body checking. Younger age groups (12 & Under and younger), girls'/women's hockey, and no check leagues play under the Body Contact regulations. Older players (14 & Under and older) play under the body checking regulations. Even though both terms are well known and frequently used, it can be difficult to distinguish between them. Below are USA Hockey's definitions.

Body Contact – Body contact is defined as an individual defensive tactic designed to legally block or impede the progress of an offensive puck carrier. This tactic is a result of movement of the defensive player to restrict movement of the puck carrier anywhere on the ice through skating, angling and positioning. Contact may only occur during the normal process of playing the puck, provided there has been no overt hip, shoulder or arm contact to physically force the opponent off the puck.

Body Checking – Body checking is defined as an individual defensive tactic designed to legally separate the puck carrier from the puck. This tactic is the result of a defensive player (player without the puck) applying physical extension of the body toward the puck carrier, by using his hip or body from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side. The defensive player must not take more than two fast steps in executing the check. A legitimate body check must be done only with the trunk of the body (hips and shoulders) and must be above the opponent's knees and below the neck. If the check is unnecessarily rough, it must be penalized.

STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR YOUTH HOCKEY



DEVELOPING CHECKING SKILLS

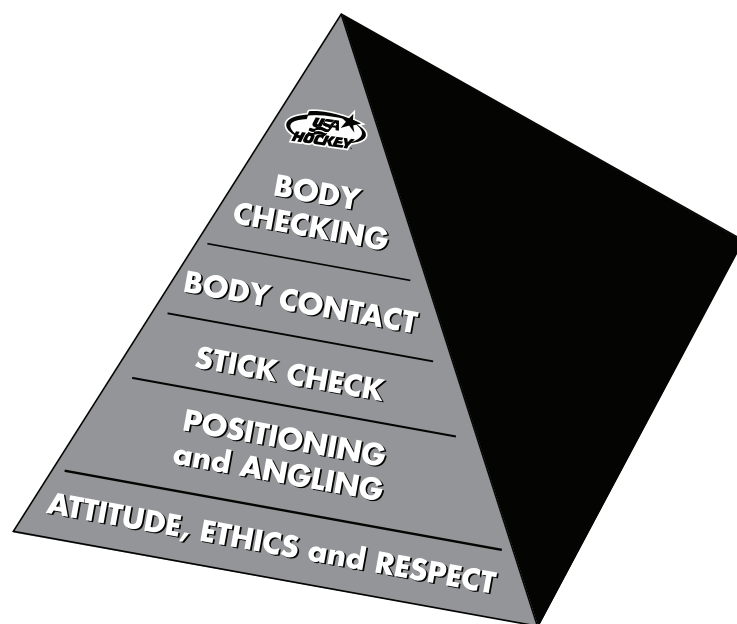
Doing it Right, Right from the Start

Successful coaches ensure that every player has a chance to develop all his checking skills in a functional progression, and allow the player's biological maturity and emotional development to reach certain levels. The USA Hockey Checking Progression Model gradually introduces players to the skills of checking. Steps 1, 2, and 3 include positioning/angling, stick checking and body contact, and they build the players' base during their early levels of hockey, 8 & Under through 12 & Under. Step 4 introduces the skills of body checking. These skills are introduced throughout the 14 & Under level.

By the time the players reach the 16 & Under and 18 & Under levels, all players should have had the opportunity to learn the essential checking skills that allow them to play body checking hockey without preventable risks for injury. However, it is important to point out, that even in these age groups, the degree of physical development varies immensely from player to player. This leads to unbalanced competition where variations in size, strength, and the body's capability to withstand injuries are dramatic. It is of the utmost importance that players, coaches and referees keep the tolerance level of the physical impact to a reduced and safe level for all participants.



Positioning and Angling – The first step in teaching checking is to learn how to control skating and to establish position to approach the opponent from an angle that minimizes time and space for the opponent.



Stick Checking – The second step is to effectively use the stick for poke checking, sweep checking, lifting or locking the opponent's stick.



Body Contact – The third step is to use the body to block the opponent's way or take away his skating lanes. The correct stance and effective use of leg strength are important parts of these techniques.



Body Checking – The fourth and final step is the actual body check. This step includes teaching techniques to give and receive a body check safely and within the rules.

Step 1

Positioning & Angling

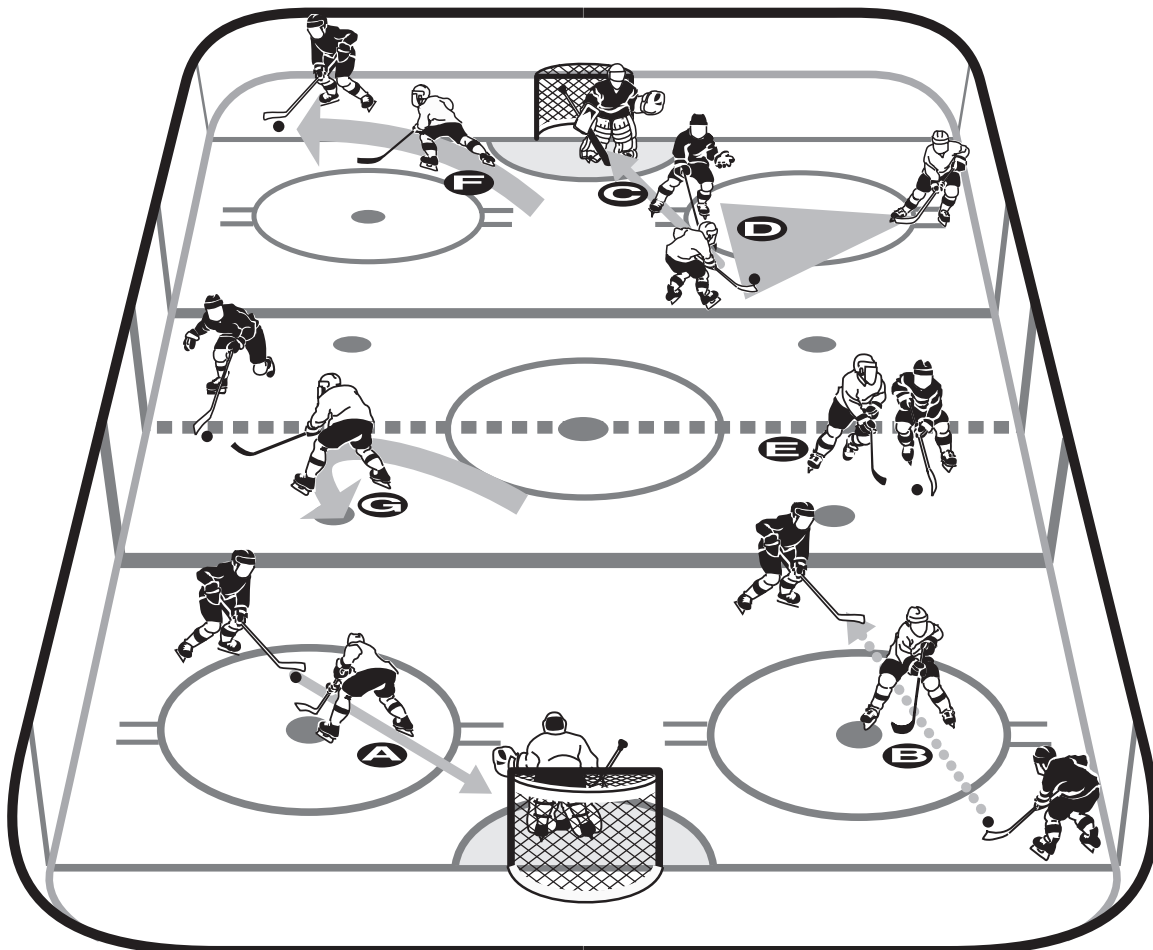


POSITIONING AND ANGLING

The right or wrong position depends on many variables, including how you match-up against your opponent, the number of teammates and opponents in the area, the score of the game, or the strategy you're utilizing. It is important to know the different options and to understand the advantages and disadvantages of different positions. Here is an overview of this section:

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| A. | Defensive Side | Between the opponent and your net |
| B. | Passing Lane | Between two opponents |
| C. | Shooting Lane | Between the puck and the net |
| D. | Defensive Triangle | Defensive side of the puck and the passing lane in front |
| E. | Offensive Side | Between the opponent and the offensive net |
| | Neutral Weak Side | Side-by-side with the opponent on your backhand side |
| | Neutral Strong Side | Side-by-side with the opponent on your forehand side |
| F. | Steering | Approaching on an angle to make the opponent move |
| | Driving | Forcing the opponent in one direction |
| G. | Closing the gap flat | Reducing the distance between you and the opponent |
| | Closing the gap tight | Same as "G" but in a tight area |

When teaching checking, emphasize how to control skating to establish position to approach the opponent from an angle that minimizes time and space for the opponent.



POSITIONING AND ANGLING

Being In the Right Place At the Right Time

Good players seem to be in the right position at the right time, and thereby get more involved in the game than others. Why is that? Are they faster so they can get to the right spot before anyone else? Are they more agile so they can switch directions more quickly? Are they smarter, and know where to be better than everybody else? Do they anticipate, read and react to the play better? Are they better coached? Are they following the system better? Are they more willing to make a difference in the game? Are they more confident? Is it just natural talent? Well the questions are many, but there is only one answer: “They are all of the above.”

To be in the right spot at the right time we need to know where that position is, when the right time is and how to get there.

One thing is for sure – players were not born with all these qualities. Somewhere and somehow as they matured, they developed these skills. In some way, they have gained experience, drawn conclusions and adapted their game. Coaching certainly played a part in it, but self-coaching played an even bigger part. If coaching made such an impact on these players, does it mean we can train all our players to be as good as the best players? Maybe not, but we can certainly train them to

be at the right spot at the right time. To do this successfully, there are three things we need to know: what is the right position, what is the right time, and how can our players get there.

The chapter on positioning and angling shows some ways to develop these skills. Very young players can learn these concepts. Learning them correctly from the start will make their actions and reactions develop naturally and become second nature.

USA Hockey recommends that positioning and angling drills are introduced early in a player’s career. The best ways to develop these skills is through read and react drills and a variety of games. Players as young as seven or eight years old can learn the basics of angling. These skills will form a very important base which will be needed as the players move into body contact and body checking. Take your time building these fundamental skills carefully. In fact, these drills should be reviewed and repeated throughout a player’s career.

In the positioning and angling section, players will learn about defensive and offensive side body positioning, passing and shooting lanes, steering and driving an opponent, and how to close the gap (space between the defensive player and puck carrier). The common denominator for all these skills is, of course, skating.

SKATING AND AGILITY

Positioning yourself in the best position, approaching the opponent from the proper angle and keeping your balance during and after the battle for the puck, are the keys to checking success. It is true to say that your checking ability largely depends on your skating skills. These skating skills are equally important when it comes to avoiding a check, protecting yourself and the puck. Pure speed can sometimes be enough, but more often it is the agility skills that will make the difference. The continuous training of all skating skills, including quick starts, stops, crossovers, turns, pivots, and lateral movements, is crucial to the development of checking skills. Skills to close the gap when playing man-to-man are also essential to learn. So, in addition to the skating skills above, every player should learn to master these three skating techniques:

1. Lateral Pivot Backward to Forward
2. Lateral Pivot Forward to Backward
3. Forward Stop to Backward Start

Lateral Pivot Backward to Forward

If you have backed off and would like to move forward to regain control of the gap, the lateral pivot backward to forward is a good move. Skate backwards, keep your body weight on one skate, and make a quarter of a circle with this skate so you are now going laterally. Turn the other skate outward, so the heel is pointing in and the toe and knee are pointing out. Step over on this skate, make a forward c-cut and start moving forward.

Lateral Pivot Forward to Backward

After approaching the opponent you need to start moving backwards without losing your momentum. Make a forward c-cut with one skate. Twist the other foot inward, so the toes and knee are pointing in. Step over to this skate and make a backward c-cut and continue backwards.

Forward Stop to Backward Start

If you have limited space, you will have to stop and start backwards. To still keep part of the momentum, do a one-foot snowplough stop. Prior to coming to a complete stop, push off with a powerful backward c-cut and continue with a crossover stride.

The better you learn to move laterally with either the heels or the toes pointing inwards, the more able you will be to move laterally and forward/backward with the opponent, keeping him contained, and waiting for the best situation to follow up with a check.

Technique Exercises

Heel-to-Heel Spiral
C-Cut Yo-Yo
C-Cut Step Over C-Cut
1-2-3 Clock

Situational Drills

3 x Wide Pass + Join the Rush
3 x 1 vs. 1 Neutral Zone
3 x 1 vs. 1 Defensive Zone

DEFENSIVE SIDE

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense,
Defensive Zone Coverage and
Penalty Killing

When the opponent controls the puck, most defensive tactics demand you to take a position on the defensive side of the player that you are covering. Defensive side means that you position yourself in an area so the opponent has to go through your area before he can get to the net. It takes extraordinary skating skills, as well as well-trained read-and-react skills, to perform this task effectively. So developing these skills will enhance your forechecking as well as your neutral zone and defensive zone defense. In penalty killing, defensive-side coverage is paramount to the success.

Try to stay square to the opponent and use an active stick (stick on puck in tight) to apply pressure without giving up your position. A low center of gravity, including good knee bend, will prepare you for body contact and increase your ability to move. Your objective is to position your body between the opponent and your net, staying in the lane from the opponent's perspective, not the puck's. Focusing on the opponent's chest will facilitate this task.

Technique Exercises

Follow the Leader

Mirror Exercise

Situational Drills

1 vs. 1 Out of the Corner

2 vs. 2 Out of the Corner

Steering Drill

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square
2. Stay low
3. Focus on the opponent's chest
4. Line up with the opponent, not the puck
5. Active stick – stick on the puck



PASSING LANE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Stickhandling

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

Controlling the passing lanes is necessary for successful defense. A player with no passing options is under pressure, exposed for checking, and likely to lose the puck. He will need to take bigger risks if attempting a pass which often leads to intercepted passes and turnovers. Players with well-developed skills for blocking passing lanes and intercepting passes are the unsung heroes of every successful hockey team. Not only do they stop the opponent from scoring, but they establish instant puck control and start quick transition attacks.

When playing the passing lanes, you do not want to give up the defensive side. The object is to continually block the lane between the passer and the intended receiver. This creates a passing shadow from which the receiver must move out of in order to receive a clean pass. Initially, control the lane with an active stick, and when you close in on the opponent, keep your shin pads and stick blade square across the passing lane to

fill as much space as possible. Focus on covering the on-ice lane. This will force the opponent to use saucer passes, which are tougher to execute and to receive.



Technique Exercise

Monkey in the Middle

Situational Drills

Two Lines Seam Pass Coverage

Passers and Shooters Coverage

Five Teaching Cues

1. Start from the defensive side of the passing lane
2. Active stick
3. Take away the on-ice lane first
4. Make yourself big (keep shin pads, stick blade, etc. square)
5. Head on a swivel

SHOOTING LANE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Stickhandling

IN THE GAME

Penalty Killing and Defensive Zone Coverage

The goaltender tries to stay in the shooting lane for the entire game. To consistently cover each new angle as the puck shifts from one shooting lane to another, he rarely steps outside the crease. Still, these rather short distances demand extraordinary skating-agility skills. In addition, all these movements are done by keeping a tight posture with no holes between the arms and the body, the smallest five-hole possible and the stick solid on the ice. If you are a defenseman or a forward, playing the shooting lane is not much different. Your goal is to position yourself in the lane between the net and the puck, not the lane between the net and the opponent. Stay square so you fill as much of the lane as possible, and use an active stick to stress the opponent. You have to think like a goaltender by focusing on the correct angle.

Aligning yourself with the puck, however, means that you are blocking your goaltender's line of vision. It is important to remember that you and your goaltender are working as a team. The purpose is to prevent the puck from going into the net, not necessarily to stop the puck yourself.



Situational Drill

Cover the Shooting Lanes

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square
2. Think like a goaltender
3. Take away the on-ice lane first
4. Line up with the puck
5. Active stick

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If you take away the lane along the ice, the goaltender can focus on the puck in the air. One method is to lie down (long body) and block the shot. This enables the goaltender to see the puck, and minimize the risks for deflections. Blocking shots is not an act of desperation, but a well-developed skill that starts with the ability to position yourself correctly in the shooting lane. Other shot blocking techniques include dropping to one knee (get big low) and standing (pads tight) in the shot lane.

DEFENSIVE TRIANGLE

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When you are forechecking or defending the neutral or defensive zones, you cannot narrowly focus on only one opponent and play the passing or shooting lane against him. On the contrary, your head always needs to be on a swivel to be aware of what is going on in other areas of the ice. In penalty killing, for example, you always have to cover, or be prepared to cover, two opponents. Positioning yourself on the defensive side, and in a not too flat angle to both of them, will make it possible to scan along the passing lanes and keep both opponents in your field of vision. Thereby, you will be aware of what one is doing without losing track of the other. The player with the best scoring angle is your primary concern, so position yourself toward him, and use an active stick (one hand on stick, stick blade on ice) to cover a larger area. This is also true for even-strength situations where a position in a defensive triangle is important, especially when you are playing on the weak side.

Situational Drills

2-on-1 From the Corner

Five Teaching Cues

1. Keep on the defensive side of both opponents
2. Keep both opponents in your field of vision
3. Overplay toward the opponent with the best shooting angle
4. One hand on stick, stick blade on ice
5. Scan along the passing lanes



OFFENSIVE SIDE

IN THE GAME

Backchecking, Neutral Zone
Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage
and Penalty Killing

Against a quick transition attack, you might find yourself on the offensive side of the puck carrier. In this position the opponent has a clear path to your net. Effectively controlling an opponent from this side is obviously more difficult than being in front of him. Nevertheless, the goal is to get control of the opponent and it starts with skating as hard as possible to close the gap. This forces the opponent to go full speed as well, and will reduce his time to make a play. Secondly, you are not alone. The key is to work together with your goaltender to stop the opponent. Your priority is to close the gap from the inside lane (from the middle). You thereby help your goaltender to isolate the opponent's options to one angle. Finally, be patient. A last minute stick check limits the opponent's ability to recover and make a play on goal.

Many backchecking systems use a back pressure tactic. A forward is pressuring the puck carrier from the offensive side and driving him into the defenseman. Thereby, the forward and the defenseman work as a team in a similar way to what is described in the example above with a backchecker and a goaltender.

Technique Exercise

Keep Away with Back to Defender

Situational Drill

Breakaway with Chaser

Five Teaching Cues

1. Skate hard to close the gap
2. Pressure the opponent to skate full speed
3. Wait with your stick check until the opponent is about to make a play
4. Make the inside lane a priority; pressure from the middle
5. Work as a team with your goaltender



NEUTRAL WEAK SIDE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When battling for the puck, you often end up side-by-side or neutral with the opponent. The weak side refers to the side of the checker's body that he holds the stick with his top hand. From this side a checker has reduced leverage with his stick when initiating a stick check.

As a first step, it is important to limit the area in which the opponent can maneuver. Try to get your hands in front of the opponent's hands. Use your shoulder and upper arm to restrict the opponent's arm movements. Ideally, you want to have your elbow in front of the opponent's chest and your hip slightly behind the opponent's hip. Once in this position, you can execute a tap check or a lift check with your stick.

It's important to maintain the same speed as the opponent to avoid allowing him to cut in

Situational Drill

Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Skate hard to position your hands in front of your opponent's hands
2. Try to restrict the opponent with your shoulder and upper arm
3. Get your elbow in front and your hip behind the opponent
4. Keep solid support on the inside edge of the outside skate
5. Never use the butt end of your stick



behind or in front of you. Keep your support solid on the inside edge of the outside foot to be ready if body contact should occur. Using the butt end of your stick to impede the opponent is illegal and could cause injury to your opponent.

NEUTRAL STRONG SIDE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

Skating side-by-side with the opponent on your stick side, bottom hand closest to the opponent, is sometimes referred to as neutral strong side. From this side it is easier to use your stick to control the opponent, but without hooking or slashing. Your skating skills are paramount. To be able to control the opponent, you need to keep the same speed and move in the same direction, so he cannot cut in front of you or escape behind you. Try to position your hands in front of the opponent to either restrict his arm motions, or to apply various stick checks. It is important to limit the area in which the opponent can move, so make the inside a priority, and balance yourself on the inside edge of the skate farthest away from the opponent. This will give you good support if body contact occurs.



Situational Drill

Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Skate hard to get your hands in front of the opponent's
2. Try to restrict the opponent with your shoulder and upper arm
3. Position your elbow in front and your hip behind the opponent
4. Keep solid support on the inside edge of the outside skate
5. Use a press, a lift or a tap check to gain puck possession

From the neutral strong side, you can separate the opponent from the puck by using:

Lift Stick Check
Tap Stick Check
Press Check
Side Body Check

STEERING

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense and Penalty Killing

Keeping the opponent to the outside and forcing him away from the middle of the ice is one common denominator of all defensive strategies in all areas of the ice. Steering is a low energy, almost passive method of achieving this. While mainly used in forechecking and neutral zone defense, steering can be used in all zones. Most frequently, steering is used to kill penalties. If you hold the inside of the ice and leave the outside areas open, the opponent is invited to move into these areas. Preferably, you want the opponent to move onto his backhand side. When he starts moving, continue to hold the inside and isolate the opponent to the outside. The perfect position is slightly behind the opponent. From this angle you should be able to read the opponent's jersey number. This inhibits the opponent from cutting to the middle behind the checker. Orientation and skating skills are thus very important. Use your stick to take away passing lanes and to make passing the puck into the middle lane very risky. You will need to communicate with your teammates.

Situational Drill

Steering Drill

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay slightly behind (you should be able to read the opponent's number)
2. If possible, steer to the opponent's backhand side
3. Take the middle and steer to the outside
4. Work as a team with your teammates
5. Use your stick to take away passing lanes



DRIVING

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Backchecking

The more aggressive form of steering is sometimes called driving. By keeping a tight gap and having the opponent constrained by the boards you can drive the opponent into an area of your choice. The purpose of driving is to force the opponent in a very small area and follow through with a check.

To achieve this, you have to approach the opponent from an angle that leaves him only one option, and that is to move wide. You aim to keep the gap so tight that the opponent cannot turn or stop without making contact with the boards or you. The perfect execution allows you to initially see part of the opponent's jersey number. As you maintain the inside track, you try to cut off the opponent's line of travel and end up with your hands and shoulders in front of the opponent, but your hip behind him. At the final stage of the drive, you can separate the opponent from the puck with a stick check, by rubbing him out or with a side body check.

Situational Drill

Wheel by the Hash Mark

Five Teaching Cues

1. Close to a tight gap
2. Stay slightly behind (initially you should be able to just see the opponent's number)
3. Keep to the inside (defensive side) track
4. Force the opponent wide
5. When making contact, get your shoulder in front and your hip behind the opponent



CLOSING THE GAP

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense and Penalty Killing

When closing the gap in open ice, you can use the lateral movement forward to backward technique. This technique allows you to bring the momentum from the approach into the backward motion. If the opponent is moving laterally, this technique allows you to follow his direction and keep a tight gap. If the opponent is coming straight at you, you make the inside of the ice a priority. Always try to stay square to the opponent. Focus on the opponent's chest, not the puck, and time your approach so there is enough time to accelerate backwards. The purpose is to come out of the turn with the same speed as your opponent.

You could add a poke check or a sweep check to the motion, but keep it controlled so you are not taking yourself out of the play. Once the move is finished, you should end up slightly to the inside. As a rule of thumb, your outside shoulder should line up with the opponent's inside shoulder. The tighter the gap, the higher demand on your skating skills, but the less demand on the timing. Closing the gap flat is often used in steering and trapping tactics, and by closing the gap to a non-puck carrier. More agile defensemen use it even in tighter checking situations such as in the defensive zone's corners and by pinching in the offensive zone.



Technique Exercise

C-Cut Yo-Yo

C-Cut Step Over C-Cut

Situational Drill

3 x 1 vs. 1 Neutral Zone

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square to the opponent
2. If the opponent moves laterally, follow that motion
3. If the opponent moves toward you, turn from outside to inside
4. Close gap as tight as possible
5. Line up to the inside shoulder of the opponent's body

Close the gap and follow through with a poke check or a sweep check.

CLOSING THE GAP TIGHT

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When approaching an opponent in the shooting lane, a constrained area or where there is very little room to move laterally, closing the gap with the forward stop to backward start technique is the better option. This technique of closing the gap is used all over the ice, but especially in the defensive zone corners and the slot. It will bring you almost to a complete stop. While you will be able to carry over very little momentum, you will be able to more consistently hold the defensive side and the shooting lane.

Focus on the opponent's chest, not the puck, and be aware of his speed and direction. Stay square so you are facing the opponent the entire time. Make your turn the same direction the opponent is going, and close the gap tight enough to be able to follow through with a poke check or a sweep check. If the opponent is moving towards you, adjust your approach so you align yourself to end up on the inside of your opponent.

Technique Exercise

1-2-3 Clock

Situational Drill

3 x 1 vs. 1 Defensive Zone

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square to the opponent
2. Close to a tight gap
3. Active stick
4. Turn the same direction as the opponent is moving
5. Turn from the outside to the inside if the opponent is coming straight at you



Step 2

Stick Checking

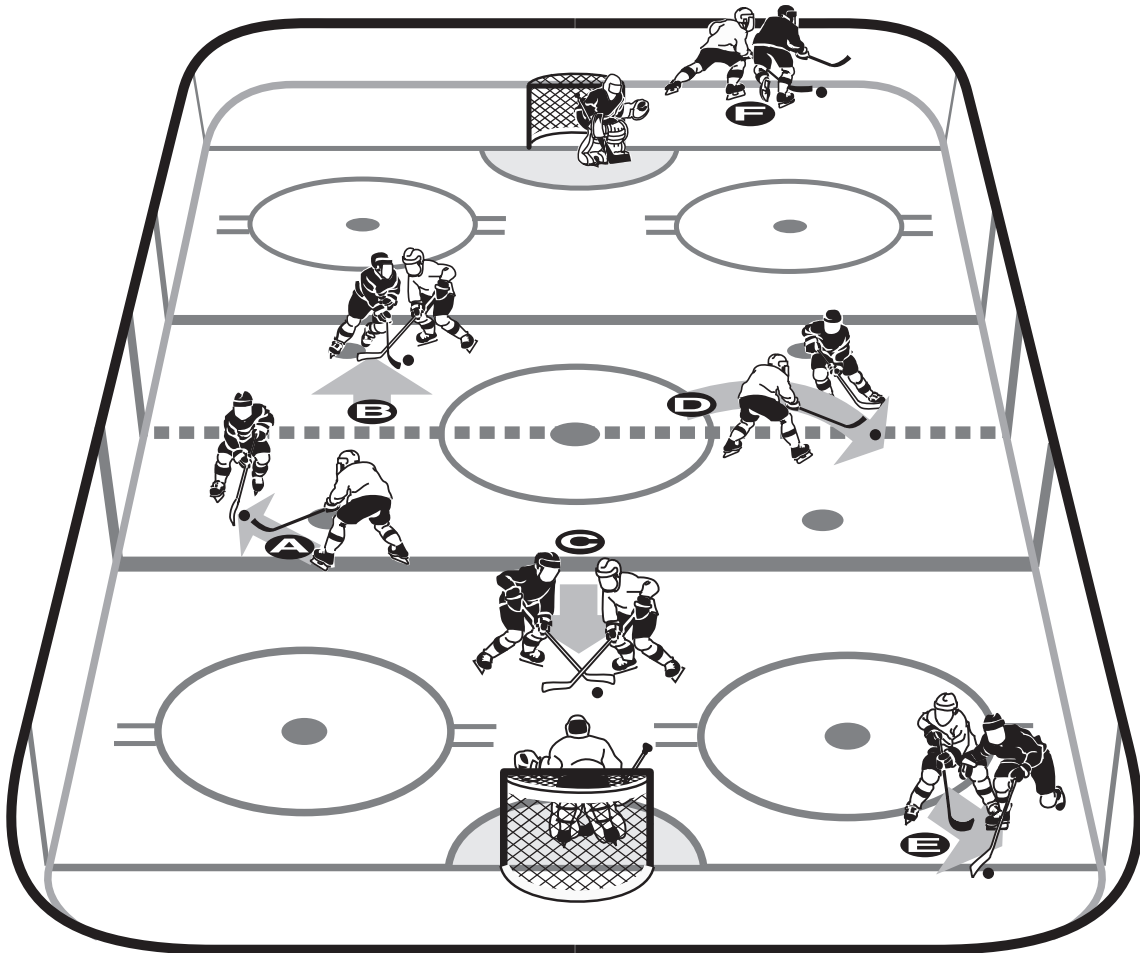


STICK CHECKING

Stick checks are the most common checks in hockey. Choosing the right check for the right situation is only an option for the players who master them all. This section will help you with the following stick checking techniques:

- | | | |
|----|-------|---|
| A. | Poke | Hold the stick in one hand and project the blade of the stick toward the puck |
| B. | Lift | Use your stick to lift the opponent's stick |
| C. | Press | Lock the opponent's stick down by pressing your stick over it |
| D. | Sweep | Sweep your stick in a circular motion towards the puck |
| E. | Tap | Tap your stick on the opponent's stick |
| F. | Pry | Use your stick to pry the opponent away from the boards |

Step 2 teaches how to effectively use the stick for poke checking, sweep checking, lifting or locking the opponent's stick.



STICK CHECKING: EXTENDED STICKHANDLING SKILLS

Have you ever wondered why some players frequently end up with the puck? It is almost as if their sticks had “puck magnets” on the blades when they effortlessly dig out the puck or take it away from an opponent. These highly skilled players gain puck control without going through the steps of finishing the check and holding the pin. By doing so they save both energy and time which can now be used for the attack. It is not possible to explain all the reasons for these players’ success, but the stick checking techniques presented here will enable your players to obtain instant puck control and launch immediate attacks.

Stick checks are an effective way to separate the opponent from the puck. An active stick will stress the opponent, which might force him to lose the puck. Combining an active stick with specific stickchecking techniques creates a very effective defensive method of play. In fact, stick checks are by far the most common checking method. For every body check, there are at least 10 stick checks in a hockey game.

Having an active stick is described as continuously moving the stick blade to confuse the puck carrier. In most defensive positions it is important for the defensive players to have one hand on their stick and the stick blade on the ice. This allows players to have influence over a greater area of the ice. As a checker closes in on the puck carrier, it is a good habit for the checker to approach with one hand on the stick and the blade on the ice. We say the checker should approach “stick on puck.” By doing this the checker makes himself bigger. The checker then has influence over the opponent from outside body contact range.

The right stickchecking techniques are an essential part of your team’s checking ability, and developing these skills is paramount for all players’ success. This section will describe stick checking skills such as poke check, lift check, press check, sweep check, tap check and pry check.



POKE CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Skating, Stickhandling and Checking

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive
Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

The most common stick check is the poke check. The poke check is used all over the ice and by all players, including the goaltender. Correctly executed, it is highly effective, but overuse or poor execution can be counter productive. Keep the stick in one hand and the elbow tucked back so the blade of the stick is fairly close to the body. Be patient and wait until your opponent moves the puck within striking distance. Focus on the opponent's chest and hands while still seeing the puck in the periphery of your field of vision. Keep the blade flat on the ice. Extend the arm with a powerful push. Think, "extend with the elbow." It is important that you not over extend by thrusting with your shoulder. You need to maintain good balance and be centered over your skates. This allows for easy recovery and the ability to continue the play. In more extreme circumstances, by stopping and launching your body forward, you can significantly increase the reach of the poke check. Be aware that an unsuccessful launch will put you in a poor defensive position, with the risk of being beaten by the puck carrier.

Technique Exercise

Poke Checking On Line

Situational Drill

1-on-1 in Narrow Lane

Five Teaching Cues

1. Keep the stick in one hand
2. Keep the blade flat on the ice
3. Start with the elbow tucked back
4. Be patient
5. Extend the arm from the elbow



LIFT CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Checking and Stickhandling

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Backchecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

From the neutral strong side position, the stick lift check is an effective skill to separate the opponent from the puck. When protecting the puck, most players pressure the stick firmly onto the ice. This is often referred to as playing with a lot of weight on the stick. This means that you have to act both powerfully and surprisingly to be successful with a stick lift check. Lowering the bottom hand on your stick will increase the power, but decrease the reach. This technique is only useful when you are in tight on the opponent.

Making contact with the opponent's stick close to the blade will have a similar effect – more power but less reach. The ideal would naturally be to attack the lower part of the opponent's shaft using a wide grip. However, the ideal situation is rarely an option, so for lack of power you need to increase the element of timing and surprise.

Technique Exercise

Stationary Lift Check

Situational Drill

Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Wide grip
2. Make impact close to opponent's blade
3. Use an element of surprise
4. Be patient
5. Time your check with the opponent's action

2



PRESS CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Checking and Stickhandling

IN THE GAME

1-on-1 Puck Battles, Neutral Zone
Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage
and Penalty Killing

From the neutral strong side, the press check is an effective way to temporarily lock the opponent's stick. There are three situations where the press check is used most often. While battling along the boards, the press check is an effective way to prevent the opponent from getting to the puck. In the slot, the press check can obstruct the opponent from receiving a pass. Finally, with a press check, the opponent's stick can be blocked during a face-off. This check can be used in a variety of one-on-one puck battle situations.

Hold your stick with a fairly wide grip (bottom hand below the middle of the shaft). Apply a lot of weight to the stick and try to block the opponent's stick two-thirds down the shaft. It is fairly easy for the opponent to release the stick from a press check, so be patient and wait for the decisive moment such as when the opponent is just about to receive a pass. Since you do not know where the puck will end up, try to position yourself to control the opponent after the press check.

Technique Exercise

Stationary Shooting vs.
Press Check

Five Teaching Cues

1. Wide grip
2. Make impact 2/3 down the shaft
3. Apply maximum power
4. Time your check with the opponent's action
5. Remain in a position where you can control the opponent



SWEEP CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Stickhandling and Checking

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage, Penalty Killing and All Zones

Correctly executed, the sweep check can be an effective way to break up an attack. The advantage to the sweep check is its reach can be useful as a last resort for odd-man rushes or a loose puck in front of the net.

For maximum reach, you should hold the stick in one hand. Make a semi-circular sweeping motion with the stick, keeping the blade flat on the ice, and aiming directly for the puck. It is important to stay centered and balanced over your skates, so try not to rotate or twist your body, as this might take you out of the play. Even after successfully executing the sweep check, you still need to be in a position to control your opponent. The large motion involved makes it difficult to use the sweep check as a surprise, but can be an effective tool in forcing the opponent to make a move or disrupting his play. Therefore, be patient and time your movement.

Technique Exercise

Sweep Check On Line

Situational Drill

3 x 1 vs. 1 Neutral Zone

Five Teaching Cues

1. Keep the stick in one hand
2. Move with your arm only; do not twist or turn your body; stay balanced on skates
3. Keep the blade flat on the ice
4. Wait for your best opportunity
5. Remain in a position where you can control the opponent

2



TAP CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Stickhandling and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

The tap check can do two things. First, if the opponent controls the puck on the opposite side of the blade, the tap check will knock his stick into the puck and in turn knock the puck away. Second, if the puck is on the near side of the stick, the tap check will knock the opponent's stick away, create separation and leave the puck open to be picked up.

With the lift and press checks, you apply force to the opponent's stick from underneath or from above. With the tap check, you apply the force from the side. Use a powerful but very short motion, and aim for the lower part of your opponent's shaft. Try to make contact with the heel area of your stick. Wait for an opportunity where the opponent's stick is open. One surprising and well-targeted tap check is better than many randomly launched tap checks. Stay in a controlled position so you can either recover the loose puck, control your opponent or continue checking.

Technique Exercise

Keep Away with Back to Defender

Situational Drill

Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Apply the tap to the side of the shaft close to the blade
2. Use the heel area of your stick
3. Use a lot of power, but do not swing
4. Wait for a good opportunity
5. Remain in a position where you can control the opponent



PRY CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Stickhandling and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking and Power Play

The pry check is a rarely used technique, but in forechecking and power play situations it can be an effective way to dig out the puck and gain puck control in the offensive zone.

If you decide to use a pry check, you've also decided not to contain your opponent. Since you have to apply the check from the side, the opponent has an "escape route" in the other direction. The pry check is therefore only effective if it is used surprisingly, or if you have a numerical advantage around the puck. Wedge your stick between the opponent and the boards. Make sure your shaft rests solid against the opponent's shin pad, not the thigh. Pry the opponent's leg away from the boards. Quickly pick up the loose puck, or have a teammate pick it up.

Technique Exercise

Stationary Freeze vs. Pry Check

Situational Drill

Pin and Pry (2 vs. 1)

Five Teaching Cues

1. Approach from your strong side
2. Wedge the stick between the opponent and the boards
3. Shaft of the stick rests against the shin pads
4. Pry the opponent away from the boards
5. Pull out the puck



Step 3

Body Contact



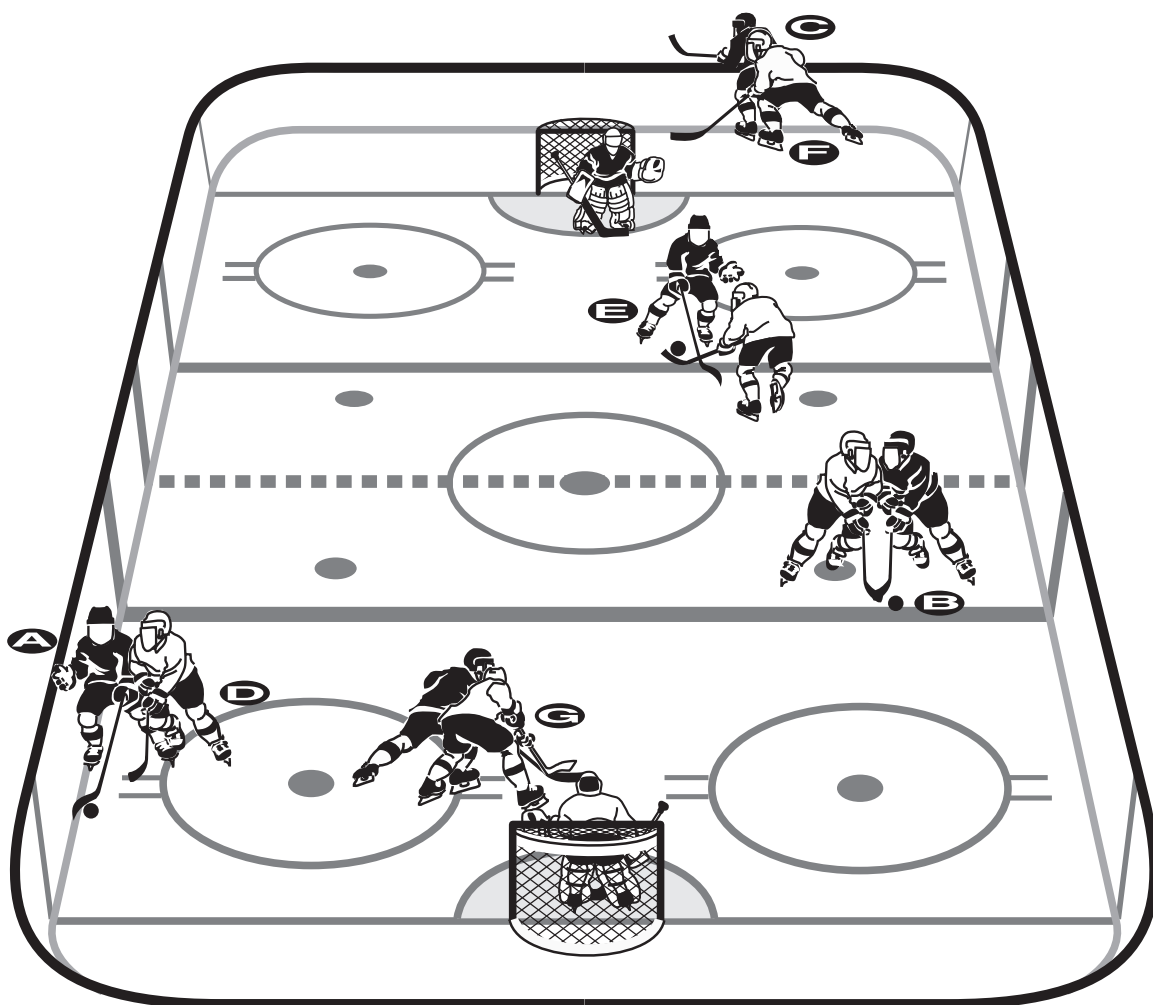
DEVELOPING BODY CONTACT SKILLS

With 12 players and two or three officials on the ice, there is very little room. Players are certain to run into each other. Body contact is natural to the game. Players who learn how to use the body to control the opponent, and how to protect themselves and the puck, will have a decisive advantage. In this section we will focus on the following skills:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| A. Receiving by the Boards | Stay tight to the boards and use the arms to brace yourself |
| B. Receiving Open Ice | Contact with the hip and shoulder, and unload the closest foot |
| C. Receiving from Behind | Get your stick and hands up against the glass |
| D. Rubbing Out | Cut off the opponent's line of travel as you are moving parallel |
| E. Screen Out | Hold your ground to prevent the opponent from continuing |
| F. Pinning | Control the opponent against the boards |
| G. Box Out | Move the opponent away from an area |

Step 3 is to use the body to block the opponent's path or take away his skating lanes.

The correct stance and effective use of leg strength are important parts of these techniques.



BODY CONTACT

The Combined Power of Skating Stability and Physical Strength

Often when two players collide, one falls down and one keeps his balance. It is not always the bigger and heavier player that remains standing. Frequently, smaller players are more stable. In hockey, keeping your balance is important since falling down will take you out of the play for a moment, and create an advantage for the other team.

Players who master the skills of body contact know how to position themselves for maximum stability. The higher the level of hockey, the less space there is and the more frequently body contact occurs. Younger players have to learn how to skate, stickhandle, pass, and shoot while being pressured by opponents. It takes a long time and plenty of training before they start to feel comfortable and safe when being pressured from behind or along the boards. It is essential they learn how to protect their head, knees, and other injury-sensitive body parts.

The third step of USA Hockey's checking progression deals with contact confidence and safety in body contact situations. It is vital for younger players to develop solid body contact skills to prepare for body checking

This icon indicates that this skill is primarily a body checking skill. It is important to learn, within the concept of body contact, since incidental collisions occur.



later in their hockey careers. This section focuses on the defensive part of body contact and the protective skills when being pressured. Under the concept of body contact, the players should also learn how to safely receive body checks and how to avoid them. Learning these skills will make players more confident and more reliable when playing both offense and defense.

This section will also explain how to use the body to restrict an opponent's options by using the skills of rubbing out along the boards, pinning, screening and boxing out in front of the net. These body contact skills make up the base of body checking. They are the fundamental skills that every player needs and every checking system depends on.

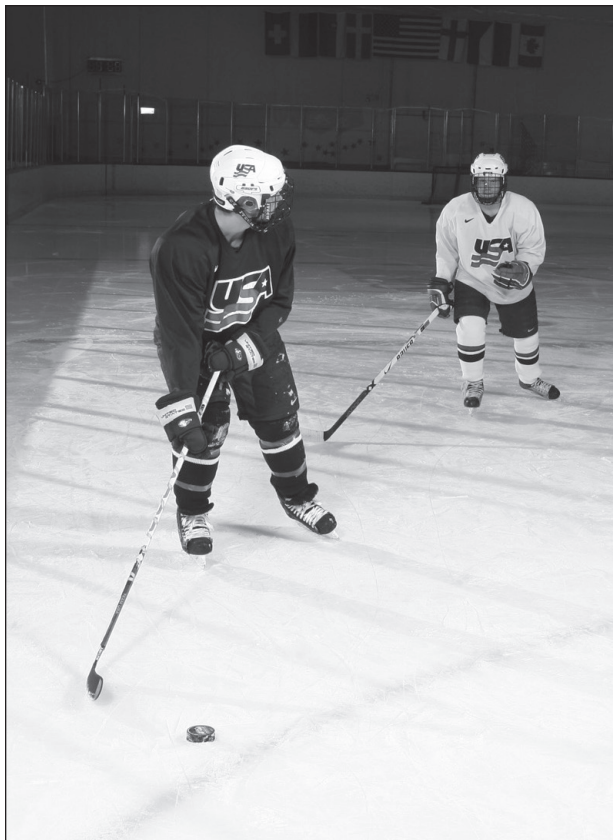
Hockey is a dynamic game and often takes unpredictable turns. We must keep this in mind when working with children.



AWARENESS AND ORIENTATION

The game is not solely played with the puck. Still, the puck has an almost magic ability to attract the attention of all players. It is mostly the player who is carrying the puck who seems to develop a very narrow vision. Not only does this prevent him from seeing the positions of teammates, but it also makes him less aware of the location of the checkers. It is thus critical to the development of young players that they work on their puck handling skills. Simultaneously controlling the puck and seeing what is going on in other areas of the rink is most important, both for making a play and avoiding a check. For this purpose, the following qualities should be developed to their fullest potential.

***The more prepared you are for body contact,
the better your chances of success.***



Split Vision

Without focusing on anything, be aware of everything your eyes catch, from the left corner of the left eye to the right corner of the right eye. This skill allows you to see the puck under your control and yet survey the ice.

Scan

Move the eyes back and forth to increase awareness of everything that is going on in front of you.

Head on a Swivel

Turn the head frequently to see what is behind you.

Shoulder Check

Turn your head and look over your shoulder to make sure you know where the checkers are. All players should shoulder check before receiving a pass or picking up a loose puck. This simple habit allows players to know what they will do once they gain puck possession and if they are under pressure from the opponent.

Communicate

Make it a habit of always informing your teammates of what you see to help them stay aware of the situation. At the same time, listen to your teammates to take advantage of what they see.

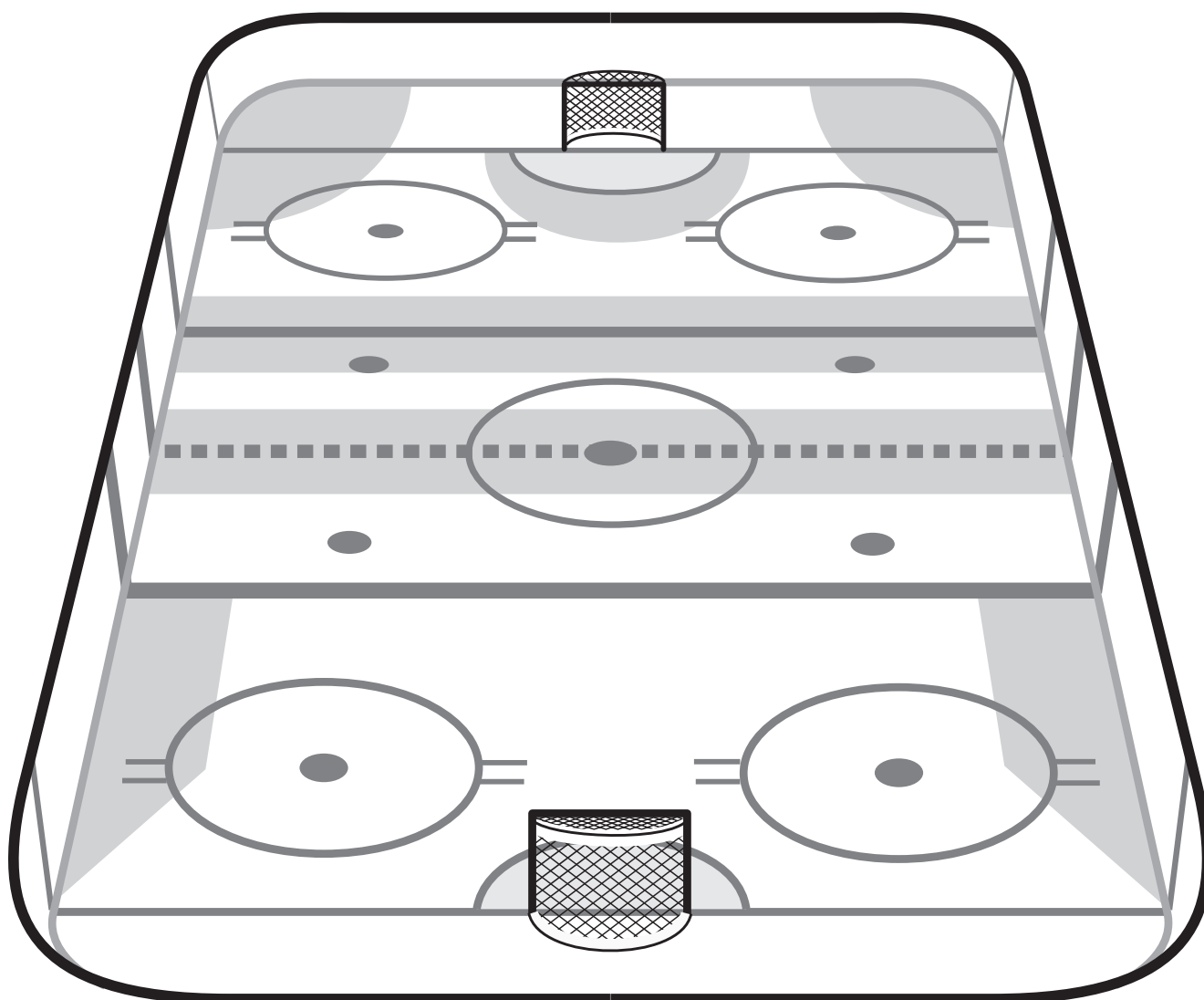
In some areas of the ice, you are more likely to get checked than in other areas. Once in these areas, you have to be aware of the fact that a body check might be imminent and you should prepare yourself to absorb it, regardless of when or from which direction it comes. These areas include:

- A. The half boards in the defensive zone (where the opponent is likely to pinch)

- B. Crossing the center line and the offensive blue line (where the opponent is likely to stand up)
- C. In front of the net in the offensive zone (where the opponent is likely to play very aggressive)
- D. In the offensive zone corners (where the defenders are also likely to play aggressive)



AWARENESS ZONES



INTRODUCTION TO BODY CONTACT

Not everybody on a team will need to develop strong body checking skills, but everybody needs to be capable of safely taking a check or collision. Therefore, the initial training focuses on receiving and protecting oneself. The goal is to work on the receiving skills and not to develop checking power. Whenever you are in a body contact situation, you want to be in a strong and stable position. This position should allow you to withstand the impact of a collision and remain in good balance to continue the play. Characteristics for every stable construction are a wide base and a low center of gravity. A hockey player's most stable stance is the tripod stance. The feet are slightly wider than shoulder width and, together with the stick, they form a wide, triangular base. With two hands holding a firm grip, the stick becomes a very sturdy "third leg." The knees are bent deeply to lower the center of gravity.

The tripod stance provides additional advantages. First of all, with the stick on the ice, you are ready to pass, deflect a shot, or shoot the puck. Second, you will not risk injuring anyone with a high stick, or get a penalty for high sticking. Finally, the deep knee bend position enables you to be explosive and quickly move laterally. This will help you to



be stable in a body contact battle as well as avoid body contact all together.

The tripod stance is the starting position for both checking and absorbing a check, so every player needs to learn how to move around in this position. All players also have to develop a strong lower body to prevent them from fatigue as they operate in this stance throughout the game.



CONTACT AREAS OF THE BODY

In body contact situations it is important to let the body part that is best protected, and most solid, absorb the impact. All young players have to learn not to expose any fragile or unprotected areas of the body, but rather turn a safe, protected body part toward the opponent and the boards. Most parts of the body are protected against a high stick or a bouncing puck, but no protection can shield the body from the impact of a high-speed collision or a crash with the boards.

Some parts are more vulnerable than others, but no part is 100% safe. Excessive blows to the head, chest, ribs, back, thighs, and knees can cause severe injuries and be very painful. Exposing any of these parts to the impact with the boards or an opponent should be avoided.

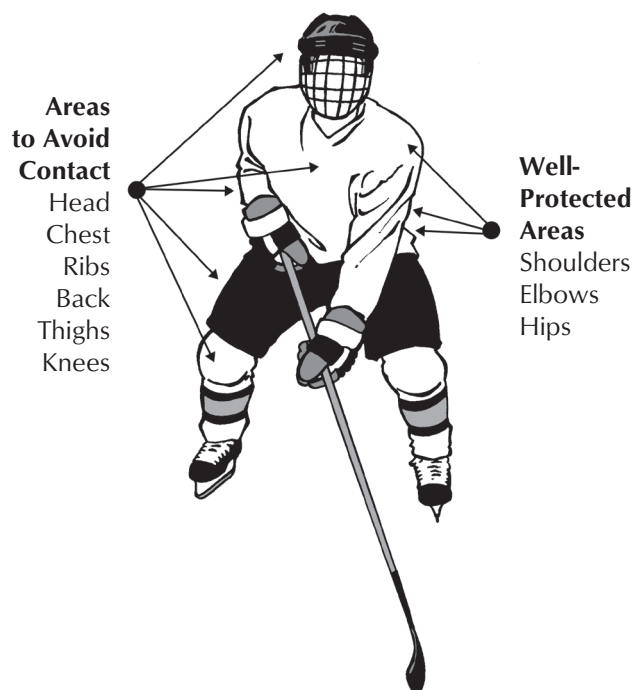
Against moderate impact, the shoulder, elbows, and hips are relatively well protected, and are unlikely to suffer any injury.

The hands could also be added to this category, but the wrists are easily twisted or even broken, and should not be exposed to the impact of body contact. Second, and more important, using the hands in a pushing motion is hazardous to the opponent, thus pushing off an opponent should not be used in youth hockey.

Using the elbows is not allowed. This leaves us with two body parts that are suitable for body contact – the shoulders and the hips. The best protection is accomplished by spreading the impact to both of these areas. In addition, by tucking in the elbow tight

to the body, the ribs will be protected. The shoulder, upper arm, elbow, and hip together form a big surface that spreads out the impact, thereby decreasing the risk of being injured.

Finally, the body can only withstand the force of a collision if the player is prepared. First, players need a high fitness level with well-developed muscles, especially around the core. Second, they have to learn to tighten up these muscles, to breathe in and to hold the breath at the moment of the impact. Without the support of the muscles, the bones themselves have no stability.



SAFELY TAKING THE IMPACT ALONG THE BOARDS

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Breakout, Entries and Offensive Zone Attack



When you collide with the boards or receive a body check, you want to operate from a strong and stable position and let a well-protected body part take the impact. If you are unprepared, or take the impact with a weaker part of the body, you are setting yourself up for failure. When a collision is imminent, you cannot simply accept being a receiver. You must play active and become just as much a checker as the person who is trying to check you.

Taking a body check by the boards is, for many young players, a stressful situation. The boards are hard and so is the opponent's equipment. Most likely it will hurt and the player has no guarantee that he will not get injured. It is important to develop a sense of control when an opponent is approaching. Knowing how to react will make the younger player feel that he is in charge and can decide how, and to a certain degree, when the impact will occur. After the impact, push off the opponent.

Technique Exercise

Receiving a Check Along the Boards

Situational Drill

Carrying the Puck vs. Forechecker

Five Teaching Cues

1. Hip and skate against the boards
2. Brace with the arm against the glass
3. Lean into the checker
4. Tighten your muscles and hold your breath
5. Unload the inside skate



SAFELY TAKING THE IMPACT ON OPEN ICE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Breakout, Regroup and Entries



When players are racing for a loose puck, they often bump into each other. If they are going in the same general direction, the impact is less intense than when going in opposite directions. In the latter case, the priority is to avoid the body contact. If the body contact cannot be avoided, it is important to absorb the impact the right way.

Non-body checking rules demand that both players do their best to avoid collisions. Body checking rules only allow adequate force to separate the opponent from the puck.

Stay in a deep tripod position. Turn your shoulder and hip toward the opponent. Keep the full blade of the outside skate on the ice for maximum support. The stick is your third leg, hence keep it on the ice. Avoid exposing your ribs by tucking in your elbow to protect this area. This posture could expose your inside knee to a vulnerable position, so unload the inside skate at the moment of contact.



Technique Exercises

Open-Ice Body Contact Exercise

Circle Bumps

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay in a deep tripod stance
2. Absorb the impact with your shoulder and hip
3. Apply power with your outside skate
4. Tuck in the elbow to protect the ribs
5. Unload the inside skate



SAFELY TAKING THE IMPACT FROM BEHIND

CORE SKILLS

Puck Control and Checking

IN THE GAME

Breakout and Offensive Zone Attack



Even though checking from behind is strictly prohibited, you still have to learn how to protect yourself if the situation should occur. In addition, successful play in the offensive zone includes controlling the puck along the boards and avoiding getting pinned. A key note is to always make your approach to the boards and puck at an angle, never straight on. This will put you in a more favorable position.

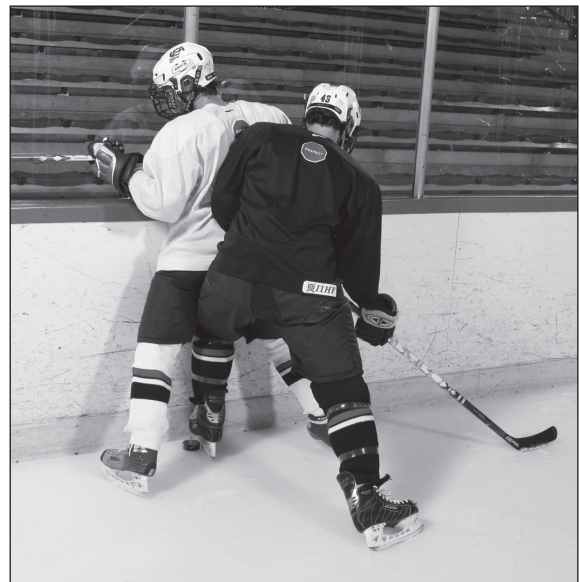
When pressured from behind, hold your hands up with your knuckles against the glass to brace and help absorb the impact. You can then push off the glass. Try to keep your hips away from the boards and support yourself with your skates and knees. Keep your balance on the middle part of the blade, control the puck with your skates, and do not look down. Remember – Heads Up, Don't Duck!

Technique Exercise

Holding the Pin Contest

Five Teaching Cues

1. Approach from an angle
2. Brace yourself with the hands up against the glass
3. Support yourself with your knees and skates
4. Keep your hip away from the boards
5. Do not look down – Heads Up, Don't Duck!



AVOIDING BODY CONTACT

CORE SKILLS

Puck Control and Skating

IN THE GAME

All situations



The only way to completely avoid body contact of body checking is to not play at all. If you choose to play, you will encounter body contact and body checking. The safest way to react to the checker is to avoid him completely. That method could turn out to be a “catch 22” though, since if you do not manage to escape the check, you are now in a poor position to safely take the impact. It is important to learn when to take the impact and when to escape.

With quickness and good agility skills, you will be able to avoid many body checks. Different techniques will work in different situations.

Quick Stop

Just prior to the contact, make a quick stop and let the checker pass by in front of you.

Quick Step

Slow down a bit, so the checker adjusts his angle. Just prior to the contact, make a quick step and let the checker pass by behind you.

Lean Off

If you are in a wide stance, you can lean towards the checker, but at the last moment lean the other way. It is important to unload the weight of your closest skate.

Roll Off

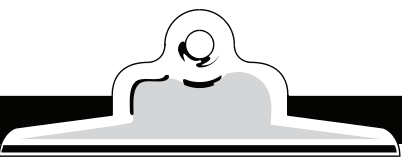
A very effective way to avoid a check is to roll off it. The principle is the same as that of a revolving door, but one that can rotate in both directions. This technique is especially useful when you find yourself in too upright of a position and with too little time to turn your shoulder toward the opponent and get good solid support with your skate. You can also use this technique after a check has been made to free yourself from the opponent (see photo illustrations on next page).



Lean Off Sequence







Technique Exercise
Circle Bumps

Situational Drill
Carrying the Puck vs. Forechecker
The Pinching Drills

Five Teaching Cues

1. Expose one side of the body
2. Give way for the impact
3. Keep your feet close together
4. Leave the puck
5. Rotate around your own axis as a revolving door

Expose one side of your body. When the checker places his check there, you give way for the impact and rotate quickly around your own axis. Bring your feet close together to increase the speed of the rotation and avoid exposing the knees for the impact. Keep your stick in two hands and lift it off the ice so it does not get tangled into the opponent's stick.



RUBBING OUT

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Backchecking,
Defensive Zone Coverage and
Any Loose Puck Race

When no one is between you and the puck, you can approach the puck and thereby cut off the skating lane for your opponent. As long as your primary drive is toward the puck, you can lean into the opponent to hold your lane. When this body contact occurs in the proximity of the boards, you can rub out the opponent and bring him to a halt. With good angling skills, you will be able to time your approach so you end up slightly ahead of the opponent and can rub him out prior to picking up the puck.

The rubbing out technique can be used all over the rink. It is particularly effective in forechecking. Approach the puck using a deep, wide stance. Your first focus should be to establish body position on the opponent with respect to the puck. If neutral with the opponent, keep your stick on the ice, ready to apply a lift, tap or press check. Use your outside foot for power to hold your lane.

**Never apply any body contact when
approaching the opponent from behind**

Situational Drill

Carrying the Puck vs. Forechecker

Five Teaching Cues

1. Time your approach to end up slightly ahead of the opponent
2. Maintain a deep, wide stance
3. Keep the stick on the ice
4. Prepare to press, lift or tap check
5. Use the outside foot for power to hold your lane



3

SCREENING OUT

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Defensive Zone Coverage,
Backchecking, Penalty Killing and
Neutral Zone Forechecking

With good skating and angling skills, you can move into an area and thus, without using a body check, force the opponent into another area. However, if body contact occurs, you cannot be moving into the opponent. You have to move parallel or in the same general direction. Once in this position, you can use body contact to hold your lane and screen the opponent out of the intended area.

Read the speed and direction of the opponent so you know into which area he is moving. Time your approach so you will end up side-by-side with the opponent. Stay in a wide, deep stance and apply power with the outside skate. Use an active stick and be prepared to poke check!

Screening out is a very important skill in defensive zone coverage and to defend against an attack on the rush. It is also used in penalty killing and forechecking, and can be used both against a puck carrier and non puck carrier.

Situational Drills

Two vs. Two with Point Shot
Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Read the opponent's speed and course
2. Approach to line up side-by-side
3. Use an active stick
4. Prepare to poke check
5. Use the outside foot for power to hold your lane



BOXING OUT

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Backchecking, Defensive Zone
Coverage and Scrums Around
the Puck

The purpose of boxing out is to help the goaltender get a clear view of the puck and to prevent the opponent from deflecting the puck. The expression “box out” refers to moving someone out of an imaginary area, or a box, in front of the net.

*The area in front of the net is a high-risk area.
USA Hockey’s Core Values prescribe a safe environment.*

***Does this imply that we should decrease the
level of physical play in this area?***

The rules do not allow any kind of checking against a non-puck carrying player, so boxing out can only be executed as a contest for an area, not a battle versus an opponent. Remain in a solid tripod stance and apply force with the outside skate. Use your shoulder and hip to force yourself into the area and to force the opponent out. Be prepared to use a lift, press, or tap check if the puck approaches.

Technique Exercise

King of the Hill

Situational Drills

One vs. One with Point Shot

Two vs. Two with Point Shot

Five Teaching Cues

1. Be aware of the puck at all times
2. Remain in a solid tripod stance
3. Apply power with your outside skate
4. Use your shoulder and hip to force the opponent out of the area
5. Prepare to lift, press and tap check



PINNING

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Defensive Zone Coverage



The purpose of the pin is to control the opponent along the boards. The pin is an effective way to defend against the cycle and a safe way to check an opponent. Since exaggerating the pin might result in a holding penalty, it is very important not to grab the opponent, but rather to strictly apply pressure.

To get the opponent in a position where you can pin him, close the gap, use your stick actively, and be patient. Wait for a situation where the opponent is close to the boards and has his back turned to the play. Apply pressure by extending the knee of the rear leg.

Pressure the opponent's hip tight up against the boards. When the puck leaves the area, release the opponent and remain on the defensive side to control his lane to your net.

Technique Exercise

Holding the Pin Contest

Situational Drill

One vs. One in the Corner

Two vs. Two in the Corner

Five Teaching Cues

1. Wrap stick around the opponent
2. Place knee between the opponent's knees
3. Pressure with thigh, hand and shoulder
4. Apply power with rear skate
5. Remain on the defensive side after releasing the pin



The T-Lock

Placing one leg between the skates of the opponent and apply pressure with the other leg.

The Lasso

Holding the stick with the top hand and wrapping it around the opponent to play the puck. The free hand can help apply pressure, but must not wrap around or grab.

These actions, if done properly and within the framework of playing the opponent or the puck, are considered to be acceptable actions. However, if these defensive tactics are used for the purpose of restraining or impeding the opponent with no effort to play the puck, these actions may be penalized under USA Hockey's Standard of Play initiative.

Step 4

Body Checking

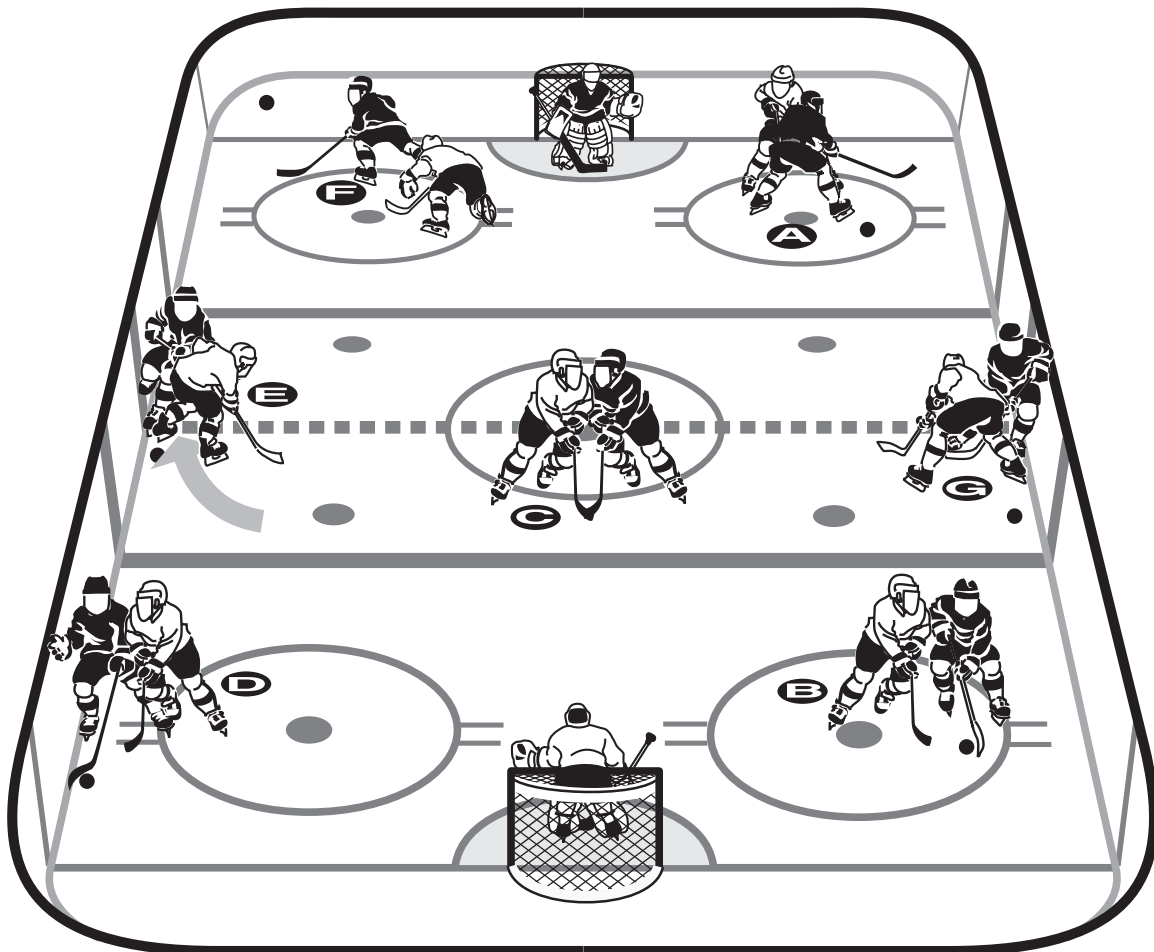


BODY CHECKING

Body checking is the most aggressive technique used to separate the opponent from the puck. Different techniques of body checking apply to different situations. In this section we will focus on the following skills:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| A. Front Check | Lean forward and connect with the top of the shoulder |
| B. Side Check | Extend the outside knee and connect with shoulder and hip |
| C. Side Check Open Ice | Unload the weight of the closest skate |
| D. Side Check Along Boards | Aim to control the opponent's arms |
| E. Hip Check Pinching | Turn sideways and connect with shoulder and hip |
| F. The Danger Zone | Receiver checks both shoulders and checker only contains |
| G. Hip Check | Maintain a solid tripod position |

Step 4 is the actual body check. This step includes teaching techniques to give and receive a body check safely and within the rules.



BODY CHECKING

The Skill of Separating the Opponent from the Puck

Body checking is much more than just crushing, banging and running into someone. Body checking is a series of different skills which have to be learned, developed and trained. To develop these skills to the fullest potential, your mind has to be unquestionably clear of the objectives about the body check.

The objective of the body check in youth hockey is to separate the opponent from the puck without using excessive force or exposing the opponent to risks of injury.

Effective body checking skills are controlled motions of launching the body into an opponent. The right body checking techniques describe contact areas, timing, stability, follow through, launching and containing power, direction of the force, in addition to a high level of judgement, risk management, sportsmanship and respect.

The goal of body checking is to separate the opponent from the puck. Body checking is used for forechecking, neutral zone defense and defensive zone coverage. It is one way to prevent the opponent from scoring and to regain puck control. This, nothing more or nothing less, is the role of body checking within youth hockey.

Intimidation is not the role of body checking in youth hockey.

The role of body checking is not used for the purpose of intimidation. This is not the role of body checking in youth hockey. In youth hockey, we are dealing with children. We are building their character by teaching them what is right and what is wrong, and we carry the ultimate responsibility for their safety.

Body checking techniques vary depending if you are checking an opponent straight in front of you, beside you, behind you, in open ice or by the boards. Which technique you use also depends if your approach is frontal, from behind or if you are skating parallel to your opponent. There are also various techniques involved in different areas of the ice such as when you are forechecking, pinching, backchecking or playing in the corner. Generally speaking, there are three different techniques: Front Check, Side Check and Hip Check.

Teaching your players the right way of body checking will increase your chances of controlling the opponent, gaining puck control and spending more time attacking.



Front Check



Side Check



Hip Check

It will also reduce the number of penalties, and increase the safety for both your players and the opponent. The right way to check includes holding your stick on the ice, using only your hips and shoulders, never pushing or extending the arms, and never making contact with the back, head, or knees of an opponent.

The right way of body checking increases your team's chances of controlling the opponent, gaining puck control and spending more time attacking.



BALANCE AND GENERATING POWER

Keeping balance and generating power are the common traits for all types of body checks. Many players rely solely on momentum for power. They need to take a few strides and let their body weight build up momentum before the impact. Other players need to use their hands in a pushing motion to create any power. Good body checkers, however, use their leg strength to generate power. From a deep knee bend and solid foot support, they extend the leg farthest from the opponent to generate a consistent force.

The deeper the knee bend, the more power the player can generate. The supporting leg, which is the power generator, needs a good grip on the ice. The skate has to be at a square angle to the direction of the check and firmly planted into the ice. Thus the cue words “the skate is anchored into the ice.” The wide stance gives a straight line of support from the anchored foot to the contact area, which normally is the shoulder.

The player to the left has taken one step forward and placed his shoulder into the chest of the opponent. Note how the checking player keeps his balance through a tripod stance, and how the contact area (the top of the shoulder) is supported in a straight line by the power generating leg. To prevent exposing his knee, the checking player has slightly taken the weight off his leg closest to the opponent.

Technique Exercises

Three Steps Front Check

Progression

Circle Bumps

Five Teaching Cues

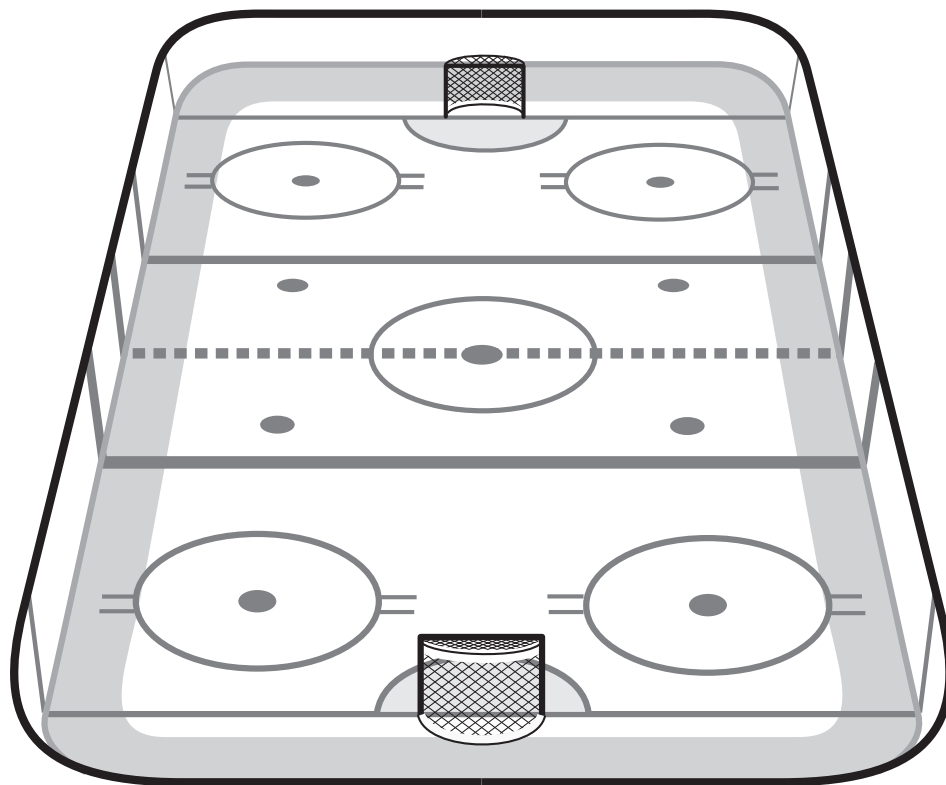
1. Wide Stance
2. Deep knee bend
3. Stick on the ice
4. Extend knee to generate power
5. Straight line of support TM



THE RESPECT ZONE

The area closest to the boards is often referred to as the “Respect Zone.” With the correct behavior, however, it doesn’t have to be dangerous. Proper respect for other players and for the boards could noticeably reduce the numbers and the severity of injuries caused in this area. Specific training on how to act and react in this zone is of utmost importance.

This area should be regarded as the “Respect Zone,” where everybody demonstrates sportsmanship and respect.



SITUATION #1	Situation	Do	Do Not
	Approaching the boards with an opponent behind you, but with a small gap.	Skate hard all the way to keep the gap as big as possible. Approach the boards at an angle. Look over both shoulders. Make a deceptive move. Get into a ready position. Take the impact prior to playing the puck.	Do not try to stop and take the impact. Do not look down on the puck. Do not duck. Do not turn and face the opponent.
SITUATION #2	Situation	Do	Do Not
	Approaching the boards with an opponent right behind you and no gap.	Turn sideways, make a light stop but continue to slide all the way to the boards. Protect yourself in the proper position. Shield the puck. Take the impact prior to playing the puck. Use one arm on the glass for support.	Do not skate straight at the puck. Do not look down on the puck. Do not keep two hands on the stick. Do not turn and face the opponent.

SITUATION #3	Situation	Do	Do Not
	You are chasing an opponent who is approaching the boards.	Stay in a low position. Follow the opponent with a close gap. Keep the stick on the ice. Only use a body check after the opponent has turned.	Do not push or check from behind. Do not lift the opponent. Do not hook or push the opponent with your arm or stick.

Be aware of what is happening around you, especially behind you, when you are approaching the boards. Look over both your shoulders, look for reflections in the glass and listen for cues from your teammates. Always approach the puck at an angle to the boards, never straight on.



Do not stop and try to stand still to absorb the impact. Chances are that you cannot hold up the power from your own momentum as well as the opponent's momentum. You may get knocked over and fall head first into the boards.



TAKING AND APPLYING THE CHECK

If there is no gap and you cannot get away from the checker, turn sideways to the boards and make a light stop. Continue to slide sideways as you reduce some of the opponent's momentum. Absorb the impact in the proper position, with your hip and skate tight against the boards and your elbow up against the glass.



Technique Exercise

Receiving a Check Along
the Boards

Situational Drill

Playing the Shoot-In

Five Teaching Cues

TAKING THE CHECK

1. Approach the boards at an angle
2. Skate hard to increase the gap
3. Look over both shoulders
4. Make a deceptive move
5. Get close to the boards with one arm on the glass

APPLYING THE CHECK

1. Do not push
2. Do not wrap your stick around the opponent
3. Do not lift the opponent
4. Do not hook or pull the opponent with your arm or stick
5. Do not check from behind

FRONT CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Offensive Zone Attack

The front check is the least used body check, but is nevertheless a very effective and powerful body check when you are:

1. Standing up the opponent on the blue line.
2. Moving an opponent in front of your net.
3. Carrying the puck and want to force your way through the defense. This is called an offensive check and it is used to surprise the defender.

Start in a deep stance, facing the opponent. Lean your upper body forward and aim the top of your shoulder to make contact under the opponent's shoulder pad. Turn your knees and toes outward and your heels inward, and extend your knees to generate power. Look straight ahead, and make your head pass by the opponent's upper arm. Keep your stick in two hands and on the ice for additional support. Do not use the front check close to the boards since you are moving with your head first during the launch.

Technique Exercises

Three Steps Front Check

Progression

Circle Bumps

Five Teaching Cues

1. Deep stance
2. Make contact with top of the shoulder
3. Toes and knees turned outward
4. Extend knees for power™
5. Stick in two hands and on the ice



USING THE FRONT CHECK

If you have the choice between using a front check or a side check, the side check should be your premier option. The side check takes better advantage of your equipment's shoulder and hip protection, and it is generally easier to launch the check and to maintain the power. The front check allows you to use a longer reach, can be launched more quickly, and enables you to maintain your initial skating direction.

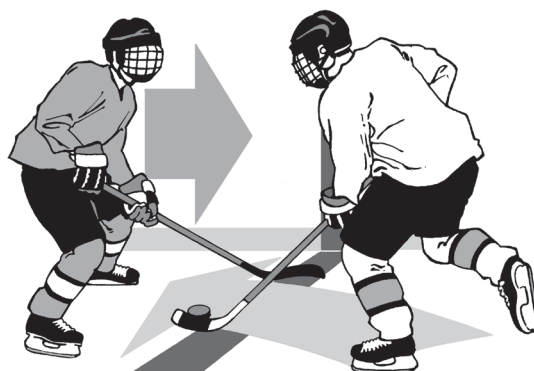
Boxing Out In Front Of The Net

If the opponent is about to make a play in front of the net, you can lean into him with the top of your shoulder and use your leg power to drive him away.



Standing Up On The Blue Line

If an opponent is carrying the puck into your defensive zone, there is usually only a narrow lane open where he can come through. If you can anticipate where he will enter, you can confront him and use a front check to bring the attack to a halt.



Driving To The Net

This is the front check version of the offensive check. If you are driving to the net and the opponent tries to body check you, you can lean into him and use the top of your shoulder to force him aside. This check often comes as a surprise to the opponent, and it enables you to continue skating in the same direction.



SIDE CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense and Defensive Zone Coverage

The side check is the most frequently used body check. You use it all over the ice, and you use it both to deliver a body check and to absorb the impact.

Use your angling skills to approach the opponent. Turn your upper body so your shoulder is toward the opponent. Stay in a low stance and make a c-cut to rotate your body 90°. Tuck in your elbow and keep your stick on the ice. Tighten your muscles, breathe in and hold your breath. Make sure you have steady footing on the ice with your outside skate, and extend the furthest knee to generate power. Try to divide the impact equally over your shoulder, upper arm and hip. Unload the closest foot to protect your knee from the opponent's knee.



Technique Exercises

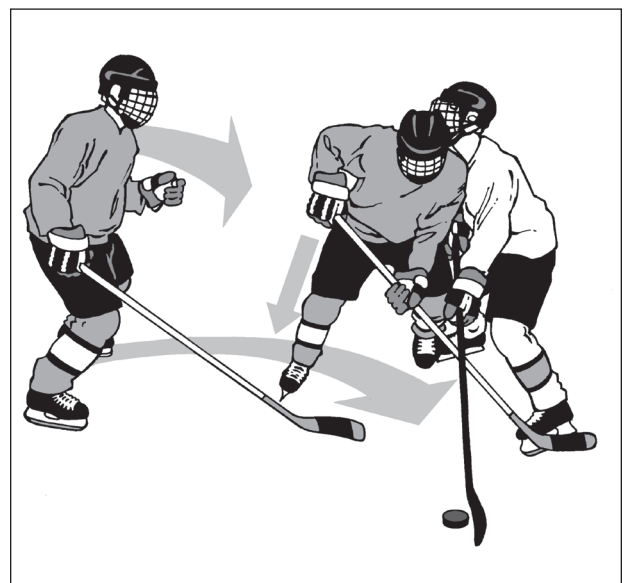
Shoulder Bumps
Side Check Against the Boards
Open-Ice Body Check Exercise
Reaction Checks

Situational Drills

Carry the Puck vs. Forechecker
Checking Race
Prison Breakout

Five Teaching Cues

1. Approach the opponent by angling
2. Stay low, keep your stick on the ice
3. Make a c-cut to rotate your body and unload the weight of the inside skate
4. Tuck in your elbow and disperse the impact to the shoulder, upper arm and hip
5. Keep a good grip on the ice with your outside skate and extend that knee



USING THE SIDE CHECK

Side checks are by far the most commonly used technique for body checking. Since the sides of the body, shoulders, hips and arms are well protected, it is a natural choice to use these areas for body checking. Compared to the front check, it is considerably safer to use along the boards whereas a front check could result in going head first into the boards. The worse case scenario with the side check is that you will fall into the boards with your shoulder or hip.

Along The Boards

Use angling skills to line up on an inside track so the opponent cannot cut in behind you. Gradually narrow the gap so you can launch your side check slightly ahead of the opponent, block his path and, at the same time, lock his hands.



Open Ice

As you approach the opponent from the opposite direction, stay in the forward stride as long as possible so you can react to any evasive move. Twist your body and turn sideways at the very last second to avoid committing

yourself (to one side) too early and give the opponent an opportunity to react to your check.



Strike First

This is the side check version of an offensive check. A good way to reduce the impact when receiving a check is to “strike first,” or body check back. When the checker is approaching and just prior to initiating a check, you initiate the contact by launching a body check. This will often catch the checker off guard and significantly reduce the impact of the check.



HIP CHECK

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense and Defensive Zone Coverage

The hips are well-protected areas and close to the body's center of gravity. Thus, using the hips for body checking can be very effective. The classic open-ice hip check, where the opponent ends up somersaulting, is not frequently used anymore. If this type of check is launched too low, it can cause serious knee injuries, and if it is not done with perfect timing, the checker takes himself out of the play. But using a hip check along the boards is a very effective and safe way to body check.

Approach the opponent or his anticipated skating lane while moving backward. Stay in a deep, wide stance and aim to make contact with your hip to the opponent's center of gravity. Do not place the check low! Keep your stick in two hands and on the ice for additional support. Your outside skate should solidly grip the ice.

Situational Drills

One vs. One in a Narrow Lane
Pinching Drill

Five Teaching Cues

1. At the moment of impact be in a backward glide
2. Stay in a low, deep stance
3. Aim for the center of gravity
4. Generate power with your outside leg
5. Keep your stick on the ice



USING THE HIP CHECK

Of the three body checks, the hip check might be technically the most difficult to master. This is partly due to the fact that you are skating backward at the launching moment. Nevertheless, it is a quite effective body check and if used properly is also very safe. Once you have learned the correct execution, the hip check is especially effective along the boards, where you can take full advantage of the opponent's narrow lane.

Pinching

Skate forward to approach the opponent. At the ideal moment, rotate your hip and shoulder into the opponent to block his skating lane along the wall. Try to get your hip up against the boards and brace yourself with the outside skate.



Open Ice vs. Rush Attack

This is the classic hip check that is not frequently used anymore. The reason is that it is not a very consistent way to control the opponent, and also because if launched too low, it can afflict serious knee injuries. Always aim for the opponent's center of gravity and make a powerful c-cut to turn your hip into the skating lane.



Along The Boards vs. Rush Attack

A hip check is a good technique to prevent an opponent from beating you along the boards. It can be very effective in low speed, battling situations, but it is less reliable when the opponent has full speed. Positioning and timing are the keys. When the opponent commits to the outside, make a powerful push with the inside leg and turn your hip towards the boards.



Session IV

Off-Ice Training



Session IV

Off-Ice Training

PRACTICAL SESSION Off-Ice (90 minutes)	
Expected Outcome for the Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching techniques for delivering a body check and how to give feedback during practice • Teaching techniques for taking a body check and how to give feedback during practice • Being able to safely lead and teach through 10 different body contact drills • Being able to safely lead and teach through four competitive body contact games 	Equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every player must wear full gear including facemask & mouthguard (except skates and goaltender leg pads) • Sock to cover the blade of the stick (or a plastic stick) to protect the floor • 10-15 cones (if there are no lines on the floor that can be used as reference points)

CONTENT	
15 minutes	Warm-up – include shoulder preparation
15 minutes	Balance and Power Tripod vs. Pushes Leg Drive Thrust of War
25 minutes	Body Checking Techniques Football Check (front check) Bump Power Bump Hit the Wall Pinning Hold the Pin Competition
5 minutes	Water Break
15 minutes	Taking a Check Board Protection Push Free Offensive Check Roll Off
15 minutes	Competitive and Reactive Drills Side Check Reaction React, Step Forward and Check Prison Breakout Guard the Lane

WARM-UP (15 minutes)

Light Jog

Run a few laps around the gym to increase body temperature and loosen up the muscles.

Stretching

Stretch out the major muscle groups (chest, lats, thorax, abdominals, back, gluteus, abductors, hip flexor, quadriceps, hamstring and calves) carefully.

Agility

Take a wide leg stance in a squat position (90° knee bend). Remain in this position and move lateral, forward, backward and do quick turns.

Shoulder Warm-Up

1. Perform various crawling exercises to increase the temperature and the fluid in the joints.

2. With a partner, press each other's shoulders together.
3. With a partner, hook your elbows together and pull, so the shoulders make contact.



4. With a partner, grab each other's forearms. Pull and hit shoulder against shoulder.

BALANCE AND POWER (15 minutes)

Tripod vs. Pushes

Take a wide leg stance in a squat position (90° knee bend). Hold the stick firmly in two hands and on the floor, so the feet and stick form a triangle (tripod).

1. One player pushes on his partner's shoulders and tries to knock him off balance.
2. Same as above, but this time the player pushes the hips of his partner.

Demonstrate

Take one pair of players who have done the drill well and let them perform the drill in front of the group. Emphasize the following points.

- Solid tripod stance, using the stick as an additional leg
- Solid foot support
- Bending the knee and getting low on the contact side
- Form a straight line with their support leg from the foot to the contact area

Repeat the demonstration with another pair for the next drill and note:

- How the player is easier to move when pushing on his hips instead of the shoulders
- How the player with the lowest center of gravity is more likely to overpower his opponent

Leg Drive

One player places the top of his shoulder right in the chest under the shoulder pad of

his partner, and his head just to the side of the partner's upper arm. The checker drives with leg power and forces his partner to back up. The partner gives adequate resistance, but makes sure the checker has a chance to drive forward.



Thrust of War

Two players begin in contact with each other. Each starts with a wide base and shoulder-to-shoulder contact facing one another. On the coaches signal the players attempt to push each other out of their held space. This exercise focuses on using the lower body and legs to generate power throughout the contact point in order to displace the opponent. Players should keep their heads up and stick down throughout the drill.

The thrust of war, exercise can also be done from a side-to-side, shoulder-to-shoulder position.

BODY CHECKING TECHNIQUES (25 minutes)

FRONT CHECK

The two partners stand in a wide stance, facing each other and a short step length apart. The checker leans forward so the top of his shoulder almost touches the partner's chest, right under his shoulder pad. The "receiver" (target) keeps his knees bent, but the upper body straight. Both players have their hands on their backs and are ready to tighten up their muscles to withstand the impact.

All checking drills are partner drills, where two players are working together on developing checking and receiving skills. The emphasis is clearly on the receiving skills, so the checker can never use more force than the receiver is willing to take.



One coach supervises the drill, and when he says "Go," the checker moves his closest foot forward, places it between the partner's feet and makes contact with the shoulder. The checker continues driving with two more steps and checks through the partner, forcing him to take a backward step.

Sticks can be added as a progression to this drill. Emphasis is then on the checking technique while keeping the stick blade on the ground and under control.

SIDE CHECK Bump

Two players are standing side-by-side in a wide stance, with their knees well bent (90°). The stick is held in two hands with the blade solid on the floor in front of the player. Together with the feet, the blade creates a tripod stance. (Alternative: The drill can also be done without sticks). The players touch each other with the closest foot. The players count together: "1, 2, 3." On "3" they extend the outside leg (the foot is still solid on the floor), lean into the partner and make contact with the side of the shoulders, the upper arms, the elbows (which are tucked tight into the ribs) and the hips. The closest knee stays bent at 90°, so the entire power from the extended leg is directed sideways (into the partner) and not upward.

Power Bump

Use the same starting position as described above under "Bump." From this position, both players move two short steps sideways and bring their feet together. It's important that the players remain in a deep stance (knee bend 90°). The players now count together: "1, 2, 3" and take sideways steps at the same time.

- "1" Lateral step (knee bend 90°)
- "2" Bring feet together (knee bend 90°)
- "3" Lateral step and make contact the same way as described above under "Bump."



Hit The Wall

The player is facing the wall and stands one short step away in a low (knees bent 90°), wide stance. The purpose is to (with a solid side check) hit the wall and hold pressure forcefully against the wall for three seconds. To do this, the player takes one step forward, twists himself 90°, places the foot parallel next to the wall and extends the outside leg. While doing this, he always remains in the low position. Make contact with the wall, with the outside of the shoulder, the upper arm, the elbow (which is tucked tight into the ribs) and the hip. Hold this position and continue to generate pressure into the wall.



It is important to start slow, and with almost no impact at all. The wall is more solid and the pads less protective than one might think.

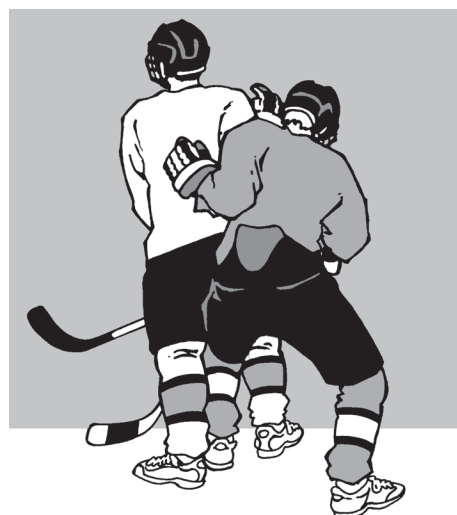
Pinning

Work in pairs. One player has his face up against the wall. The partner places himself in a pinning position. The top hand holds the stick wrapped around the other player. The feet form a "T" with the front foot in between the other player's feet.

The pinning player tries to hold the pin for three seconds. The pinned player is trying to break loose.

Hold the Pin Competition

Two pairs of players are competing against each other. In Pair 1, Player A (in the dark jersey) is pinning Player B (in the light jersey). In Pair 2, the roles are reversed with Player B pinning Player A. The player that manages to free himself from the pin first earns his team a point.



TAKING A CHECK (15 minutes)

Board Protection

Get up tight against the boards with your inside foot, knee and hip. Keep your hands in front of your body and the inside elbow resting on the top board. Keep your knees bent, but your back straight, so your head is held high and protected by your shoulder pad. Be aware of what's happening around you at all times.



In the moment of the check, turn your shoulder and hip toward the checker to make sure you'll use these body parts as your contact area. Do not expose your chest, stomach or ribs. Forget the puck for a second. Hold your breath and tighten up your muscles. Don't leave the boards, but lean into the check, and do not duck. Ducking could expose your head and risk getting it squeezed between the checker and the boards. Finally, unload the weight from the inside leg. This will ease the impact on the knee.

One player is standing in the position described above up against the wall. His partner is in the ready-to-check position as executed in the hit-the-wall drill (facing the

wall, one short step away). The checker executes the same motion as for the hit-the-wall drill, but instead of hitting the wall, he makes contact with his partner's shoulder and hip. Both players keep their elbows tucked in tight against their ribs.

Push Free

The checker finishes the check by holding the pressure for three seconds, whereas the receiver tries to push free using the arm against the board and the arm closest to the checker. The receiver tries to push free and forward to escape the checking pressure.

Offensive Check (Strike First)

Same set up and drill as above, but the receiver will not only lean into the hit, but hits back. When the checker makes his first move, the receiver pushes off with the elbow on the wall (still keeping his foot, knee and hip tight against the wall), and hits backs, or more correctly, strikes first. This will take away some of the checker's momentum, and reduce the impact that has to be absorbed.

Roll Off

There is only one way to completely avoid body checking – don't play! If you want to play, you will get hit. The best you can do is to limit the frequency and the impact of the hits you'll receive.

Two players face each other a short step apart and slightly leaning forward, so their right shoulders (or left) almost touch each other. Knees are well bent in a ready-to-go position. A coach (or a teammate) calls the name of one of these players. That player takes a powerful step with his right foot (left if the left shoulders are touching) forward and executes a front check (football check) and drive through. The other player reacts and rolls off the check.



As an alternative, the coach (teammate) can tag the player with his hand, instead of calling out his name.

Begin with using no stick, and then alternate keeping the stick in one hand and in two hands.

REACTIVE AND COMPETITIVE DRILLS (15 minutes)

Side Check Reaction

Three players are lined up in a straight line 6-8 feet apart. The outside players are facing each other and the middle player is turned so his shoulders line up with the two other players. All players are in a deep knee bend, alert and ready to go.



Behind the player in the middle there is a coach. The coach will give a sign, which the player in the middle can't see. The two other players will react to the sign. Whoever is chosen by the instructor will take 2-3 steps forward and execute a side check on the player in the middle. He should react to the checker as quickly as possible, take a lateral step and "hit back."

The drill can be done with or without sticks. If sticks are used, make sure the sticks are down at all times.

React, Step Forward and Body Check

Three players are lined up in an equilateral triangle 6-8 feet apart. Two players are facing the middle player. All players are in a deep knee bend, alert and ready to go.

Behind the player in the middle there is a coach. He will give a sign, which the player in the middle can't see. The two other players will react to the sign. Whoever is chosen by the coach will take two or three steps forward and execute a side check or a front check

(football check) on the player in the middle. He should react to the checker as quickly as possible, take a step forward and "hit back."



The drill can be done with or without sticks. If sticks are used, make sure they stay on the floor at all times. It is important with both drills that the distance between the players not exceed eight feet. That would allow the checker to take a run and build up excessive force and momentum which could be hazardous.

Second, it would also give the player in the middle too much time to react and the purpose of the drill would be lost.

Prison Breakout

One player lines up in the middle of a circle. In a gym, the basketball circles are of suitable size. All the other players place themselves around the circle with one foot inside and one foot outside the circle. The illustration shows only four players, but 10 or 12 players work better. Everybody begins in a deep knee bend position.

The player in the middle starts from the center dot. He tries to break through the line of players by executing a body check against one of these players. If he can't break through on the initial body check, the player cannot keep on pushing or wrestling his way out. He has to back up and try again. Before starting

a second attempt to break out, the player has to return to the middle, seek a new player and try again. Each attempt starts from the middle. This is to prevent the player from taking a run and build up excessive momentum as well as giving the players on the circle less time to react. For a breakout to be considered successful, the player breaking out has to be able to place both his feet outside the circle.

The purpose of the drill is to be competitive, not to over run a smaller player. Therefore the player in the middle should seek a challenge and try to make his way out by body checking a player bigger or equal in size. The players guarding the circle must hold their ground. Do not duck, roll off or step aside.



Guard the Lane

This competitive drill begins with two players facing each other but offset and about 20 feet apart. The offensive player attempts to drive by the defender through an imaginary lane. As the offensive player attacks this lane, the defensive player moves laterally to guard the lane. The defensive player times his movement to block the lane and make body contact with the attacker. The defender turns his body to the side and places a side check against the attacking player. Keep the head up and stick down through the contact.

Session V

Developing Checking Skills II



Session V

Developing Checking Skills II

PRACTICAL SESSION On-Ice (60-90 minutes)	
Expected Outcome for the Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching techniques for delivering a body check and how to give feedback during practice • Teaching techniques for receiving a body check and how to give feedback during practice • Being able to safely lead and teach through 10 different body contact drills • Being able to safely lead and teach through two competitive body contact games 	Equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every player must wear full gear including facemask and mouthguard • Pucks

CONTENT	
10 minutes	Pre-Ice
15 minutes	Warm-up and Review of Front and Side Check Basics <i>Agility</i> <i>Shoulder Bumps</i> <i>Three-Step Front Check Progression</i> <i>Side Check Against the Boards</i>
20 minutes	The Basics of Receiving a Check <i>Receiving a Check Along the Boards</i> <i>Pressure from Behind, Against the Boards</i> <i>Open Ice Body Check</i> <i>Circle Bumps</i> <i>Reaction Checks</i>
15 minutes	Controlled Checking Situations <i>Carrying the Puck vs. Forechecker</i> <i>The Pinching Drill</i> <i>Holding the Pin Contest</i> <i>Playing the Dump-In (Look over both shoulders)</i>
10 minutes	Competitive Drills <i>Checking Race</i> <i>Prison Breakout</i>

PRIOR TO HITTING THE ICE

Prior to going on the ice, it is very helpful to share a quick overview with the players in the dressing room to inform them of what we expect from them. This pre-ice briefing includes three sections:

1. Key points
2. Review the off-ice session
3. Pre-ice warm-up

Key Points

- All players must wear full equipment, including a mouth guard at all times.
- Most players will not need to learn how to hit with impact, but every player will need to learn how to take the impact from a hit.
- Every drill is done as a pair, where both players are working together on their checking and receiving skills. Only use adequate force.

Review the Off-Ice Session

Refer to the experiences made off-ice to explain how these techniques can be carried over to the on-ice execution.

- Balance and power is generated from the legs, so stay low and keep your feet wide.
- Front Check – Use the top of the shoulder and keep your stick on the ice.
- Side Check – Use the side of the shoulder and hip. Keep elbow tight to the body and your stick on the ice.
- Receive a Check – Stay tight against the boards with your inside skate, hip, elbow and shoulder. Hold your breath and tighten up all your muscles.

Pre-Ice Warm-Up

Include a couple of shoulder warm-up exercises before going on the ice.

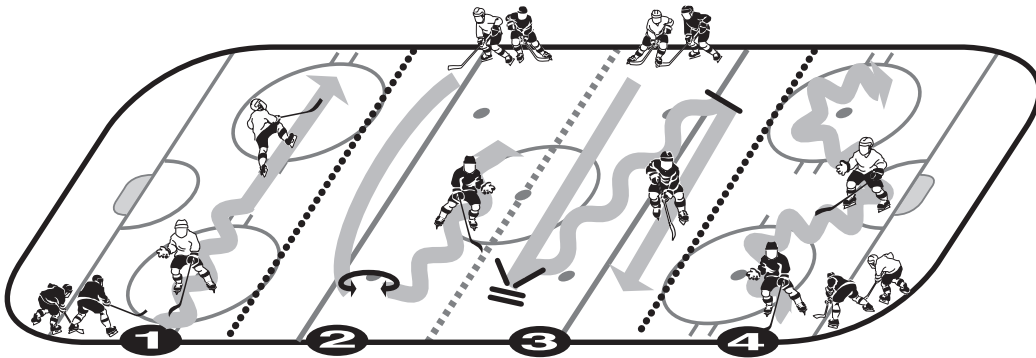
- Include various crawling exercises to increase the temperature and the fluid in the joints.
- Pair up.
- Press each other's shoulders together.
- Hook your elbows together and pull, so the shoulders make contact.

WARM-UP AND THE BASICS OF FRONT AND SIDE CHECKS

Agility

Divide the team into four groups and work on different skating agility exercises. The ice is split along the red line and the top of the circles into four equal lanes. The nets are moved off to the side to open up more room to skate. The purpose of the drills is to warm-up, get comfortable on the edges and work on specific skating skills used when controlling the gap as well as approaching an opponent before a body check. Each group has one lane for the exercises.

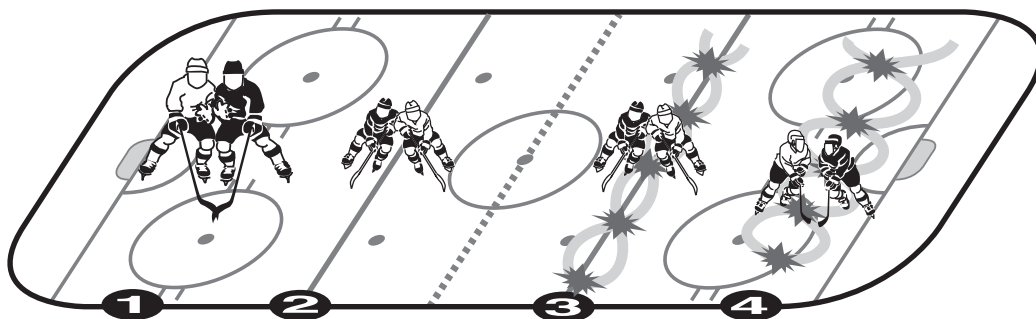
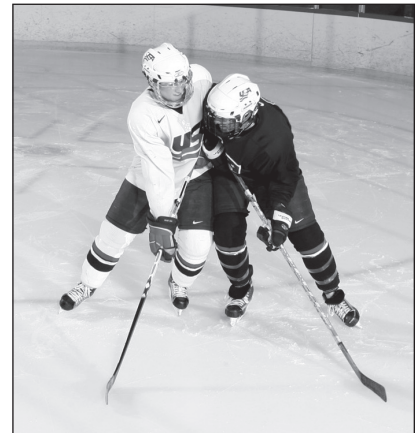
1. Backward to forward turns
2. Lateral pivot, forward to backward
3. Forward stop to backward start. One foot backward stop and move forward
4. Backward lateral movements



Shoulder Bumps

All players in the four groups pair up with a partner of equal size, weight and strength. Remind the players how important it is to work together in these drills. The purpose is not to over-power the partner, but to gradually help each other to improve the impact you can take and give. Conduct bump exercises stationary or across the rink.

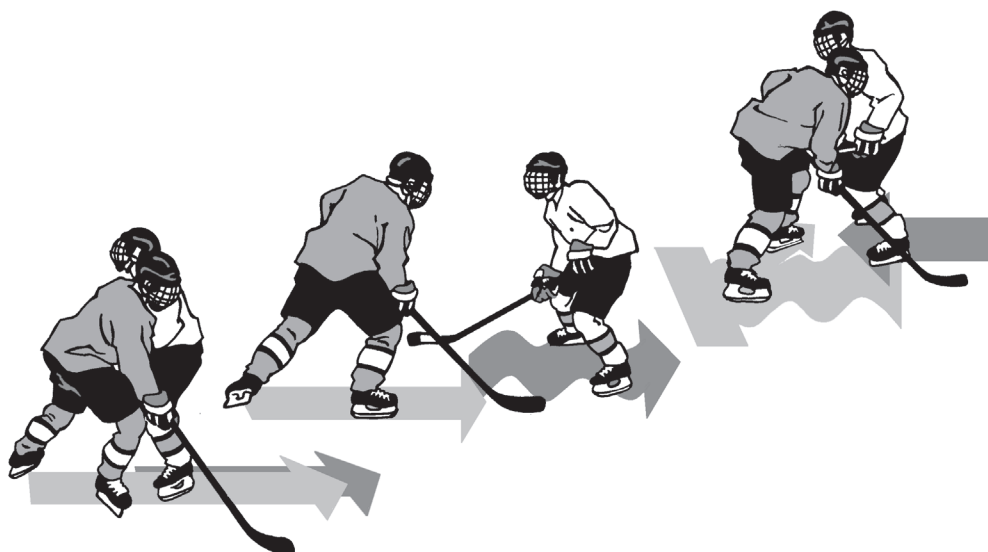
1. Arm-in-arm bumps
2. Stationary bumps
3. Moving bumps
4. Moving bumps with momentum



Three Step Front Check Progression

The players remain with their partners and do front checking exercises.

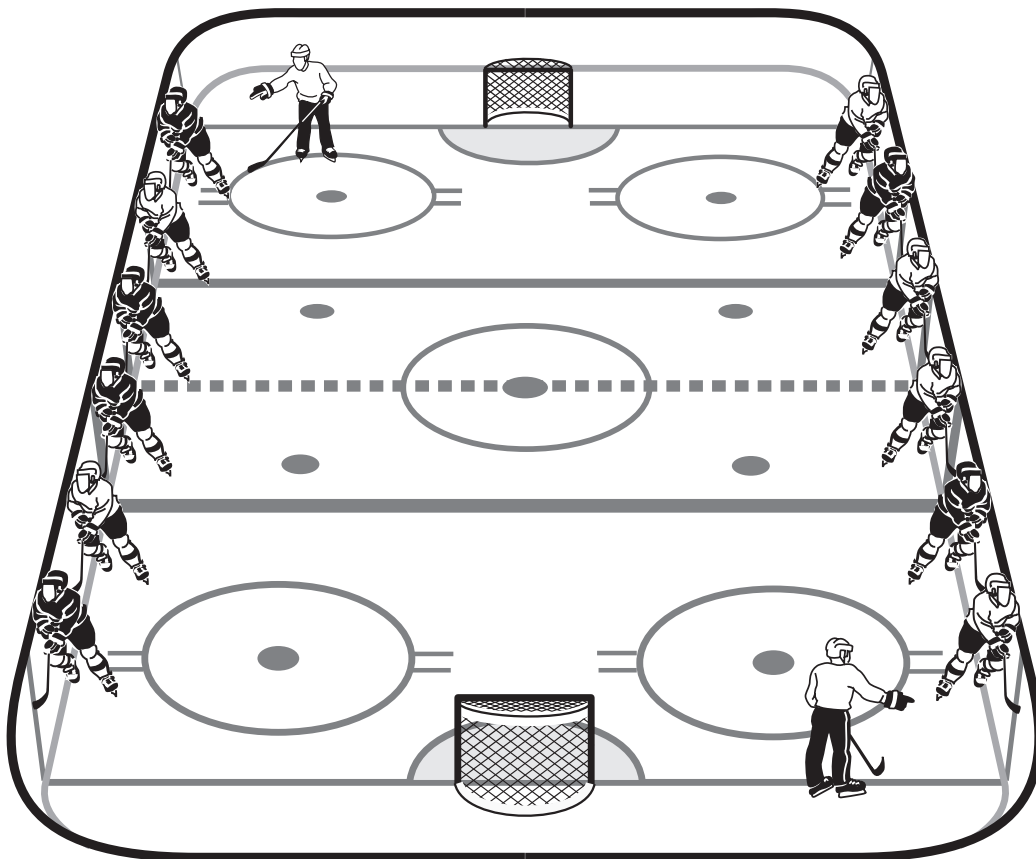
1. **Front Check Push** – Start in a deep stance, facing the opponent. Lean your upper body forward and place the top of your shoulder under the opponent's shoulder pad. Turn your knees and toes outward and your heels inward, and extend your knees to generate power. Look straight ahead, and make your head pass by the opponent's upper arm. Keep your stick in two hands and on the ice for additional support. Drive forward and push your partner backward. The partner provides a small amount of resistance.
2. **Front Check Drive** – This is similar to the previous exercise; however, both players begin in motion, one forward and one backward. Contact is made the same way as above with the checker continuing to push/drive the opponent backward.
3. **Front Check Stand-Up** – The checker begins by skating backward and his opponent skating forward toward him in the same direction. The checker performs a backward stop and launches forward to contact the opponent with a front check. It is important that the launch portion of the check be performed with reduced force. The timing of the contact is what is being practiced.



Side Check Against the Boards

The players line up along the boards so everybody has a space to work on hitting. Face the boards so that you are, at maximum, two feet away. Make a c-cut with the left skate and hit the boards with your left shoulder and left hip. Apply pressure by extending the right knee. Hold the pressure for 2-3 seconds. Go back to the starting point and repeat the exercise, but this time to the right.

The players should stay together with their partner. Even though this is an individual drill, staying with the partner is important to be able to move to the next drill quickly.

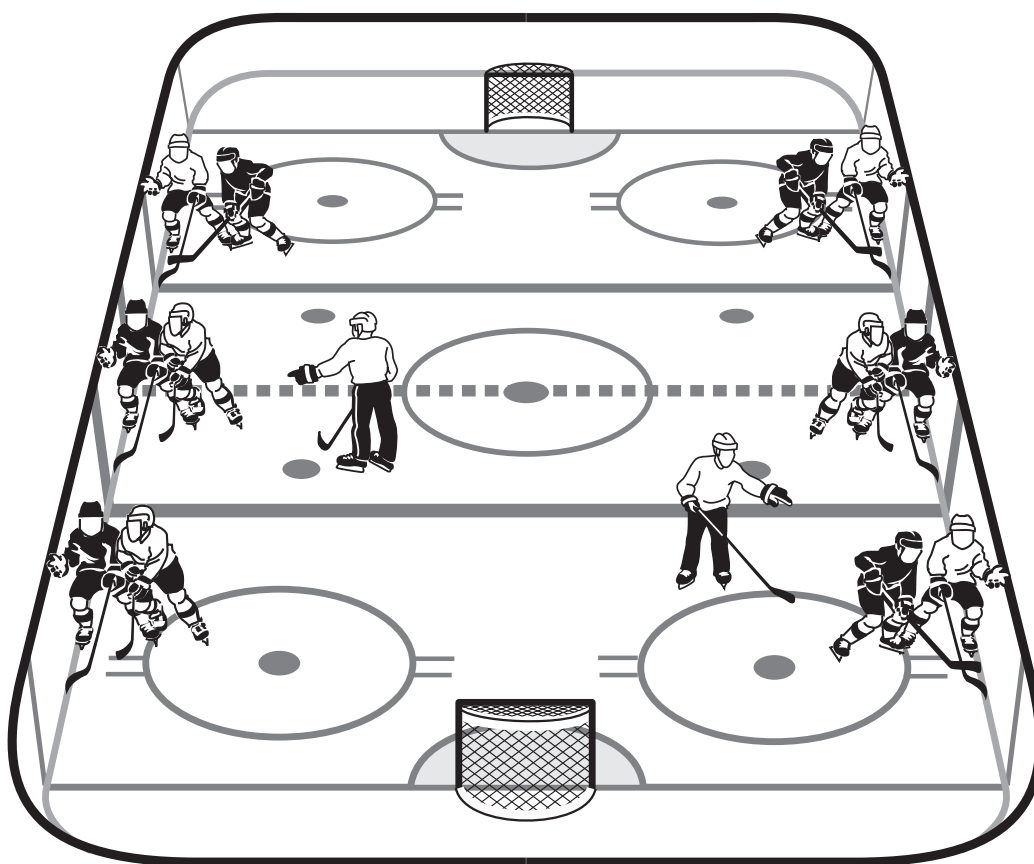


THE BASICS OF RECEIVING A CHECK

Receiving a Check Along the Boards

Have the players go back into their pairs. One player should line up against the boards, with feet apart, knees bent and two hands on the stick. His partner should line up no further than two feet away from the player on the boards. The checker makes a c-cut and places a controlled side check into the player by the boards. The player by the boards releases his stick, places the elbow on the rim, bends his knees and tightens up his body. In the moment of the hit, he unloads the closest foot. Work on these three skills:

1. **Receive the Check** – Turn the shoulder toward the checker and absorb the hit with the shoulder.
2. **Strike First** – Just prior to the impact, step into the hit and strike first.
3. **Push Off** – After the impact use your arms to push yourself free.



Pressure from Behind Against the Boards

Work the same drill, but this time the pressure is applied from behind. Make sure your players understand that they are applying pressure, not body checks.

Open Ice Body Check

The players stay with their partner. One player lines up on a face-off dot in the middle of a circle. His partner lines up with both skates on the circle line. The players are facing each other. Remind the players that this is not a competition. It's a drill where both players should work on their technique in safely receiving a check in open ice.



The instructor makes sure that both players have two hands on their sticks and that the sticks stay on the ice. When both players are ready, the coach says, “check” and each player takes one forward stride, continues with a c-cut, turns his side to the opponent and places a controlled side check. In the instant of the check, both players should unload the weight from their closest legs.

After the body check, the players roll off, pass each other, line up in the opposite position and get ready for the next drill.

Circle Bumps

Have approximately six players in one circle. They each have two hands on their stick and their sticks and feet on the ice. In this position, they skate around in all directions, bumping in to each other. Players must

keep their sticks and skates in constant contact with the ice. There can be no checking from behind. If a player leaves the circle with any body part, he does five push-ups before returning to the drill.



Reaction Checks

Two players are lined up, facing each other, with skates on their respective blue or red line. In the middle, between the two players, a third player is lined up with his left shoulder toward one player and his right shoulder toward the other. The coach stands behind the player in the middle and makes signals with the stick. If the coach points at the player on the red line, that player takes one or two strides forward, turns his body and places a controlled side check. The player in the middle reacts as he sees the checker coming, gets ready and checks back.



CONTROLLED CHECKING SITUATIONS

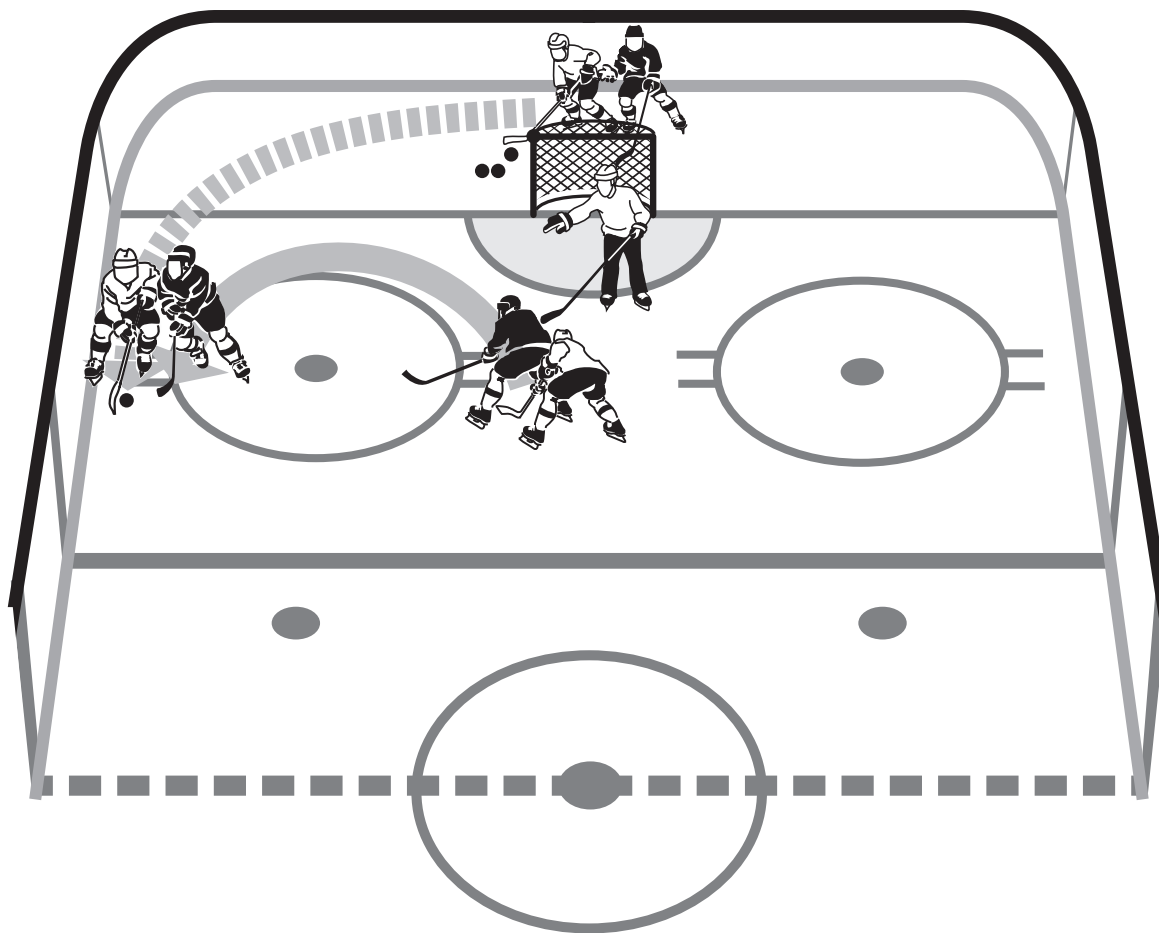
Divide the team into four groups and run the following drills in the four corners of the rink. These drills are more competitive than the preceding drills. It is therefore imperative that the body checking is controlled at all times. Sticks should always be on the ice and excessive force should not be tolerated. Remember, the main goal is to develop the skills of receiving a check and not checking power.

Carrying the Puck vs. Forechecker

The puck carrier is trying to carry the puck from behind the net and across the blue line. He thereby has to beat the forechecker on the outside (wide). There are two reasons for this rule. First of all, we are working on the techniques involved in receiving a body check, pushing oneself free after a body check and delivering a body check. If the puck carrier tries to avoid the check, the purpose of the drill is missed. Secondly, the way the groups are lined up will make it hazardous if the skaters start to skate into the areas where they are waiting.

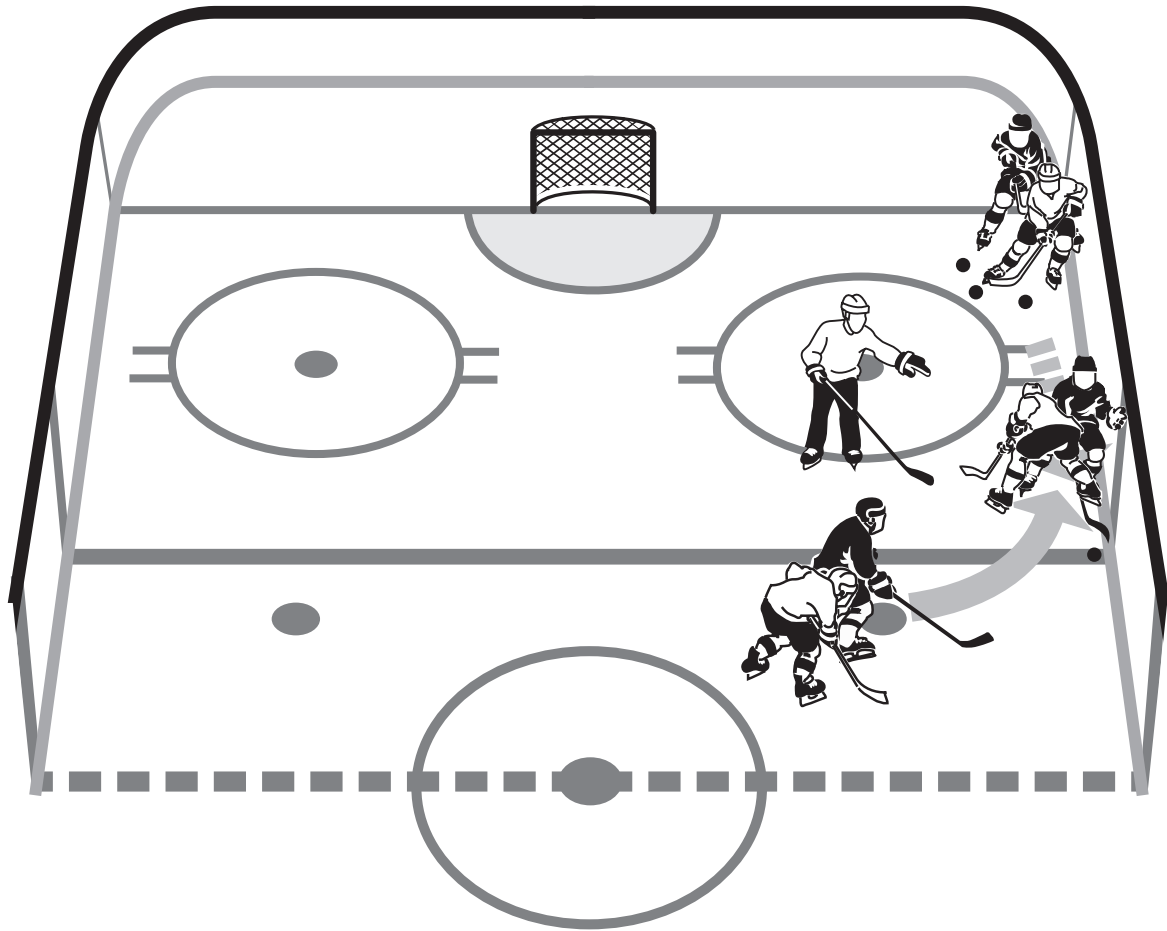
The forechecker starts at the inside hash mark. His goal is it to place a controlled body check and try to pin the puck carrier.

After each run, the players line up in the opposite line.



The Pinching Drill

The puck carrier starts on the outside hash mark and tries to carry the puck over the blue line. By doing so, he has to stay wide and beat the checker on the outside. The checker starts on the neutral zone face-off dot and tries to pinch in and place a controlled body check against the puck carrier.



Holding the Pin Contest

Four players are divided into two pairs. The checker in one pair and the receiver in the other pair are one team. The goal is to hold the pin until your partner in the other match-up can break free. When the hips of both receivers are pushed up against the boards, the instructor says “go!” to begin the competition.

The nature of this drill is very competitive. The instructor must pay strict attention to the rules, especially holding. If illegal play is used, the instructor calls the penalty and the faulting team loses.

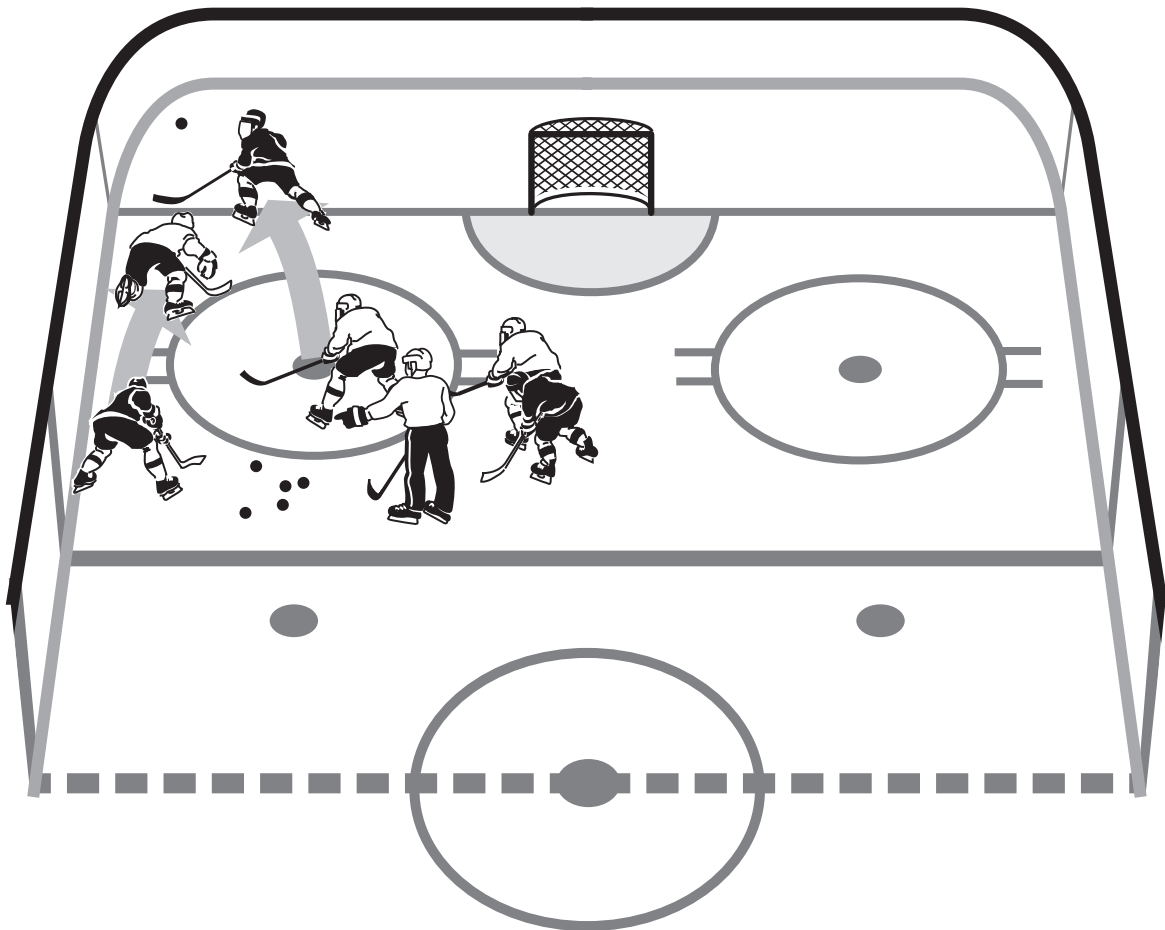


Playing the Dump-In (Look over both shoulders)

One player is standing at the face-off dot facing the corner. Two checkers are standing outside the circle and slightly behind the player in the middle. The coach gives a sign to one of the checkers. This indicates who will pressure the puck carrier. Then the coach spots a puck in the corner and the player in the middle takes off to pick up the puck and carry it out of the corner. He cannot go behind the net, since he should learn how to play against pressure and not to skate away from it. Secondly, there is another group doing the same drill in the other corner, and the two groups should not interfere with each other.

The key for the player in the middle is to look over both shoulders and to make sure he knows where the pressure is coming from.

After a player has been the checker, he lines up in the middle next time. After being in the middle, he takes one of the checker positions next time.



COMPETITIVE DRILLS

Checking Race

Two players line up across the rink from each other and with one foot on the neutral zone face-off dot (A&B or C&D). The two players start on the whistle. They have to keep their sticks on the ice and check each other shoulder to shoulder. After the check, they race for a puck. Remember, it is just a race after the check. Whoever gets to the puck first, tries to score and the other player back checks.

Note: If no goaltenders are present during a body checking session, the players must hit the cross bar or the posts to score.



Prison Breakout

One player lines up in the middle of a face-off circle. All the other players place themselves around the circle with one foot inside and one foot outside the circle. The photo shows only five players, but 10 or 12 players work better. Everybody begins in a deep knee bend position.

The player in the middle starts from the center dot. He tries to break through the line of players by executing a body check against one of these players. If he can't break through on the initial body check, the player cannot keep on pushing or wrestling his way out. He has to back up and try again. Before starting a second attempt to break out, the player has to return to the middle, seek a new player and try again. Each attempt starts from the middle. This is to prevent the player from taking a run and build up excessive momentum as well as giving the players on the circle less time to react. For a breakout to be considered successful, the player breaking out has to be able to place both his feet outside the circle.

The purpose of the drill is to be competitive, not to over run a smaller player. Therefore the player in the middle should seek a challenge and try to make his way out by body checking a player bigger or equal in size. The players guarding the circle must hold their ground. Do not duck, roll off or step aside.



Exercises & Drills



Exercises and Drills

EXERCISES

The following pages feature a number of checking skills exercises. Compared to a drill, an exercise is a way of executing a skill in a repetitive and educational way. The exercise can be done as a “stand alone” activity or integrated in a drill. The purpose is to make the player focus on a certain aspect of the skill execution by completing a challenging and fun activity.

Checking skills exercises are great for station training, can often be executed on-ice or off-ice and can be built into chains of progression. By nature, exercises are short-term activities and therefore need to be changed often. In general, you only want to do an exercise for one minute, before changing to something else. Many slightly different exercises, focusing on the same checking skill, can build longer segments of highly focused work and are very effective to develop checking skills.

Heel-to-Heel Spiral

Divide the body weight equally on both skates. Make repeated pushes with the rear skate so you are gliding laterally (forward on one skate and backward on the other). As the exercise continues, try to increase the radius of the circle so you eventually will be skating in a straight line.



C-cut Yo-yo

Start with one skate pointing straight forward and the other at a 90° angle touching heels. Make a powerful c-cut forward until the skates end up in 90° angle, but this time with toes touching. Continue with a powerful c-cut backwards until you are back at the starting position. Skates should be in a 90° angle with heels touching. Repeat continuously!



C-cut, Step Over, C-cut

Start in the same position as the previous exercise and do the first powerful forward c-cut (illustrated: right foot). Prior to touching toes, lift the supporting leg, twist the toe inward, place it on the inside edge in a straight line with the other skate and the toes pointing inward. Continue with a powerful backward c-cut (illustrated: left foot) until you are back in the starting position again. Repeat continuously!

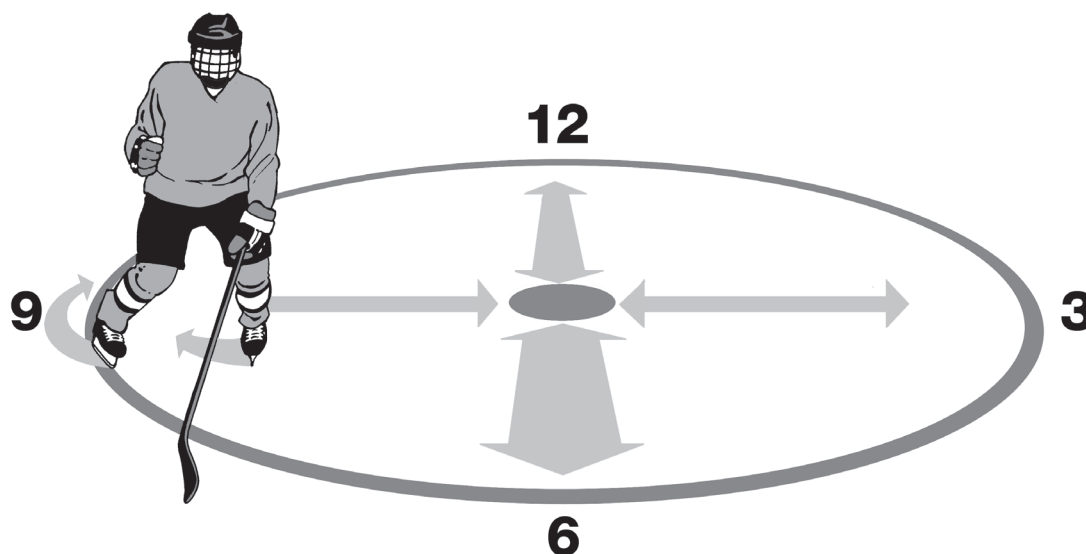


Around the Clock

Start in the middle of the circle. Skate forward to the circle and pivot forward to backward.

1. Make a one foot snowplow stop (illustrated: right foot)
2. Continuing with a powerful c-cut with the same skate (illustrated: right foot)
3. Follow up with a powerful crossover push under (illustrated: left foot)

Return backward to the starting point and repeat to the 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock, and 9 o'clock position. In the circle, remember to always skate forward going outward and backward going inward.



Follow The Leader

Follow your partner as close as possible and execute the same moves he does.



The Mirror Exercise

Face your partner and copy his moves making sure there is a close gap between you and your partner. While focusing on your partner's chest, use your peripheral vision to mirror your opponent's stick.



Front Check Leg Drive

Place the top of your shoulder pad into the chest of your partner. Your pad should be slightly under your partner's shoulder pad and your head should be at the side of the partner's shoulder. Keep the stick in two hands and on the ice to give you solid support. Twist both skates outward to an almost 180° angle and push your partner backward across the rink with powerful, driving, skating strides. Make sure to use the entire blade to push off. The partner should give adequate resistance to force the driving player to work hard to achieve the task.



Side Check and Pin

Start in a wide stance about three feet away from the boards. Your stick should be on the ice and firmly in two hands. Make a c-cut forward and then lift the foot (illustrated: left foot) as the body twists. Make contact between the boards with the shoulder and hip. Continue applying pressure with the outside leg (illustrated: right foot) and hold a “pin” for three seconds.



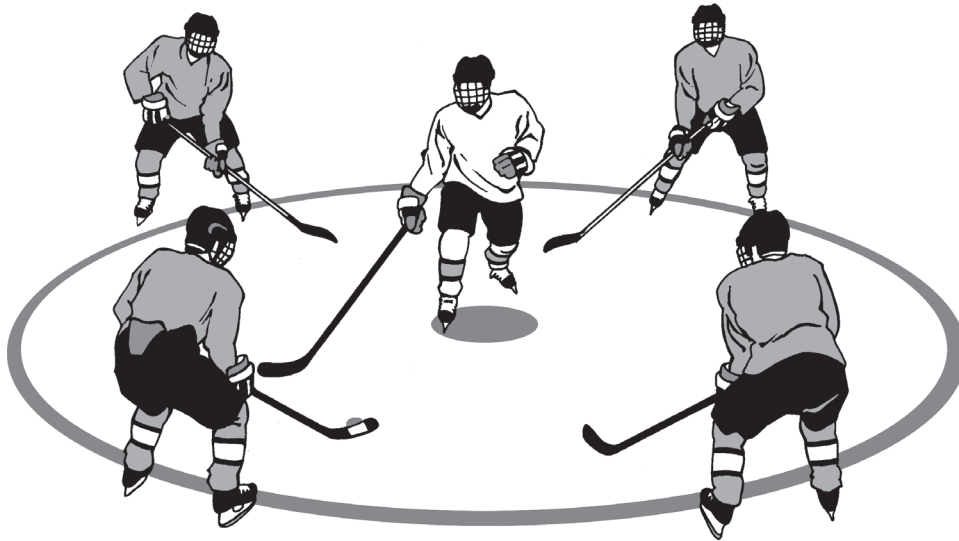
Side Check Bump with Movement

Line up side-by-side with a partner. Move forward side-by-side and make a “pretzel pattern” so you will separate and approach. As you approach each other follow through with a controlled side check. Remember the emphasis on the exercise is to develop receiving skills, so never apply more impact than the partner is comfortable receiving.



Monkey In The Middle

Four to six players line up around the circle and pass the puck to each other. One player is in the middle of the circle and tries to intercept the passes. If he touches the puck, the player who made the play replaces the player in the circle.



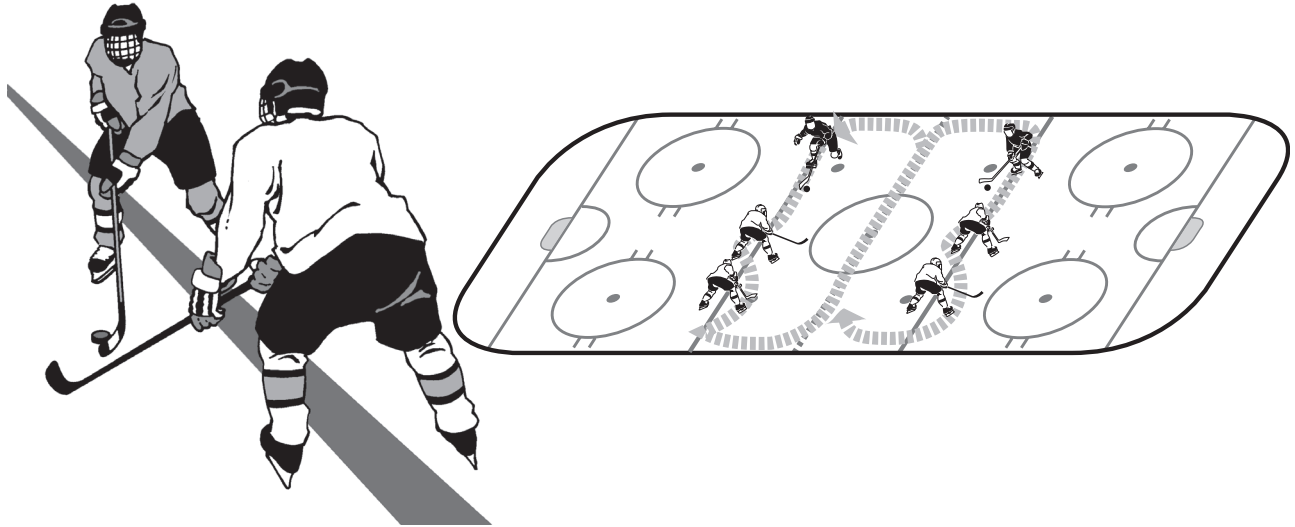
Keep Away Puck Protection

Two players are battling for the puck. By doing so, the puck carrier is always turning his back to the opponent. The checker will now be in a situation similar to a backchecker, checking from the offensive side, and can work on the stick checking techniques used in this situation. The puck carrier should attempt to stay in a confined area. This will increase the contact and stick checking repetitions.



Poke Check/Sweep Check On Line

Two players are standing stationary on each blue line. The remaining players are carrying a puck and skate along the lines. Each time they approach a stationary player, they try to stickhandle through his stick zone. The stationary player tries to make a poke check or a sweep check.



Stationary Lift Check

One player is stickhandling and protecting the puck in a small area. The opponent tries to gain possession of the puck using only lift checks. This way the puck carrier works on his puck protection skills and in playing with more weight on the stick. The opponent works on his lift checking techniques.

It is important to protect the puck by turning your back to the opponent. This will force him to use lift checks more frequently.



Stationary Shooting vs. Press Check

One player is standing still, handling a puck, and shoots it on the net. Another player is standing close by and when the shot is taken, he tries to lock the shooter's stick by the use of a press check. The shooter learns to shoot through the check and play with more weight on his stick. The checker develops the timing and technique of press checking skills. Adding in a pass to the shooter changes the drill and offers another option in timing.



Stationary Freeze vs. Pry Check

One player is trying to freeze the puck, and another player is trying to dig it loose by the use of the pry check.



King of the Hill

One player is protecting the face-off dot and the other player is trying to place his foot on that dot for three seconds.



Tripod vs. Push

Two players are working together to develop stability. One player plants his feet and stick solidly on the ice and gets ready in the tripod stance. The other player uses the fists, not the stick, and gives adequate pushes on the hips. Use controlled force as the purpose is to enhance stability skills, not to knock the partner over.



DRILLS

Drills are used to organize parts of the practice session. A drill always focuses on one or a few areas of the game. A good drill includes the following elements:

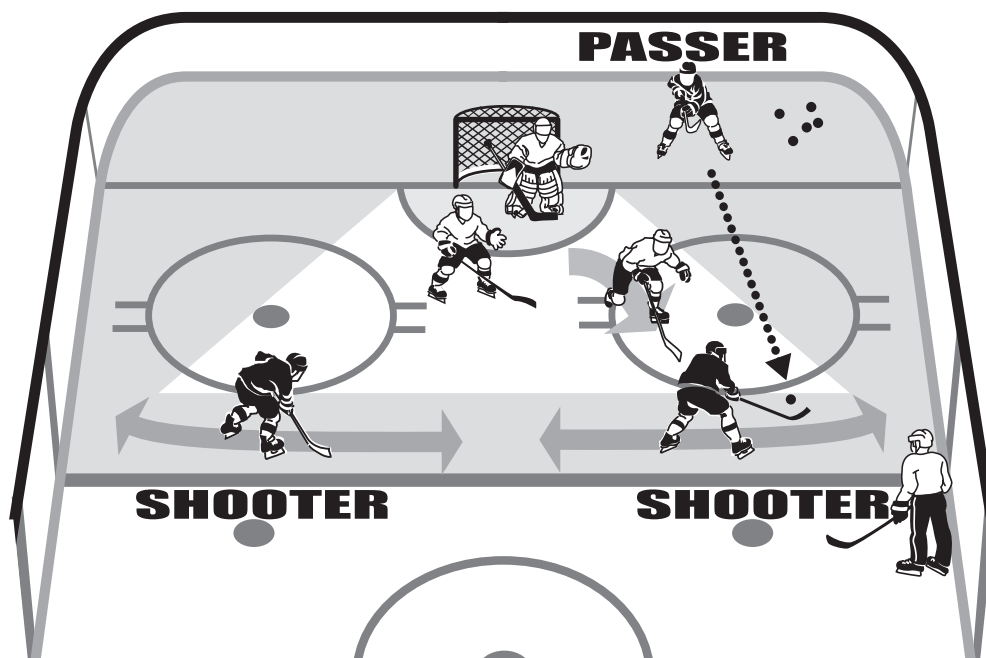
- The targeted areas, or skills, should be frequently executed.
- The time and space available should be adequate for the skill level of the players.
- There should be a start, execution and end to the drill.
- It should be safe.
- It should not interfere with other drills or activities going on at the same time.
- It should be self-supplying, which means pucks and players should end up where they start the next run in the drill.
- It should be easy to give feedback.

Cover the Shooting Lanes

This is a three vs. two drill with the objective to develop the orientation skill to cover the shooting lanes from the points. Three players are attacking — for example, the center and two defensemen. Two players, for example the two wings, are defending. To create many read-and-react situations for the two defending wings, the plays are executed under the following rules:

1. The attacking defensemen (shooters) have to remain on the points and cannot go deeper than the top of the circle. For safety, they keep all shots on the ice.
2. The attacking center (passer) must pass the puck and cannot carry it or shoot it on the net.
3. The defending wings cannot go higher up than the top of the circles or outside an area marked by a straight line from the blue line on the boards, through the face-off dot, and to the goal line (see illustration below).
4. The wings have to block the shooting lanes from the point and the passing lanes from the passer to the shooters.

With these rules, the wings consistently have to move between covering passing lanes to covering shooting lanes.

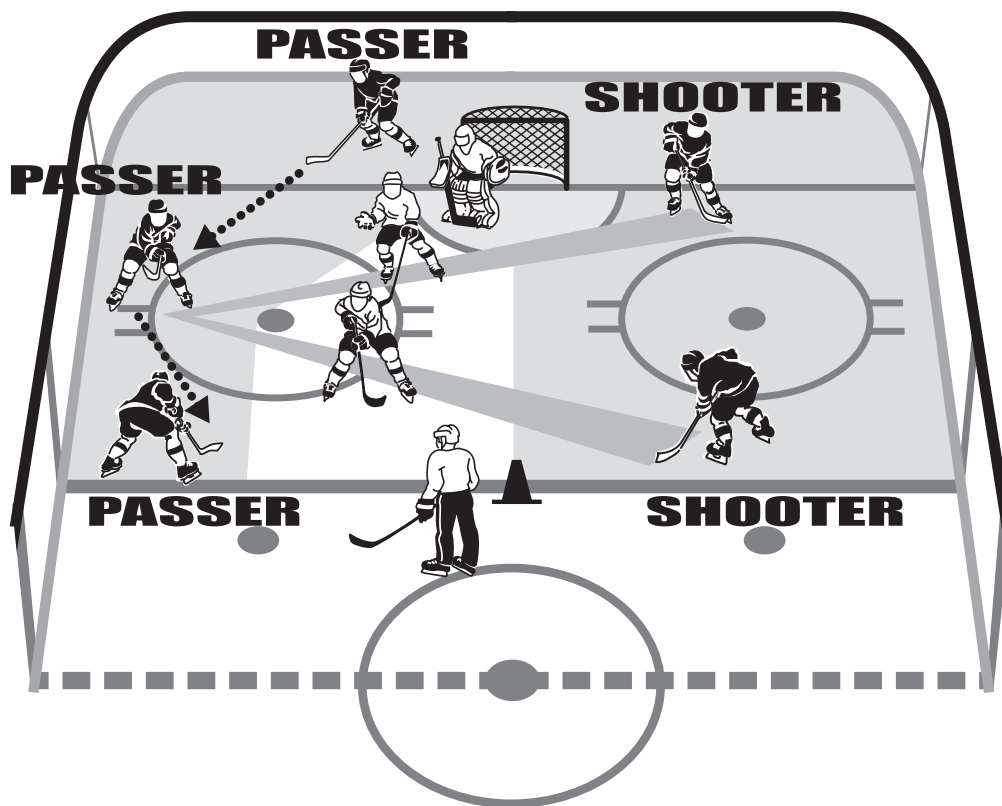


Cover the Passing Lanes

This is a five vs. two drill with the objective to develop orientation skills to cover the passing lanes in the defensive zone. A unit of five players are attacking against two defenders — for example, a defenseman and a wing, or a center and a wing. To create many read-and-react situations for the two defenders, the plays are executed under the following rules:

1. Two forwards and one defenseman on the attacking team are passers and may only pass the puck.
2. One forward and one defenseman on the attacking team are shooters and may only shoot the puck.
3. The passers and the shooters must stay outside the “defenders area” (see below) and on opposite half of the zone at all times.
4. The objective for the passer is to set up a “one-time shot” for a shooter.
5. The defenders can only move within the “defenders area.” The “defenders area” is illustrated below.

With these rules, the defenders consistently have to move to cover different passing lanes.



Two Lines Seam Pass Coverage (1 vs. 1)

The group is divided into two teams. The teams line up their defensemen in opposite corners and their forwards on opposite blue lines. The drill is executed as two connected 1 vs. 1 situations. It flows in both directions, one way at a time. Each run of the drill starts with the coach's whistle.

This drill develops the orientation skills to cover the passing lanes in the neutral zone.

- A. A (white jersey) forward is in position between the red and blue lines.
- B. A (white jersey) defenseman is in the far corner and carries the puck behind the net.
- C. The (white jersey) defenseman carrying the puck behind the net, skates to a good passing position (face-off dot) and makes a two line pass to the (white jersey) forward that is between the center red line and far blue line.
- D. The (white jersey) forward receives the pass from the (white jersey) defenseman and attacks 1 vs. 1 against the (dark jersey) defenseman that is waiting inside the blue line.

The 1 vs. 1 continues until there is a whistle. This signifies the end of the current 1 vs. 1 and starts the next 1 vs. 1 in the opposite direction.

The drill follows the above flow continuously.



Two Lines Seam Pass Coverage (2 vs. 2)

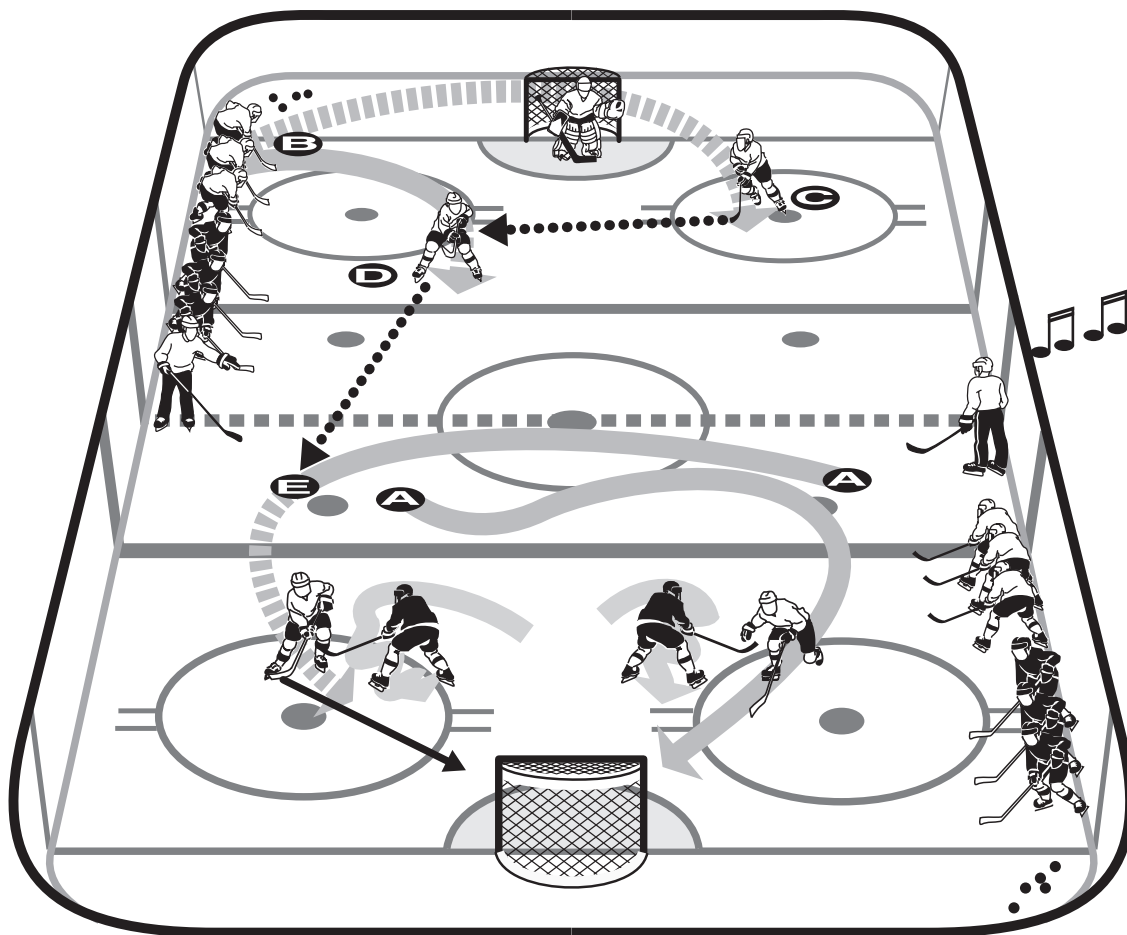
The group is divided into two teams. The teams line up their defensemen in opposite corners and their forwards on opposite blue lines. The drill is executed as two connected 2 vs. 2 situations. It flows in both directions, one way at a time. Each run of the drill starts with the coach's whistle.

This drill develops the orientation skills to cover the passing lanes in the neutral zone.

- A. Two (white jersey) forwards are at positions between the red and blue lines.
- B. Two (white jersey) defensemen are in the far corner. One carries the puck behind the net while the other skates up the middle of the ice to receive an outlet pass.
- C. The defensemen carrying the puck behind the net, skates to a good passing position (face-off dot) and makes a pass to the other defensemen (partner) who is skating up the ice.
- D. The defensemen who just received the pass, then makes a two line pass to one of the two forwards that are between the red line and far blue line.
- E. One of the two forwards receives the pass from the defensemen and the two forwards then attack 2 vs. 2 on the two (dark jersey) defensemen that are waiting inside the blue line.

The 2 vs. 2 continues until there is a whistle. This signifies the end of the current 2 vs. 2 and starts the next 2 vs. 2 in the opposite direction.

The drill follows the above flow continuously.



The Steering Drill (2 vs. 2)

The group is divided into two teams. The teams line up at opposite ends of the rink. The drill is executed 2 vs. 2 and can progress to 3 vs. 2 to further challenge the steering defenders. The area marked “GOAL” on the illustration below is an area consisting of the blue line in between the face-off dots. The attackers’ objective is to carry the puck through this area, while the defenders attempt to steer the attackers away from this area. Each run of the drill starts with the coach’s whistle. **This drill develops the orientation and teamwork skills to control the middle lane and steer the opponent to the outside of the rink.**

- A. Two steering defenders are in the neutral zone.
- B. The coach passes the puck to start the drill.
- C. The two (white jersey) attacking players receive the pass and attack the neutral zone.
- D. The two (black jersey) steering defenders steer the puck carrier to the outside and control the defensive side of the player without the puck.
- E. The two (white jersey) attacking players move the puck to open the middle lane.

Try to carry the puck over the blue line and in between the face-off dots. Do not carry the puck over the blue line if you are outside the dots. Pass the puck to keep the drill alive. Prevent the attackers from carrying the puck across the blue line. The coach’s whistle will end the run.

The drill follows the above flow continuously.

**Be careful to explain that this drill is for the defenders.*

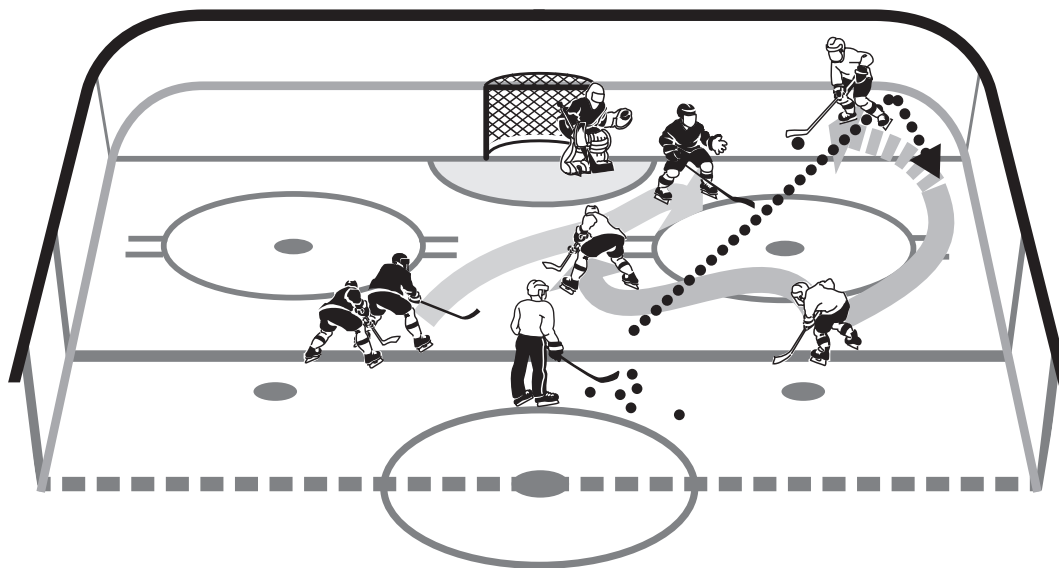


Two vs. One From the Corner

This drill can be used to develop positioning skills such as holding a defensive triangle, as well as reading and controlling passing lanes. Each run of the drill starts and ends with the coach's whistle.

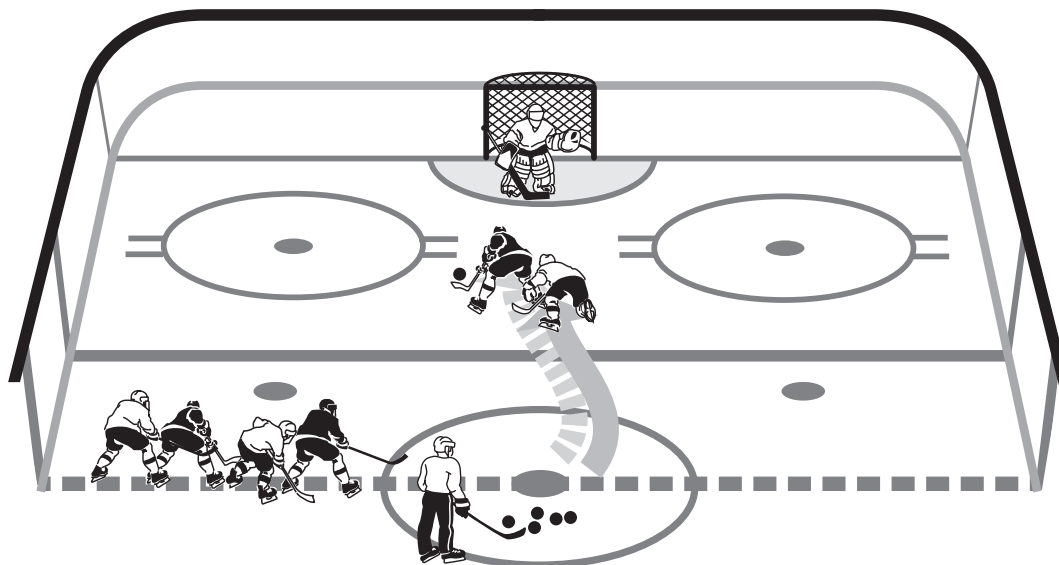
This drill will develop positioning skills such as the defensive triangle.

- A. The coach blows the whistle and shoots a puck into the corner.
- B. The first player in the far-side line closes the gap and plays defense.
- C. The first two players in the near-side line pick up the puck and attack.
- D. The coach blows the whistle to end this run and start the next one.



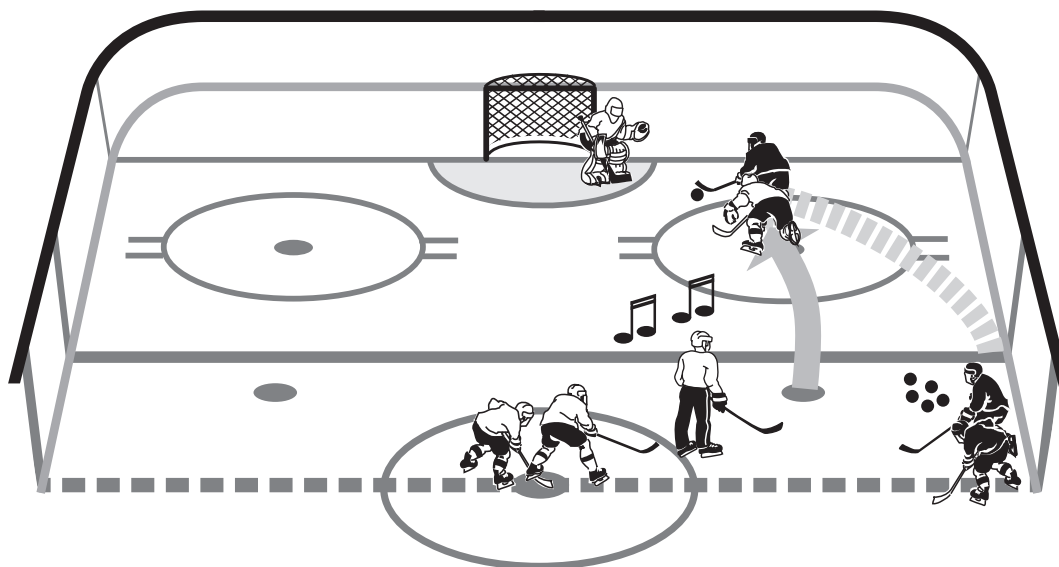
Breakaway with Chaser

One player, the attacker, is standing in the center circle, and has a puck on his stick. A second player, the chaser, is standing behind with his hand on the back of the attacker. At any given moment the attacker can take off and try to create enough of a gap so he can shoot. The chaser has to react on the attacker's move, chase the attacker, close the gap, and apply an appropriate check.



Wide Drive Race

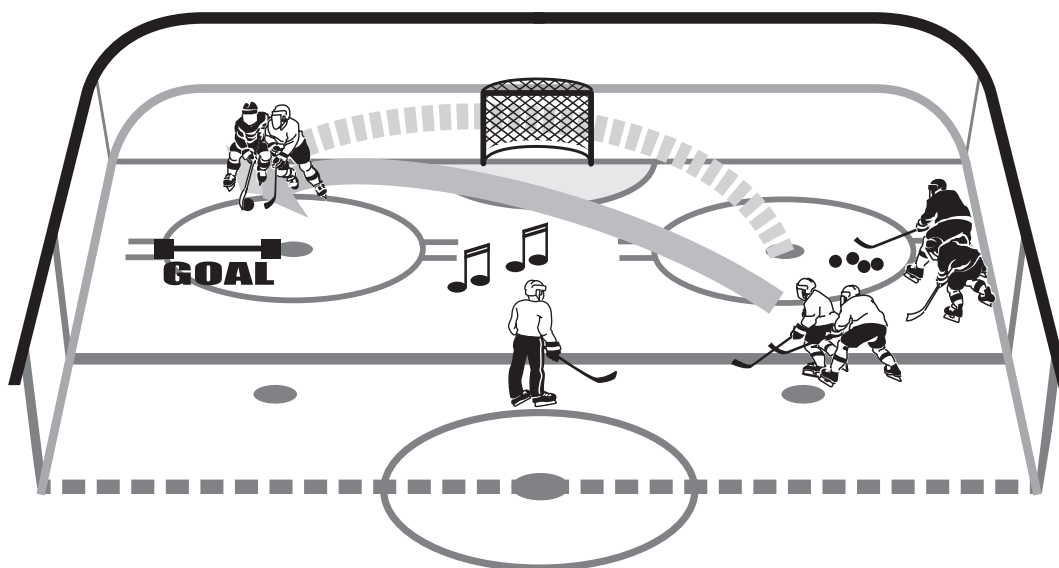
The attacker starts with one foot on the blue line, touching the boards. The defender starts with one foot on the face-off dot. On the coach's whistle, the attacker tries to carry the puck wide and get enough separation to take a shot on the net. The defender tries to close the gap and apply an appropriate check.



Wheel by the Hash Mark

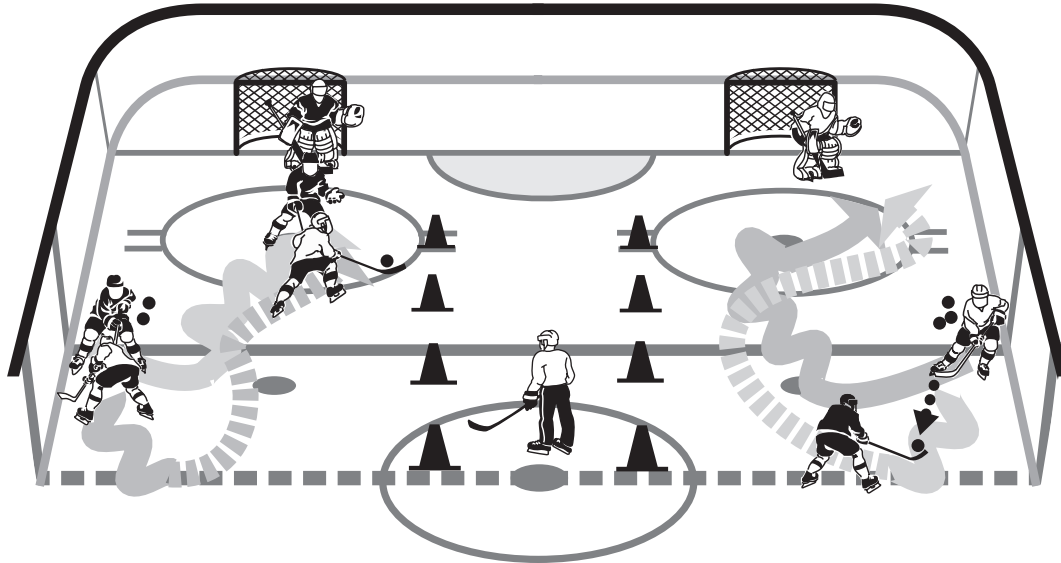
The puck carrier starts with one foot on the face-off dot. The forechecker starts with one foot at the top of the circle. The purpose for the puck carrier is to carry the puck behind the net and between the hash mark and the face-off dot on the opposite side (the area marked "goal" on the illustration below). The purpose for the forechecker is to drive the opponent wide and force him to carry the puck wide (outside the circle).

The drill gets a better flow if the puck carrier has to skate full speed and is not allowed to stop. The drill gets more challenging if the puck carrier can choose any speed or route to get to the "goal."



One vs. One in a Narrow Lane

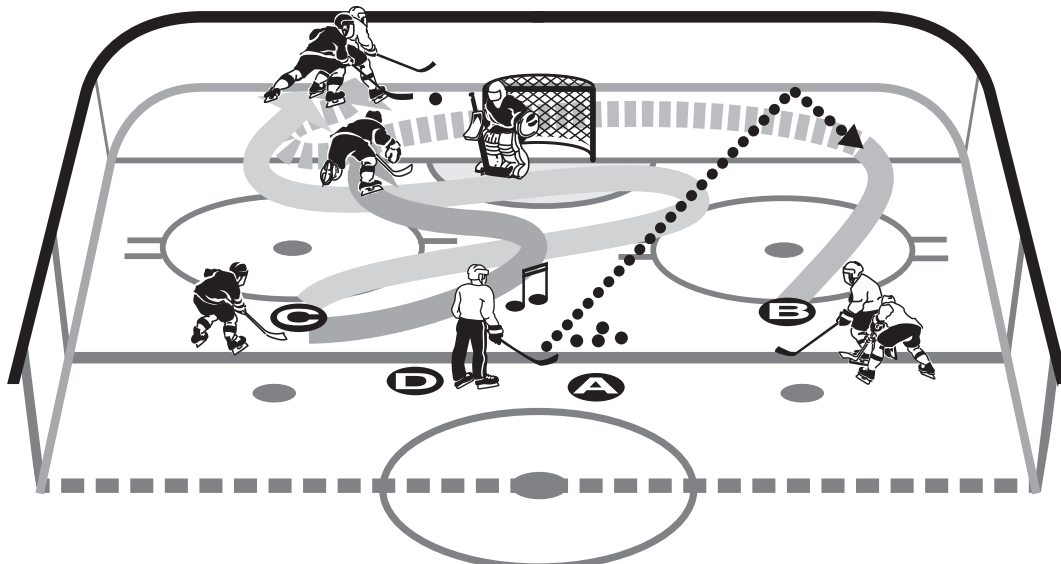
A row of pylons restricts the playing area to a narrow lane. Players may not skate outside this area. The first player in line skates backward and receives a pass from the second player in the same line. Once he has received the pass, he pivots and starts to attack against the player who gave him the pass.



Pin and Pry 2 vs. 1

Two players work as a pair to narrow down the puck carrier's area, pin him to the boards, and pry the puck loose. Each run of the drill starts and ends with the coach's whistle. **This drill will develop teamwork for puck recovery by using pinning and pry checking skills.**

- A. The coach blows the whistle and shoots a puck into the corner.
- B. One player from the nearest line picks up the puck and tries to control it deep in the zone.
- C. Two players from the other line try to pin the puck carrier and pry the puck loose.
- D. The coach blows the whistle to end this run and start the next one.



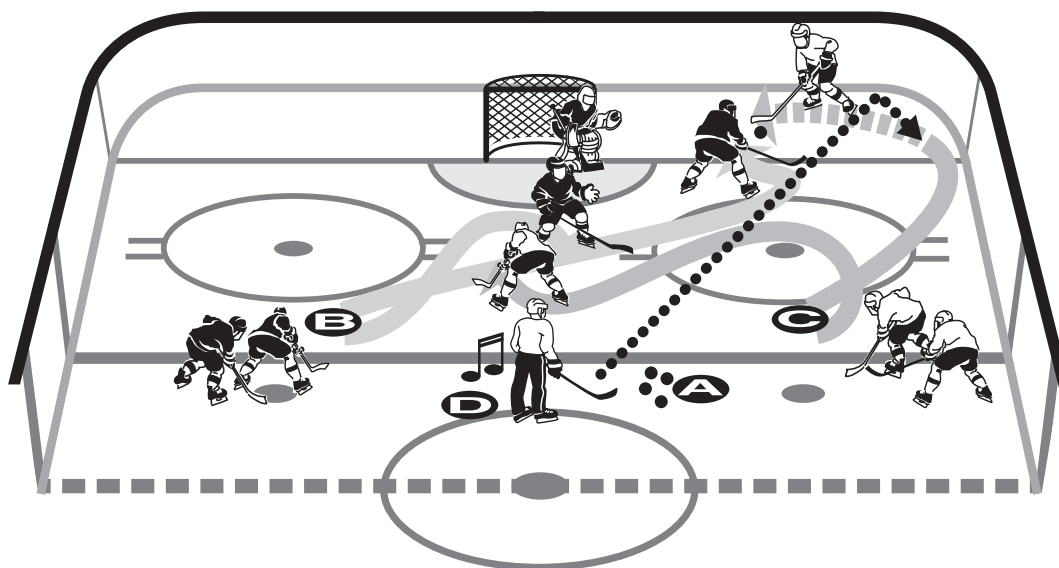
Two vs. Two in the Corner

This drill can be used as a controlled skill development drill or as a competitive team drill. If you chose to use it as a competition, the rules could be:

- Attacking players need to score to win.
- Defending players have to carry the puck past the top of the circles to win.

The drill does not end until one of the two options above has occurred. Each run of the drill starts and ends with the coach's whistle. **These two drills are generic and can be used to work on most checking skills.**

- A. The coach blows the whistle and shoots a puck into the corner.
- B. The first two players in the far-side line close the gap and play defense.
- C. The first two players in the near-side line pick up the puck and attack.
- D. The coach blows the whistle to end this run and start the next one.



One vs. One in the Corner

Same drill as above, but executed as one vs. one.

- A. The coach blows the whistle and shoots a puck into the corner.
- B. The first player in the far-side line closes the gap and plays defense.
- C. The first player in the near-side line picks up the puck and attacks.
- D. The coach blows the whistle to end this run and start the next one.

3 x 1 vs. 1 Defensive Zone

This drill is executed through three continuous one-on-ones, where the defenseman closes the gap and defends three times against three different forwards. The group is divided into two teams, lined up by the boards behind the top of the circles. The first three players from one team (white in the illustration below) position themselves as follows: one player in the corner, one player in the opposite corner and one player behind the top of the circles in the middle of the zone. The first player on the other team (dark in the illustration below) positions himself in front of the net. Each run of the drill starts with the coach's double whistle. **This drill develops gap control skating techniques.**

- A. Pass the puck to one of the three players.
- B. Read and react to the pass.
- C. Receive the puck.
- D. Close the gap on the puck receiver, and back up to defend the net.
- E. Attack one vs. one.
- F. Coach's single whistle ends the first attack and starts the second.
- G. Pass the puck to one of the two remaining players.
- H. Read and react to the pass.
- I. Immediately finish the attack with a shot and then get out of the way.
- J. Receive the pass and start attacking one vs. one.
- K. Close the gap and start defending one vs. one.

After a short moment the coach gives one more whistle signal, and this run continues with one more pass to the final player, who attacks one vs. one. On the next whistle, the two players return to their teams and four new players take the positions as described on top of this page. This time, however, the other team will line up as the defender. The next run starts on the coach's whistle.



3 x Wide Pass Plus Join the Rush

This drill is executed as two wide drives with an angle shot, and one wide drive with a back pass. It runs simultaneously in both directions. Each run of the drill starts with the coach's double whistle. **This drill develops gap control skating techniques.**

- A. On the double whistle the defenseman starts skating backward.
- B. On the single whistle, pass a puck to the defenseman.
- C. Make a lateral pivot.
- D. A forward starts and skates down the ice in the wide lane.
- E. Make a pass to the forward, who receives the pass, drives wide and shoots from an angle.
- F. Make a forward to backward pivot.
- G. On the blue line, receive a pass.
- H. Make a backward to forward lateral pivot.
- I. A forward starts and skates down the ice in the wide lane.
- J. Make a pass to the forward, who receives the pass, drives wide and shoots from an angle.
- K. Make a forward to backward pivot.

As the defenseman reaches the blue line, the coach blows one more whistle and a third puck will be passed to the defenseman, who makes a lateral pivot and passes the puck to a forward skating in the wide lane. This time, however, (not diagrammed), the defenseman joins the rush, receives a back pass and shoots. The next run starts on the coach's whistle.



3 x 1 vs. 1 Neutral Zone (Close the Gap Flat)

This drill is executed through three continuous one-on-ones, where the defenseman closes the gap and defends three times against three different forwards. It runs in both directions simultaneously. Each run of the drill starts with the coach's whistle.

NEAR SIDE

- A. A forward carries the puck in a wide curve through the neutral zone.
- B. A defenseman closes the gap and controls the defensive side of the forward.
- C. Carry the puck outside the face-off dot and attack 1 vs. 1.
- D. Use a forward to backward pivot turn and keep the forward on the outside.
- E. On the coach's whistle, separate from the puck carrier.
- F. Finish the attack and go back to the end of the line on the opposite side.
- G. On the coach's whistle, carry the puck in a wide curve the same way the previous forward did under the points A, C, and F.
- H. Close the gap to forward G the same way you just played against forward A.

FAR SIDE

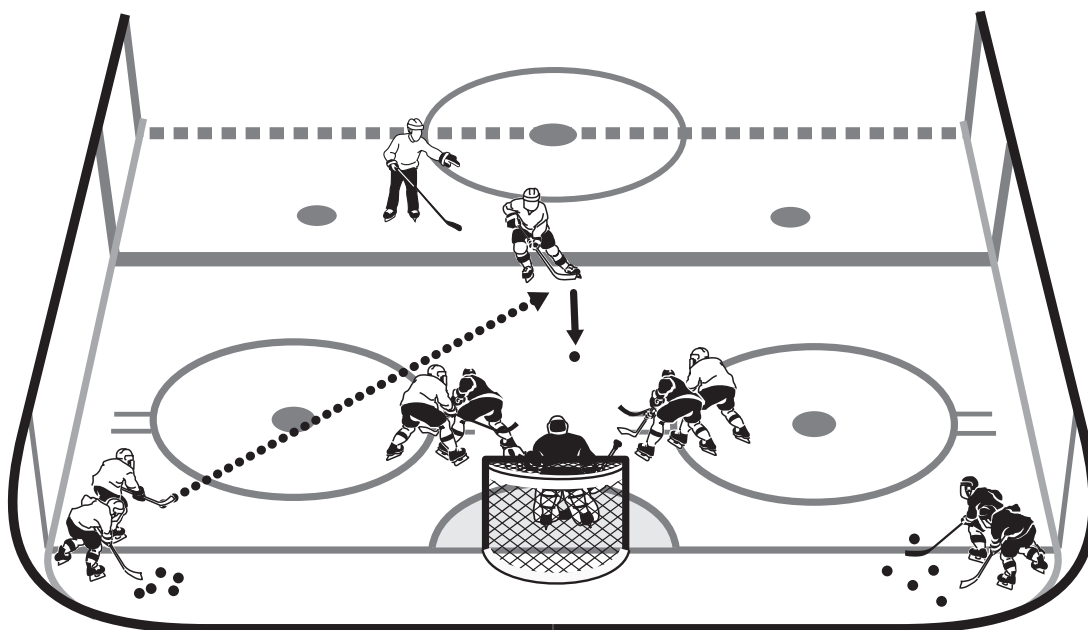
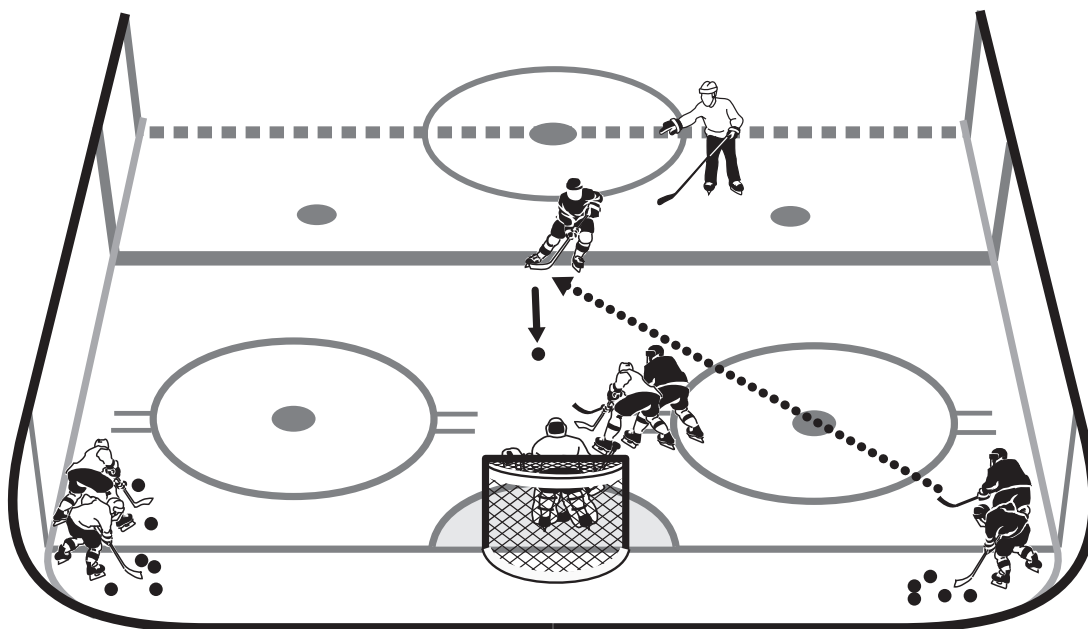
- I. A forward carries the puck in a wide curve.
- J. A defenseman closes the gap and controls the defensive side of the forward.

As forward "G" reaches the blue line on his attack, the coach blows one more single whistle and a new attacker starts a third attack, identical to Forward "A" and Forward "G." This time, however, the defenseman follows through playing one vs. one all the way to the net. The next run starts on the coach's whistle. **This drill develops gap control skills.**

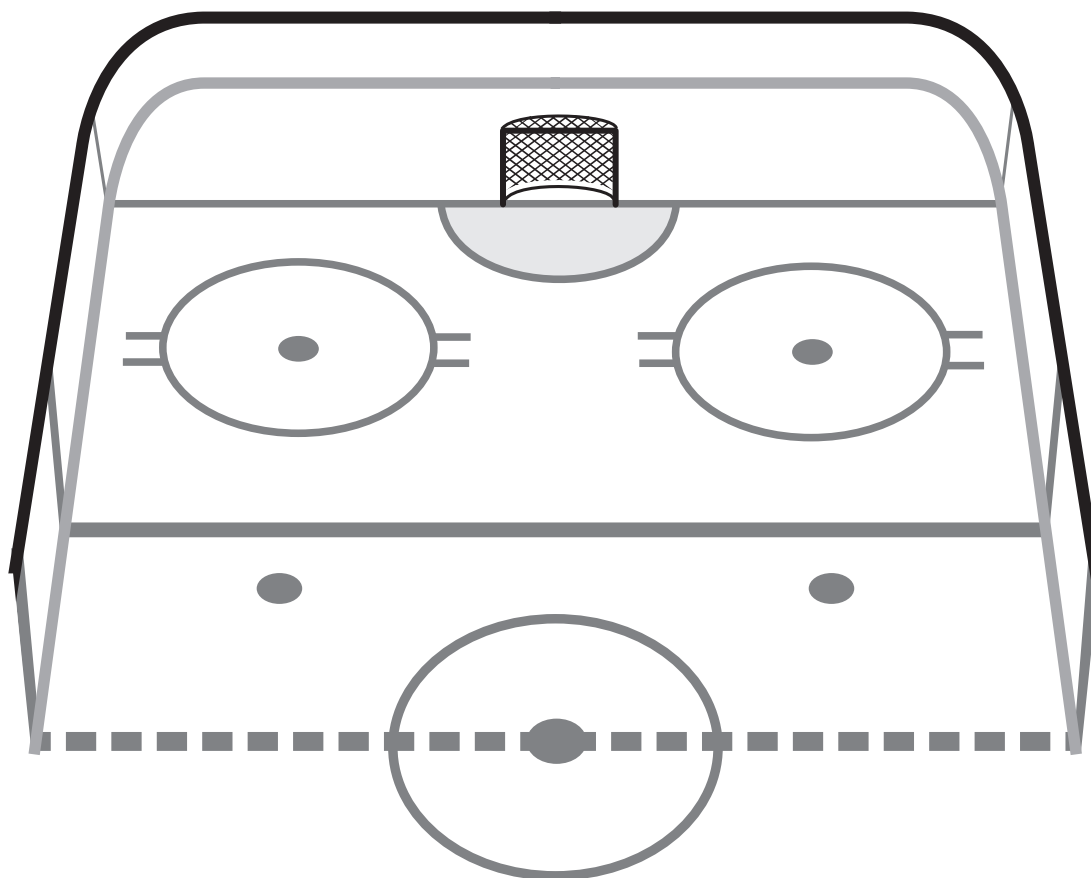


One vs. One With a Point Shot

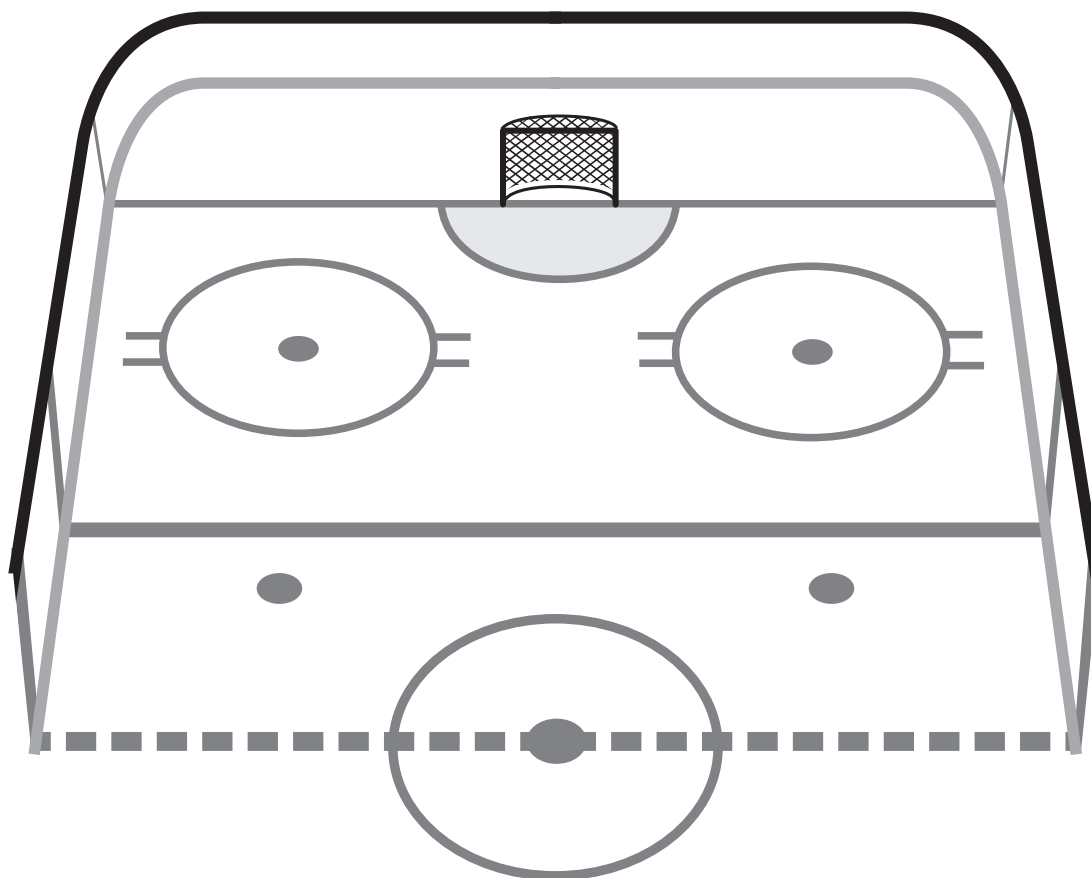
This drill is executed through three continuous one-on-ones, where the defenseman closes the gap and defends three times against three different forwards. It runs in both directions simultaneously. **These drills develop box out drills.**



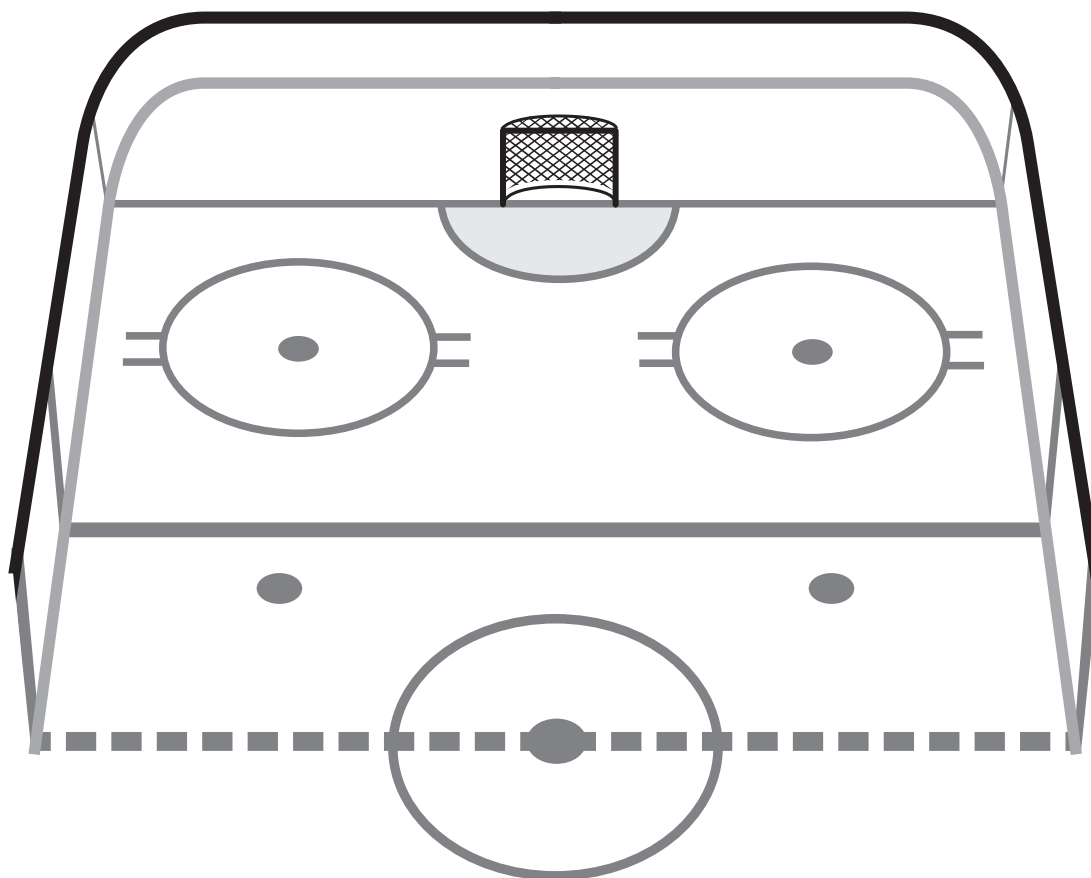
ADDITIONAL EXERCISES & DRILLS

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

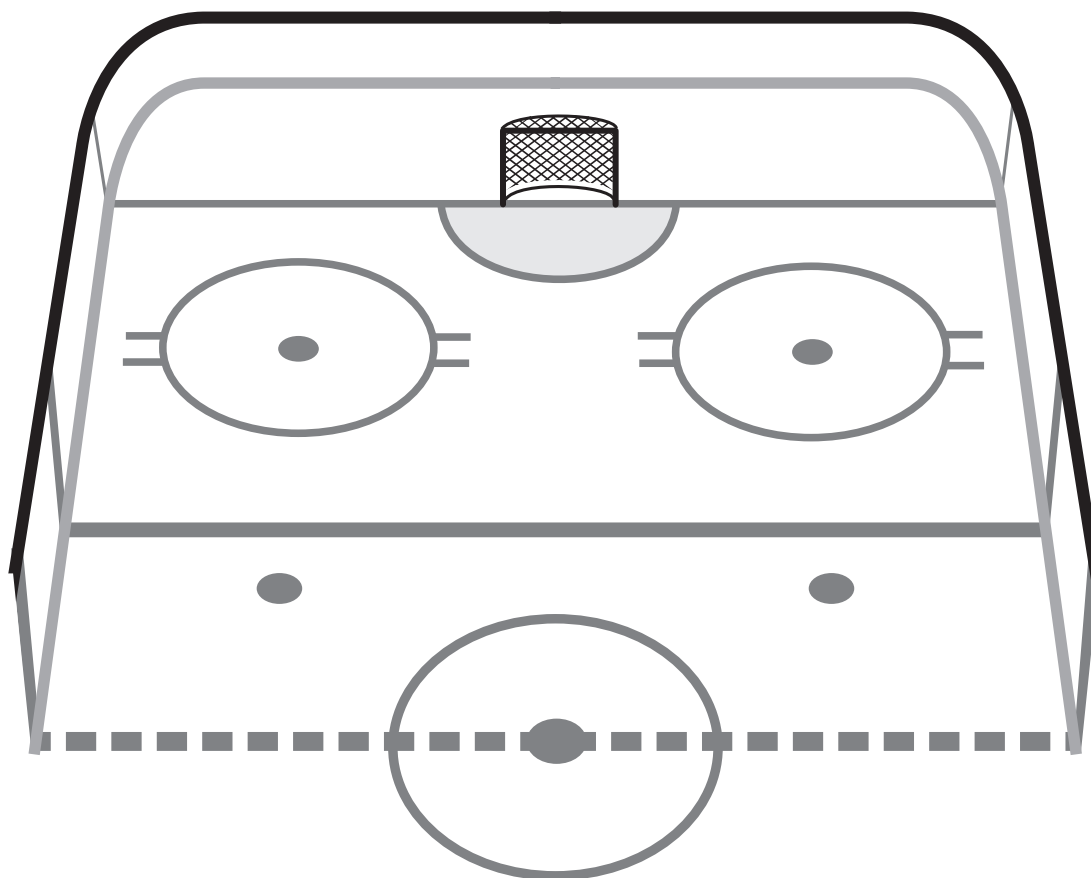
ADDITIONAL EXERCISES & DRILLS

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ADDITIONAL EXERCISES & DRILLS

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES & DRILLS

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**1775 Bob Johnson Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80906
usahockey.com**