



Offensive Zone Entries

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Over the past several years, coaches at all levels of hockey have placed a strong emphasis on teaching the defensive side of the game. The “trap” and other conservative, defensive tactics and systems are prevalent in minor to professional hockey. There is now a realization among coaches that we must place an equal emphasis on teaching offensive principles, skills, and tactics to develop “complete” players who are capable of playing the game the way it is intended to be played; tough, disciplined defense combined with a willingness to create offensive chances.

This article will focus on an important aspect of offensive team play; offensive zone entries. In discussing offensive zone entries (e.g. 3 vs. 2, 2 vs. 2 attacks), I will refer to tendencies of both North American and European hockey nations that I observed at the 2002 World Under 18 Championship in Slovakia. The opportunity to participate in the World Under 18 Championship was made possible thanks to a professional development grant provided by the Canadian Hockey Association and the Canadian Professional Coaches Association to whom I am very grateful.

I will first describe the principles that are important for the successful execution of offensive zone entries, and later illustrate various entry options.

* Speed

- Intimidates the defenders; forces them to back off the blue line allowing the puck carrier more time and space inside the offensive zone.
- Makes it difficult for the defender to recover from a bad defensive decision.
- Speed and timing are the keys.

* Wide Entry

- The safest place for the puck carrier to enter the offensive zone is wide with speed and puck control as this avoids the area of defensive concentration in the mid-ice. Most North American and European teams will primarily enter the offensive zone wide. The exception is the Czech Republic teams who seem to automatically attack through the middle then drop pass to a teammate crossing underneath.

* Drive - Drive

- As the puck carrier drives wide, the second offensive player who enters the offensive zone (F2) drives the mid-lane between the opposing defencemen to create pressure at the net.
- Mid-lane drive gives the F2 inside position on the backside defenceman, making the F2 more available to receive a pass or get to a rebound.
- The drive – drive is the most difficult entry to defend as it forces the opponent’s defencemen to drop back to cover the puck carrier and F2, thus creating open space for the third and fourth attackers.

* Activate Defencemen

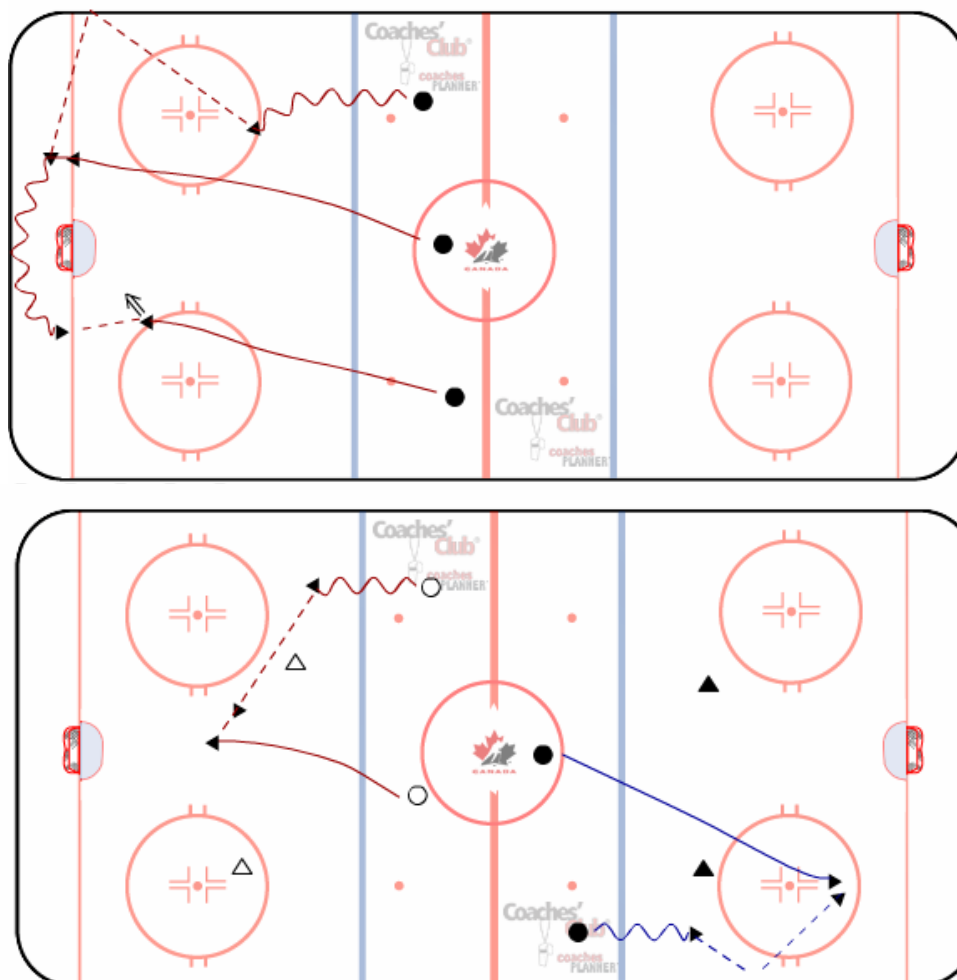
- Defencemen must be prepared to join the attack whenever;
 - they are in a better position than a forward to support the puck carrier,
 - they can create an outnumbered attack (3 v 2 or 4 v 3),
 - And the attack is a wide offensive zone entry.

* Shoot

- Finish the play by getting a shot on goal rather than looking to make a better play.

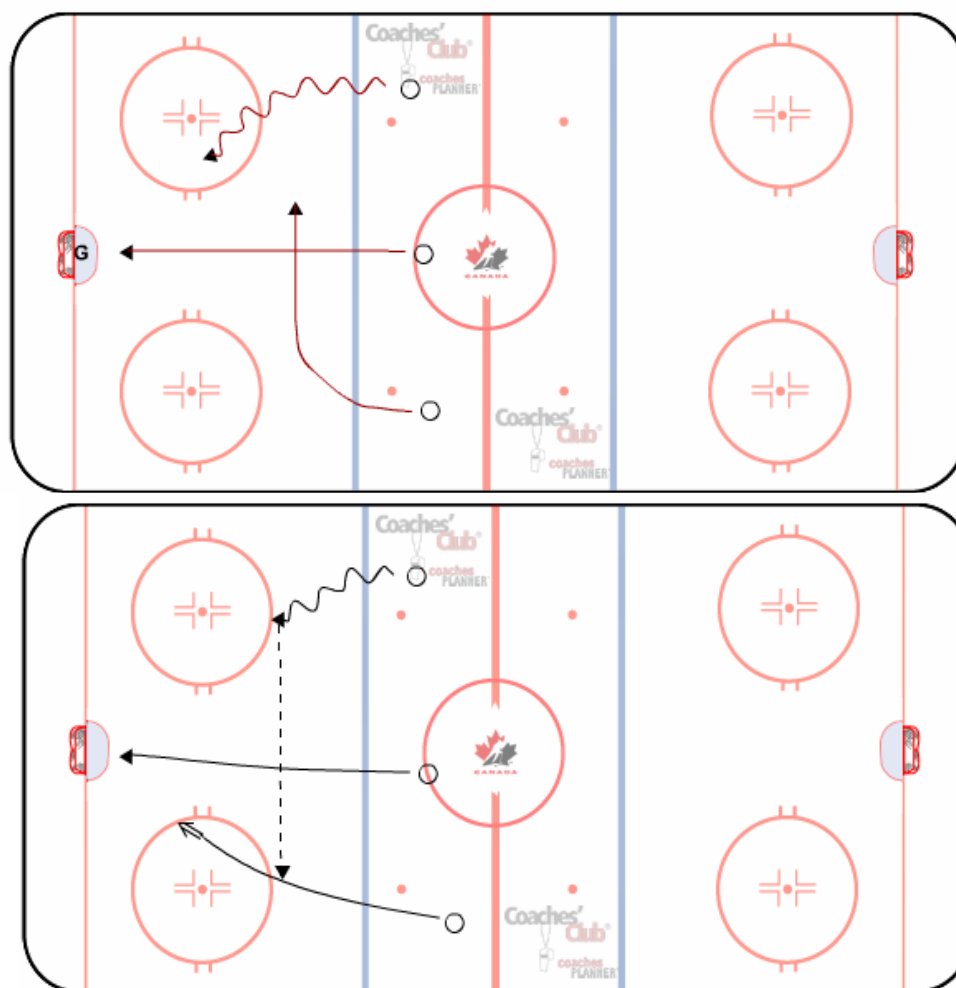
The following diagrams illustrate various offensive zone entries that incorporate the principles of speed, wide entry, drive – drive, activating defencemen, and shooting.

2 vs. 2



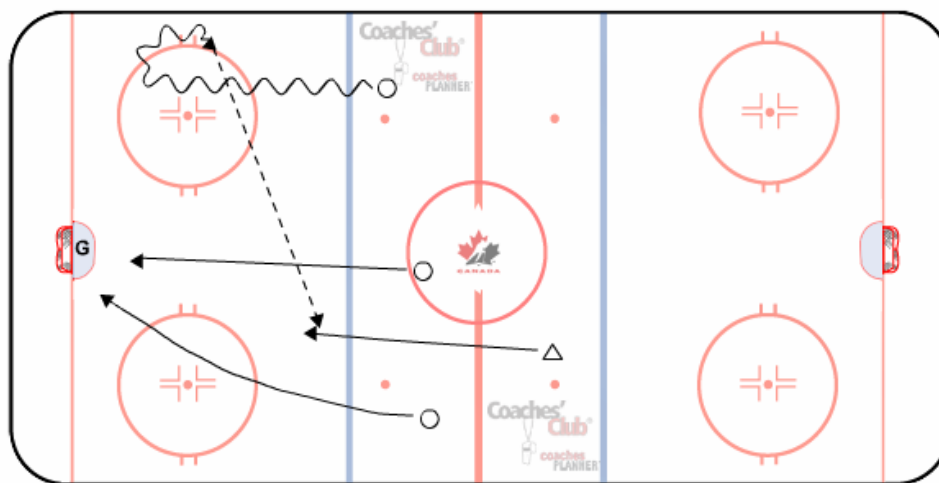
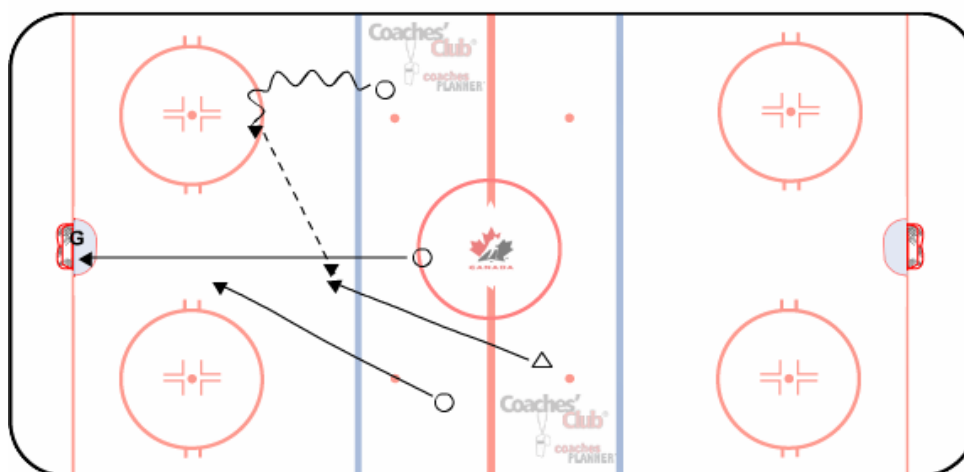
One of the strengths of Canadian teams is the willingness of Canadian players to drive or “crash” the net. Using the drive – drive principle on a 2 vs. 2 makes it very difficult to defend. F1 drives wide with speed, as they must be a threat to the net. F2 drives the mid- lane between the two defencemen to be a passing option for F1, or to be in a position for a rebound. F1 will read how the defencemen react and then determine which is the best available option. If D1 plays a tight gap against F1, then F1 will try to penetrate the space behind D1 by attempting to drive around D1 and shoot, or by using an area or chip pass to F2. If D1 backs off, then F1 will take advantage of the space in front of D1 by cutting into the middle and shooting. Some European teams, like the Czech Republic, prefer a different tactic in a 2 vs. 2 situation. Their players will automatically attack through the middle and rather than driving a lane to the net, they will skate laterally while looking to drop the puck to a teammate coming late into the zone.

3 vs. 2 Overload, and 3 vs. 2 w/ F3 High and Wide



The principles of speed, wide entry, drive – drive, and shooting must also be used to execute a good 3 vs. 2 that results in a quality scoring chance. As in a 2 vs. 2 situation, F1 drives wide with speed and F2 drives the mid-lane. Timing is the key for F3, as they must enter the open space in the high slot after F1 and F2 have driven the opposition defencemen back into the offensive zone. An attack triangle is formed and F3 now becomes an available passing option for F1. If F3 does receive the pass, they must shoot immediately rather than looking to make a better play. Another option on a 3 vs. 2 is for F3 to stay high and wide instead of moving across laterally. This is a more difficult play to execute and F1 has to have the skill to make an early, hard, and accurate pass to F3. If your players have the skill to make this play then it almost always results in a shot on goal if F3 shoots immediately upon receiving the pass. Since the backside defenceman has been driven deep by F2, he/she is not able to move up quickly enough to prevent the shot from F3.

3 vs. 2 Cut Off the Drive and 3 vs. 2 Delay, Pass to 4th Attacker





The last two diagrams illustrate the addition of the “activating defencemen” principle. European teams attack with all five players and their defencemen look for opportunities to join the attack and become offensive threats. Once again timing is key, and the 4th attacker must wait until the first wave of attackers (F1, F2, and F3) has driven the opposition defencemen back into the zone. The 4th attacker then enters the open ice created in the high slot. Because of the backcheckers tendency to focus on the puck and not pick up the late players entering the zone, the 4th attacker is usually open to receive a pass in a prime shooting position.

By teaching offensive principles and various entry options, and providing an opportunity for their players to repeatedly work on them in practice, coaches will better develop the offensive capabilities of their players. This will increase your team’s offensive production and help contribute to a successful season.