

**2005**



**NATIONAL HOCKEY COACHES  
SYMPOSIUM**

**Skills & Tactics for Defensemen**

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**GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN**

**JUNE 22-26, 2005**

# Skills and Tactics for Defenseman

By

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Playing good defense is less complicated than offense; No puck skills are required.

## The Most important fundamental technical skill required:

- **SKATING**
  - Proper Stance
  - Forward Skating
  - Backward Skating
  - Pivoting right and left
  - Lateral mobility
  - Transition Skating Forward to Backward/Backward to forward
  - Explosive Speed winning races to loose pucks

### Passing

Weight transfer passing the puck  
Most critical pass is the first pass out of your zone  
Need good velocity  
Flat tape to tape  
Keep the puck on the forehand in the pass ready position

### Shooting

Quick release  
On the net  
Move lateral to change your shooting angle; changes angle on coverage/goaltender  
12-18 inches off the ice  
Head up looking what is happening in front of you for tips and screens

### Puck control/protection

Might need to buy some time  
The ability to handle the puck under pressure  
Use of your body to protect the puck

## **There are several tactical defensive skills For a Defenseman.**

- Reading the Play
- Positioning
- Angling
- Gap Control
- Basic Use of Stick
- Body Checking/Rideouts
- Body Checking/Open Ice Hits
- Shot Blocking

**\*\*These all require sound SKATING fundamentals.**

## **The Environment- Ice Surface**

- The dots, playing each situation from inside out.
- Playing the lines
- Defending the prime scoring area
- The area behind the net
- Corners
  - Point Coverage
  - In the corners

## **Objectives of Defensive Play**

- To Limit Time and Space of puck possession
- To regain control of the puck
- To force the offense to poor ice position
- To prevent scoring chances and scoring

## **Principles/Concepts to Realize Objectives of Defensive Play**

The objective of limiting the time and space of puck possession will be accomplished by the principles of:

### **Time & Space**

The goal is to limit time and space so we can gain control of the puck as quickly as possible

- **Time:**
  - Get on people quickly before they have a chance to assess the situation and make a play.
  - Once you have proper coverage this is when you quickly get on them limiting the time they have with the puck.
- **Space:**
  - Limit the space or deny use of the best space (Middle of the ice) until there's enough support to pressure the puck and thereby eliminate time.

## **Pressure**

The decision to pressure will be based upon:

- Closeness and relationship of the offensive players(s) to the:
  - Mid ice Corridor
  - Goal/Danger zone area
  - Slot area
- Danger of the opponents attack on goal
- Number of defenders vs. number of offensive players
- Ability to close on a player-relates to the player's gap control skills

### **Pressure when**

Important to pressure  
Player has back to you  
Player has poor puck control  
Support is available  
Opponent is isolated

### **Contain when**

No immediate goal scoring threat  
Puck carrier is approaching  
Puck carrier has good puck control  
No support  
Need to buy time for outnumbered situation

**The objective of regaining puck possession will be accomplished by the principles of:**

- Approaching the opponent on the defensive side.
- Approaching the opponent from the mid-ice corridor outwards.
- Being able to close the gap when ready.

**The objective of forcing the offense to poor ice position will be accomplished by the principle of:**

- Proper angling to delay, deflect and steer the attack.

**The objective of preventing the opposition from scoring will be accomplished by the principles of:**

- Sound individual and team use of tactics
- Communication
- Providing support away from the puck. Through triangulation – the width, depth and concentration of defense.
- The willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of the team in the defensive zone.



## **1 on 1 Play**

- **Skating posture:** Upper body erect, knee and ankle flexion, stick directly in front of the body with blade of stick on the ice held with one hand; top hand should be tucked on the hip or close so that poke checks can be used without a forward lunge of the upper body; good stick position keeps the attacker out of the defenders personal space allowing him time to pivot should the attacker attempt to beat him wide; stick in front also discourages use of the middle of the ice and subsequent crossing attacks which are more difficult to defend; skates no wider than shoulder width apart, otherwise difficulty in pivoting
- **Outside shoulder lined up with inside shoulder;** eyes on chest can see puck through split vision
- **Gapping:** Two stick lengths ideal, no more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  zone; backward skating speed equal to or slightly less than the forward skating speed of attacker; tight gaps deny space and time to puck carrier and limit crossing type attacks
- **When attacker goes wide pivot using a mohawk technique rather than cross under;** pivot so as to return on a straight line to the near post, effectively cutting off the path to the net for the attacker

## **2 on 1 Play**

- **Good gap essential as soon as play is identified as 2v1;** this limits play options and slows attack; the fewer passes they are allowed to make the easier it is for the goalie who doesn't have to constantly re-position himself
- **Positioning is between both attackers initially;** Initially one hand on the stick, stick in front of the body
- **Defenseman must constantly re-check position of player without the puck (Swivel Headed)**
- **Can use false information, fakes to push puck carrier wider or entice him to make a pass before he's ready**
- **As play progresses below the tops of the circles, stick should be pointed a bit more toward the puck carrier than directly in front of the body;** this closes the space between stick and skates that attacker could use to pass the puck; At this point shading slightly toward the player without the puck should occur; goal must be not to allow a pass to get through once the puck is below the tops of the circles
- **If play continues below the dots, two hands on the stick;** this allows for optimum reaction time on attempted passes; body must be turned to roughly 45 degree angle denying pass; At this point, the player with the puck will be forced to shoot; defenseman now with two hands on his stick must not mark either player but prepare himself to react to the rebound