

Dictating the flow of the game

Establishing a good forecheck in hockey is much like establishing a good running game in football – you control the game. As a coach, you need to get a feel for your personnel and decide on a forechecking system that is best suited to the strengths of your team. For example, if your forwards tend to be small and quick with good puckhandling skills, you might want the game to be more of the up-and-down ice variety, giving your players the opportunity to create offense off of the rush. On the other hand, if your forwards tend to be bigger and a little slower, your team might be better suited to a puck control forecheck, hemming the opposition in their end and battling it out along the boards. In any event, your players will need to have some basic fundamental skills and a grasp of some concepts that will enable them to play within the framework of your system so that everyone on your team can work together to dictate the flow of the puck and the game.

What to stress to forwards

- Always maintain good defensive-side positioning
- Sticks on the ice, taking away ice and potential passing lanes
- Attack puck carriers under control
- Finish checks – take the body whenever possible and beat your man back into the play
- Have an “inside-out” mindset – force the puck carrier toward the boards and don’t allow him to move up the middle of the ice – this limits his options for passing or carrying the puck and it limits his space
- Communicate with one another
- Second and third men must “read” off of the first man and react accordingly
- Make sure to have a third man high
- Play within the system that the coach wants (i.e. 2-1-2, 1-2-2, etc.)
- Trust your teammates to do their job and play your own position and do your own job

What to stress to defensemen

- Constantly be aware of all players on the ice – don’t get caught watching the puck only
- Move in unison with your partner – support him both offensively if he has the puck, and defensively if he is playing the puck carrier
- Only pinch if you can arrive at the pass receiver at the same time as the puck does
- Only pinch if there is a third forward high supporting you
- Always be sure to take the man and/or the puck – the man first, the puck if possible
- Maintain good defensive-side positioning at all times

The beauty in doing forechecking drills with your team is that they are confrontational in nature – forwards against defensemen. The forwards get a feel for the individual containment skills they need to perfect while the defensemen have an opportunity to work on the footwork, puckhandling and decision-making skills necessary for breaking the puck out of the zone. To get the most out of your practices, create a competitive, but fun, environment by making the “loser” of the following drill situations do something undesirable, yet funny, like roll over three times while barking like a dog. As the coach, you decide who should be successful in the situation, forwards or defensemen. You make the rules, and you have the pleasure of deciding on the “punishment”.

- Have your players go 1-on-1 to get the feel for angling. The forwards should be successful about 50-75% of the time.
- The next step is to have two forecheckers on one defenseman.

The first player takes the man. The second player must sit back in a good position to read the play – take the puck if the first guy gets to his man – play the puck carrier if he misses – forwards should be successful 90-100% of the time.

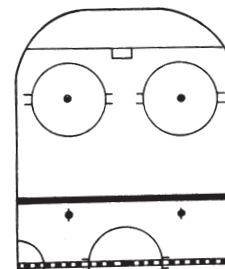
- The next step is 3-on-1 – same rules apply as in 2-on-1 but the third man remains high in the slot – first man takes the man – second man takes the puck – third man is high and is the safety man and the shooter. Forwards should be successful 100% of the time.
- The next step is 2-on-2 – first player on the puck – second player in a position to react to D to D partner pass but also in a position to play puck carrier if he beats the first forechecker – if your defensemen are any good at all, your forwards should only be 50% successful at best.
- The next step is 3-on-2 – first man on the puck hard – second man in a position to pick up the puck or react to D to D pass – third man high as a shooter or safety – forecheckers should have about a 75% success rate.

Forechecking Systems

The following are some common team forechecking systems. In all cases, all players need to be prepared to make the transition from defense to offense when the puck turns over, whether it is deep in the offensive zone, high in the offensive zone or in the neutral zone. A quick transition from defense to offense is the key to a good scoring chance. These systems not only put the players in good position to channel the puck to where they want it to go on the forecheck, but they also put the player in good offensive support position to attack on a turnover.

There is one note of caution in instilling these systems. When going over them with your team, on the ice or on the blackboard, there will always be “what if?” questions. You won’t be able to answer them all. **Remember that a forechecking system is only a framework that allows your team to know where their linemates should be and have confidence that they are doing their respective jobs.**

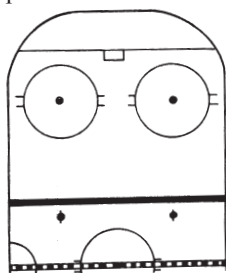
1-2-2 A defensive-oriented attack that is very conducive to a flow game up and down the ice, as well as offense off of turnovers high in the offensive zone or in the neutral zone. Lead forechecker forces the puck out of the middle of the ice toward the boards. Second and third forwards set up at the inside of the tops of the circles in a position to step up and provide support on the first pass. Whichever forward does not attack on the first pass supports the middle of the ice and is the third man back. Defensemen provide support as necessary, prepared to move out of the zone if necessary. On a turnover, all



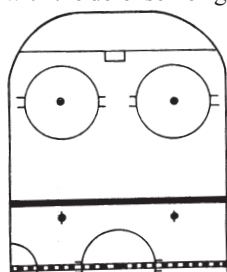
players make the transition to offense.

2-1-2 A more aggressive system that allows for more of a containment game to create turnovers deep in the offensive zone.

The first forward pursues the puck aggressively as shown with the second forward moving quickly to take away the cross-ice D-to-D pass. The third forward is the key and must be able to read the play and “cheat” accordingly by flowing to where he believes the puck will move. The most obvious play is a pass to the winger on the “strong side” (puck side) as shown, but the third man must read and react to the initial play of the puck-retrieving defenseman. The defensemen must provide support as needed.



2-3 A very similar system to the 2-1-2 only more aggressive with the defensemen getting more involved in the play. The first two forwards pursue the puck and the open defenseman accordingly, forcing the puck to the winger on the hash marks. The “strong-side” (puck side) defenseman is the player who must read the play and arrive at the hash mark at the same time as the puck does. The third forward high must provide support near the boards with the weak-side defenseman moving to the middle of the ice.



Left Wing Lock A system that effectively shrinks the ice, taking away one lane of the ice and allowing the other four players to focus on a smaller area of ice. No matter where the puck is the left wing “locks” up the opposing right winger, eliminating him as a passing option. The center pursues the puck and the third man reacts to the first pass made with the defensemen providing support as needed. In this system the defensemen, confident that the opposition right winger is covered, can be a little more aggressive at the offensive zone. In addition, with less ice to worry about, it is easier for all defensive players to read the play and identify their responsibility.

