

NEUTRAL ZONE REGROUP

Creating offense from transition can be a very powerful weapon for your team. In the NHL today, many teams use a very passive forechecking system allowing the opposition to move the puck out into the neutral zone. With at least four (and sometimes five) players back defensively, they clog up the neutral zone and look to create a turnover. Once a turnover is created, the key is a quick counterattack while the other team is trying to recover back on defense.

Whether this passive style of play is right or wrong, or good or bad for the game could be debated all day. Many teams have success with it no matter what system they use, the neutral zone trap, the left wing lock or any of the other variations used. The common element in all systems is the quick counter attack and it is certainly something you should spend some time working with your team on to ensure that they are all on the same page and working together.

Use the width of the ice

The path of least resistance is most often the other side of the ice. When a defenseman gets possession of the puck, he/she should be thinking immediately of moving it across ice to his/her partner (provided that passing lane is not covered).

The partner should be in good puck support position, creating a good passing lane, on the other half of the ice and a few steps back toward your team's net, creating a diagonal pass rather than straight across the ice. This will lessen the chances of the cross-ice pass being intercepted and also give the pass receiver a little more time and space to make a play.

Come back to the puck

Any player who has possession of the puck should have at least two passing options. Forwards need to come back to the puck and get available.

Many forwards get lazy and develop a bad habit of stand up at the far blue line waiting for a pass. In this position, they are standing still, are easily covered by the other team's defense and have no space to make a play or attack with speed. By coming back to the puck, the forwards are available as good, short passing options for their teammates and then have some space and time to pick up speed through the neutral zone.

Fill lanes

Forwards should be moving and able to react to the movement of the puck and their teammates. As the puck moves from defenseman to defenseman, the center needs to have a sense of timing and move with the puck (too early or too late and he will be out of position), always being available as a passing outlet. The winger on the side of the ice that the puck started on also needs to flow with the puck and fill the center lane. The winger on the side of the ice that the puck is moving toward can create some depth to the attack by moving up-ice forcing the opposing defensemen to back off with him/her.

Attack as a unit with speed

Timing and positioning of all five players is critical in developing an attack quickly and being able to move up-ice with speed. All players should be moving and in good puck support position to play off one another for good quick short passes as necessary.

Speed is necessary on rushes up-ice where the other team is prepared – it becomes that much harder to defend on a quick counter-attack when players are caught out of position defensively.

D1 – Move with the puck (usually backward if getting pressure) to create some time and space. Look for the cross-ice pass to your partner to use the width of the ice.

D2 – Create a passing lane for your partner – in the middle of the ice and back toward your team's net to reduce the risk of getting a cross-ice pass intercepted.

LW – Initially hold ground on the left side of the ice as a passing option for D1. As the puck moves cross-ice, flow with the puck and fill the center lane as a passing option for D2.

C – Come back in the center lane available for a pass from D1 if necessary. If the puck moves across the ice, flow with it and fill the right wing lane as a passing option for D2.

RW – Play off the movement of your linemates. As the puck moves to D2, initially be available for a quick pass or move up across the ice to back off the opposing defensemen to create space for your linemates as they flow to the right wing side of the ice.

