

# One-handed puck control

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Many coaches, especially at the younger age groups, constantly are telling their players to have both hands on their stick at all times when they are on the ice. While this is not necessarily bad advice, it is not necessarily good advice in all circumstances either.

There are certainly times to have two hands on the stick. Whenever a player is carrying the puck in traffic, is about to make or receive a pass, or is battling for a loose puck, it is best to have two hands on the stick for control and strength. However, there are times when it is necessary, and best, to only have one hand on the stick. For younger players and inexperienced players of all ages, and even many experienced players who do not have great balance, skating with one hand on their stick will help to improve their balance. If a player always skates with two hands on the stick, he tends to have a lot of upper body side-to-side movement, which translates into a lot of lower body side-to-side movement, with the end result being a very inefficient skater with poor balance. Just the slightest turning of the shoulders (in many cases caused by the stick controlling the player) can cause the player to lose his balance.

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Any time a player has open ice (a break-away, a defenseman carrying the puck from his goal line to the blue line uncontested, a winger receiving a pass at his own hash marks moving out of his zone without being pressured) he should be striving to get to top speed while controlling the puck. The following are key components of one-handed, full-speed puck control:

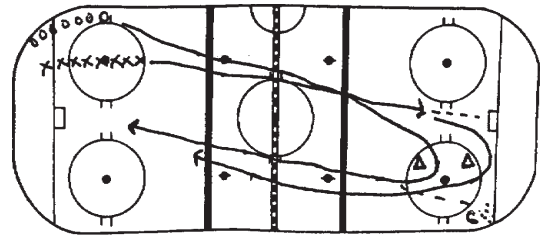
**Head up** – It goes without saying that any time you have the puck, you should have your head up – to be able to see where everyone is on the ice, to be able to make a play – and most importantly if you are moving at full speed, so that you don't get hit.

**Carry the puck directly in front of the skates** – Carrying the puck with one arm outstretched to the side can cause two potential problems. It will slow you down, and you will probably lose the puck. If you carry the puck directly in front of your skates, you will be able to pump your arms up and back, not side to side, improving your balance, and increasing your speed, while at the same time keeping your head up, and keeping your eye on the puck. With

your arm extended straight out in front of you, you should be able to see the puck while viewing the rest of the ice. Also, if you do happen to lose the puck when it is directly in front of your skates, you can use your skates to kick it back up to your stick.

**Carry the puck on your stick** – This also goes without saying, but many players tend to push the puck way out in front of them and then skate to it. With the puck on your stick, you will have much better control and are not as likely to get checked, and if you have to turn, stop or pass, you have control of the puck. Both arms should be pumping up and back, but the arm with the stick in it should remain extended out in front of the body, turning from “palm down” to “palm up” to control the puck with the back side and the front side of the blade. Turning the hand, palm down or palm up positions the stick blade to be able to push the puck with the full length of the blade.

**CHASE DRILL:** This is an excellent drill to teach players to carry the puck in front of them at top speed. A “back checker” behind them forces them to



skate as fast as they can with the puck and to carry it in front of them to “protect” the puck, using their body as a shield. If they carry the puck to the side, it will slow them down and the puck will be left unprotected to be easily stolen by the back checker.

Form two lines as shown with the puck carrier at the top of the circle and the back checker at the hash marks on the boards. Be sure to match up players of similar speed for competitiveness. On the whistle, the players head up ice. If the puck carrier gets past the top of the circles at the other end untouched, he shoots on net and goes around the second cone as shown. The back checker tries to catch and check the puck carrier until the top of the circle. If he is successful, he tries to lift the stick or poke checks the puck carrier. He then goes around the first cone, receives a pass from a coach and becomes the puck carrier for the return trip up the ice, chased by the back checker.