

Stick Checking Technique

Checkers need to know that their stick is an extension of themselves. When used properly it allows them to take away the time and space of the puck carrier.

The use of the hockey stick for checking is an extremely important skill at any level, at ages and classifications where body checking is not allowed, as well as in those divisions where body contact is a part of the game. In reality, it is no different a skill than handling the puck or passing the puck. The difference is that you don't have the puck and are trying to retrieve it. And if you think about it, a player is probably in that situation more in a game, than they actually are in possession of the puck. So stick checking skills are an essential component of every player's game and should be practiced accordingly.

Using the stick to separate the puck from the puck carrier is a skill that requires balance on the skates, body control, a sense of positioning, good timing, and the strength to be able to move the stick quickly to poke the puck free, or to lift an opponent's stick or pry an his/her leg or skate away from the boards to get the puck. Once the puck is free, it is up for grabs, so quickness, positioning, puckhandling skills and good hockey sense come into play at that point to take advantage of the turnover.

Poke Checking

Different coaches use different terminology in talking about stick checking. We like to refer to stick checking as poke checking. Unless it involves lifting or prying, you are in essence poking the puck free, whether you are skating backward or forward, sweeping your stick blade or thrusting it straight ahead. It is all the same to us. Your goal is to poke the puck free. And it requires that you have good body control and balance so that you do not have to lunge or over-commit one way, and are able to recover if you happen to miss with the poke check.

Checkers need to know that their **stick is an extension of themselves**. When used properly it allows them to take away the time and space of the puck carrier. They also need to have a **quick stick** to be able to take advantage of when the puck is in a position to be knocked free. When poke checking, as in all checking situations, the checker should be **concentrating on the puck carrier**, not the puck, to be able to position his/her self to make the check at the appropriate time. Once in position, the checker should throw his/her stick

at the **stick blade of the puck carrier**, not the puck. The puck is a pretty small target. The stick blade is bigger, and hitting it will in most instances knock the puck free.

Lifting

In lifting the stick of a puck carrier, quickness counts. The checker should insert his/her stick under the puck carrier's stick as close to ice level possible for the best leverage, not to mention the fact that the puck will be on the ice, and the quicker they can get their stick on the puck, the better. The checker should lift the puck carrier's stick using the point where the blade meets the shaft of their (checker's) stick as the contact point. The stick does not have to be lifted high, and does not have to be lifted for a long time. Only high enough to get it up over the puck, then quickly back down to retrieve the puck and move on.

Pinning

Although we are not big fans of pinning an opponent's stick, it sometimes can be used effectively if properly timed. When pinning an opponent's stick, the checker places his/her stick over top of the opponent's stick. It can be used on someone carrying the puck, or someone about to receive a pass, and basically does not allow them to move their stick. The disadvantage of it are that the checker needs to be stronger than the offensive player, it is potentially dangerous in terms of getting a penalty, and it ties up the checker as well. We much prefer getting the puck and getting out of there to being tied up.

Prying

An effective means of getting to the puck when it is tied up by an opponent's feet along the boards. Sometimes in battling along the boards, a puck carrier will protect the puck and move it along between his/her skates and the boards, trying to find an opening to make a play. In this instance, a checker should insert his/her stick between the puck carrier's skate/leg and the boards and use it to pry the puck free. The closer the prying is done to the ice, the quicker the checker can get the puck on his/her stick to move it out of there.