

Supporting the Puck

USA Hockey did a very interesting study during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Individual players were tracked and statistics recorded for these players for ice time, amount of time these players had control of the puck, and for numbers of passes the players attempted to make and the number of passes they received during the games.

Some people are amazed at the results, while others find them to be just what they had thought they would be. The bottom line is that in a hockey game, each player has control of the puck for a very minimal amount of time. Average puck possession times for world-class players like Joe Sakic, Jaromir Jagr, Sergei Fedorov and Mats Sundin were around one minute per game. That means that most other players had it even less than that.

From the study, a many different conclusions could be drawn. One of the most important conclusions is that players spend much more time without the puck than they do with it, so they need to be very proficient, and very well-schooled as to what to do when they don't have it, and either a teammate does, or an opposition player does. In other words, they need to learn how to support the puck, both offensively and defensively.

Supporting the puck means being in the proper position as it relates to the puck both offensively, when your team has the puck, and defensively, when the other team has the puck. This issue we will look at some offensive puck support situations in the defensive and neutral zones that your players should be prepared for, and in future issues we will go over the offensive zone and also break down defensive puck support options in the three zone.

Offensive Puck Support

Defensive Zone – In the situation in figure A, the defenseman has possession of the puck in the corner in his own zone. His defensive partner should move below the goal line on the other side of the ice as a potential outlet, while the winger should be at the hash marks as another potential outlet, and the center moving through the area in front of the net as shown as another potential outlet.

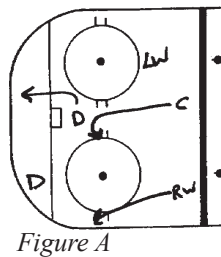


Figure A

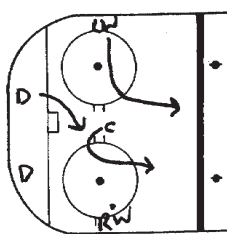


Figure B

In figure B, the puck has moved to the winger at the hash marks. The center moves up to the top of the circle to be in position for a pass, the defenseman follows up to be another option, and the winger from the other side of the ice moves across to support the center in the event that the winger passes him the puck.

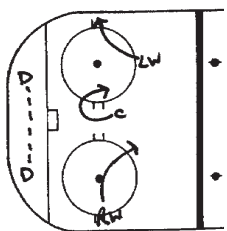


Figure C

In figure C, the puck has moved from defenseman to defenseman behind the net, requiring the winger on that side to get to the hash marks as an outlet, while the center flows to that side of the ice as an outlet for the defenseman and the winger if needed, while the winger on the other side starts to flow to the middle to support the center if the puck comes to him.

Neutral Zone – In a neutral zone regroup situation in figure D, the defenseman with the puck has support from his winger on the boards, the center who is holding his ground in the middle of the ice, waiting to move as the puck moves, and his defensive partner who backs off a little towards his own end to allow for more time and space to make a play if the puck is moved across ice to him.

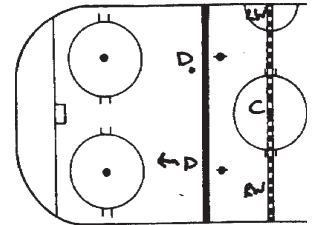


Figure D

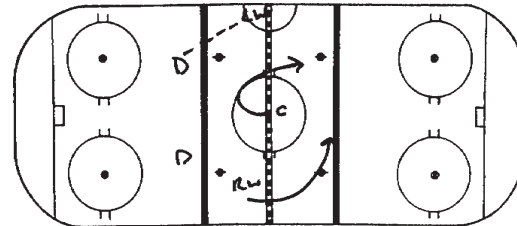


Figure E

If the puck is moved to the winger, the center moves into position to receive a pass as shown in figure E, while the off-winger flows up-ice to back off the

opposing defensemen, and to be available for a pass, or to be moving in the event the puck needs to be dumped into the offensive zone. Meanwhile the defenseman who made the pass to the winger, holds his ground as an outlet in case the winger is pressured and has no options up-ice.

If the puck is moved to the center as shown in figure F, the wingers begin to move up-ice to become a passing option, or to back off the opposing defenseman to give the center room to carry the puck (figure G).

If the puck is moved across the ice to the defensive partner as shown in Figure H, the center swings with the puck to be an option, the winger moves with the center to be available in the middle of the ice as an option, and the winger along the boards moves up and across the ice to be available and to back off the opposing defensemen.

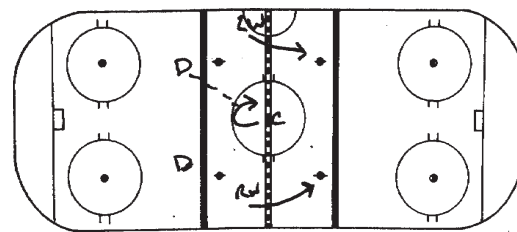


Figure F

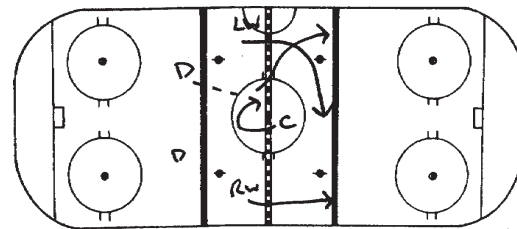


Figure G

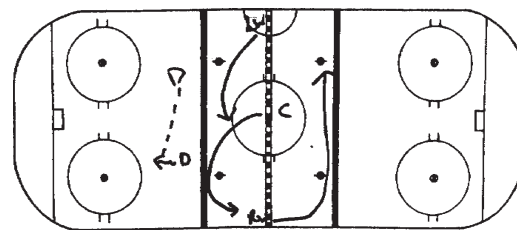


Figure H