

# Using scrimmages to evaluate players

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Most hockey experts will agree that the best way to evaluate hockey players is by “dropping the puck” and letting them scrimmage. At most NHL training camps, scrimmages are used as the primary means of player evaluation. One top NHL general manager told Chalk Talk that “scrimmages may hide some players’ deficiencies, however, it is the best and quickest way to find out if a player can play.” The following are five scrimmage options that you may want to consider when evaluating players.



## One-On-One

Divide players into teams by placing one team on each bench. The coach will position himself at the red line, along the boards and between the two benches. On the whistle, the coach will shoot a puck across the ice to commence play. The first player from each bench will jump the boards (or go through the door, depending on their age) and try to score at the opposite end. Play continues until a goal is scored.

Coaches can have several groups of two going at one time. This is also an excellent scrimmage for goaltenders that will have to be alert and quick to react. Once a player scores, the two players return in line at the end of their bench. (Note: coaches may also like to use four nets if you have four or more goalies, and allow the players to shoot on either of the two nets in the zone they are attacking). This form of scrimmage is an excellent way to evaluate a player’s one-on-one intensity and competitiveness.

## Three-On-Three

Conducting a three-on-three scrimmage is an excellent way to evaluate the skill level of the players. By keeping the shifts short, evaluators can see the players perform at a high tempo and with a lot of room on the ice. This type of scrimmage will reveal a player’s skating ability, puck movement ability and competitiveness.

## Zone Scrimmages

A zone scrimmage can be used if you want to review a player’s ability in a particular zone. To begin (this is a five-on-five scrimmage) you place two defensemen in the defensive zone, one forward in the neutral zone and two forward in the offensive zone. The players cannot leave their zone and the puck must be passed through the neutral zone before it changes zones (from offensive to defensive and visa versa). Players will be forced to react both offensively and defensively to the change in puck possession. As you change lines, rotate the players so they have the opportunity to play in all three zones.

## Half-Ice Scrimmages

The purpose of a half-ice scrimmage is to evaluate a player’s ability to play within a confined area. This is also a good way to maximize your ice usage as you could play in all three zones if six nets are available at your rink.

You may play 3-on-3, 4-on-4 or 5-on-5. Drop the puck and let them play. Look for a player’s ability to protect the puck, handle it and move it in a small area. As well, watch players as they move without the puck to see how/if they work to get open. If checking is permitted, it will make for an even tougher environment to play.

As an option (to challenge the goalies in particular), you may want to place the nets back-to-back in the middle of the zone).



## Five-On-Five

This is probably the most common scrimmage used. Obviously, it best reflects an actual game situation and allows the maximum number of players to play at one time. Our only suggestion is to make sure you control the line changes. If players are out too long, the tempo of the scrimmage will quickly diminish.