

DEFENSIVE TEAM CONCEPTS

**“POSITION IS 9/10 OF THE LAW. IF YOU ARE IN THE RIGHT
POSITION THEY COME TO YOU.”**

- Chris Pronger, St. Louis Blues

Rick Van Fleet

INTRODUCTION

- **Best defense possible would be to deny the opposition from ever touching the puck!**
- **Team defense therefore deals with any part of the game when your team is not in possession of the puck.**
- **While one or two can carry a team's attack, defense requires all 6 players working together.**
- **Defense is attention to duty and detail. Can be boring!**
- **Defense requires players to commit a maximum and unselfish effort.**

KEY CONCEPTS FOR EFFECTIVE PLAY

1. **Limit offensive time and space**
2. **Limit puck possession.**
3. **Force offensive players to poor ice positions**
4. **Prevent scoring.**

AREAS OF DEFENSIVE PLAY

- 1. In the offensive or attacking zone (the forecheck).**
- 2. In the neutral zone (picking up your man - the back check).**
- 3. In the defensive zone (various DZ coverage schemes).**

OBJECTIVES OF DEFENSIVE PLAY

1. Limit the *time* and *space* of the opposition.
Take time and space away from the puck carrier and limit access for opponent(s) without the puck. Utilize aggressive play versus passive.
2. Give defense the opportunity to regain the puck. “If you are not on defense, then you are on offensive!”

OBJECTIVES cont.

- 3. Force offensive player to poor position. Done through angling or steering to critical areas. Control the ice surface from an “inside out” perspective. Force opponents to the perimeter of the zones. Players should maintain a “defensive side position” on your opponent.**
- 4. Prevent scoring.**

KEY INDIVIDUAL CONCEPTS

1. Choice of Pressure or Position.

- ♦ Read and React
- ♦ Establish gap control

2. Defensive or goal side position.

3. Angle of attack

- ♦ Deflection
- ♦ Delaying
- ♦ Steering

SELECTIVE PRESSURE OR POSITION

- **Decision based upon:**
 - **Closeness and relationship of offensive player to goal**
 - ♦ If they are closer than more pressure
 - ♦ Read the number or the logo?
 - **Closeness of offensive player to mid-ice corridor**
 - **Number of defensive vs. offensive players (support)**
 - **Ability to close on the puck carrier (gap)**

CHOICE OF PRESSURE vs. CONTROL

- **Checking without stick or body contact**
 - Neutralizing (defensive side positioning)
 - Marking (defensive zone, backchecking)
 - Slugging off or collapsing
- **Checking with stick contact**
 - Poke check
 - Stick check
 - Blocking/controlling of offensive players' progress
- **Checking with body contact**
 - Blocking
 - Pinning
 - Sealing off

BASIC RULES OF PRESSURE VS. CONTAIN

PRESSURE

- Goal area
- Slot mid-ice
- Scoring threat
- When you are outnumbering the offensive players
- When approaching back of player close the gap
- When puck control is poor
- When support is available

CONTAIN (PATIENCE)

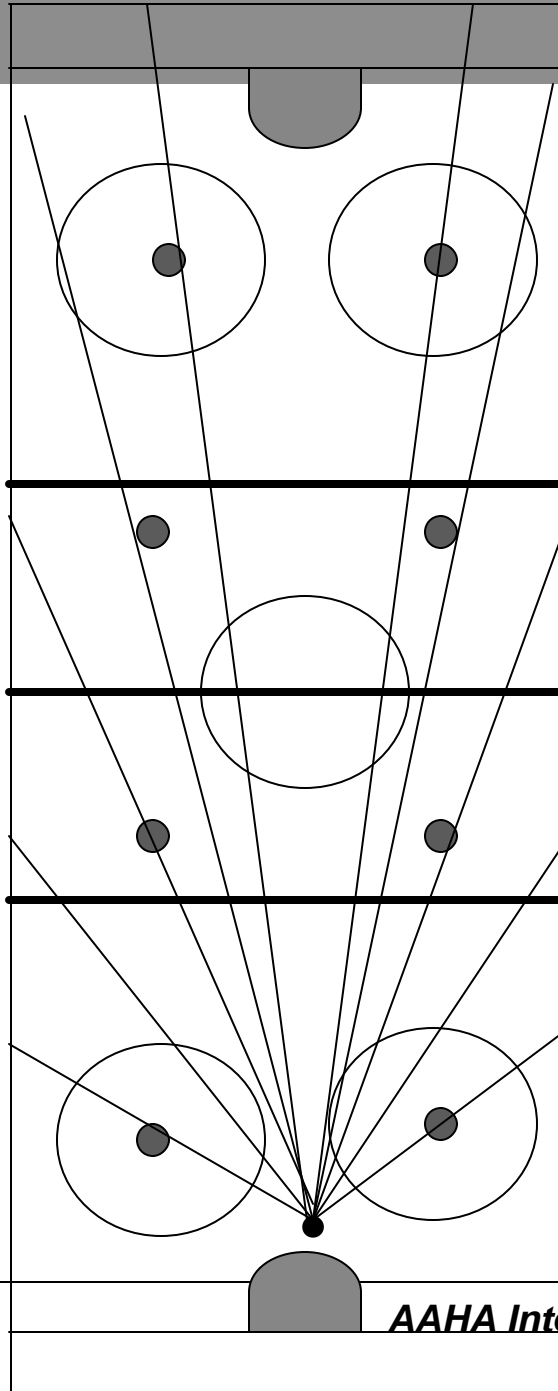
- No immediate threat
- When outnumbered by offensive players
- When puck carrier is moving towards checker
- When puck carrier has good control of puck
- When support is not available, even or outnumbered

DEFENSIVE OR GOAL SIDE POSITIONING

- **Body positioning between puck carrier (or offensive player) and goal that player is defending.**
- **Alignment is similar to goaltender playing angles**
 - **Applies to both forechecker and backchecker**
- **Protect mid-ice corridor by playing from the inside out towards the boards**
- **Choice of pressure vs. contain**

DSP

- Keep body between defender and goal at all times.
- Think about where you are at all time.
- Where is the puck going?
- Inside out at all times.
- Do not allow cut backs!



FORCE UNFAVORABLE ICE POSITION

- **Angling/Deflection**
 - Use gap control to force to outside
- **Delaying**
 - Used to provide time and space for teammates and to provide assistance and support
- **Steering**
 - Adjust skating speed and approach angle
 - One hand on stick and “tell player where you want them to go”
 - Use the boards/corners

GAP CONTROL AND CHECKING

- **Checking techniques**
 - Quick pressure (hurry towards puck carrier, 1-2 stick lengths))
 - Establish approach angle to steer puck carrier to desired position
 - Get body in control, be able to react right or left
 - Maintain gap control for reaction/initiation
 - Square body and skates relative to defensive side position
 - Body focus
 - Use boards as “extra man”
 - Stop if puck carrier stops in order to maintain DSP
 - Track to puck
 - Low guy wins, better knee bend wins
 - Crosschecking is waste of energy as player bends at waste.

COMPLETING THE CHECK

- **Body Focus**
- **Stick on stick**
- **Hip to hip**
- **Separate bottom hand from body**
- **Do not allow cutbacks**
- **Pin and contain**
- **Leg between players leg**
- **Keep body in control**
- **“Loudness” of hit or crowd acceptance should never be a measure of the effectiveness!**

COMMUNIATION

- **Critical element of defensive coverage, must talk on bench and especially on ice**
- **Be aware of crossovers, picks and when not to switch**
 - Before redline forwards should follow checks.
- **Goaltenders are key member**
 - Can see entire play in front
 - Can identify the wide guy, puck carrier or the trailer.

DEFENSE IN THE OFFENSIVE ZONE

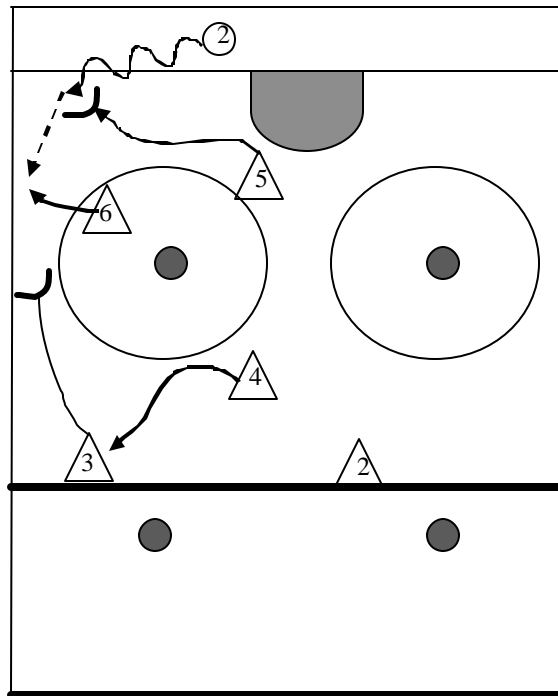
- **Forechecking**
 - Type of system used depends on several factors
 - ♦ Your team's personnel
 - ♦ Your team's fitness level
 - ♦ The situation in the game (score, time left etc.)
 - Skill level of opposing team
 - Use as an offensive weapon
 - ♦ Passive or aggressive

2-1-2 AGGRESSIVE FORECHECK

- **First player into zone attacks the puck carrier and finishes the check.**
- **Second player follows closely behind, hotly pursuing either an errant pass or a loose puck caused by the initial checker's pressure.**
- **Third forward stays out high in the deep slot looking for either an offensive opportunity from the turnover, or in ready defensive position to fill in coverage for the defense who may be pinching down the boards.**

2-1-2 AGGRESSIVE FORECHECK

- Often referred as an offensive forecheck.
- Can lead to scoring chance if turnover is created.



2-1-2 PRESSURE FORECHECKING KEYS

- **Key elements:**

- **Hustle**

- ♦ First forward must be quick and be aggressive on the puck carrier. Pressure must direct the puck carrier towards traffic which should be around the hash marks of the face-off circle. Usually involves hurrying the defense and completing the check.

- **Anticipation**

- ♦ The second and third forwards must read the play. They are responsible for taking away the pass around the boards or reading a reverse. The third forward becomes the “high man” (F3).

- **Lock the middle**

- ♦ Third forechecker prevents the pass up the middle

- **Pinching**

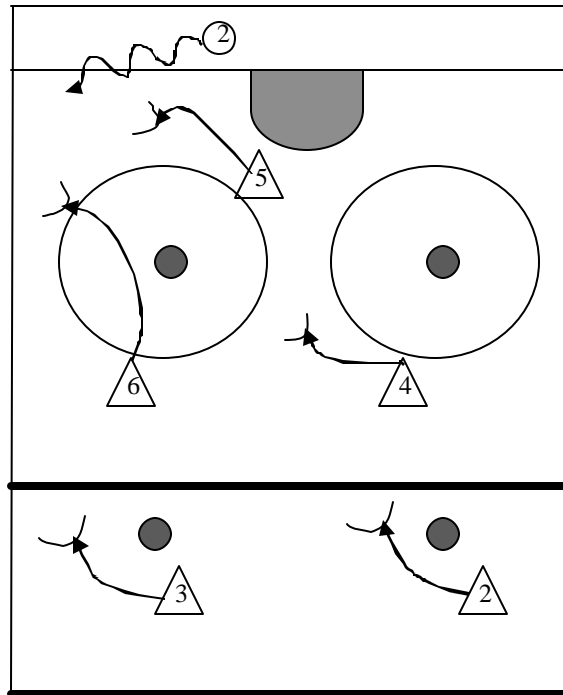
- ♦ Defense pinches to the puck carrier if under pressure and support exists.

2-1-2 MODIFICATIONS

- **Two player corner forecheck**
 - **Used in soft dump situations or defense slow**
 - ♦ **Take away the typical first two options of the short side quick up outlet and center curl breakout.**
 - ♦ **Forces the offensive team to consistently use the reverse option.**
 - ♦ **Forces longer breakout passes up the middle.**
 - ♦ **Tests the offensive teams' support.**
 - ♦ **Makes good use of big physical wingers and can isolate other teams' weakest defense.**
 - ♦ **Makes the breakout become predictable.**

2-1-2 AGGRESSIVE FORECHECK

- The first forward 5, angles the puck carrier to the corner or boards.
- The second forward 6, reads off of 5 and moves in to provide support.

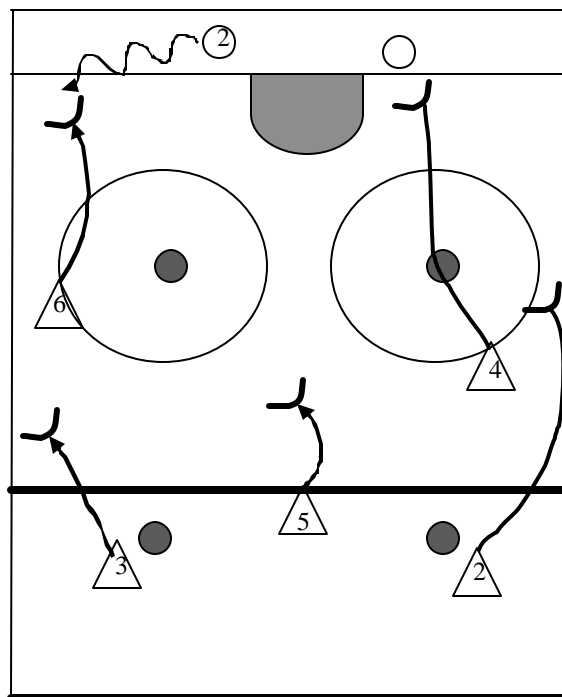


2-1-2 TWO MAN WIDE

- **Used in rinks with fast boards and shallow corners**
 - **Restricts puck exchange between defense.**
 - **Stretches the offensive teams' support and makes them come back to help.**
 - **Makes it physically more tiring for the defense and wingers.**
 - **Forces goaltender to handle the puck more.**
 - **Creates chaos and makes them scramble if they cannot execute quick reverse.**
 - **Forces them to play smart away from the puck.**

2-1-2 WIDE

- Forwards 6 and 4 apply pressure to both defense and are supported by defense 2 and 3 if the puck should come up along the boards.

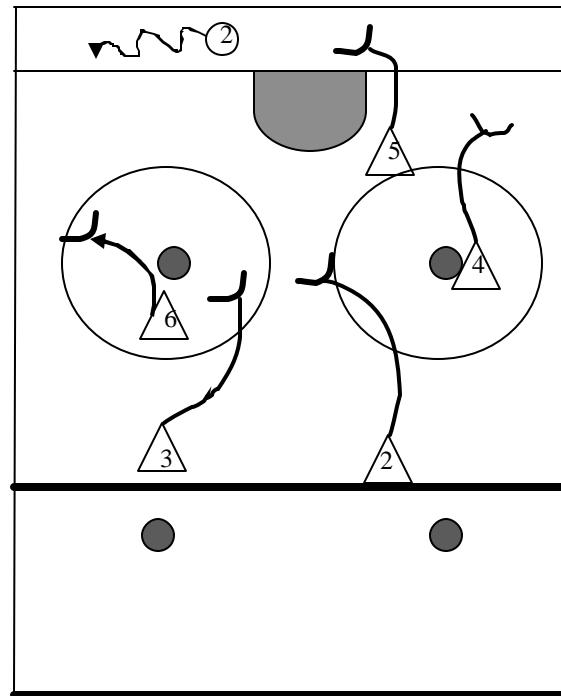


1-2-2 CONTAIN FORECHECKING

- **Often referred to as a defensive weapon as it is capable of applying continuous pressure.**
- **Prevents them from getting organized**
- **Can be used near the end of a game to protect a lead.**
- **Can be used to produce a turnover in the high offensive or early neutral zone.**
- **To force both defense to handle the puck.**
- **Can be frustrating to play against.**

1-2-2

- Lead forechecker 5 sets up one of the goal posts so that other two forecheckers can key on the other side where puck carrier is most likely to go.



KEYS TO FORECHECKING

- 1. The nearest player to the puck pressures the puck carrier to reduce their reaction time.**
- 2. Force the opponent towards the boards where space is limited.**
- 3. The checker should always remain between their net and puck carrier, (DSP).**
- 4. The first checkers' prime purpose is to make the puck carrier give up the puck or force a pass.**
- 5. Physically eliminate by a body check, the give and go tactic.**
- 6. Hesitation gives the puck carrier too much time. If you are late, think containment.**
- 7. Never let one pass beat two players.**
- 8. A forward should always cover for a defenseman pinching.**

NEUTRAL ZONE DEFENSIVE PLAY

- **Ultimate goal is to prevent offensive team from gaining the blue line.**
- **There is a need to be able to read what the offensive team is trying to do.**
- **The defense should always maintain good gap control.**
- **Forwards should always be on the defensive side of their checks.**

CHECKING IN THE NEUTRAL ZONE

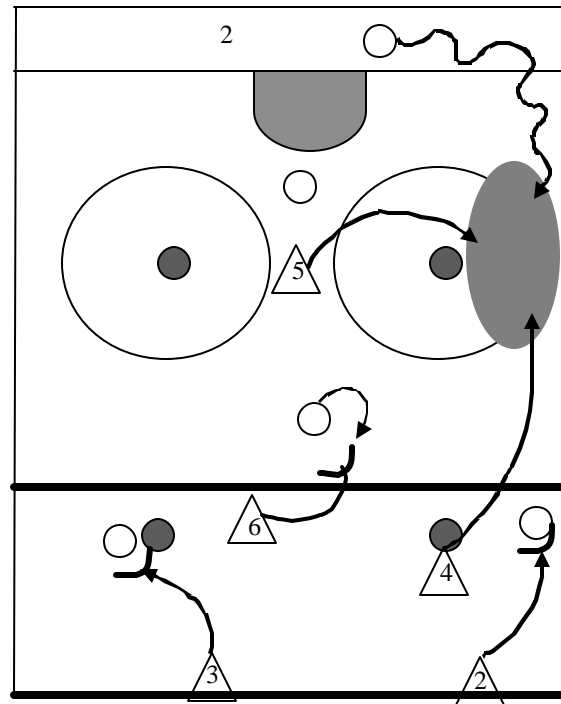
- **Early physical contact**
 - Make contact early to break the players' concentration. Break the stride, maintain some physical contact. Be a pest.
- **Head on a swivel**
 - Constantly watch both player and the puck.
- **Skate hard**
 - Match stride if forced to chase.
- **Switch**
 - Communicate
- **Narrow the gap**
 - Should be as narrow as possible here.
- **Forwards are responsible for loose pucks behind the defense**
 - Allows defense to narrow gap at blue line with confidence.
- **Pick up the trailer**
 - Make sure someone is aware, usually the forward, have goalie call out.

NEUTRAL ZONE SYSTEMS

- **Attacking the puck carrier**
 - Lock up center and limit space puck carrier has.
 - Forwards are responsible on offensive side of center.
 - On defensive side, puck carrier becomes defense responsibility and forwards pick up other players and look for trailer.
 - Makes it tough for opponents to gain redline and dump puck in.
 - Prevents a good puck carrier from skating over red line with speed.
 - Gets everyone involved.
 - Better suited to slower wingers as it is less aggressive
 - Supports the defense.

1-2-2 DELAYED FORECHECK (TRAP)

- First player 5 does not attack but steers up one side. Other two forwards react like a box formation in neutral zone.
- With 5 still influencing, 4 jumps away from their check and attacks.
- Defense 2 picks up forward and 6 prevents wide cross ice pass. 3 has responsibility of picking off far side pass.



COVERAGE IN THE NEUTRAL ZONE

- 1. Backchecking forwards should identify checks early. COMMUNICATE, “I got him”**
- 2. Use center redline as point of commitment, after which defense knows that outside lanes are covered by forwards.**
- 3. Prior to redline wingers can leave check to attack puck carrier.**
- 4. If opponent crosses in front of defense, the winger should communicate to defense and hold checking lane.**
- 5. If opponent crosses behind the defense, checker should stay with check. Switch only if you can communicate.**
- 6. Backchecker should stay with check all the way to goal line.**
- 7. Backcheckers are responsible for all loose pucks behind defense. Allow them to close gap first.**

DEFENSIVE ZONE COVERAGE

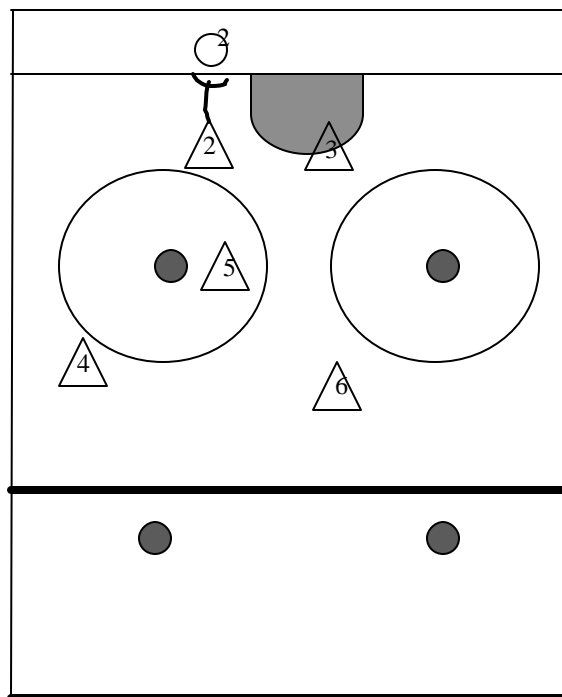
- **Pressure the puck carrier at all times.**
- **Must be contained and not allowed to move to prime scoring areas.**
- **Forwards must stay with checks all the way to the net and are responsible for second wave or trailer.**
- **Defense should be responsible for puck carrier as they enter zone.**
- **Defense should be in responsible to prevent rebound shots.**
- **Defend the scoring area.**
- **Maintain numerical equality at all times and do not allow 2 v1's or 3 v 3's.**
- **Defense should play even and not staggered if possible.**

2-1-2 DEFENSIVE ZONE COVERAGE

- **Provide good support for the defense when working out of corners.**
- **Center or winger always close for support**
- **It is simple to learn.**
- **The zones of responsibility are clear and easy to understand.**
- **Each player has zone of responsibility and it is easy to apply all of the defensive concepts such as playing the body, positioning, taking away passing lanes etc.**

2-1-2 ZONE

- Offensive player, O, has the puck in corner and is closely checked by 2. Left defense 3 is covering the front of net, center is 15-20 feet away ready to get loose puck, right winger 4 is at point and left winger 6 is between slot and point ready to support.



OTHER DEFENSIVE ZONE SYSTEMS

- **Man to Man**
 - Fundamental- somewhat aggressive
 - Must win all 1 v 1 battles
 - Easy to teach at younger ages
- **Combination Zone/Man to Man**
 - Each player has responsibility but also freedom to react to particular area.
 - Requires good communication
- **Box plus one**
 - Aggressive
 - Rover must be excellent skater
 - Seams are vulnerable
- **Double down**
 - Aggressive
 - Need awareness
 - Communication essential
 - Watch for backside pressure

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

- **Penalty killing**
 - Aggressive box
 - Passive box
 - Triangle for 5 v 3, passive
 - Aggressive inverted triangle
- **Face-offs**
 - Neutral zone
 - Defensive zone (5 across)
- **4 v 4 or 3v 3**
- **Empty net 6 v 5**
 - Do not finish checks
 - Keep two in front of net.

SUMMARY

- **Team systems still based on sound individual skills.**
- **Communication as always is key.**
- **Read and react skills will always be required.**
- **Do not turn your back to opponents. You cannot defend what you cannot see.**
- **Do not carry puck towards your own goal line, move it up the ice. Transition.**
- **Finish all checks.**
- **Play with confidence and authority.**