

Playing Defense in Hockey is similar to other sports like basketball and soccer. The idea is to stay between the offense and the goal. In these sports, there are different styles of playing defense: zone, man to man, box and 1.

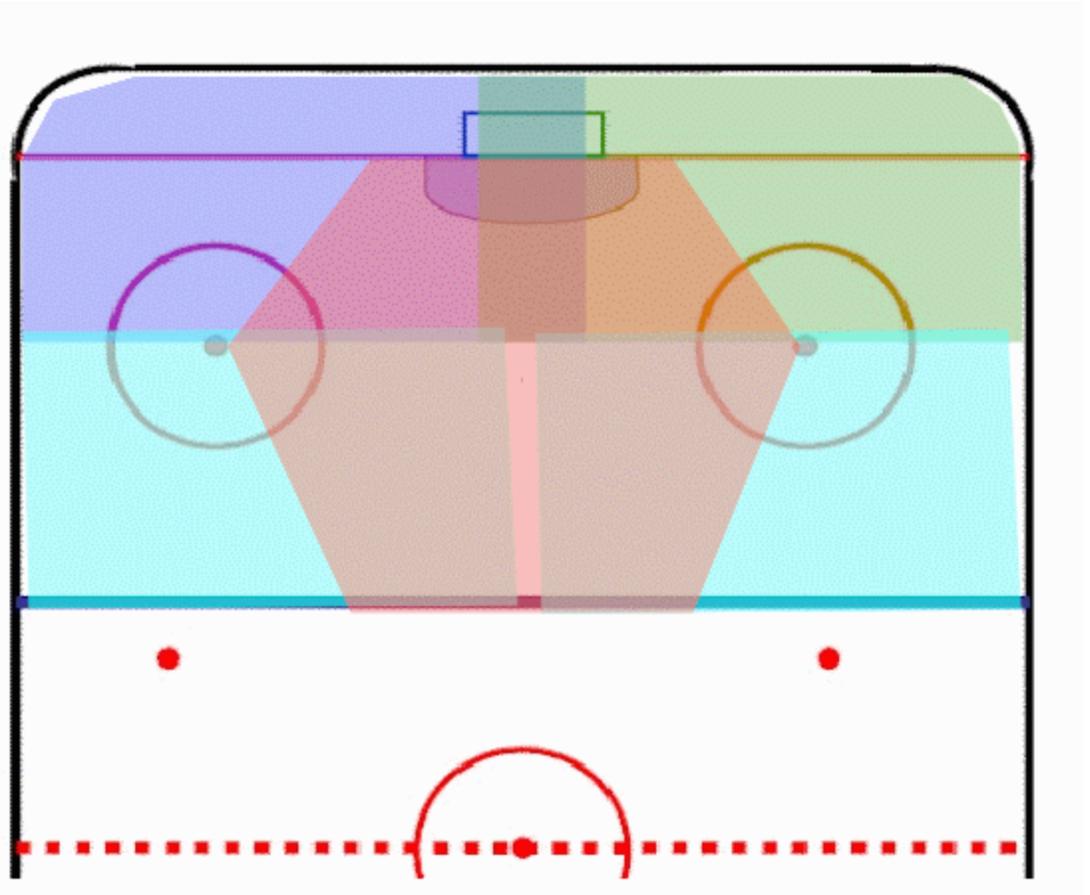
Here is where I show a zone defense. The key to this is each shaded area is a zone where a player is responsible for when the puck goes in it. What makes this work is the other defensive players are in their zones and everyone is covered. When defensive players start to stray from the zones, then the defense breaks down and the other team can score easily.

When you are playing defense and the person you are guarding leaves you zone, let your team mate know that there are 2 people in the zone. You can stay with the person but you need to be aware if another offensive player rotates around and enters the zone you are guarding.

Everyone is playing Defense when the other team has the puck. When playing Defense, each position is primarily responsible for certain areas in the zone.

Defense is usually staying in position and waiting for the other team to make a mistake or turn over the puck. When challenging the person with the puck, force them towards the boards and try to cut off their passing lanes. Why? The goalie has an easier time stopping a shot when they can line up on it early. If the puck is passed to another player, the goalie has to shift to a new spot. Keeping the "point of attack" the same gives out goalie a better chance to make a play on the puck.

When the offense attacks our goal, they are most dangerous when they can get to the center of the ice or when they have clear passing lanes.



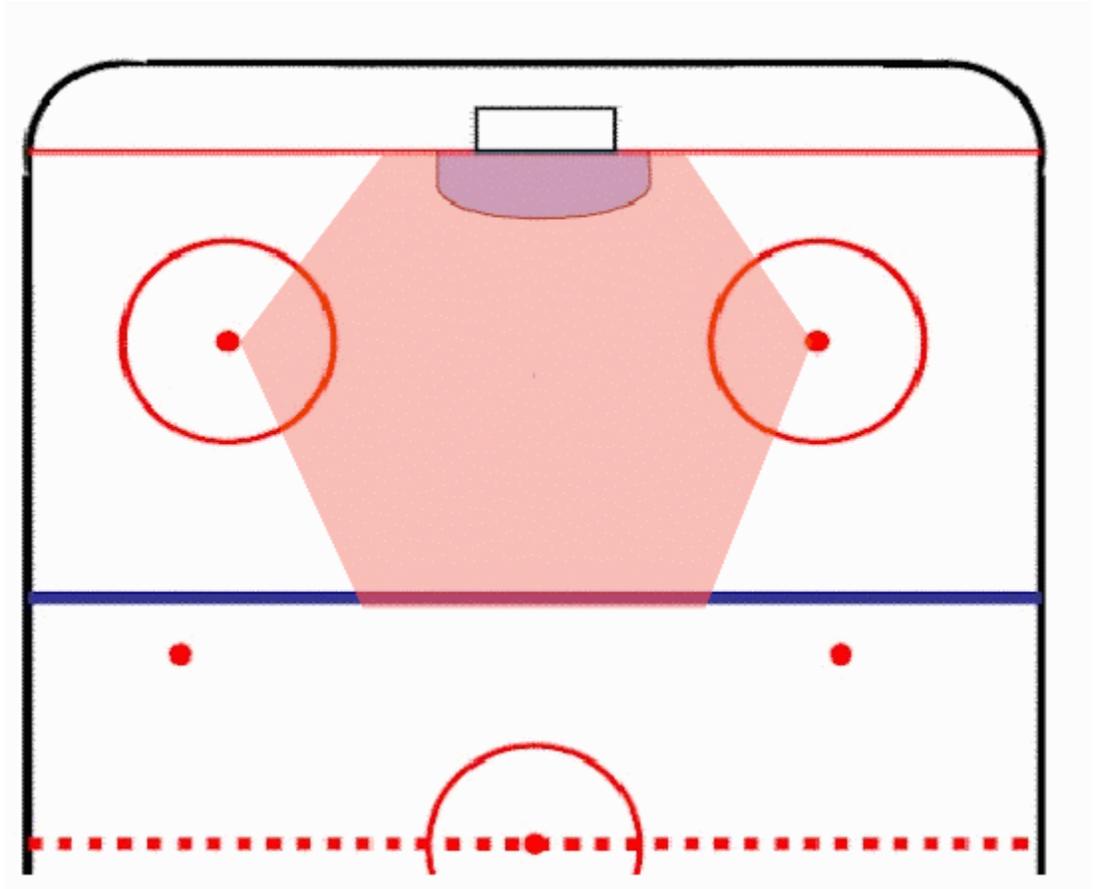
The Center

The Center has the most area to cover. Usually they can match up with the other Center and stay "man to man" with them where ever they go. The rest of the Defense (especially the wings) needs to recognize when this is happening so that they keep the center of the ice guarded.

If the center stays in the middle of the ice, then they need to watch where the defenders go and help to fill in the open areas. If the center takes the puck behind the net and the defensive center does not apply pressure, then the defender will apply pressure and the center will guard the middle.

When the puck is in the middle of the ice, the center can assist the defensive player putting pressure on the puck but needs to keep in check where the offensive center is.

Do not just chase after the puck. This will cause players to get confused on who they need to guard.



The Defenders

The key to the 2 defender's success is balance.

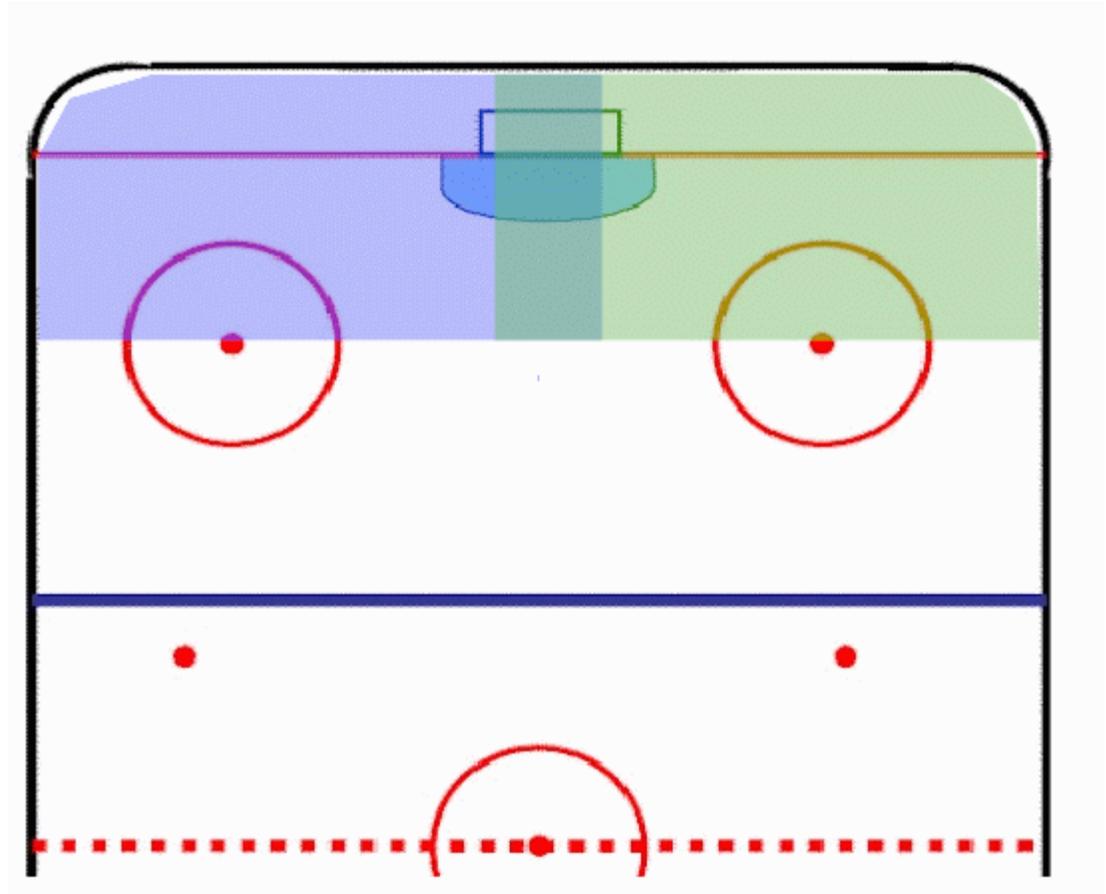
- If one is on the left side, the other should be on the right.
- If one is in the corner or behind the net, the other one should be in front of the net.
- If the left defender is playing the person with the puck and they go behind the net and to the right side, the right side defender should move over to the left side.

While the play is near the boards, the offside defender should be watching out for:

1. Players that setup in the crease
2. Players trying to sneak in "backdoor"

Defenders should be talking when ever possible letting the other know "I got the puck" or "watch backdoor"

Do not chase the puck up the wall to the blue line.

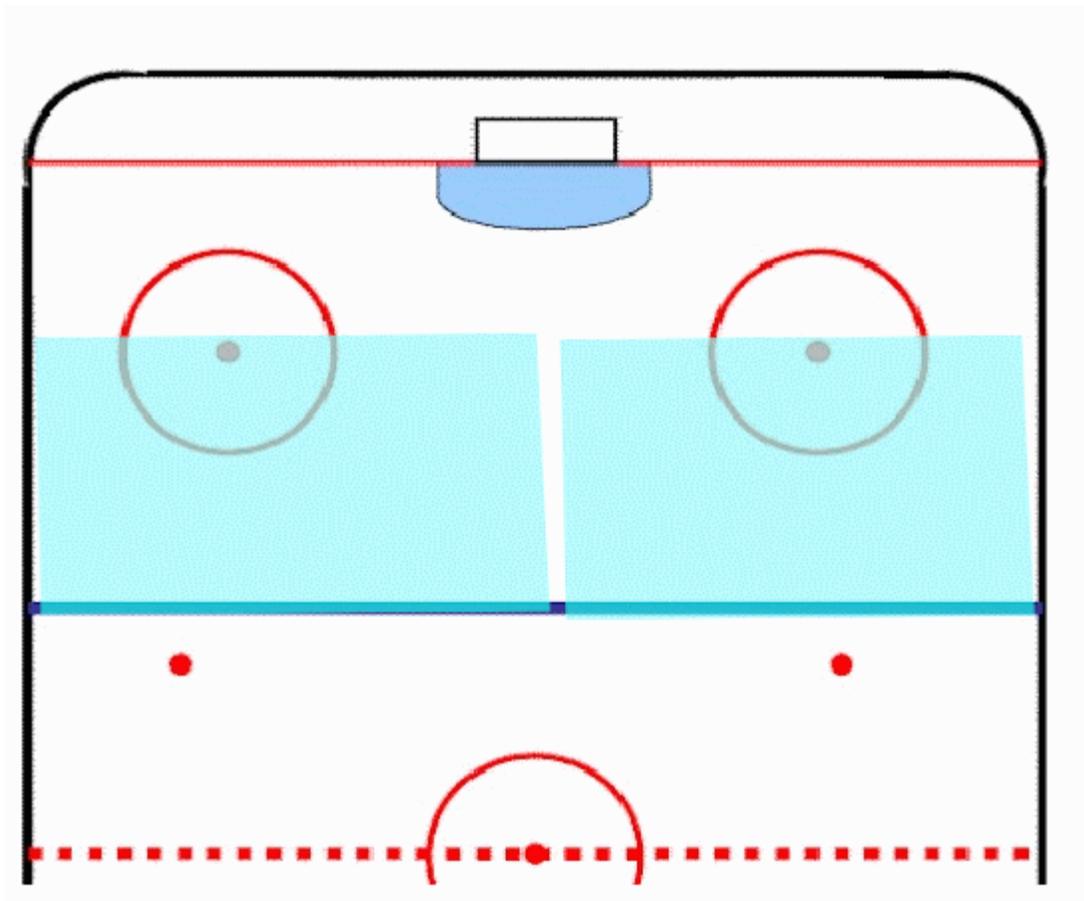


The Wings

The wings need to stay high and guard the 2 defenders from the other team. Typically they stay high near the blue line but will sometimes sneak down or towards the middle when the puck is on the opposite side of the play.

Do not chase a defender past the blue line if they do not have the puck.

Do not get sucked down to the redline or the corners trying to help the defenders with a play. That leaves your person wide open for a blast back at the blue line.

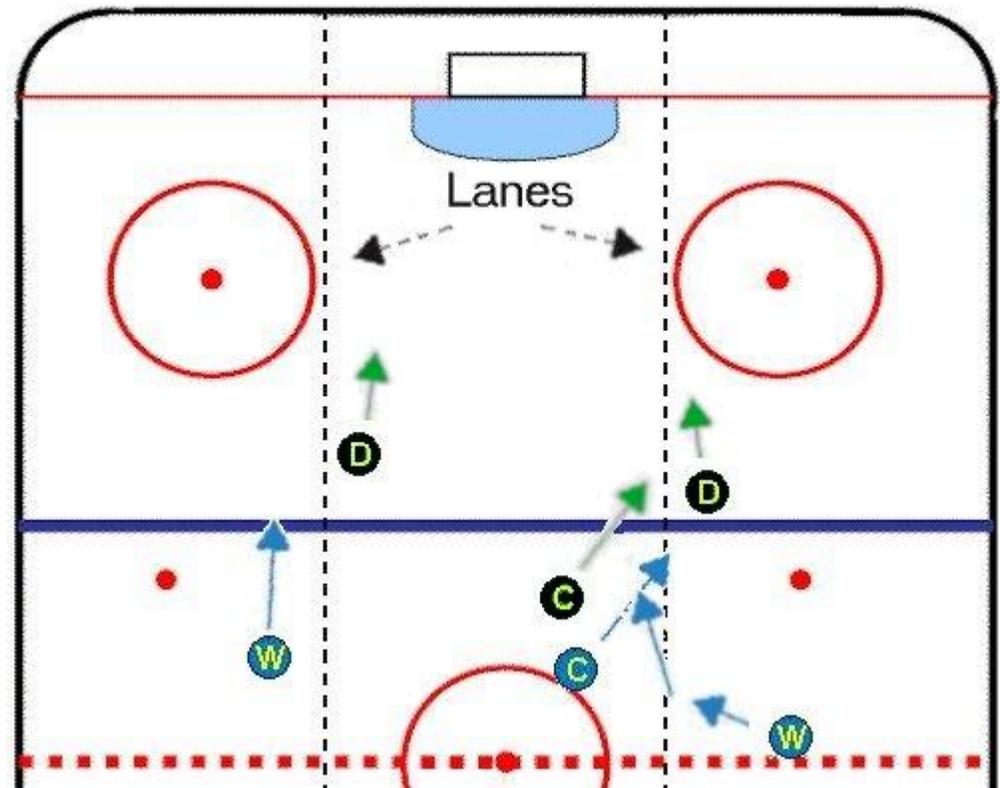


Lanes You want to put some effort into playing your position, so that your line mates know where to expect you. But hockey is a very fluid game, so you need to exercise some flexibility. One of the fundamentals of hockey strategy is the concept of three lanes across the ice.

The point to filling lanes is to avoid bunching up. If we have two or more people bunched close to the puck then it's fairly easy for the opponents to keep them corralled in a safe portion of the ice. Instead, if we can spread out our attack then it's much more difficult for the other team to first keep track of us and second control us.

In general, the puck carrier will dictate a lane change. If the center has the puck and the opposing center corrals him toward the outside then the wing on that side should recognize what's happening and slide over to the adjacent lane. The same applies if we start with a wing carrying the puck up the boards and he gets forced into the center.

You'll generate many more opportunities if you fill the empty lane when you don't have the puck. Or, look for someone in the next lane when you do have the puck.



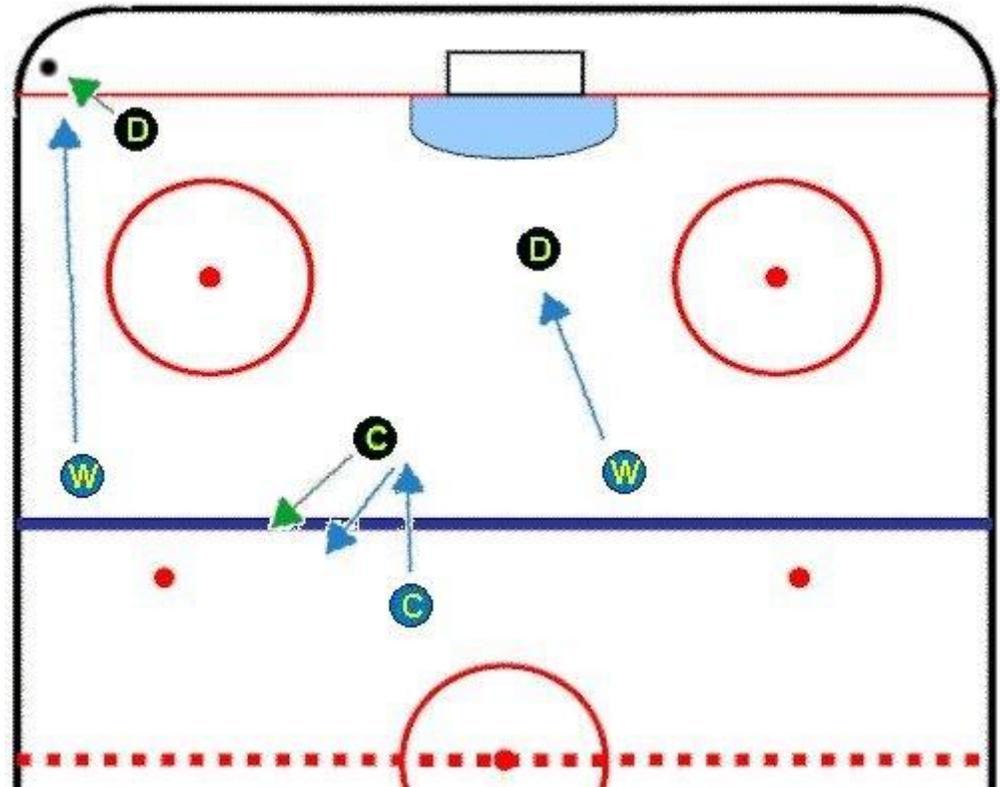
Offensive triangle

Similarly, one of the basic flexible formations is the offensive triangle. One of the primary goals of the offensive triangle is to generate shots and take advantage of rebounds.

If it's a dump in then the first person in should go to the puck. Go to the puck hard. Get there first, or barring that, get there before the opponent gets control of the puck, or barring that, before the opponent has time to look for someone to pass to. This is important. That first person needs to expend all of their energy getting to that puck. Otherwise the other team has an easy breakout.

The other two offensemen in need to watch what happens with the first person.

If the opponents get control of the puck before the first person gets there, then the second person should cut off the passing lane to the other opposing defenseman. That's going to be the puck carrier's first outlet. Again, it's important to hustle to get there before they even try the pass. The third person should look to cover the next opponent in the zone, usually the center in the high slot. This third person should turn to



If the third person into the scrum comes from center ice, then the guy in the slot is probably open. In that case, your man in the slot is probably wide open. Usually, that third person will park himself against the boards, expecting you to try passing to the point. Your best bet is to work yourself around the corner a little ways toward the net to get a clear passing lane into the slot.

The player in front of the net has two main tasks. First, screen the goalie. Second, try to take advantage of rebounds.

You screen the goalie by turning to watch the play and try to get between the goalie and the shot. In I league a lot of shots will get through when the goalie can't see the puck.

If it looks like the opposing team is going to try to clear along the boards, DO NOT head to the far boards. If you want to cut it off, do so behind the net. If you go to the far boards then you'll be way too far out of position to have any chance at a rebound, which is where most goals come from. If the puck does end up going across the face of the goal to the far side then you need to scramble to it. You become the guy in the corner and the other guy heads to the net.

It's important for one person to stay in the high slot, between the circles, from the line connecting the face-off dots to the line connecting the top of the circles. A lot of rebounds end up in that area. If you get in too close then the rebound is going to end up behind you, in perfect position for the other team to scoop it up and break out. If you're too close to the blue line then the rebound will never dribble out to you.

The guy in front of the goalie has a couple of other things he can do. One is, if the opposing defense is blocking a lot of passes and shots, this guy can pester them. Make sure they know you're there, bump into them, whack their sticks or their shins. Just mess with their concentration so that they let more shots through.

If the defense isn't good at blocking passes then you can try do the opposite and try to get them to lose track of you. When you first enter the crease they'll probably mess with you. Just back up a few feet and many I league defenders will fixate on the puck and forget you're behind them. Then you can slide back in on the far side of the crease from the play. You'll be wide open for a tip-in.

Excerpt From "Ice Hockey Made Simple":
Chapter 10: Things To Look For During Play / Strategy

ATTACK STRATEGIES

Dumping the Puck Into the Zone

Because of the *offside* rule, attacking players must be careful to stay out of the *attacking zone* until the *puck* has crossed the *blue line*. When one or more players from the attacking team are about to commit an offside by crossing the blue line ahead of the puck, their teammate with the puck will often dump or shoot the puck into the attacking zone where they chase after it and hope to regain control. In an example shown in Figure 18, player A dumps the puck so teammates B and C can enter the attacking zone without being offside.

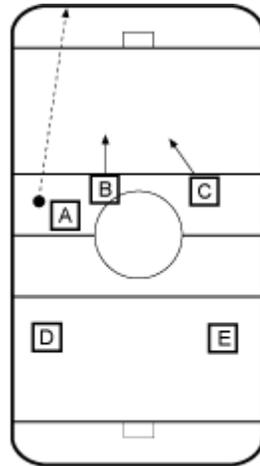


Figure 18: Dumping the puck.

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GOALIE STRATEGY: CUTTING DOWN THE ANGLE

When an attacker skates towards the goal with the *puck*, the *goalie* will often come out of the goal several feet to cut down the angle of the attacker's shot, leaving him with less *net* area to shoot at by making himself closer and larger to the shooter. (See Figure 20) However, this is risky because if an attacker maneuvers the puck past the forward-playing goalie, he has an open shot at the net.

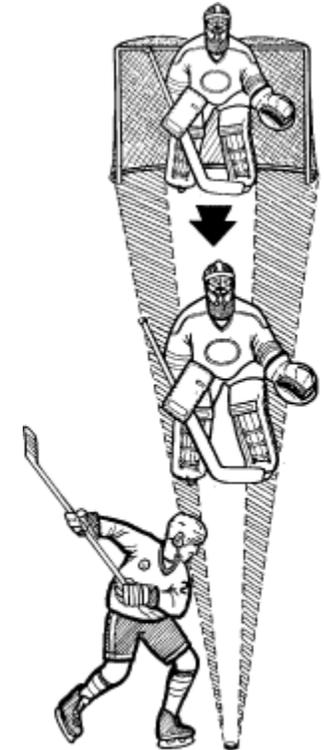


Figure 20: Cutting down the angle.