



# Teaching Concepts Through Small- Area Games



The USA Hockey Coaching Education Program is presented by





# Teaching Concepts Through Small Area Games

# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>OFFENSIVE ZONE PLAY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>TRANSITION.....</b>	<b>2</b>	Kane Game.....	23
Soccer/Handball.....	2	Using The Points Game.....	24
Mancini 2 vs. 2 Game .....	3	Flank Game.....	25
Flank Game.....	4	Kane/Suter Game.....	26
Odd-Man Rush Game .....	5	Rice Levels Game .....	27
Add-On Game.....	6	Nobles Transition Game .....	28
Rice Levels Game .....	7	Backcheck Game .....	29
Nobles Transition Game .....	8	<b>FORECHECKING .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>BREAKOUT.....</b>	<b>9</b>	Off-Side Game .....	30
Off-Side Game .....	9	Forecheck Game .....	31
Regroup Game .....	10	Breakout Game.....	32
Breakout Game.....	11	Rauschy Breakout/Forecheck Modified Regroup Game .....	33
Rauschy Breakout/Forecheck Modified Regroup Game .....	12	Line Change Game .....	34
Outlet Game .....	13	<b>SPECIAL TEAMS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
Backcheck Game .....	14	Outlet Game .....	35
<b>DEFENSIVE ZONE PLAY.....</b>	<b>15</b>	Pearl 4 vs. 2 Game .....	36
Defend the Net Front Game .....	15	Pearl 4 vs. 2 One Net Game .....	37
Kane Game.....	16	Flank Game.....	38
Outlet Game .....	17	4 vs. 3 Power Play Game .....	39
Backcheck Game .....	18		
Using The Points Game.....	19		
Third Player High Game.....	20		
Shooter on the Dot Game.....	21		
Kane/Suter Game.....	22		

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# Introduction

This collection of small-area games is designed to help coaches teach aspects of the sport in a fun and challenging atmosphere. These activities will allow the coach to incorporate many hockey concepts (puck support, special teams, breakout, etc.) into practice in the form of a game that does not have a pre-determined outcome. Small-area games represent an efficient use of valuable ice time and will help maximize the development of players while dramatically increasing the competitive level of practice.

USA Hockey continues to be influenced by Bill Beaney, Middlebury College head hockey coach. Bill has long been viewed as the leader in using small-area games and allowing the game itself to be the greatest teacher. The games that children play should not look like the games that adults play. Small-area games with a purpose help create the age-appropriate training environment that will enrich young athletes of various skill levels and experience.

Small-area games begin by emphasizing basic fundamentals, such as skating and shooting, and progress to a more complex coordination of skills as players advance. The majority of time on the ice should be spent working on skills, regardless of age. The second component is “sense,” both with and without the puck. Hockey sense, one of the most sought-after traits in our game, involves the ability to read the play and react (or anticipate) appropriately. “Systems,” or team play training, includes concepts such as defensive zone coverage and forechecking patterns. Small-area games enable you to train your players in all three areas (skills, sense and systems) in an efficient, competitive and fun environment.

In his article titled, “Small-Area Games,” NHL coach Mike Sullivan says, “Situations in hockey rarely occur

the same way we draw them up in practice. We, as coaches, would like to make the game black and white. The fact of the matter is that the game, by nature, is gray.”

Part of coaching is finding the balance between guiding players through the game and over-coaching, thereby stifling their creativity. Hockey is an instinctive, largely unscripted game, where players are constantly trying to gain time and space in offensive situations and take away time and space on defense. As such, players who can think for themselves, adapt and find their own solutions to game-play challenges have a major advantage. Small-area games encourage players to learn by doing, while competing in an environment that encourages creativity and deception skills. These games will force players out of their comfort zones and move the traditional landmarks (crease, hash marks) of the playing surface. Players will be forced to make decisions repeatedly while battling for space in confined areas. In addition, your goaltenders will see many more shots in various game-like scenarios.

The games within are organized by concept. As you progress through the chapters, you may notice that some games will be in more than one chapter. That is because many concepts can be taught within the same game. Coaches can choose to focus on one concept over another to change the key teaching points and emphasis of the game, whether it’s an offensive or defensive situation.

USA Hockey wants to thank all of our great volunteer coaches around the country who interact with the athletes on a daily basis. We want to arm you with the best possible drills and philosophies to help improve the most important part of our game: the player.

# Transition Soccer/Handball

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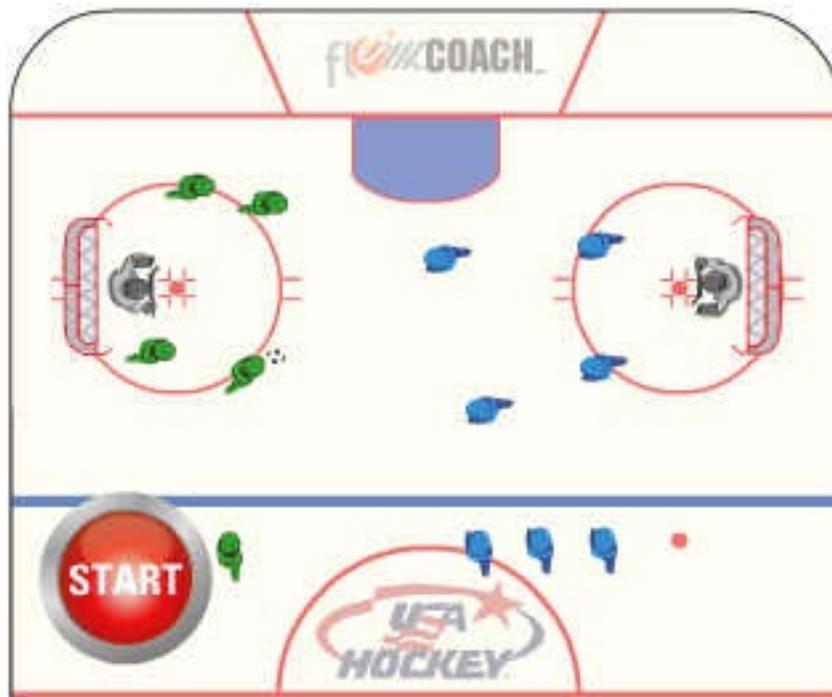
## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Transition*

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**Soccer** — Coaches place four players on each team without goalies to start the game. When it's the goalies' turn, they must play out as a regular player. Play the game cross-ice in one zone, alternating skate edges to kick the ball. As coaches, be creative and progress the drill as you see fit.

**Handball** — Coaches use an equal number of players on both teams depending on how many players are available. Start the game playing cross ice with two nets and 5 players on each team. Players can only take three strides before they must pass or throw the ball into the net. Players have to pass to their teammates by throwing the ball in the air. If a player takes more than three strides without passing, or a pass is dropped, it's an automatic turnover with the ball going to the other team. Encourage short passes on offense.



# Transition

## Mancini 2 vs. 2 Game

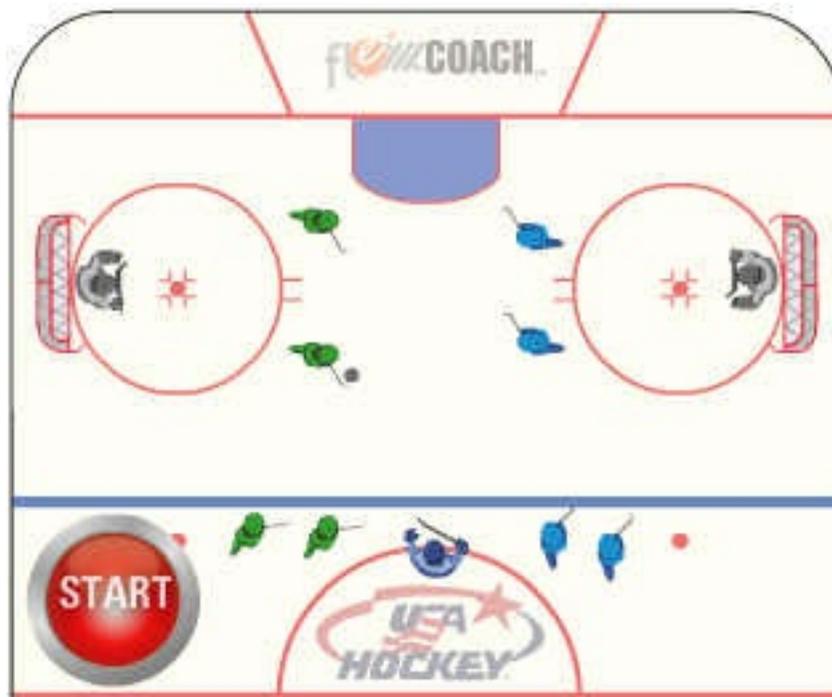
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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Line Rushes, Defending the Line Rush, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Transition*

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The game begins with one team on offense with the puck and the other team on defense, 2 vs. 2. As the offensive team attacks and crosses the half-way area, two more players from the offensive team skate to the middle and wait. If the offensive team scores, it gets a new puck. If the defensive team gets the puck, they transition to offense and attack the two players at the mid-line. When the offensive team loses the puck, they can try to get it back before the mid-line, if they are unable, they change and two new players come to the mid-line, making it a continuous 2 vs. 2.



# Transition Flank Game

## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Power Play,  
Penalty Kill, Transition*

The game begins 2 vs. 2 with teams also having two support flank players on both sides in the offensive zone. The flank players can only skate up and down their flank and not into the play. The players with the puck can use their flank players to set up a 4 vs. 2, simulating a power play situation. The flank players can pass or shoot when they receive the puck. On the whistle for a change, the flank players stay and go into the play, 2 vs. 2, and four new players (two on each team) now become the flank players.



# Transition

## Odd-Man Rush Game

### CONCEPTS

*Odd-Man Rushes,  
Zone Entry, Transition*

The coach begins the game with a 3 vs. 2 exiting one end; the team with two players has a third player behind its net. The team with the 3 vs. 2 tries to score until the defensive team gets the puck to its player behind the net. Once that happens, the team that had three skaters goes for a change and two more players from the other end come out to face a 3 vs. 2 and a third goes behind the net. The team that now has three players goes in 3 vs. 2, making it a continuous 3 vs. 2. Make the team with new 3 vs. 2 players delay briefly so the other team has time to change.



# Transition Add-On Game

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## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Hockey Sense, Passing, Receiving, Power Play, Penalty Kill, Body Contact, Communication, Transition*

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The coach starts the game 2 vs. 2. Players can “add on” to their team by passing the puck to the first player in line on its side of the blue line. The player on the blue line has to make a pass back to a player already in the game before entering the play. When a team scores, go back to playing 2 vs. 2. Make line changes every 45 seconds.



# Transition Rice Levels Game

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## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Deception, Transition, Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Penalty Kill*

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The game is played 3 vs. 3 with coaches on both sides of the boards for support. The coaches can skate up and down the boards to get open, but they can't enter the play. Players must pass to a coach to be able to go on offense. Players from either team can pass to either coach throughout the game and they can score on either net to foster creativity and deception.



# Transition

## Nobles Transition Game

### CONCEPTS

*Skating, Passing, Communication,  
Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play*

The game is played 3 vs. 3. One team is on offense, the other is on defense. When the defending team steals the puck, they pass it to three players waiting on the side boards who now are on offense. The three that just made the pass leave the zone and go back to the boards, the three that were on offense now are on defense. It's a continuous 3 vs. 3.

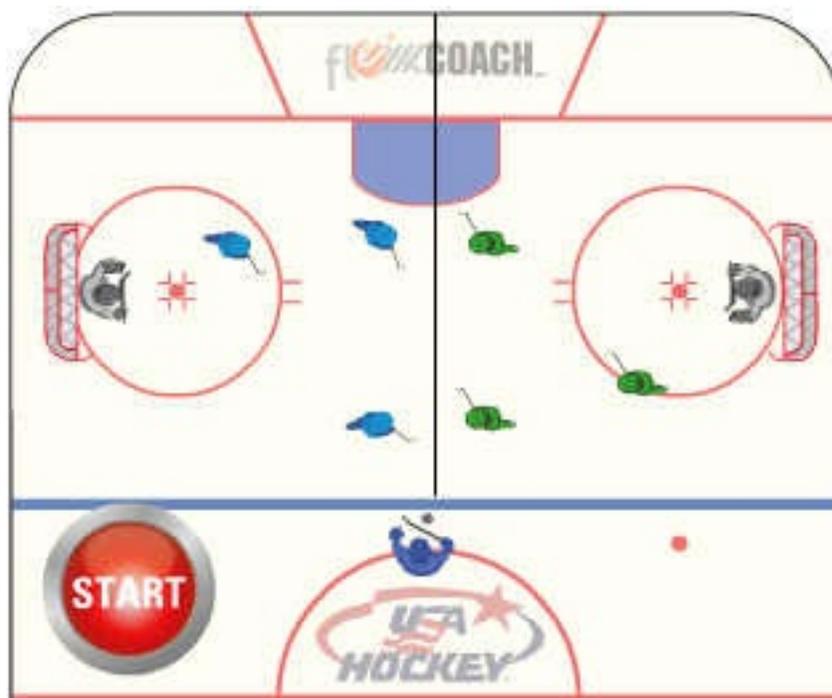


# Breakout Off-Side Game

## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Regroups, Line Rushes, Zone Entry, Forechecking, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Transition*

The game is played 3 vs. 3. With a thick marker, the coach draws a line across the middle of the ice from the boards to the blue line. Before an attacking team can go on offense, it must regroup in its defensive half. Once they have regrouped, they must stay on-side while attacking the defensive team. If they go off-side, the puck goes to the other team and the drill continues. Another variation of the game is to have the offensive team complete one or two passes before going over the center line.



# Breakout Regroup Game

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## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Regroups,  
Line Rushes, Transition*

---

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with one extra player on both teams behind their own nets. Before you can go on offense, you must pass the puck to your regroup player behind the net. The regroup player can skate side to side behind the net but cannot cross the goal line. Players must move to get open on the regroup then they can proceed on offense. It's a continuous 3 vs. 3.



# Breakout

## Breakout Game

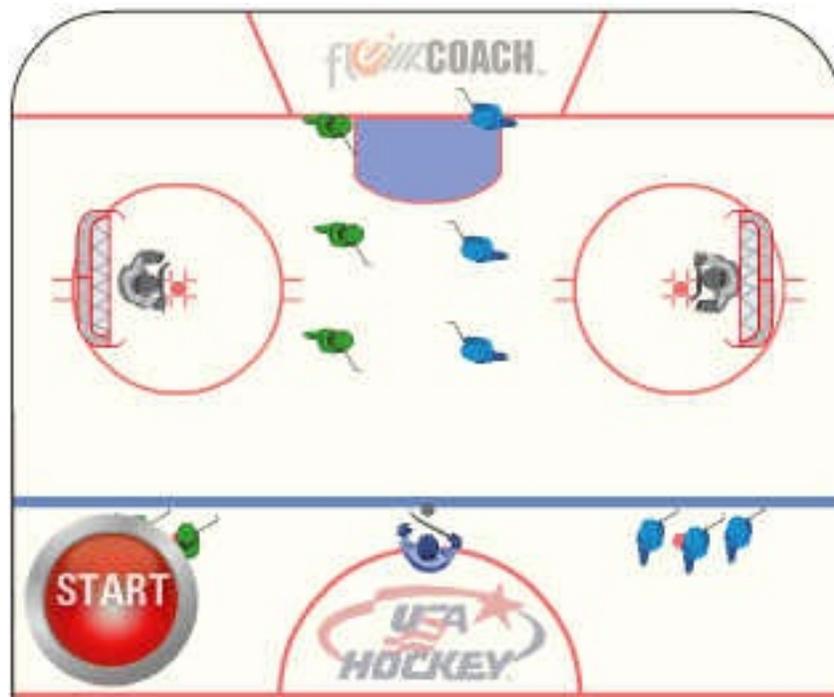
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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Regrouping, Breakouts, Forechecking, Line Rushes, Transition*

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The game is played 3 vs. 3. Before the offensive team can go on the attack, it must make a pass behind its own net. The team without the puck must forecheck them, emphasizing good angles while reading and reacting to the play. The game is a continuous 3 vs. 3.





# Breakout Outlet Game

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## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Line Rushes,  
Power Play, Penalty Kill, Transition*

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The game is played 3 vs. 3 with two coaches on both sides as outlet passers. Before being able to go on offense, you must outlet the puck to one of the coaches. You can also use players as outlet passers as well, if desired. The coaches can skate laterally up and down their side but cannot enter into the play. Encourage short passes to create support.



# Breakout Backcheck Game

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## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Line Rushes, Backchecking, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Transition, Line Changing*

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The game begins with a 2 vs. 0, with two opposing players backchecking them. There are also two players placed behind the backcheckers. When the backcheckers gain possession of the puck, they then breakout the two players on their team waiting to attack the other way. After the offensive players are stopped, they become the backcheckers. The shift is as follows: start on offense, move to backcheck, lead the breakout, and then change.



# Defensive Zone Play

## Defend the Net Front Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Defensive Zone Play,  
Offensive Zone Play, Transition*

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The game is played 3 vs. 3 with two nets, two goalies, and two point players. Before the offensive team can shoot, it must pass to its designated point player located on the blue line. The point player can either shoot or pass but must do so quickly. Players who are defending must defend at the net and not the point. Attacking players must get to the net for tips and screens. When the puck is turned over, the play switches to the other side, with the puck being passed to the opposing point player who then is passing or shooting on the opposite goalie.



# Defensive Zone Play

## Kane Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Penalty Kill, Transition*

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#### FOCUS IS ON DEFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with a support player (Kane) below the goal line on the attacking net. You must pass the puck to your Kane and get it back before you can attempt to score. Defending players cannot defend Kane; they must pick up an offensive player in front. Offensive players must constantly move to get open. Kane can move side to side below the goal line and pass from either side.





# Defensive Zone Play

## Backcheck Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Line Rushes, Backchecking, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Transition, Line Changing*

---

The game begins with a 2 vs. 0, with two opposing players backchecking them. There are also two players placed behind the backcheckers. When the backcheckers gain possession of the puck, they then breakout the two players on their team waiting to attack the other way. After the offensive players are stopped, they become the backcheckers. The shift is as follows: start on offense, move to backcheck, lead the breakout, and then change.



# Defensive Zone Play

## Using The Points Game

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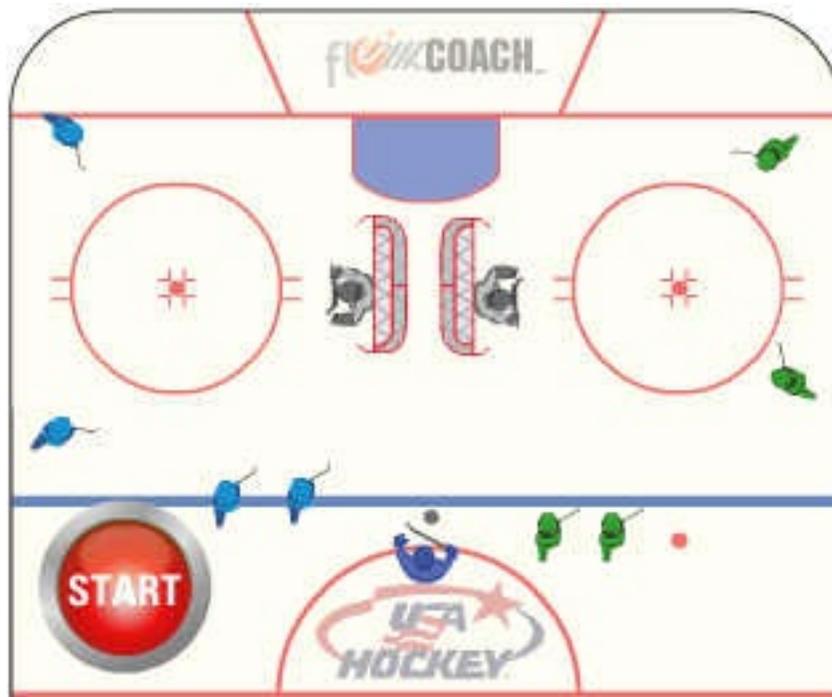
### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Line Changes, Transition*

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#### FOCUS IS ON DEFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The coach places two nets back to back with 6 feet between them. The game is played 2 vs. 2 with both teams having two designated players on the boards simulating defensemen that they must pass to before they can shoot or go on offense. The two defensemen must pass back and forth at least once before moving the puck to the forwards or offensive teammates. The players playing defense can only defend the forwards and not the two defensemen on the boards. On the whistle, the four players in the middle leave the zone and the defensemen now become the forwards and play 2 vs. 2 in the middle and the four new players jump in to simulate defensemen.



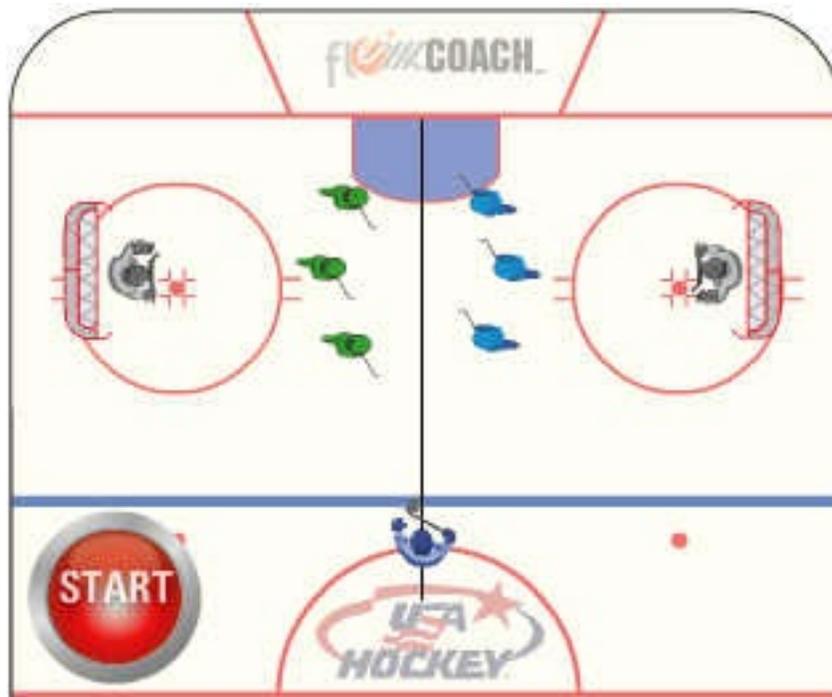
# Defensive Zone Play

## Third Player High Game

### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Reading and Reacting, Transition, Odd Numbered Offensive Play*

The coach uses a thick marker to draw a line from the middle of the end boards to the blue line as shown in the illustration. The game is played 3 vs. 3, but the last attacking player cannot cross the half-way line. This leaves the attacking team with a 2 vs. 3 situation. The players on offense can use the third forward as an outlet if they want, but that player cannot enter the zone. The defensive team can cover the high point player but they can't cross the line.



# Defensive Zone Play

## Shooter on the Dot Game

### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Transition*

The game is played 3 vs 3 with two nets and a goalie on both sides. One player on each team stands on his/her offensive zone face-off dot and is the designated shooter. The other two must pass to the designated shooter who is the only one who can shoot. The defensive team cannot defend the designated shooter. After a turnover, the play moves to the other side, with the defensive team going on offense and the offensive team going on defense. Change every 45 seconds.



# Defensive Zone Play

## Kane/Suter Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Cycling, Transition*

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#### FOCUS IS ON DEFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with both teams trying to score on the same net. One team has a player behind the net (Kane) who can skate side to side but can't cross the goal line. The other team has a defenseman (Suter) on the blue line that can skate side to side but can't enter the play. Players cannot attack Kane or Suter; they must pick up a player in front of the net. Half way through, switch which team has Kane and which team has Suter.



# Offensive Zone Play

## Kane Game

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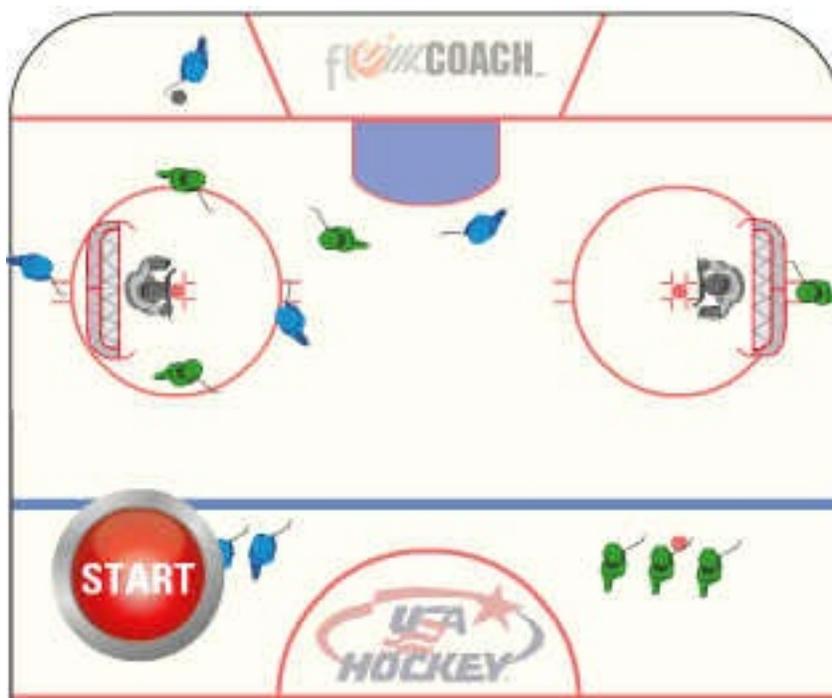
### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Penalty Kill, Transition*

---

#### FOCUS IS ON DEFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with a support player (Kane) below the goal line on the attacking net. You must pass the puck to your Kane and get it back before you can attempt to score. Defending players cannot defend Kane; they must pick up an offensive player in front. Offensive players must constantly move to get open. Kane can move side to side below the goal line and pass from either side.



# Offensive Zone Play Using The Points Game

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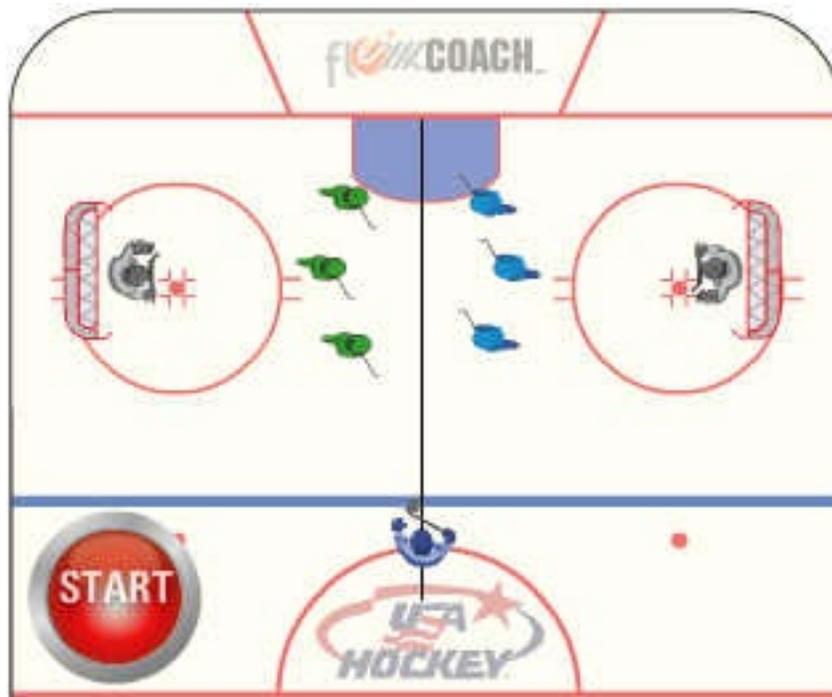
## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Line Changes, Transition*

---

### FOCUS IS ON OFFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The coach places two nets back to back with 6 feet between them. The game is played 2 vs. 2 with both teams having two designated players on the boards simulating defensemen that they must pass to before they can shoot or go on offense. The two defensemen must pass back and forth at least once before moving the puck to the forwards or offensive teammates. The players playing defense can only defend the forwards and not the two defensemen on the boards. On the whistle, the four players in the middle leave the zone and the defensemen now become the forwards and play 2 vs. 2 in the middle and the four new players jump in to simulate defensemen.



# Offensive Zone Play Flank Game

## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Power Play,  
Penalty Kill, Transition*

The game begins 2 vs. 2 with teams also having two support flank players on both sides in the offensive zone. The flank players can only skate up and down their flank and not into the play. The players with the puck can use their flank players to set up a 4 vs. 2, simulating a power play situation. The flank players can pass or shoot when they receive the puck. On the whistle for a change, the flank players stay and go into the play, 2 vs. 2, and four new players (two on each team) now become the flank players.



# Offensive Zone Play

## Kane/Suter Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Offensive Zone Play,  
Defensive Zone Play, Cycling, Transition*

---

#### FOCUS IS ON OFFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with both teams trying to score on the same net. One team has a player behind the net (Kane) who can skate side to side but can't cross the goal line. The other team has a defenseman (Suter) on the blue line that can skate side to side but can't enter the play. Players cannot attack Kane or Suter; they must pick up a player in front of the net. Half way through, switch which team has Kane and which team has Suter.



# Offensive Zone Play

## Rice Levels Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Deception, Transition, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Power Play, Penalty Kill*

---

#### FOCUS IS ON OFFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with coaches on both sides of the boards for support. The coaches can skate up and down the boards to get open, but they can't enter the play. Players must pass to a coach to be able to go on offense. Players from either team can pass to either coach throughout the game and they can score on either net to foster creativity and deception.



# Offensive Zone Play

## Nobles Transition Game

### CONCEPTS

*Skating, Passing, Communication,  
Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play*

#### FOCUS IS ON OFFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game is played 3 vs. 3. One team is on offense, the other is on defense. When the defending team steals the puck, they pass it to three players waiting on the side boards who now are on offense. The three that just made the pass leave the zone and go back to the boards, the three that were on offense now are on defense. It's a continuous 3 vs. 3.



# Offensive Zone Play

## Backcheck Game

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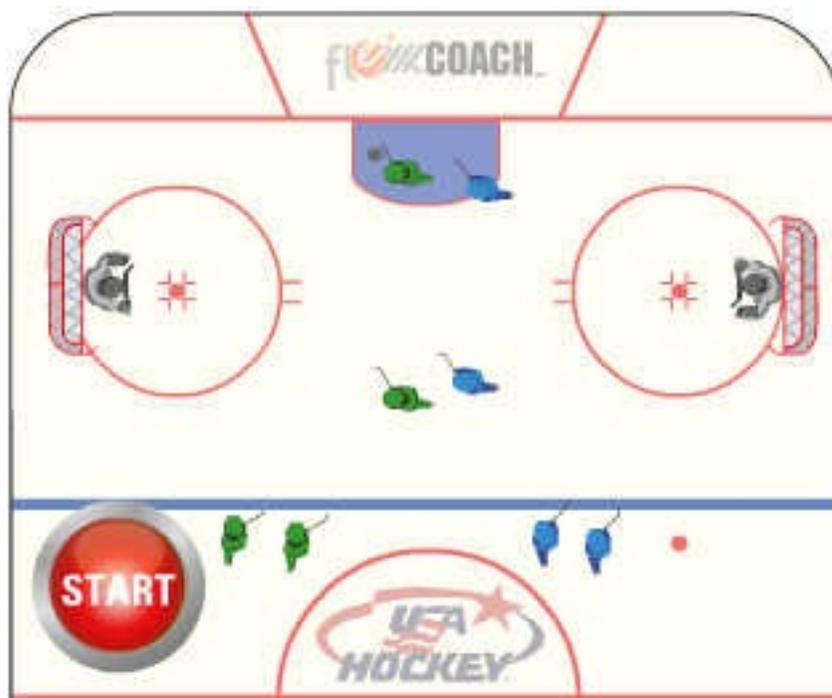
### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Line Rushes, Backchecking, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Transition, Line Changing*

---

#### FOCUS IS ON OFFENSIVE SIDE OF DRILL

The game begins with a 2 vs. 0, with two opposing players backchecking them. There are also two players placed behind the backcheckers. When the backcheckers gain possession of the puck, they then breakout the two players on their team waiting to attack the other way. After the offensive players are stopped, they become the backcheckers. The shift is as follows: start on offense, move to backcheck, lead the breakout, and then change.

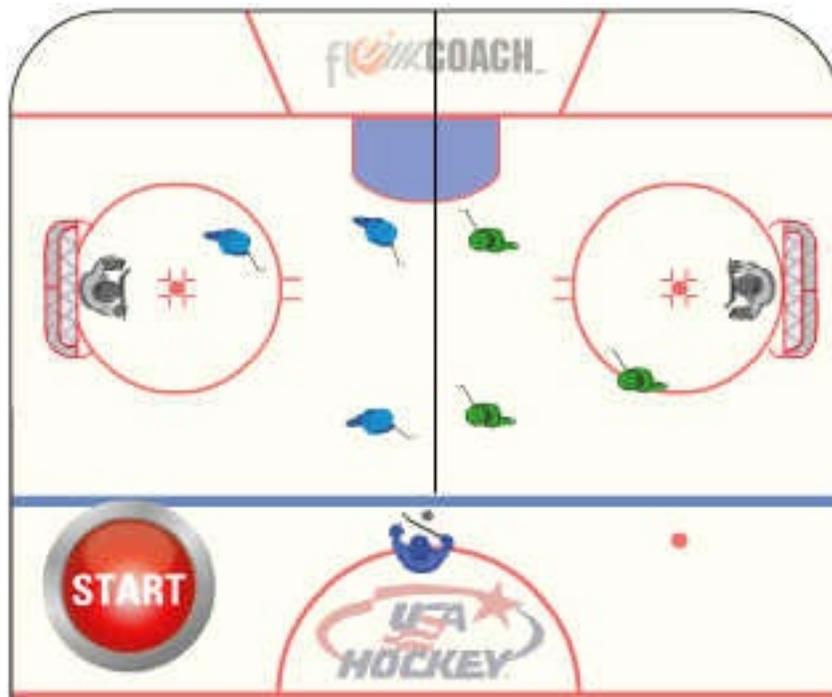


# Forechecking Off-Side Game

## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Regroups, Line Rushes, Zone Entry, Forechecking, Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play, Transition*

The game is played 3 vs. 3. With a thick marker, the coach draws a line across the middle of the ice from the boards to the blue line. Before an attacking team can go on offense, it must regroup in its defensive half. Once they have regrouped, they must stay on-side while attacking the defensive team. If they go off-side, the puck goes to the other team and the drill continues. Another variation of the game is to have the offensive team complete one or two passes before going over the center line.



# Forechecking

## Forecheck Game

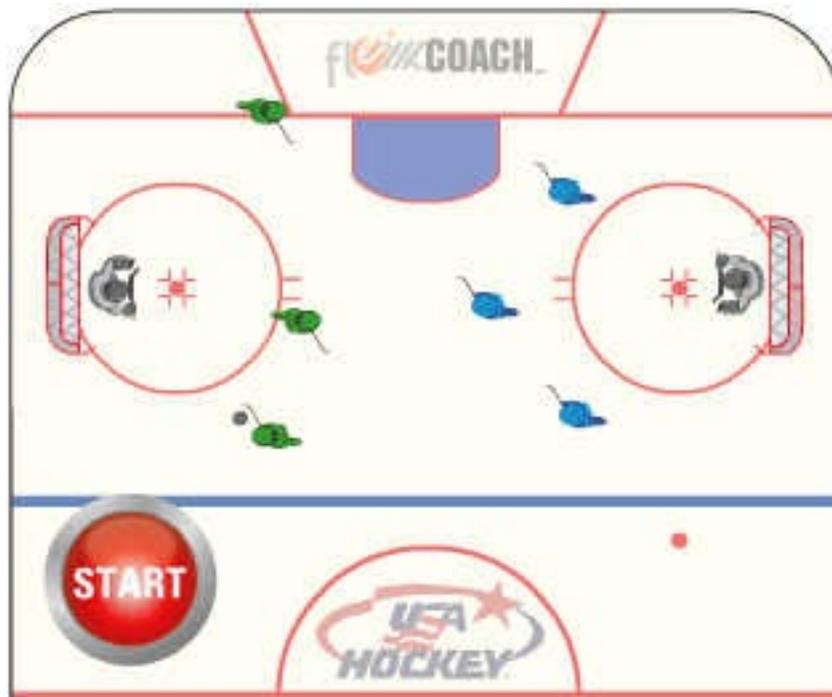
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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Regrouping Skills,  
Breakouts, Line Rushes, Transition*

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The game is played 3 vs. 3. The offensive team with the puck must first go behind its net before it can attack. The team without the puck must forecheck the team that is skating behind its own net. Emphasize proper angling and read-and-react skills.



# Forechecking Breakout Game

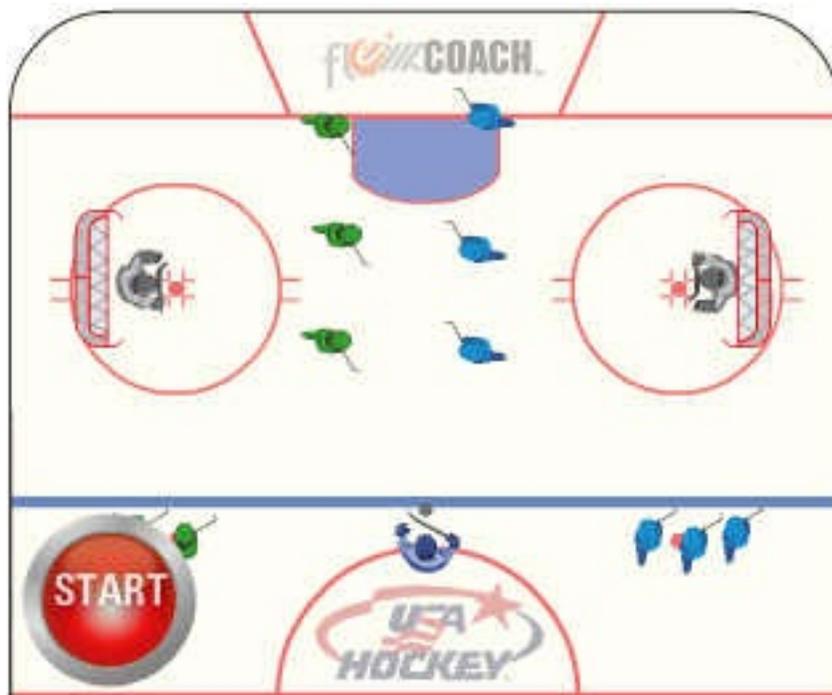
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## CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Regrouping, Breakouts, Forechecking, Line Rushes, Transition*

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The game is played 3 vs. 3. Before the offensive team can attack, it must make a pass behind its own net. The team without the puck must forecheck them, emphasizing good angles while reading and reacting to the play. The game is a continuous 3 vs 3.



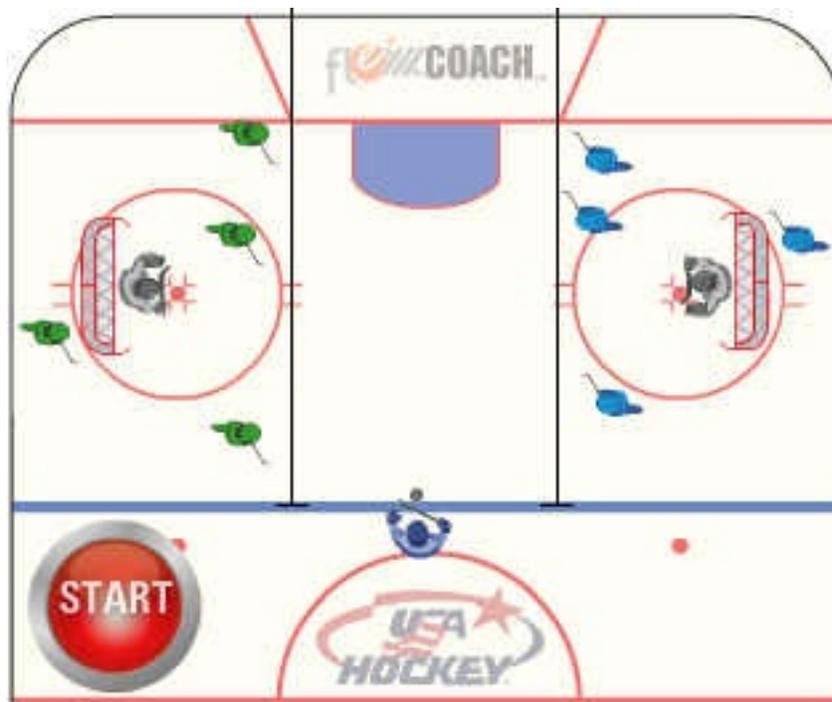
# Forechecking

## Rauschy Breakout/Forecheck Modified Regroup Game

### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Regroups, Line Rushes, Forechecking, Transition*

With a thick marker, the coach draws two lines making blue lines from the boards to the actual blue line as seen in the illustration. The game is played 3 vs. 3 with each team having an extra player behind its own net who can skate side to side but not past the goal line to make the breakout pass. The team with the puck passes it to the player behind the net. The three offensive players then come down below the line and breakout with puck support. The defensive team sends one player in to forecheck and pressure the offensive team. The coach can start with one forechecker and move to two later in the drill and then three. After a turnover, the other team then breaks out, by passing the puck to the player behind the net.



# Forechecking Line Change Game

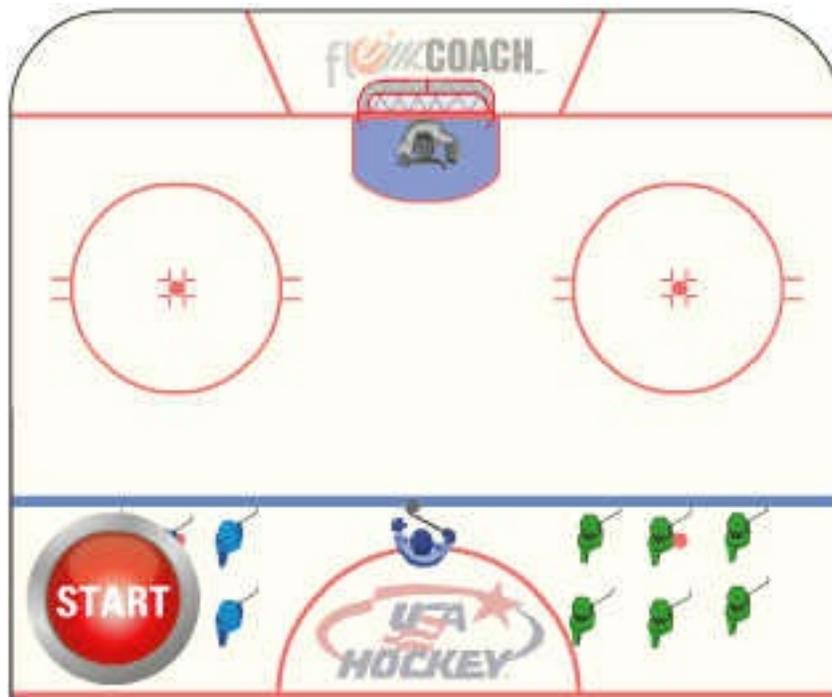
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## CONCEPTS

*Quick Transition, Battling, Body Position,  
Offensive Zone Play, Defensive Zone Play*

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The game is 3 vs. 3 with the extra players lined up on separate sides outside the blueline. The coach dumps a puck into the zone and the first player from the three lines on each team enters the zone and battles for possession of the puck. The team that gets possession has to pass to the first player in one of the team's lines. Once that happens, the three new players enter the zone trying to score while the three remaining players go on defense to stop them. This alternates after a turnover and continues unless there is a goal or the goalie freezes the puck. The team that scores gets the puck at the blueline and the game starts over. If the goalie freezes the puck, the defensive team gets the puck at the blueline.



# Special Teams

## Outlet Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Breakouts, Line Rushes,  
Power Play, Penalty Kill, Transition*

---

The game is played 3 vs. 3 with two coaches on both sides as outlet passers. Before being able to go on offense, you must outlet the puck to one of the coaches. You can also use players as outlet passers as well, if desired. The coaches can skate laterally up and down their side but cannot enter into the play. Encourage short passes to create support.



# Special Teams

## Pearl 4 vs. 2 Game

### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Line Changes,  
Power Play, Penalty Kill, Transition*

The coach divides players into two teams with goalies at either end. The game begins 4 vs. 2. When the whistle blows, the players change with four players from the other side on offense and two players from the original puck-carrying team on defense going the other way. It's a continuous 4 vs. 2, with teams changing from four players to two players back to four players. Encourage the defensive pair to try and score shorthanded.





# Special Teams

## Flank Game

### CONCEPTS

*Puck Support, Power Play,  
Penalty Kill, Transition*

The game begins 2 vs. 2 with teams also having two support flank players on both sides in the offensive zone. The flank players can only skate up and down their flank and not into the play. The players with the puck can use their flank players to set up a 4 vs. 2, simulating a power play situation. The flank players can pass or shoot when they receive the puck. On the whistle for a change, the flank players stay and go into the play, 2 vs. 2, and four new players (two on each team) now become the flank players.



## Special Teams

# 4 vs. 3 Power Play Game

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### CONCEPTS

*Passing, Receiving, Puck Support, Power Play Skills,  
Penalty Kill Skills, Transition, Line Changes*

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The coach divides the players into two teams with one goalie at each end. The game begins with a 4 vs 3 situation and runs for about 45 seconds. On the whistle, teams change, alternating back and forth with four players then three players, then back to four. It's a continuous 4 vs 3. Keep score. Power-play goals are worth one point and shorthanded goals are worth two points.



