

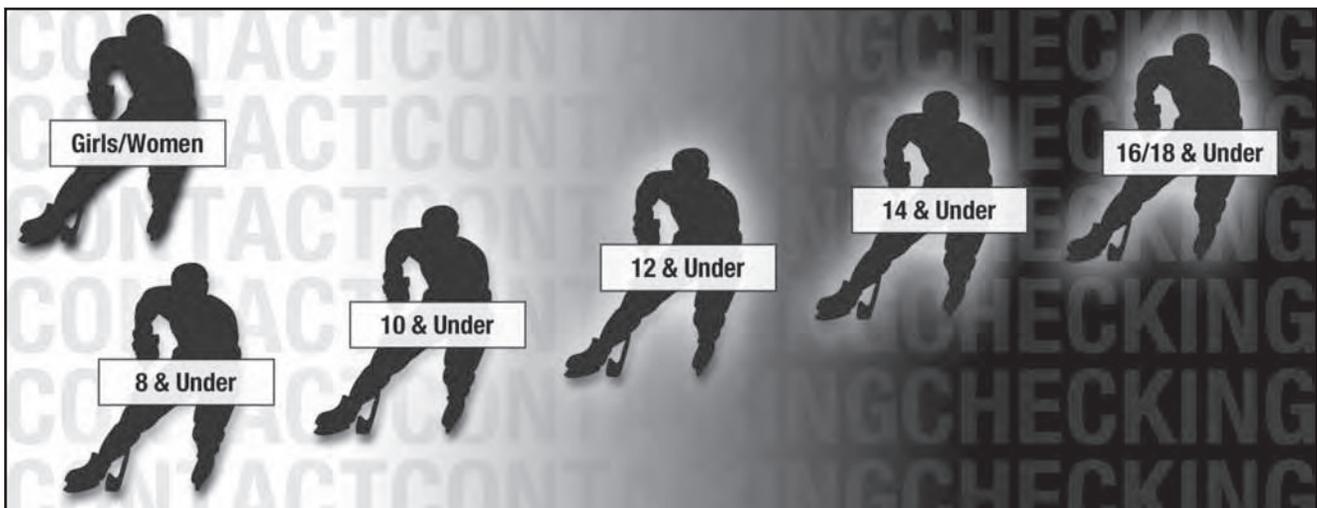
DEFINITIONS

Youth hockey identifies two different streams, Body Contact and Body Checking. Younger age groups (10 & Under and younger), girls'/women's hockey, and no contact leagues play under the Body Contact regulations. Older players (12 & Under and older) play under the Body Checking regulations. Even though both terms are well known and frequently used, it can be difficult to distinguish between them. Below are USA Hockey's definitions.

Body Contact – Body Contact is defined as an individual defensive tactic designed to legally block or impede the progress of an offensive puck carrier. This tactic is a result of movement of the defensive player to restrict movement of the puck carrier anywhere on the ice through skating, angling and positioning. Contact may only occur during the normal process of playing the puck, provided there has been no overt hip, shoulder or arm contact to physically force the opponent off the puck.

Body Checking – Body Checking is defined as an individual defensive tactic designed to legally separate the puck carrier from the puck. This tactic is the result of a defensive player (player without the puck) applying physical extension of the body toward the puck carrier, by using his hip or body from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side. The defensive player must not take more than two fast steps in executing the check. A legitimate body check must be done only with the trunk of the body (hips and shoulders) and must be above the opponent's knees and below the neck. If the check is unnecessarily rough, it must be penalized.

STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR YOUTH HOCKEY



DEVELOPING CHECKING SKILLS

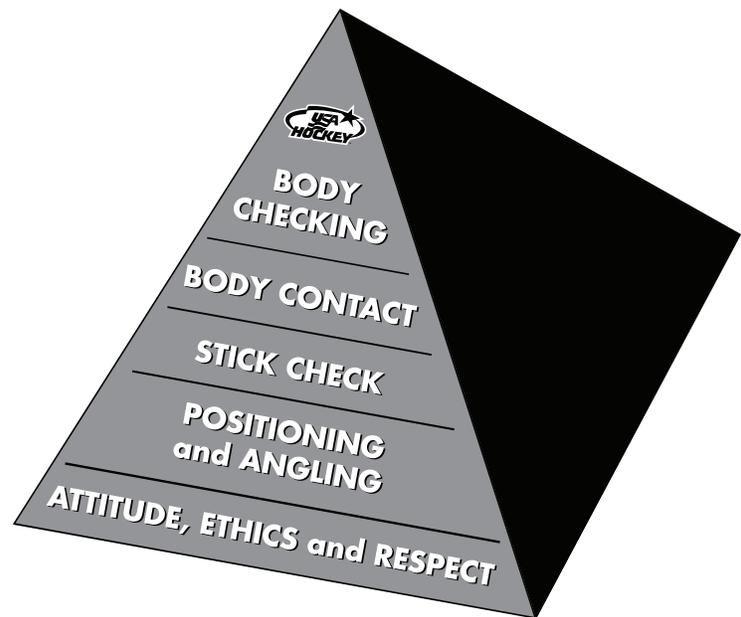
Doing it Right, Right from the Start

Successful coaches ensure that every player has a chance to develop all his checking skills in a functional progression, and allow the player's biological maturity and emotional development to reach certain levels. The USA Hockey Checking Progression Model gradually introduces players to the skills of checking. Steps 1, 2 and 3 include positioning/angling, stick checking and body contact, and they build the players' base during their early levels of hockey, 8 & Under through 10 & Under. Step 4 introduces the skills of body checking. These skills are eased in throughout the 12 & Under level.

By the time the players reach the 14 & Under and 18 & Under levels, all players should have had the opportunity to learn the essential checking skills that allow them to play body checking hockey without preventable risks for injury. However, it is important to point out, that even in these age groups, the degree of physical development varies immensely from player to player. This leads to unbalanced competition where variations in size, strength, and the body's capability to withstand injuries are dramatic. It is of the utmost importance that players, coaches and referees keep the tolerance level of the physical impact to a reduced and safe level for all participants.



Positioning and Angling – The first step in teaching checking is to learn how to control skating and to establish position to approach the opponent from an angle that minimizes time and space for the opponent.



Stick Checking – The second step is to effectively use the stick for poke checking, sweep checking, lifting or locking the opponent's stick.



Body Contact – The third step is to use the body to block the opponent's way or take away his skating lanes. The correct stance and effective use of leg strength are important parts of these techniques.



Body Checking – The fourth and final step is the actual body check. This step includes teaching techniques to give and receive a body check safely and within the rules.



Step 1

Positioning & Angling



POSITIONING AND ANGLING

The right or wrong position depends on many variables, including how you match-up against your opponent, the number of teammates and opponents in the area, the score of the game, or the strategy you're utilizing. It is important to know the different options and to understand the advantages and disadvantages of different positions. Here is an overview of this section:

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| A. | Defensive Side | Between the opponent and your net |
| B. | Passing Lane | Between two opponents |
| C. | Shooting Lane | Between the puck and the net |
| D. | Defensive Triangle | Defensive side of the puck and the passing lane in front |
| E. | Offensive Side | Between the opponent and the offensive net |
| | Neutral Weak Side | Side-by-side with the opponent on your backhand side |
| | Neutral Strong Side | Side-by-side with the opponent on your forehand side |
| F. | Steering | Approaching on an angle to make the opponent move |
| | Driving | Forcing the opponent in one direction |
| G. | Closing the gap flat | Reducing the distance between you and the opponent |
| | Closing the gap tight | Same as "G" but in a tight area |

When teaching checking, emphasize how to control skating to establish position to approach the opponent from an angle that minimizes time and space for the opponent.



POSITIONING AND ANGLING

Being In the Right Place At the Right Time

Good players seem to be in the right position at the right time, and thereby get more involved in the game than others. Why is that? Are they faster so they can get to the right spot before anyone else? Are they more agile so they can switch directions more quickly? Are they smarter, and know where to be better than everybody else? Do they anticipate, read and react to the play better? Are they better coached? Are they following the system better? Are they more willing to make a difference in the game? Are they more confident? Is it just natural talent? Well the questions are many, but there is only one answer: "They are all of the above."

To be in the right spot at the right time we need to know where that position is, when the right time is and how to get there.

One thing is for sure – players were not born with all these qualities. Somewhere and somehow as they matured, they developed these skills. In some way, they have gained experience, drawn conclusions and adapted their game. Coaching certainly played a part in it, but self-coaching played an even bigger part. If coaching made such an impact on these players, does it mean we can train all our players to be as good as the best players? Maybe not, but we can certainly train them to

be at the right spot at the right time. To do this successfully, there are three things we need to know: what is the right position, what is the right time, and how can our players get there.

The chapter on positioning and angling shows some ways to develop these skills. Very young players can learn these concepts. Learning them correctly from the start will make their actions and reactions develop naturally and become second nature.

USA Hockey recommends that positioning and angling drills are introduced early in a player's career. The best ways to develop these skills is through read and react drills and a variety of games. Players as young as seven or eight years old can learn the basics of angling. These skills will form a very important base which will be needed as the players move into body contact and body checking. Take your time building these fundamental skills carefully. In fact, these drills should be reviewed and repeated throughout a player's career.

In the positioning and angling section, players will learn about defensive and offensive side body positioning, passing and shooting lanes, steering and driving an opponent, and how to close the gap (space between the defensive player and puck carrier). The common denominator for all these skills is, of course, skating.





SKATING AND AGILITY

Positioning yourself in the best position, approaching the opponent from the proper angle and keeping your balance during and after the battle for the puck, are the keys to checking success. It is true to say that your checking ability largely depends on your skating skills. These skating skills are equally important when it comes to avoiding a check, protecting yourself and the puck. Pure speed can sometimes be enough, but more often it is the agility skills that will make the difference. The continuous training of all skating skills, including quick starts, stops, crossovers, turns, pivots, and lateral movements, is crucial to the development of checking skills. Skills to close the gap when playing man-to-man are also essential to learn. So, in addition to the skating skills above, every player should learn to master these three skating techniques:

1. Lateral Pivot Backward to Forward
2. Lateral Pivot Forward to Backward
3. Forward Stop to Backward Start

Lateral Pivot Backward to Forward

If you have backed off and would like to move forward to regain control of the gap, the lateral pivot backward to forward is a good move. Skate backwards, keep your body weight on one skate, and make a quarter of a circle with this skate so you are now going laterally. Turn the other skate outward, so the heel is pointing in and the toe and knee are pointing out. Step over on this skate, make a forward c-cut and start moving forward.

Lateral Pivot Forward to Backward

After approaching the opponent you need to start moving backwards without losing your momentum. Make a forward c-cut with one skate. Twist the other foot inward, so the toes and knee are pointing in. Step over to this skate and make a backward c-cut and continue backwards.

Forward Stop to Backward Start

If you have limited space, you will have to stop and start backwards. To still keep part of the momentum, do a one-foot snowplough stop. Prior to coming to a complete stop, push off with a powerful backward c-cut and continue with a crossover stride.

The better you learn to move laterally with either the heels or the toes pointing inwards, the more able you will be to move laterally and forward/backward with the opponent, keeping him contained, and waiting for the best situation to follow up with a check.

Technique Exercises
Heel-to-Heel Spiral
C-Cut Yo-Yo
C-Cut Step Over C-Cut
1-2-3 Clock

Situational Drills
3 x Wide Pass + Join the Rush
3 x 1 vs. 1 Neutral Zone
3 x 1 vs. 1 Defensive Zone

USA HOCKEY™

DEFENSIVE SIDE

CORE SKILLS

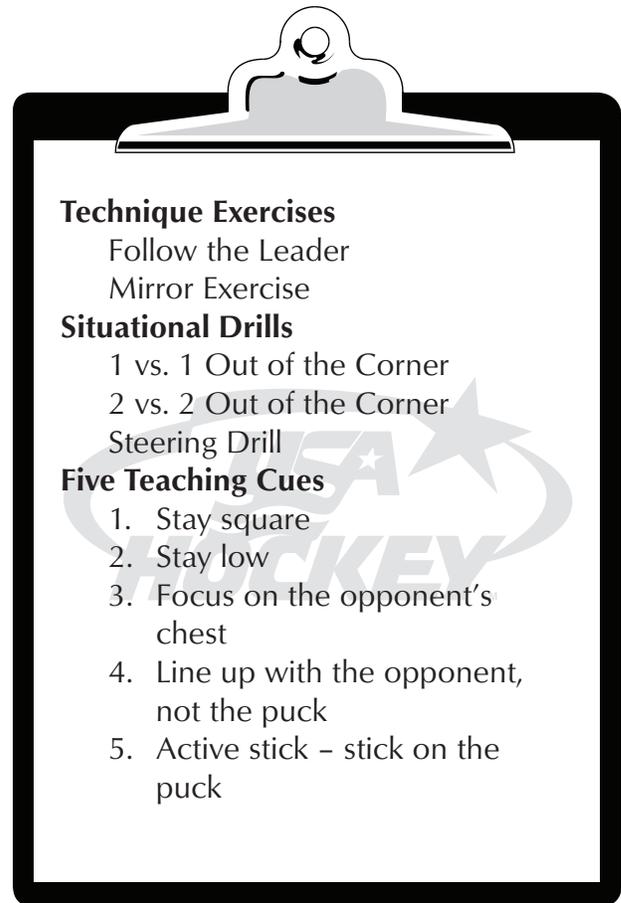
Skating

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When the opponent controls the puck, most defensive tactics demand you to take a position on the defensive side of the player that you are covering. Defensive side means that you position yourself in an area so the opponent has to go through your area before he can get to the net. It takes extraordinary skating skills, as well as well-trained read-and-react skills, to perform this task effectively. So developing these skills will enhance your forechecking as well as your neutral zone and defensive zone defense. In penalty killing, defensive-side coverage is paramount to the success.

Try to stay square to the opponent and use an active stick (stick on puck in tight) to apply pressure without giving up your position. A low center of gravity, including good knee bend, will prepare you for body contact and increase your ability to move. Your objective is to position your body between the opponent and your net, staying in the lane from the opponent's perspective, not the puck's. Focusing on the opponent's chest will facilitate this task.



Technique Exercises
Follow the Leader
Mirror Exercise

Situational Drills
1 vs. 1 Out of the Corner
2 vs. 2 Out of the Corner
Steering Drill

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square
2. Stay low
3. Focus on the opponent's chest
4. Line up with the opponent, not the puck
5. Active stick – stick on the puck

USA HOCKEY



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PASSING LANE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Stickhandling

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

Controlling the passing lanes is necessary for successful defense. A player with no passing options is under pressure, exposed for checking, and likely to lose the puck. He will need to take bigger risks if attempting a pass which often leads to intercepted passes and turnovers. Players with well-developed skills for blocking passing lanes and intercepting passes are the unsung heroes of every successful hockey team. Not only do they stop the opponent from scoring, but they establish instant puck control and start quick transition attacks.

When playing the passing lanes, you do not want to give up the defensive side. The object is to continually block the lane between the passer and the intended receiver. This creates a passing shadow from which the receiver must move out of in order to receive a clean pass. Initially, control the lane with an active stick, and when you close in on the opponent, keep your shin pads and stick blade square across the passing lane to fill

as much space as possible. Focus on covering the on-ice lane. This will force the opponent to use saucer passes, which are tougher to execute and to receive.



Technique Exercise

Monkey in the Middle

Situational Drills

Two Lines Seam Pass Coverage
Passers and Shooters Coverage

Five Teaching Cues

1. Start from the defensive side of the passing lane
2. Active stick
3. Take away the on-ice lane first
4. Make yourself big (keep shin pads, stick blade, etc. square)
5. Head on a swivel

SHOOTING LANE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Stickhandling

IN THE GAME

Penalty Killing and Defensive Zone Coverage

The goaltender tries to stay in the shooting lane for the entire game. To consistently cover each new angle as the puck shifts from one shooting lane to another, he rarely steps outside the crease. Still, these rather short distances demand extraordinary skating-agility skills. In addition, all these movements are done by keeping a tight posture with no holes between the arms and the body, the smallest five-hole possible and the stick solid on the ice. If you are a defenseman or a forward, playing the shooting lane is not much different. Your goal is to position yourself in the lane between the net and the puck, not the lane between the net and the opponent. Stay square so you fill as much of the lane as possible, and use an active stick to stress the opponent. You have to think like a goaltender by focusing on the correct angle.

Aligning yourself with the puck, however, means that you are blocking your goaltender's line of vision. It is important to remember that you and your goaltender are working as a team. The purpose

is to prevent the puck from going into the net, not necessarily to stop the puck yourself. If you take away the lane along the ice, the goaltender can focus on the puck in the air. One method is to lie down (long body) and block the shot. This enables the goaltender to see the puck, and minimize the risks for deflections. Blocking shots is not an act of desperation, but a well-developed skill that starts with the ability to position yourself correctly in the shooting lane. Other shot blocking techniques include dropping to one knee (get big low) and standing (pads tight) in the shot lane.



Situational Drill

Cover the Shooting Lanes

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square
2. Think like a goaltender
3. Take away the on-ice lane first
4. Line up with the puck
5. Active stick



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DEFENSIVE TRIANGLE

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When you are forechecking or defending the neutral or defensive zones, you cannot narrowly focus on only one opponent and play the passing or shooting lane against him. On the contrary, your head always needs to be on a swivel to be aware of what is going on in other areas of the ice. In penalty killing, for example, you always have to cover, or be prepared to cover, two opponents. Positioning yourself on the defensive side, and in a not too flat angle to both of them, will make it possible to scan along the passing lanes and keep both opponents in your field of vision. Thereby, you will be aware of what one is doing without losing track of the other. The player with the best scoring angle is your primary concern, so position yourself toward him, and use an active stick (one hand on stick, stick blade on ice) to cover a larger area. This is also true for even-strength situations where a position in a defensive triangle is important, especially when you are playing on the weak side.

Situational Drills

2-on-1 From the Corner

Five Teaching Cues

1. Keep on the defensive side of both opponents
2. Keep both opponents in your field of vision
3. Overplay toward the opponent with the best shooting angle
4. One hand on stick, stick blade on ice
5. Scan along the passing lanes



OFFENSIVE SIDE

IN THE GAME

Backchecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

Against a quick transition attack, you might find yourself on the offensive side of the puck carrier. In this position the opponent has a clear path to your net. Effectively controlling an opponent from this side is obviously more difficult than being in front of him. Nevertheless, the goal is to get control of the opponent and it starts with skating as hard as possible to close the gap. This forces the opponent to go full speed as well, and will reduce his time to make a play. Secondly, you are not alone. The key is to work together with your goaltender to stop the opponent. Your priority is to close the gap from the inside lane (from the middle). You thereby help your goaltender to isolate the opponent's options to one angle. Finally, be patient. A last minute stick check limits the opponent's ability to recover and make a play on goal.

Many backchecking systems use a back pressure tactic. A forward is pressuring the puck carrier from the offensive side and driving him into the defenseman. Thereby, the forward and the defenseman work as a team in a similar way to what is described in the example above with a backchecker and a goaltender.



Technique Exercise

Keep Away with Back to Defender

Situational Drill

Breakaway with Chaser

Five Teaching Cues

1. Skate hard to close the gap
2. Pressure the opponent to skate full speed
3. Wait with your stick check until the opponent is about to make a play
4. Make the inside lane a priority; pressure from the middle
5. Work as a team with your goaltender

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NEUTRAL WEAK SIDE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When battling for the puck, you often end up side-by-side or neutral with the opponent. The weak side refers to the side of the checker's body that he holds the stick with his top hand. From this side a checker has reduced leverage with his stick when initiating a stick check.

As a first step, it is important to limit the area in which the opponent can maneuver. Try to get your hands in front of the opponent's hands. Use your shoulder and upper arm to restrict the opponent's arm movements. Ideally, you want to have your elbow in front of the opponent's chest and your hip slightly behind the opponent's hip. Once in this position, you can execute a tap check or a lift check with your stick.

It's important to maintain the same speed as the opponent to avoid allowing him to cut in

behind or in front of you. Keep your support solid on the inside edge of the outside foot to be ready if body contact should occur. Using the butt end of your stick to impede the opponent is illegal and could cause injury to your opponent.



Situational Drill

Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Skate hard to position your hands in front of your opponent's hands
2. Try to restrict the opponent with your shoulder and upper arm
3. Get your elbow in front and your hip behind the opponent
4. Keep solid support on the inside edge of the outside skate
5. Never use the butt end of your stick

NEUTRAL STRONG SIDE

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

Skating side-by-side with the opponent on your stick side, bottom hand closest to the opponent, is sometimes referred to as neutral strong side. From this side it is easier to use your stick to control the opponent, but without hooking or slashing. Your skating skills are paramount. To be able to control the opponent, you need to keep the same speed and move in the same direction, so he cannot cut in front of you or escape behind you. Try to position your hands in front of the opponent to either restrict his arm motions, or to apply various stick checks. It is important to limit the area in which the opponent can move, so make the inside a priority, and balance yourself on the inside edge of the skate farthest away from the opponent. This will give you good support if body contact occurs.



Situational Drill

Wide Drive Race

Five Teaching Cues

1. Skate hard to get your hands in front of the opponent's
2. Try to restrict the opponent with your shoulder and upper arm
3. Position your elbow in front and your hip behind the opponent
4. Keep solid support on the inside edge of the outside skate
5. Use a press, a lift or a tap check to gain puck possession

From the neutral strong side, you can separate the opponent from the puck by using:

Lift Stick Check
Tap Stick Check
Press Check
Side Body Check

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STEERING

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense and Penalty Killing

Keeping the opponent to the outside and forcing him away from the middle of the ice is one common denominator of all defensive strategies in all areas of the ice. Steering is a low energy, almost passive method of achieving this. While mainly used in forechecking and neutral zone defense, steering can be used in all zones. Most frequently, steering is used to kill penalties. If you hold the inside of the ice and leave the outside areas open, the opponent is invited to move into these areas. Preferably, you want the opponent to move onto his backhand side. When he starts moving, continue to hold the inside and isolate the opponent to the outside. The perfect position is slightly behind the opponent. From this angle you should be able to read the opponent's jersey number. This inhibits the opponent from cutting to the middle behind the checker. Orientation and skating skills are thus very important. Use your stick to take away passing lanes and to make passing the puck into the middle lane very risky. You will need to communicate with your teammates.

Situational Drill

Steering Drill

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay slightly behind (you should be able to read the opponent's number)
2. If possible, steer to the opponent's backhand side
3. Take the middle and steer to the outside
4. Work as a team with your teammates
5. Use your stick to take away passing lanes



DRIVING

CORE SKILLS

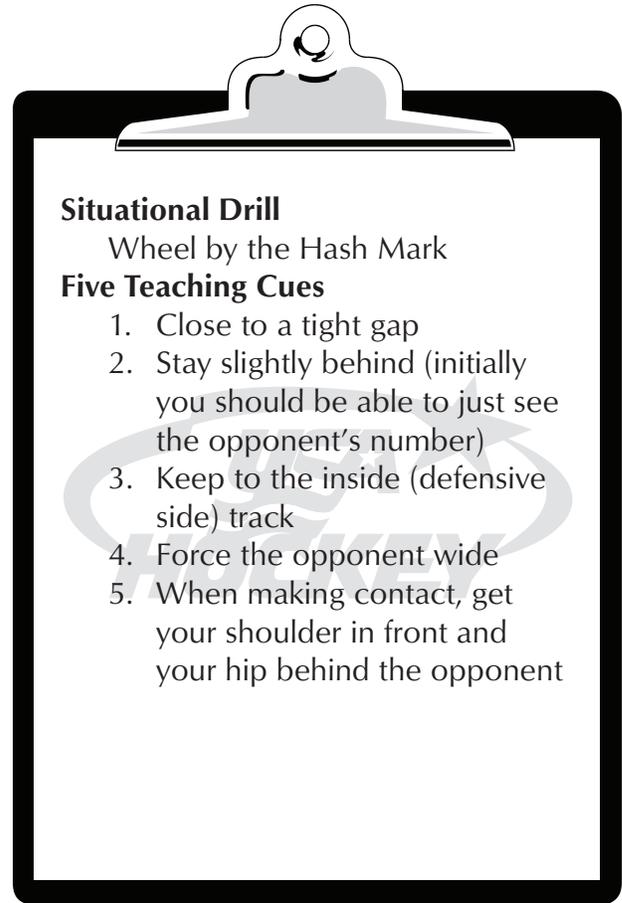
Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Forechecking, Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Backchecking

The more aggressive form of steering is sometimes called driving. By keeping a tight gap and having the opponent constrained by the boards you can drive the opponent into an area of your choice. The purpose of driving is to force the opponent in a very small area and follow through with a check.

To achieve this, you have to approach the opponent from an angle that leaves him only one option, and that is to move wide. You aim to keep the gap so tight that the opponent cannot turn or stop without making contact with the boards or you. The perfect execution allows you to initially see part of the opponent's jersey number. As you maintain the inside track, you try to cut off the opponent's line of travel and end up with your hands and shoulders in front of the opponent, but your hip behind him. At the final stage of the drive, you can separate the opponent from the puck with a stick check, by rubbing him out or with a side body check.



Situational Drill

Wheel by the Hash Mark

Five Teaching Cues

1. Close to a tight gap
2. Stay slightly behind (initially you should be able to just see the opponent's number)
3. Keep to the inside (defensive side) track
4. Force the opponent wide
5. When making contact, get your shoulder in front and your hip behind the opponent



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CLOSING THE GAP

CORE SKILLS

Skating

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense and Penalty Killing

When closing the gap in open ice, you can use the lateral movement forward to backward technique. This technique allows you to bring the momentum from the approach into the backward motion. If the opponent is moving laterally, this technique allows you to follow his direction and keep a tight gap. If the opponent is coming straight at you, you make the inside of the ice a priority. Always try to stay square to the opponent. Focus on the opponent's chest, not the puck, and time your approach so there is enough time to accelerate backwards. The purpose is to come out of the turn with the same speed as your opponent.

You could add a poke check or a sweep check to the motion, but keep it controlled so you are not taking yourself out of the play. Once the move is finished, you should end up slightly to the



Technique Exercise

C-Cut Yo-Yo

C-Cut Step Over C-Cut

Situational Drill

3 x 1 vs. 1 Neutral Zone

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square to the opponent
2. If the opponent moves laterally, follow that motion
3. If the opponent moves toward you, turn from outside to inside
4. Close gap as tight as possible
5. Line up to the inside shoulder of the opponent's body

inside. As a rule of thumb, your outside shoulder should line up with the opponent's inside shoulder. The tighter the gap, the higher demand on your skating skills, but the less demand on the timing. Closing the gap flat is often used in steering and trapping tactics, and by closing the gap to a non-puck carrier. More agile defensemen use it even in tighter checking situations such as in the defensive zone's corners and by pinching in the offensive zone.

Close the gap and follow through with a poke check or a sweep check.

CLOSING THE GAP TIGHT

CORE SKILLS

Skating and Checking

IN THE GAME

Neutral Zone Defense, Defensive Zone Coverage and Penalty Killing

When approaching an opponent in the shooting lane, a constrained area or where there is very little room to move laterally, closing the gap with the forward stop to backward start technique is the better option. This technique of closing the gap is used all over the ice, but especially in the defensive zone corners and the slot. It will bring you almost to a complete stop. While you will be able to carry over very little momentum, you will be able to more consistently hold the defensive side and the shooting lane.

Focus on the opponent's chest, not the puck, and be aware of his speed and direction. Stay square so you are facing the opponent the entire time. Make your turn the same direction the opponent is going, and close the gap tight enough to be able to follow through with a poke check or a sweep check. If the opponent is moving towards you, adjust your approach so you align yourself to end up on the inside of your opponent.

Technique Exercise

1-2-3 Clock

Situational Drill

3 x 1 vs. 1 Defensive Zone

Five Teaching Cues

1. Stay square to the opponent
2. Close to a tight gap
3. Active stick
4. Turn the same direction as the opponent is moving
5. Turn from the outside to the inside if the opponent is coming straight at you

