



# TACTICAL

*Defensive Positional Play*



REVISED 2/19



## OBJECTIVES

- To describe the potential responsibilities of defensemen
- To describe the defensive side of positional play
- To outline the importance of individual positional skill development

### DEVELOPING DEFENSEMEN

Today's swift, wide-open style of hockey makes playing defense one of the most difficult positions to master on a hockey team. It is a position at which a player receives few accolades. But make a mistake, and he or she is sure to hear the jeers and sneers. However, defense is the backbone to sound team play because defensemen are responsible for initiating offensive attacks and also thwarting the opposition's assaults. The days of placing the big, slow, clumsy player back on defense are gone. Today's game requires a unique, intelligent, highly skilled and well-trained player back on the blue line. Many coaches select their best athletes to play defense, because they are the "quarterbacks" of a hockey team.

#### Defenseman Characteristics

- superb skater - strong and stable on skates
- excellent lateral mobility
- good upper body strength
- patient and confident
- keen hockey mind
- handles the puck well
- passes with pin-point accuracy – short, long and one-touch
- has a quick, hard, low shot

Many coaches neglect drilling their defensemen on the skills required to play their position. Drills must be constantly used to develop the abilities needed for today's defensemen.

Before coaches or players begin special drills for defensemen, they must understand the responsibilities a defenseman has on the ice during a game. This understanding avoids a great deal of confusion and indecision on the ice and in the players' minds

during a game. Everybody knows their assignments in any given game situation. It is another part of the systematic approach to the game of hockey.

#### Methods for Playing Various Situations

**1-on-1** – Skate backward, one hand on the stick, with the elbow cocked next to your hip, blade open to forehand, and the stick out in front without leaning too far forward. Face the on-rushing forward and watch his or her upper body (chest), not the puck. Let the attacker make the first move. If you over-play him or her to the inside, his or her only option is to go outside off of the shooting angle. Keep your body between the attacker and the net. Play the attacker and not the puck, and keep a good gap (distance between you and the puck carrier). Maintain the same speed as the forward and force the player to his or her backhand. Do not cross your feet.

**1-on-2** – The first defenseman who can play the forward to his or her backhand side moves on the attacker and forces him or her to the outside, therefore limiting his or her mobility to one side of the ice. The second defenseman moves to back up his or her partner and picks up the loose puck.

**2-on-1** – Position yourself between the two forwards and try to force them off the shooting angle. Stay in the middle of the ice to prevent attempted passes. Never let the puck carrier get behind you or cut in on the goal. Keep the puck out of the prime scoring area in front of the net. The defenseman's prime responsibility here is to prevent a pass, force a bad-angle shot and let the goalie play the puck.

**2-on-2 No Backchecker** – Play this scenario just like the 1-on-1. The defense pair does not cross if



the forwards criss-cross; only player coverage may change. Talk with your partner and know your assignment. Protect the middle of the ice. Don't allow the attacking forwards to split you or create a 2-on-1 situation. Don't back in too far on the goalie. Keep a tight gap, and try to prevent your opponents from gaining the blue line.

**3-on-1 No Backchecker** – Stay in the middle of the ice and try to stall or slow down their attack or force a shot from a poor angle. Don't become physically tangled with any of the attackers. Avoid picks, interference and checks. Try to position yourself so that the puck carrier will have to pass the puck through you to reach a teammate. Don't back in too far on your goaltender.

**3-on-2** – There can be two ways to play this scenario. (1) Try to force the play at the blue line with a 1-on-1 situation involving the puck carrier and one defenseman. The other defenseman plays the open attackers like a 2-on-1, with the player closest to the net receiving the most attention. (2) One defenseman plays the puck carrier side, establishing a 2-on-1 situation and forcing the puck carrier to the outside and a bad shooting angle. The other defenseman plays a 1-on-1 situation with the off-side attacker. Play a delaying game but threaten any puck carrier coming into the prime scoring area in front of the goal. Do not allow yourself to be drawn out of position.

### General Tips

- Remember that the defensemen should be staggered, and they must work together as a pair.
- Always gauge the speed of the attackers coming at you. Your backward speed must be the same as the attacker's speed.
- When stick or poke checking, never reach out so far that you are off balance – a forward can easily turn you if you have shifted the wrong way.
- Don't body check when you are in a situation where the opposition has a numerical advantage. Check when you have

an even or numerical advantage, or the player has his or her head down.

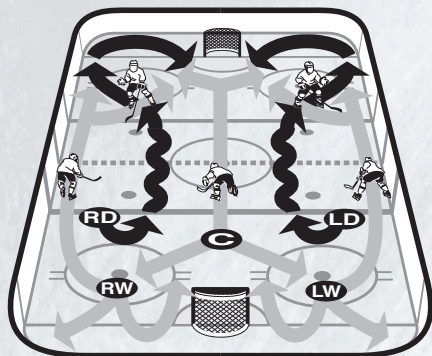
- Communicate with and back up your teammates in your zone.
- Blocking shots (not recommended for younger players) – If you have to block a shot, make sure the attacker is about to shoot. Look for the clues: head drops, hand slips down the stick or he or she drops his or her arm and shoulder on his or her shooting side. Do not drop too soon or the attacker will carry the puck around you. Don't commit yourself too early. Another method sometimes used is the sliding block. The player must leave his or her feet and slide the body in front of the puck as close to the shooter as possible. This method is very dangerous and must be perfectly timed. It should only be used by advanced players.

### Defensive Zone Tips

- Always try to stay between the puck carrier and the goal.
- Coverage in the corner – Move in under control and force your opponents to go in the direction you want them to move. Cautiously play the body. Always create a good angle to eliminate the puck carrier's options.
- Coverage in front of the net – Block all opposing players out of the prime scoring area. Cover their sticks without losing sight of the puck. Be prepared to intercept passes, clear rebounds and check opponents attempting to shoot on goal. No one should be left uncovered in this area. Defensemen should stand off the goal posts facing up ice with a full view of the ice surface. They should turn their heads, not their bodies, when looking into the corners and maintain physical contact (use the stick or your arm, etc.) with the opponent in the slot area. Don't get into a pushing and shoving match in front of the net with an opponent who doesn't have the puck. Keep your body position.



## AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

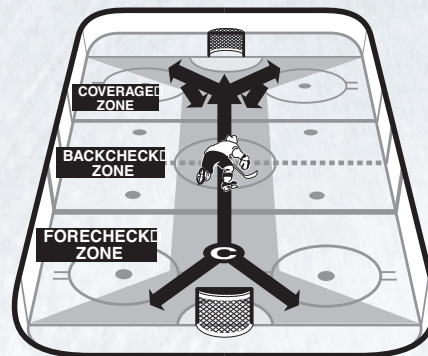


**Defense** – The phase of the game during which your team is not in possession of the puck. It begins when your team loses possession of the puck and ends when your team regains control of the puck.

### Key Elements

1. Individual skills
  - checking the puck carrier and angling
  - intercepting passes or cutting off passing lanes
  - covering opponents
  - blocking shots
2. Team skills
  - carrying out lane responsibilities in all three zones
  - pressuring and outnumbering opponents at the puck
3. Defense is a matter of pride
  - Be proud of maintaining your defensive responsibilities.
4. Give 100 percent
  - Effort and energy are a matter of will.

## DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITY



### Offensive Zone – Forecheck

1. Defensemen hold the blue line until the puck is between the faceoff dot and the top of the circle.
2. The middle defenseman plays like a free safety, keeping all five of the opponents in front of him or her.

### Neutral Zone – Backcheck

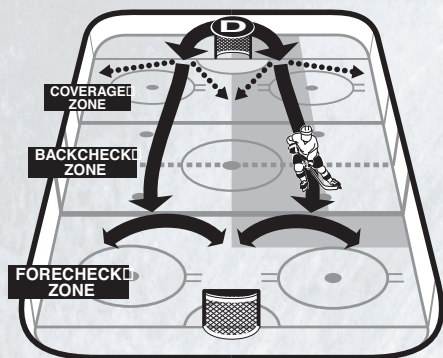
1. Each defenseman plays the seam (imaginary line drawn through the faceoff dot), to the middle of the ice).

### Defensive Zone – Coverage

1. Force play to outside
2. The strong-side defenseman should, block out the puck carrier from going to the net.
3. The weak-side defenseman should cover the front of the net. Start on the weak-side post.



## OFFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITY



### Breakout Zone

1. Move the puck quickly up the ice.
2. The puck carrier is between the faceoff dots when making a breakout pass.

### Neutral Zone

1. The strong-side defenseman, after making a pass, follows up the play inside the seams.
2. The weak-side defenseman is the last player to leave the zone and moves up the middle.

### Attack Zone

1. The strong-side defenseman moves to the top of circle.
2. The weak-side defenseman moves to just inside blue line.