



# TACTICAL

*Gap Control*



REVISED 2/19



## OBJECTIVES

- To provide a basic understanding of gap control
- To review the governing principles of hockey
- To describe the effects of gap control offensively and defensively

Gap control involves a high level of skill, intelligent decision making, discipline and the proper mental attitude. Perhaps the most important thing is to have coaches create practice environments that will continually improve the overall skill level, encourage problem solving and decision making and develop the proper mental approach.

This chapter will give a practical overview of suggestions and techniques in teaching “gap control” for forwards and defensemen, as well as address its common components.

It is absolutely essential that a coach gets back to the basics and reviews a few common components influencing gap control.

### Definition

Gap control is defined as the spacial relationship between an offensive opponent and a defensive opponent.

### Types of Gaps

- **Tight Gap:** players within a stick length of each other
- **Loose Gap:** players more than a stick length apart

### Governing Principles

- **Pressure (defensive):** defensive speed creating pressure on the offensive player, reducing the time, space and force of the attack
- **Pressure (offensive):** offensive speed placing pressure on the defensive player, creating time, space and force for the attack
- **Stall/Contain (defensive):** an attempt to force an opponent to stop or slow down

the speed of an attack to provide time to set up better defensive coverage

- **Stall/Contain (offensive):** an attempt to change the speed of the attack to provide time and space to set up better offensive options
- **Support (offensive/defensive):** players away from the puck involving themselves as an offensive option to an attack or as a defensive deterrent to an attack.
- **Transition:** the ability of players to move quickly from defense to offense, or offense to defense.

### Defensive and Offensive Gap Control

Gap control applies to all players on the ice (offensive and defensive) from 1-on-1 situations to 5-on-5 situations. In the past, the talk of gap control (closing the gap, etc.) has focused too much on the defensive segments of the game when, in reality, its influence is equally as important in the offensive segment of hockey.

### Objectives

- control of situation offensively and defensively
- influence play offensively and defensively
- reduce time/space/force of an attack
- create time/space/force of an attack
- regain puck possession
- retain puck possession
- prevent scoring opportunities
- gain scoring opportunities

Far too often as coaches we become enamored with the overall look of a tactic, overlooking the key skills necessary to execute it. These skills (physical and mental) must not be neglected and



must be nurtured at every practice. No player is too old, experienced or skilled to be excluded from the continual development of individual skills that are a vital component of an effective athlete. Additionally, these skills mastered by the athlete will create confidence reflected in the athlete's overall performance.

### **Key Components**

1. Skating
  - speed
  - quickness
  - agility
  - balance
  - transition
  - acceleration
2. Proper checking techniques
3. Play away from the puck
4. 1-on-1 confrontation technique
5. Decision making: when? where? how?
6. Proper mental attitude

### **Coach's Question:**

1. Are you one of those coaches who questions the contribution of certain players because they can't execute within the system?
2. Are you a coach who knows the value of continually providing time to develop the skills of your players throughout the season so that they may meet the skill necessary to achieve total peak performance within a system?

### **Small Game Activities/Drills**

One of the coach's major responsibilities is to create an environment where the athlete has the opportunity to reach his or her optimum level of peak performance.

In developing the athlete's decision-making skills, the coach needs to put the athlete in as many game situations as possible, allowing the athlete an opportunity to come up with solutions.

The coach must make the athlete realize that there is more than one solution to any given situation and that the decision made will be based on many

factors such as ability, confidence, knowledge, game situation, etc.

An excellent way to develop decision-making skills in a hockey player are small area games and activities that will create an environment challenging players. Players gain a better understanding of pressure, stall/contain, support, transition and time/space.

### **Mental Attitude**

Energy will be used in this presentation to describe a hockey player's degree of mental attitude. Athletes who are somewhat energized will generally perform better and reflect confidence in their overall performance. Peak performance comes when the player has reached his or her optimum level of energy.

Listed below are a few energizing techniques for controlling and increasing a player's mental energy level:

- positive self-talk
- positive mental imagery
- psych-up technique
- goal setting
- relaxation technique
- deep breathing technique
- task focus technique

### **Defensively**

- Reduce the time/space/force of an attack.
- Limit the speed and velocity of play.
- Prevent penetration to the prime scoring areas.
- Isolate game situations and avoid getting outnumbered.
- Control.
- Be pro-active.

### **Offensively**

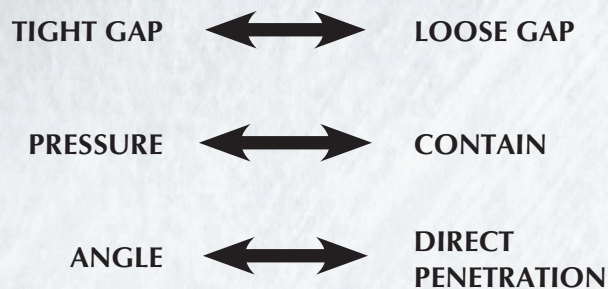
- Create the time/space/force for your attack.
- Control the speed and velocity of the play.
- Penetrate the prime scoring areas.
- Create outnumbering situations and maximize opportunities.
- Control.
- Be pro-active.

### **Basic Concepts for Sound Gap Control**

- Communicate both verbally and visually.



- Protect or attack critical areas of the ice.
- Create or eliminate offensive and defensive options.
- defensive or offensive side positioning
- angling - steering - deflecting
- creating/controlling multiple speeds for the attack
- stick-on-stick — body-on-body principle
- Effective use of body, stick, boards and areas of the ice



### Factors in Decision Making

There are many factors influencing the read on a particular situation and in making a decision or gap control. Creating opportunities and an environment for your players to experiment and master these skills is your challenge as a coach. Below are a few helpful hints and cues that will assist them in their process:

- Defensively, look through or beyond the attack.
- Offensively, look beyond or through your attack.
- Know what support you have offensively or defensively.
- Who is controlling the puck and what type of control do they have?
- Where is the situation in relationship to the ice surface (ice position)? Close to the boards? In open ice? What zone? Defensive blue line? Offensive blue line? Prime scoring area?

- speed and direction of the play
- total game awareness (score, period, type of game, specialty teams, etc.)

Should you take an aggressive attitude offensively or defensively regarding your approach to gap control? Based on what system you play, there must be a philosophy or “attitude” established for this component of the game.

### Tight Gap Control – Defensive Reads

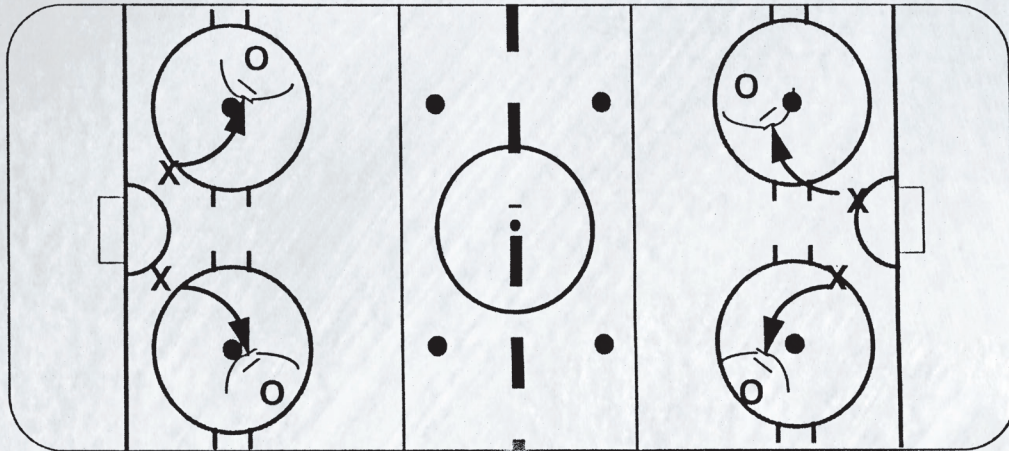
1. Approaching the backside of a puck carrier
2. When a puck carrier moves across the ice or along your defensive blue line
3. The skating speed of both players and the situation is the same
4. The offensive player has not established solid control of the puck
5. When you numerically outnumber the offensive opponent
6. When you have isolated the situation down to 1-on-1
7. When the puck carrier is attempting to penetrate the prime scoring area
8. The puck carrier is in a “threat” to score position

The following is a review of skill techniques for the players to master regarding the tactical component of game control:

- skating
- open-ice checking
- play away from the puck
- 1-on-1 confrontation
- angling/steering/deflecting
- body positioning
- body contact
- decision making
- pinching



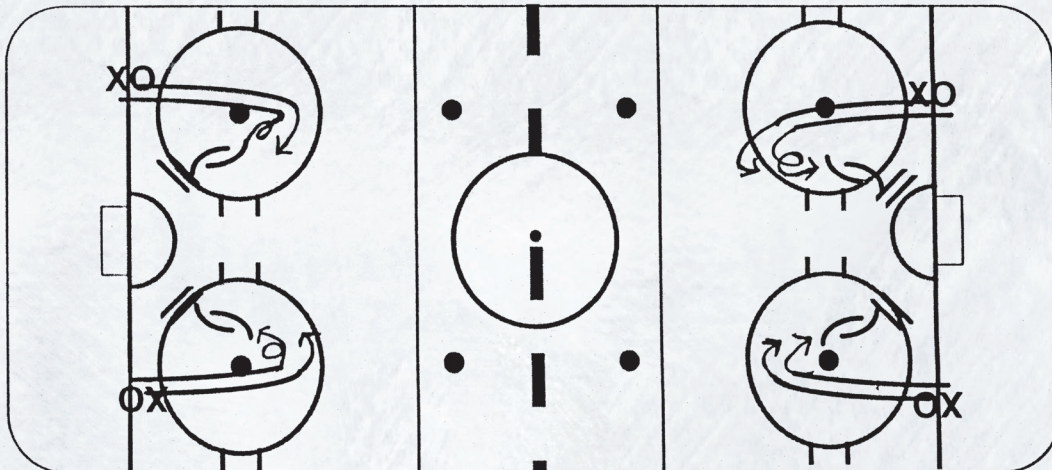
## DRILLS FOR IMPROVING THE SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES OF "GAP CONTROL"



### Circle Drill

**Purpose:** Angling/defense side positioning

X uses a short burst to establish a checking angle (inside out) and defensive side positioning. O attempts to get to the goal. X and O start simultaneously.



### Defensive Side Positioning Drill

**Purpose:** Defensive side positioning

O and X skate forward toward blue line with X in a tight gap. O turns and attacks X, who maintains defensive side positioning and boxes out O.