

MIDDLE ICE ZONE ENTRY

Monday, January 13th, 2025

Please Note: The Practice of the Week is designed to bring value across multiple age levels, but this practice in particular is probably unsuitable for U14 and under. We do have other zone entry practices that focus on simple concepts you can check out or you can use this to build ideas to develop your own practice. IHS should always be used as a starting point and you can add/remove layers to fit your team.

Practice Theme: The drills and games in this practice are designed to help your players work on entry and entry denial skills in different situations. We want to promote gaining middle ice on all entries and this practice will allow you to work on the zone entry concepts you want your team to implement. This practice will challenge your players to think critically about space, positioning, and timing while reinforcing the importance of middle ice control for both offensive and defensive success. Adapt the drills to suit your team's needs and watch your players grow in confidence and capability during zone transitions.

KEY CONCEPTS AND COACHING POINTS:

Offensive Zone Entry:

- Getting Off the Wall:** Forwards should aim to pull defenders to the inside by taking a lateral angle off the wall. This technique creates space on the outside for supporting forwards to underlap or drive wide. By skating the puck instead of relying solely on passing, forwards can disrupt defensive gaps and open up offensive opportunities.
- Gaining Middle Ice:** The primary goal for forwards is to gain middle ice on entries. This creates additional space, forces defenders into challenging positions, and provides more passing and shooting options.
- Support and Lanes:** Forwards without the puck should fill lanes and drive defenders back to create space for the puck carrier. The timing and positioning of supporting forwards are critical for a successful entry.

Defensive Entry Denial:

- Maintaining Tight Gaps:** Defensemen should maintain a tight gap, dictating the movements of attacking forwards and forcing them to the outside. This minimizes scoring opportunities and keeps the play to the perimeter.
- Anticipating Lateral Movement:** Defenders must read and react to lateral movements, ensuring they stay engaged and control the middle ice.

Advantages of Gaining Middle Ice on Zone Entries

Details:

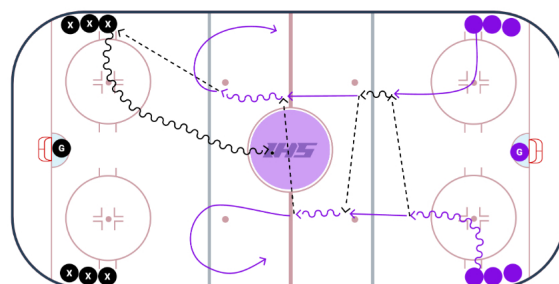
<https://www.icehockeysystems.com/education/team-play/advantages-getting-off-wall-on-entries>

Fight for the Middle

Details:

Overview

The Fight for the Middle drill from [Jason Lammers](#) combines pace, conditioning, and rush attack concepts. The drill emphasizes fighting for middle ice (so you have more passing & skating options than if you were against the boards).



Setup

- Players:** Divide into two groups, on each side of the rink as shown in the diagram.
- Starting Position:** Two players (O's) start with a puck from one side.

Execution

- 1**Puck Exchange:** The first two players pass the puck back and forth as they skate up the ice. By the time they reach the far-side neutral zone face off dot, they pass the puck to the player in line on the other side of the ice (the third player).
- 2**Fight for the Middle:** The third player (newly engaged) must work to get off the wall and fight for the middle lane. Their goal is to drive hard and fast to the center ice dot.
- 3**Kick-Out Pass:** Once the third player reaches the center dot, they make a kick-out pass to one of the original two players.
- 4**3-on-0 Rush:** The group transitions into a 3-on-0 rush against the goalie. Players drive the dots, with the puck carrier deciding to shoot, make a slip pass, or create another offensive play.
- 5**Reset:** Once the play ends, the next two players on the opposite side begin their puck exchange. The drill repeats continuously, alternating sides with quick transitions to maintain a high pace.

Coaching Points

- Offense:**
 - Work hard to fight for the middle of the ice.
 - Use the dot drive to create spacing and offensive options during the rush.
 - If you do not have the puck, work to stay open with your stick on the ice.
- Team Play:**
 - Communicate effectively to ensure smooth puck transitions.
 - Maintain high intensity and fast pace throughout the drill.
- Puck Movement:**
 - Focus on crisp, accurate passes during the breakout and rush.
 - Encourage creative offensive decisions on the zone entry (e.g., deceptive shooting, slip passes, curls, etc).

Variations

- Defense Addition:** Introduce a backchecking defender to simulate game-like pressure. Or a coach / player acting as a defender that applies pressure on the forward trying to achieve middle ice.

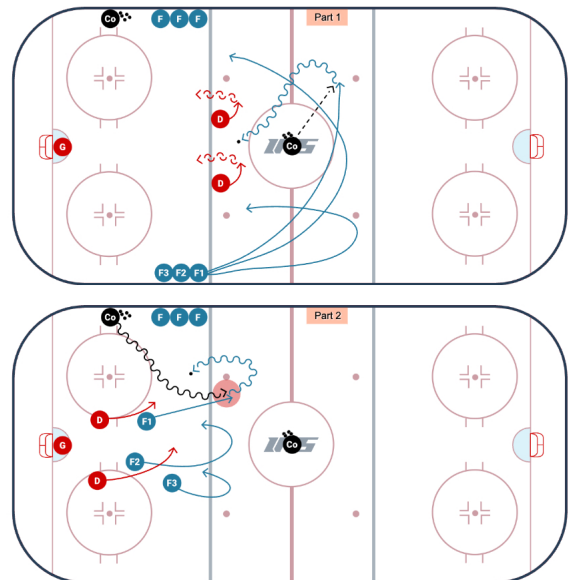
Turn & Burn

Details:

The Turn & Burn drill from Cail MacLean allows teams to practice high tempo 3 on 2's, transitions, gaps, zone entries and tracking.

Setup

- Forwards on the blueline against the boards. Defenders can line up with them as well. To start the drill two defenders should be at the whistle.
- Part 1 - first whistle:
 - A coach places a puck in the neutral zone, and three forwards race to get the puck. They should be aware of each other and communicate so that they can each fill a lane and not all be on one side of the ice.
 - At this time the defenders gap up and decide to skate backwards or surf and angle the play.
 - Forwards work together to get the puck to the middle of the ice, enter the zone on sides, attack the net and try to score. Defenders work to kill the play.
- Part 2 - second whistle:
 - A coach from inside the zone skates hard to the blue line and the 3 forwards that were trying to score, track and strip the puck from the coach, get onside, and work to transition back to offense on a 3 on 2 against the same defenders that are gapping up on them.
 - Play out the 3 on 2 and then the next rep the forwards should come from the other side of the ice.



Coaching Points

- Forwards should work to get the puck to the middle of the ice as they are attacking and entering the zone. They should communicate with each other and fill in lanes to be support options.
- Defenders should work on proper gaps and angles while keeping their sticks on the ice to block passing lanes.

Variations

- Coaches can place the puck in different areas of the ice.

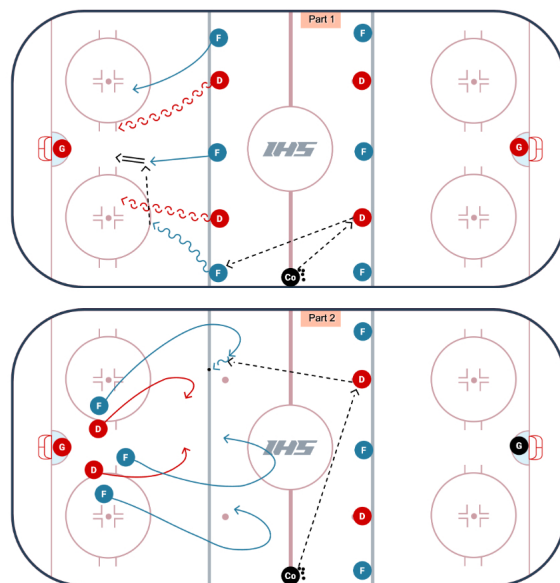
Avery 3 on 2 Drill

Details:

The Avery 3 on 2 Drill from Cail MacLean allows teams to practice 3 on 2's in two different situations along with quick transitions.

Setup

- Line up 3 forwards and 2 defenders on each of the blue lines as shown in the diagram.
- The coach will be against the boards on the center ice line with pucks.
- Part 1 - first whistle:
 - On the whistle, the coach passes the puck to one of the defenseman who quickly passes the puck to ANY of the forwards on the opposite line, which begins a 3 on 2 for all of the players on that blue line. The 3 on 2 plays out.
- Part 2 - second whistle:
 - On the second whistle, the coach passes the puck to the other defenseman on the blue line and all 3 forwards that are in the zone race to be an outlet in the neutral zone, while the two defenders that are in the zone work to get proper gaps on the players. The defenseman with the puck quickly passes the puck to one of the 3 forwards to begin a second 3 on 2. Let the 3 on 2 play out.
 - Replace the players on the blue line with new players and begin the drill again with the other blue line.



Coaching Points

- All players need to be ready to quickly react and start the 3 on 2, no matter who the defenseman passes to.
- Forwards should work to support each other, fill lanes and to get middle ice.
- Defenseman should work on proper gaps and defending the middle ice.

Variations

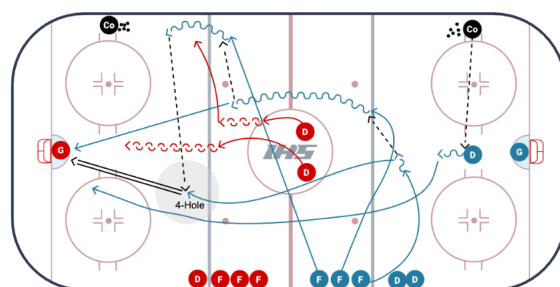
- Coaches can start the play by passing to any defender that they want to, and that defender can pass to any forward on the opposite blue line.

Drop Down 4 on 2

Details:

Objective

To develop players' comfort and skill in interchangeable roles during line rushes, focusing on neutral zone attacks and offensive zone entries. This drill emphasizes a fast, flexible playing style for teams who want to play with pace and be more adaptable on their rushes.



Setup

- Forwards: Positioned along the walls at center ice on both sides.
- Defensemen: One blue defense in their d-zone with 2 red defensive players ready to accept the line rush at center ice
- Coaches: Positioned with pucks near the boards at the hash marks in each zone

Execution

- 1 A blue defenseman starts with the puck, and three blue forwards drop down to connect with the defenseman.
- 2 Forwards vary their routes to simulate different neutral zone scenarios:
 - One or two forwards stretch long to push back defenders.
 - Others stay low or cut through the middle to create diverse rush patterns.
- 3 As the group moves up the ice, players organize into entry roles:
 - Kick-out option: Wide player for puck support.
 - Wide option: Player driving the boards.
 - Four-hole option: Player attacking the middle as a trailer or driving the net.
- 4 Two defenders set up to defend the rush, and the attacking group finishes with a scoring attempt.
- 5 On the whistle, one of the red defenders retrieves a puck from the coach and initiates a counter-rush.
- 6 Three red forwards drop into position to connect with the defenseman, executing their 4-on-2 attack in the opposite direction, with two new defenders stepping in.
- 7 The drill continues back and forth, providing multiple opportunities to work on line rushes and positional interchangeability.

Coaching Points

- Neutral Zone Attack:**
 - Encourage creativity in how forwards drop into the play. Mix low support, long stretches, and middle cuts.
 - Focus on timing and spacing to ensure dynamic entries.
- Offensive Zone Entry:**
 - Ensure players fill the kick-out, wide, and four-hole roles effectively.
 - Defensemen should be comfortable driving the rush and going to the net.
 - Forwards should be comfortable filling traditional defenseman roles, like the four-hole.
- Interchangeability:**
 - All players must adapt to different roles during the rush.
 - Emphasize the importance of maintaining speed and decision-making during position swaps.
- Game-Like Scenarios:**
 - Stress the variability in rush patterns to replicate realistic game situations.
 - Ensure players read and react to each other's positioning to create effective rushes.

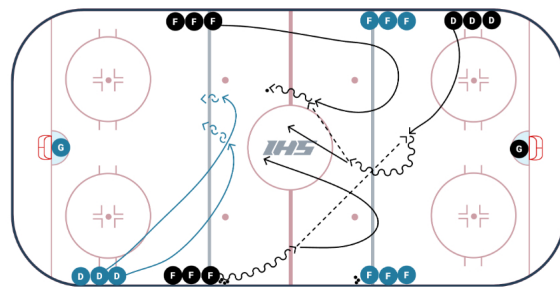
3 on 2 with D Activation

Details:

The 3 on 2 with D Activation from Marty Wilford helps teams practice a high tempo rush attack while activating their defenseman in the rush.

Setup

- Forwards at all 4 blue lines with pucks. Defenseman in opposite corners lined up at the hashmarks.
- On the whistle, 2 forwards skate towards their defenseman in the far zone. One of the forwards has a puck and passes it to the defenseman, who is now activated on the rush.
- The 3 players on the same team swing back up ice and attack 2 defenders who gap up from the hashmarks in the opposite zone.



Coaching Points

- The activated defenseman should look to get up ice quickly and help lead the rush, or fill an open lane.
- The forwards should work to support the puck carrier with their stick on the ice to be an outlet and not get too far up ice.
- The defending defenseman should work to gap up quickly and match their speed with the speed of the rush.

Variations

- Can have the gapping defenseman try to kill the play at the blueline instead of taking the rush.