

# **THE BEAR ACADEMY**

## **Session 5 – Time and Space**



**Excellence in Education and Performance**

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# QUOTATION

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*If you can define the hockey concept of “Time and Space” with one word, what would it be? The answers are;*

- 1) DISTANCE or;*
- 2) SEPERATION or;*
- 3) GAP.*

*Offense wants to create “Time and Space” while Defense wants to shrink it.*



# WHAT'S THE CONFLICT?

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Offensive skaters want distance to defenders. Defenders do not want distance to attackers. All basic defensive tactics are based on making it difficult for the attackers to control the puck, especially into dangerous areas such as the slot or the middle of the ice in general. They all try to make the options fewer and the area to make decisions smaller for the attackers.

Attacking players try to make it difficult for defenders to take away their ability to receive a puck, change lanes, cut to the middle, gain a dangerous angle on the net, change direction of the puck.

Defense wants the puck to the outside of the ice, to move as few times as possible between attacking players and to be predictable (north to south hockey, or train track hockey). They also want to stay as close to attacking players (coverage) as possible.

Attacking skaters want to change direction and speed of the puck a lot, change lanes a lot, pass the puck a lot and spread the defense out a lot (break away from coverage).

Time and space is the key ingredient when understanding the strategy of hockey. Attacking teams want more, defending teams want less. Depending on the strengths of our team, and the weakness of the opponent, various strategies allow to expose opponents more and strengthen our team more. This also changes within the game as coaches try to break the strategy of one another, especially the older the players get.



# HOW TO CREATE TIME AND SPACE

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## **With The Puck**

- 1) Speeding up or Slowing Down (tempo-change) to create separation.
- 2) Changing Direction

Combine the two above and you have a “Double Whammy” Time and Space creator. Add deception and peripheral awareness and you got yourself a very dangerous team that is impossible to defend.

## **Without The Puck**

- 1) Draw opponents away from the puck carrier (depth or width) by speeding up or slowing down (tempo-change).
- 2) Supporting laterally (criss-cross + providing drop option). The steeper the angle on lateral “cuts” before catching a pass will create more space (distance) for you to receive the puck. It is especially effective to skate outwards to draw the Defense apart before cutting in to catch the puck. The worst thing you can do is to skate straight into a defender unless that is absolutely your only option. Remember, even a foot or two of extra distance is a big deal. That is all you get at the pro-level.

## **Conclusion:**

Time and Space comes down to the ability of a line to create change in direction and speed AS A UNIT!.

- 1) Before it happens = Anticipate and communicate
- 2) While it happens = Make one decision at a time (3 seconds at least) and make it clear (don't confuse your line mates), Timing!!
- 3) After it happens = Stay with the play (expect to get the puck back after a pass)

# OFFENSIVE ZONE TIME AND SPACE

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## Separation

You will hear coaches talk about “separation” which applies to the puck-carrier creating distance from opponents. This could happen in any zone but is mostly used when talking about players in the offensive zone since that is where the puck carriers are pressure the most.

Key elements to separation BY YOURSELF (i.e. with the puck) are a) Three steps hockey, 2) Agility, 3) Acceleration and the magic combination of 4) change in direction/speed.

- **Three Steps Hockey** – The first three steps generate a lot of separation. If you turn, stop, cut to the middle or battle a 50/50 puck, three steps out of either situation is key to gaining new passing lanes or the ability to penetrate the middle of the offensive zone. This will give you separation. Remember that it takes the defense about 3 seconds to recover from a mistake on average so learn to act quickly without taking chances (i.e. heads up hockey).
- **Agility** – Being an agile skater allows you to move around small areas with ease and without losing speed, balance or puck-control. This must be combined with heads-up-hockey (awareness) to allow you to actually use your agility to gain an advantage. Agility refers to stops-and-go’s, hard turns, skate fakes, pivots, tempo changes, changes in direction. This will give you separation.
- **Acceleration** – Allows you to gain top speed quickly via footwork and aggressive skating, especially after an agile move (see agility above). This will give you separation.
- **Change in direction and/or speed.** This is the most difficult combination to defend. For example, skating slow down the side then moving the puck quickly to the inside and cutting hard to the middle with a tempo change allows both these elements to happen at once. You can also decelerate or include fakes in the process to make it even more difficult to defend. This will give you separation.

# OFFENSIVE ZONE TIME AND SPACE

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## Separation

On the previous slide, we talked about separation by yourself (i.e. while retaining the puck on your own). Now we will introduce time and space UTILIZING TEAMMATES which is where the game is going to predominantly depend on the older you get.

Key elements are heads-up-hockey (vision, awareness, scanning the ice), passing, receiving, timing, lane creation, criss-crosses, reverse plays, drop passes.

- The most effective, and easy, way to create time and space in the offensive zone is to utilize criss-cross plays. At the time your teammate supports you with a criss-cross option, you can simply drop the puck to create a change in speed and direction. You can also fake the drop and potentially throw off opponents that way.
- Reverse plays (where the receiver takes the puck off a board pass in a different direction) are very effective when opponents are pressuring hard man-to-man.
- Cycling the puck combined with puck protection is a good way to sustain pressure but its predictable and easy to defend. Once you throw in a reverse play or outside drop or change in direction with the puck, the cycle becomes a lot more dangerous.
- Drop passes allow for the defense to slow down and expose a weakness but ONLY if the player dropping the puck remains a viable option. It is common to drop the puck and start watching what happens when, in fact, you usually become the best option to pass back to.
- Players must be able to skate with, and without, the puck constantly scanning the ice to find weaknesses of the opponent. You must think ahead of the game to see where simple separation opportunities exist and make the right decision at the right time.

# NEUTRAL ZONE TIME AND SPACE

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## Gap

Coaches generally refer to time and space in the neutral zone as GAP. Especially referring to the defense covering the players within reasonable and controllable distance. For the opponents, gap control is a bad thing and you must learn to break out of a controlled gap by the defenseman.

Key elements to doing so is to a) switch lanes, b) tempo changes, c) puck movement, d) criss cross plays.

For the defense, gap control will allow you to control the attack. You want to avoid having the opponent change lanes and pass the puck with ease between the three neutral zone lanes. By having a great gap control, you are essentially taking away time and space. If it is an odd-man situation, try to cover the passing lane first, then migrate towards your position. Your position depends on whether you are defending a 2 on 1 (where your position reference is the center lane) or a 3 on 2, or 2 on 2 (where your position reference is inside of the imaginary lines segregating the neutral zone lanes by the outside face-off dots).

Try to remember the rule of defending attackers to the outside shoulder by 45 degrees and within 1 to 2 stick-lengths (distance depends on your ability to keep up with the attacking players. Slower defenders must cushion and move to the middle more than faster defenders).

Remember that attackers retaining the puck without passing is much slower than having the puck moving from one attacker to the next. More puck retention by the attackers is good for the defense and bad for the offense as it allows back checkers to have a much better chance skating back to help and it is easier to line up with the player each defender is covering. Communication is key both on offense and defense.



# DEFENSIVE ZONE TIME AND SPACE

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As soon as the defending team in the defensive zone win the puck, the entire team is on offense. Various breakout options will allow the team to move the puck up the ice with ease. Time and space is mainly created off the puck (in all zones) so it is important that everyone tries to become a good option to the puck-carrier as soon as possible. Remember that not everything has to be north of the puck-carrier. Utilizing the ice is just as important along the boards as it is to the middle. The more you spread out and the more options the puck-carrier has, the better and faster the attack will be down the ice. It is harder to defend a team that understands this than it is defending a team that a) carries the puck a lot on their own, b) skate all players towards the middle of the ice and c) do not utilize lateral movement or drop passes (towards their own net).

In the end of all of this, the game become simple if you make rules for yourself.

ATTACKERS (creating time and space)

- 1) In the attacking zone, depth and width of the attackers is pivotal. Change in tempo and direction is key (by yourself or via puck movement)
- 2) In the neutral zone, keeping a skater in each lane at all times (preferably with lane changes and/or puck movement happening) is pivotal.
- 3) In the defensive zone, getting open quickly is pivotal.

DEFENDERS (taking away time and space)

- 1) Control your gaps and understand your reference lanes defensively in the neutral zone.
- 2) Keep attackers to the outside, avoid passes, avoid lane changes, anticipate your coverage as much as possible (scan the ice, three steps hockey).
- 3) Learn that stick positions without the puck drive attackers to bad areas and take out lanes. Learn stick positions early and implement it constantly.

\* There many solutions to thousands of situations, making it easy is the hard part.

# WHEN DO YOU WORK ON TIME/SPACE

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Every practice and drill has components of time and space in it. Your fundamental skill (agility, footwork, edge-work, acceleration etc.) combined with your ability to anticipate (vision, awareness both peripherally and plain sight, reading body language) is built over time via repetition. If you just go to a practice and skate the way a coach wants you to, then you don't see the "forest through the trees". Time and space is added as an extra layer BY YOU. Have imagination, understand what is actually taught and you will constantly work on this very important part of the game. I guarantee you that until you start looking at hockey this way, you will never figure it out because you will chase a puck around and you will never win. If you learn time/and space however, the puck will do the work for you and it becomes an ally instead of an unbeatable enemy. This is the separating factor that makes good players great. As a training tool, always ask yourself where the components of time/space come to play within each drill. If you don't have an answer you **SHOULD ASK THE COACH!!!**. If he does not have an answer, find a new coach. Otherwise you will learn how to read but your interpretation will never get to a level it needs to in order for you to play hockey at the "higher levels" (juniors, college, pro).

