

Bustin' out: adding options to your breakout

By Greg Siller

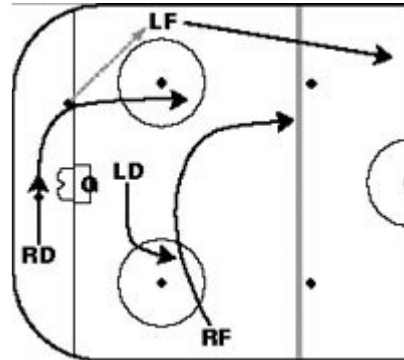


Figure 1

Breakout plays are used by a team to move the puck out of their defensive zone and into an offensive attack. The ability to effectively move the puck out of your own end is important both defensively and offensively. Defensively, it means that you have eliminated the offensive threat from your opponent. Offensively, it means that you have possession of the puck and now have an opportunity to score.

The old saying "The best defense is a good offense" is particularly meaningful in the context of breakouts. Every coach should establish some fundamental breakout plays early in the season and ensure that two, or even three, options are built into each of these plays. The options are critical because on-ice situations vary, and if the options are well-rehearsed, a player will be able to act instinctively when confronted with an unexpected, or less than ideal, situation.

Three Keys to

an Effective Breakout:

Gain control of the puck. The players must not move to their breakout positions until the team has absolute control of the puck. All players need to read, anticipate, and react to know when to drop their defensive coverage and get into position for a breakout. If players move prematurely, they may be leaving their opponents open for a quick scoring opportunity if the opposition gains control of the puck.

Create space. Space is needed for the breakout play to develop, and your players have to create that space. The positioning and movement of the forwards and defensemen depends upon puck position, forechecking intensity, team abilities, and how aggressive, conservative, or creative the coach is with the breakout play. Although many breakouts appear to involve only one or two players in the execution of the play, all players need to assume a role to enhance the likelihood of success.

The perfect pass to an open forward seems most evident—however, the players away from the puck also play a significant role. This point reflects the necessity for team play during a breakout. By creating space as a team, you create options for the team.

Maintain puck control. No turnover is more dangerous than one that occurs in your defensive zone. The first pass must be accurate. If it isn't, the receiver should do whatever possible to gain control of the puck. It is essential that all receivers control the puck after receiving a pass.

Breakout Options

The strong side breakout is the most fundamental breakout play in hockey. However, by adding a few options to this play (or any other breakout play), it becomes much more than just fundamental. The objective of the strong side breakout is to move the puck up the playing surface using the strong side forward (the forward that is on the side of the playing surface that the puck is on). The advantage of the strong side breakout is that it is generally low risk.

In Figure 1, RD gains control of the puck (key #1) deep in the defensive zone, reads that there is minimal coverage on the left side of the playing surface, and skates behind the net to the left side. As he moves out from behind the net, he passes the puck to LF. This first pass, as mentioned above, is the most critical one in the breakout (key #3).

Figure 1:

Strong Side 4-Player Breakout

Once LF has control of the puck, the other players continue to contribute to the breakout play by creating space and providing various options (this is key #2). LF now has three options; skate with the puck, pass it, or dump it (as a last resort). Each of these options requires teammates to execute specific movement and positioning as shown in Table 1.

Note that 5-Player Breakout Options are similar to 4-Player Options, but in a 5-Player scheme the center can fill the void vacated by RF.

Adding options to your breakout plays will add depth to your playbook, and an enhanced ability to succeed in their execution—no matter what the opposition does to counter your play. |

Greg Siller, founder of Pro Learning Systems and author of Roller Hockey Skills and Strategies for Winning On Wheels, has 25 years of ice and roller hockey experience.