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The Left Wing Lock

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The left wing lock is a controlled forechecking system that was popularized by the Detroit Redwings in the late 1990's. Before I get into the details of this system, it is important to note that there are a few variations of the Left Wing Lock. Of course, a coaching staff should modify any system they feel will better compliment the strengths of the team.

The left wing lock looks like a basic 2-3 formation, where, once puck possession changes in the neutral zone or offensive zone, the center and right wing forecheck aggressively, and the left wing moves back in line (or top of the circles) with the two defensemen to form a three man wall at the blue line. Generally, the left wing is responsible for the left lane, the left defenseman is responsible for the middle lane, and the right defenseman is responsible for the right lane at the blue line. This tactic helps to avoid odd man rushes by having 3 players back at all times.

The Basic Set-Up of the Left Wing Lock (as soon as the puck is turned over in the neutral zone or offensive zone):

- The center and right wing forecheck the puck aggressively, forcing the opposition towards the left side of the ice, and as much as possible take away the middle of the ice by forcing the opposition to use the boards.
- The left wing moves back and acts as a third defenseman, protecting the left lane (either at the blue line or the top of the circles), and being aggressive and ready to pinch if the opposition uses the boards to chip or clear the puck away.
- The left defenseman protects the mid lane (cheating towards his left), keeping his feet moving, ready to react to a successful breakout by the opposition.
- The right defenseman protects the right lane, keeping feet moving, ready to react to a successful breakout by the opposition. Teams vary whether they want their right defenseman to be aggressive or not if puck is rimmed along the right boards. A coaching staff often tweaks the system to fit to the strength of the team.
- Players should maintain this defense until you succeed in getting back possession of the puck, or until the opposition is successful with their breakout (main responsibility for three players back at the blue line is to protect their own lane, do not break the wall)

For the left wing lock to be successful, the following needs to occur:

- 1) the forecheckers must steer the play to the left boards (oppositions right)
- 2) The defensive team will need to have a power advantage over the opposition. Part of this advantage is a result of there being more left handed shooters in the NHL (and youth hockey) than right handed shooters. So if the puck is dumped into the left corner, the opponents will have their right defenseman and right wing on the forehand but their center will probably be on his backhand (if they are all fighting for a loose puck in the corner). On the contrary, the defensive team will have their center, left wing, and left defenseman on their forehand.
- 3) The center needs to prevent any outlet pass through the slot area, forcing the opposition to use the boards on the left side, where the defenders left wing and left defenseman are waiting to intercept the puck. If the puck is chipped off the boards and intercepted by the left wing or left defenseman, and you are pressured immediately, it is recommended to re-dump the puck into the left corner, and begin to battle again. The longer you battle in your opponents end, the less time they are spending in your zone. At the same time you can take advantage of a mistake by your opponent for a direct scoring chance on net.

Although the 'lock' was made famous by the Detroit Red Wings and has been used to great success in their

Stanley Cup runs in the past decade, they are not credited with inventing it. It is widely believed that the lock was invented in Czechoslovakia to work against the dominant Soviet teams of the 1970s.

How to beat the left wing lock:

Teams needed to work on different breakout strategies in order to penetrate through the left wing lock. Here are some strategies that teams use:

- Have very mobile and good skating defenseman that can quickly retrieve the puck and begin the breakout as quickly as possible.

- Focus the breakout towards your opponent's right side, where you will now gain the advantage in the "forehand vs. backhand" theory, as well as disrupt the opponent's set-up formation.

- With the removal of the red line in recent years, you can have the off side winger cheat and leave the defensive zone. This will cause the defensive wall at the blue line to break as one of the defenseman will come out in the neutral zone with you. This is a very aggressive strategy but will keep your opponents guessing at all times.

I once read somewhere where a coach can teach the left wing lock system to his team in a 30 second time-out. Perfecting it, off course, is a different story!

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