

Figure 1

Playing defense in your defense zone (Part 3 of 3)

By Greg Siller

Last month, I covered techniques for playing defense in the neutral zone (neutral zone trap). In this Chalk Talk, I am presenting techniques to help your team play defense at home (in your defensive zone).

The primary role of a team in their defensive zone is to prevent the opponents from scoring goals. The defensive team should always favor protecting the middle of the defensive playing surface, especially the slot area, and approach scrambles for the puck from this defensive side; pressuring from the inside out.

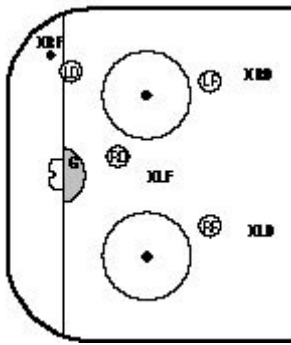
Zone defense

The Zone defense is used as a basic defensive zone strategy when the opponents are not using an aggressive offensive attack. It is the best strategy to teach beginning hockey players because of its basic design and set of responsibilities.

Figure 1 shows the three zones used by both teams: the left-, central- and right-defensive zones. The zone defense utilizes the defensive players in a box-like formation to cover the opponents with the objective of gaining control of the puck or at least neutralizing the opponents attack.

One disadvantage of the zone defense strategy occurs when more than two opponents converge into one location within a zone. This can cause confusion on the part of the defense regarding coverage of the extra opponent. Communication is essential during those situations.

In Figure 2, the defensive team (circled players plus the goaltender) positions one forward (LF) and one defenseman (LD) on the strong side (left zone in this example), the second forward (RF) is placed on the weak side (right zone), and the second defenseman (RD) is placed in the central zone in the slot. The defensive team moves quickly in the zones to cover, control, and pressure their counterparts.



When the puck is deep in the defensive zone and controlled by XRF (Figure 2), the defensive team should cover players in the slot at the expense of the point men. If XRF begins to skate with the puck, LD moves with him, angling him toward the boards. If XRF passes the puck, both the LD and the corresponding defender maneuver to intercept the pass while the corresponding defender covers the opponent. If XRF passes the puck behind the net (open area pass) to XLF, LD moves to the central defensive zone while RD controls XLF and gains control of the puck. If XRF takes a shot, RD covers XLF, making sure that the goaltender is not being screened, and secures or clears any rebounds.

Man-to-man defense

Figure 2

Man-to-man defense is best used when your team is fast and agile and can keep up with the opponents. The man-to-man approach is essentially a series of one-on-one battles with the objective of gaining control of the puck by preventing the opposition from creating any odd-man-attacks (i.e., two-on-ones). When executed perfectly, man-to-man defense is one of the most aggravating styles of defense that a team can play. Problems occur when any of the defensive players cannot keep up with the opponent, but even if the other team's puck carrier beats the man covering him, your goaltender should only have to stop one shot because all the other players will be covered.

In Figure 3, the defensive players (4-on-4 roller hockey example) position themselves in proximity to their counterparts. If the puck carrier (XRD) begins to skate with the puck, LF moves with him, angling him toward the boards (Figure 3). If XRD passes the puck directly to one of the attackers, both LF and the corresponding defender maneuver to intercept the pass while the corresponding defender pressures the opponent. If XRD passes the puck to the lower left corner (open area pass) to XLF, RD moves to control XLF and gain control of the puck while the other three defenders read the play and react by moving with their coverage. If XRD takes a shot, LF maneuvers to block the shot while RD covers XLF, making sure that the goaltender is not being screened, and helps secure or clear any rebounds.

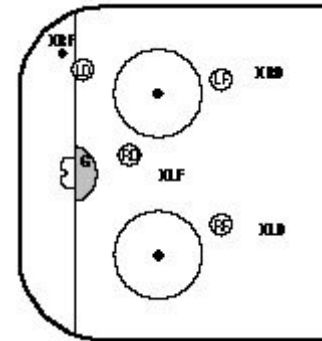


Figure 3

The defensive team should think defense first and offense only when they have full control of the puck!

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