



Successful play up front

By Bob Cunningham

Winger Pat Falloon is constantly in search of a new and better angle to playing his forward position. Literally.

A 13-year veteran of the NHL, and San Jose's top pick (second overall) in the 1990 NHL Entry Draft, believes that the key to successful play up front starts with creating good forechecks in an effort to force turnovers. To create good forechecks, he says, you must get good angles.

The same holds true in his own end, where Falloon is also conscious of angles. For example, it helps to know in advance what angle an opposing forward might take in his pursuit of the play.

"Even though I'm a forward, which is generally thought of on offense more than defense, a big part of my responsibility out there is puck protection," says native of Foxwarren, Manitoba. "The best way to accomplish that is not only to make sure you're in the right position, but to keep track of where everyone else is on the ice."

It surely helps that Falloon possesses a lot of natural ability as well as a frame—5'11" and 200 pounds—built to compete in the trenches. But he maintains that technique and the mental aspects are equally, if not more, important than his physical gifts.

"You do your best to always think ahead, to anticipate the next sequence of events," Falloon explains. "Really, that's how the best scoring opportunities are produced."

At home on the rush

An attacker's favorite play, the rush, is where Falloon is most at home. Again, the angles are vital. Falloon says that it's best to reach the offensive zone at one angle, but come into the actual shot-taking range at another, giving the defense and goaltender less of an opportunity to anticipate, react and adjust.

"Those are the most critical times throughout a game; that and power plays," Falloon says. "Because that's when most of a game's scoring is supposed to happen. It's real important to be able to work effectively with your teammates, all of the time of course, but especially in those situations. That makes or breaks you."

But when it comes to working the power play, you can change your focus even more.

"It's a privilege to be on the power play," he said. "The best chance is to get the puck on the wide side, get it in deep and have a guy driving to the net. You get good chances that way, and there are also rebounds even if you miss the shot because if it works properly, you're shooting at close range."

Many of those focused scoring chances come off forced turnovers.

"I've been able to create quite a few turnovers in the offensive end," he says.

And since what works at one end also works at the other, Falloon says he has made it a priority to keep the puck under control.

Bob Cunningham is a Southern California-based freelance writer who contributes to several sports publications throughout the U.S. and Canada.