

Figures 1 and 2

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Three simple team systems

By Rick Trimble and Ken Biedzynski

There are three commonly used defensive systems; the 2-1-2, the center support system, and the 1-2-2. We first discuss each player's role within these three models, then explain the systems themselves. Again, players operating within any system must not only know where they must be but also why they are positioned where they are and what they are expected to do in the context of that role. Following are the three systems.

Defend Home Plate: Colgate University employs this concept and they ask their players to defend the area shaded in Figure 1. Note that it resembles a home plate in baseball.

Three Tiers to the Defensive Zone: As is illustrated in Figure 2, Tier I extends from the top of the face-off circles to the blue line. Defensemen must force the puck carrier somewhere in this tier or they will be guilty of "backing in" on their goaltender. Back checking forwards must also be aware of picking up their checks in this zone. Tier II is a shooting zone and players must approach defense in this tier with a sense of deeper urgency. Tier III calls for control of the corners and posts. Some coaches do not allow their defensemen to

chase puck carriers behind their own net while others may stress this. It's your call and it may be partly dictated by game situations.

Defend Your Quadrant: Many coaches prefer to break their defensive zone into four quadrants for the purposes of team defense. This will be elaborated on in the following systems play.

The 2-1-2 system

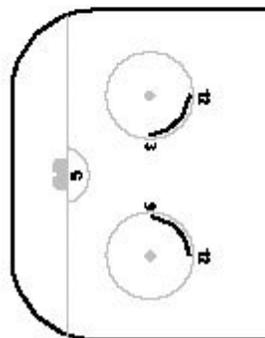
Divide the defensive zone into four sectors as shown in Figure 3. In simple terms, the wings take Sectors A and B, the defensemen C and D, and the center defends the cross hairs. Some coaches prefer an overlap of the wing/defensemen sector along the boards so as to exert more pressure on a puck carrier there. Too many inexperienced coaches tell their wingers to "cover the point." And the player, responding in good faith, will station himself, cone-like, in front of the point man.

The best-kept secret of this system is what we call "3 o'clock/9 o'clock." Thus, wings should envision the face-off circles as the face of a clock. This theory is illustrated in Figure 4. Note the shading in this diagram. Wings should be sure to place themselves along the perimeter of the circle so that they can pulsate out to attack the point, clear rebounds and defend against the dot shot. Have your centerman pick up any loose traffic in the high slot and have your defensemen take care of things down low.



Center support system

This system begins with the quadrant notion described above, but it allows for greater freedom for the centerman. He is encouraged to chase the puck and attack in any threatened sector. To be sure, this system will result in two defenders on a puck carrier and turnovers are a benefit, but beware that it does leave the high slot open and vulnerable. The center support system is illustrated in Figure 5.



The 1-2-2 system

Good skating centermen are needed to make this system work since they must cover both pointmen. They must prevent the pass across the points and they should try to force the puck carrying pointman down boards and into a waiting winger. This system is illustrated in Figure 6. In simple terms, the center defends Tier I while the wings take Tier II and the defensemen take Tier III. The advantages are you will have a 4-on-3 down low and if you coach a youth team whose opponents seem to forget that pointmen exist, then you have not wasted defenders on needless coverage. Note the center's triangular alignment. However, realize that good point play can drive you out of this system.

Figure 3 and 4

In sum, whatever system you choose to employ is fine as long as your players understand it conceptually and know their roles. As New Jersey Devils Coach Jacques Lemaire said, "Teach defense first and the offense will take care of itself." You can also refer to *Winning Hockey: Systems Play in all Three Zones* by the late Bob Cielo for a more exhaustive discussion of these defensive concepts.

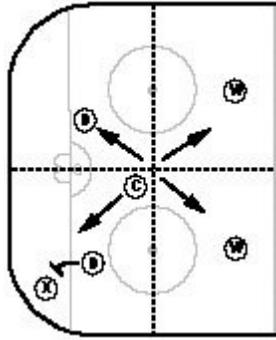


Figure 5

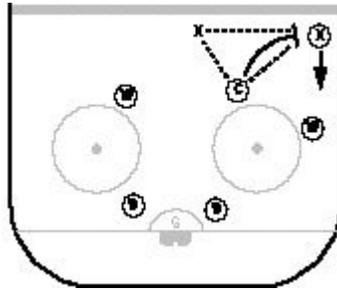


Figure 6

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