

How to block shots

By Tony DiRito



This defensive move not only distracts the shooter but shrinks the area the goal has to defend. ©BBS

Both defensemen and forwards should know how to block shots and do so on a regular basis. With a properly-executed shot block, you can avoid injury while keeping the puck from reaching your goalie.

Blocking shots is an integral part of your overall defensive strategy. As with any other hockey skill, blocking takes practice and a certain level of confidence to perform correctly. Once you have the knowledge, you can block shots without much fear of injury from a flying puck.

The basic methods of blocking the puck are: with the body in a standing position, with the legs in a sliding position, or by going down and sliding on your knees, or even one knee.

The way you set up to block a shot is dependent on the type of shot the shooter is taking. For instance, you want to take a different approach from an opposing defenseman at the blue line compared to a forward racing down the boards. In this article I will discuss shot-blocking basics, along with principles to apply in game situations.

Shot Blocking Basics

The key to blocking shots is A) getting as close to the shooter as possible without taking yourself out of the play; B) positioning your shins; and C) collecting rebounds with the arms and body.

The closer you are to the shooter, the safer it is to block the puck.

Your proximity also cuts down the angle (like a goalie), preventing the puck from sailing over your outstretched body, or to the left or right of you in a standing position.

Moving towards the shooter should be a controlled motion so you don't slide past. If you slide past, you have taken yourself out of the play and allowed a clear shot.

In order to properly and safely block a shot you must keep your legs pointed towards the puck, remembering to tuck your arms and stack your legs. The ideal place to absorb the power of the shot is in your legs due to the shin guard protection.

Your objective, once you decide to block the puck is to not allow it to get past you. You must act quickly, but don't commit too early because this will allow the opponent to rethink his or her decision.

Another key to shot blocking is recovery time, which means the speed in which you regain control of your body and rejoin the play. To improve your recovery time you should concentrate on getting up and down quickly. Stay focused on your on-ice positioning as well as the puck location.

Good shot blocking should result in the deflection of the puck away from your net either in a corner or out of your defensive zone altogether.

Sliding Block to the Point

When an opposing player is attempting a shot from the point, you must quickly close the gap between you and that player in a way that cuts off shooting and passing angles toward your goal.

While approaching, you must be in total control of your body so you can stop if needed or go down quickly to block the shot or pass.

Once you go down, you should be aiming your slide (your legs) at your opponent's stick blade, keeping your head safely pointed toward the boards to prevent head or neck injury.

By sliding at your opponent's stick you are also taking away options to pass or drag the puck around you. This is a way to force your opponent to shoot or simply dump the puck into the corner.

A few key points to keep in mind: avoid rushing your decision, be aware of your position on the ice, don't get sucked into chasing the puck around your zone. Finally, contain the puck either in your pads or deflect it safely out of your zone.

On-Coming Shooters

Blocking shots taken by fast-moving attackers are the most difficult because your decision to block the puck must be quick and accurate. Again, don't attempt to block the puck too early since it could result in your opponent getting past you.

Use your stick to poke check at the puck so you force your opponent to be aware of your presence. This will act as your first line of defense. The objective is to constantly force your opponent toward the boards because this will give you a better chance to block and decrease the scoring percentage.

Once you have forced your opponent wide, the second objective is to time your slide effectively and properly. To ensure this you slide where your opponent is heading, not where they were.

By this I mean drop your outside leg, the one furthest from your opponent, to the ice first allowing the other leg to stack on top of it. The direction of your slide should be at a backward angle toward your opponent's stick blade, so you cut off any chance for a change of direction or pass.

Sometimes you are forced to block the shot simply by dropping to your knees and facing your opponent.

This type of shot blocking should be performed as close to the shooter as possible because you are absorbing the puck force. By staying close to your opponent you are eliminating the chance for the puck to gain significant velocity and power.

Odd-Man Rushes

When you are faced with a situation of either a two-on-one or possibly a three-on-two, you should be focused on blocking the pass or shot.

Once you have decided to block the puck you must be aware of where the rest of the opponents are on the ice so you're cutting off all angles.

To ensure your opponent won't fake the shot and simply pass to a teammate, you should follow the same blocking rules as before, but this time keep an outstretched arm between the opponent taking the shot and their teammate.

This will allow you to block the pass if it is attempted with your arm, and put more pressure on the shooter to shoot. In order to perform this effectively you should be closer to the person shooting the puck and make sure your arm is flat on the ice by keeping your head tilted on the shoulder. This will ultimately force your arm to be flat and eliminate the chance of the puck to slide underneath your outstretched body.

Practice Makes Perfect

To become confident with blocking shots, you should work in a progression. Start by gaining the proper form and techniques without even facing shots.

Secondly, try a tennis ball or street hockey puck until you feel you have the right technique, then progress into hockey pucks and facing real shots.

I have provided many examples of situations and a few tips that will help you begin practicing your technique. Once you have eliminated the fear of blocking, you will notice a skill increase and you'll be blocking shots more effectively — much to your goalie's delight.

Based in Plymouth, MA, Tony DiRito is the national director of New England Edge Hockey Clinics, which trains amateur ice hockey players throughout North America.