

A PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING THE COMPLETE PLAYER

These hockey-playing principles contain reads and habits that make it possible to develop players who have skill and also understand how to play the game in all of the 4 game-situation playing roles, as well as offensive, defensive and loose-puck situations.

Even though hockey is a team sport, it is individuals who play the game. Each player needs to have the proper information about the game principles in order to solve the frequently changing game situations on both offense and defence.

TEAM PLAY – STARTING TO READ THE GAME

When playing the Game-Situation Roles, **reading and reacting are the keys**. This approach is strengthened by playing a lot of small games and creating game-like situations. This philosophy, following the game principles, simplifies all the game strategies.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE COACH

The old, one-way coaching and communication style, in which the coach taught players what to do and what not to do, became a **coach's game**, with a lot of predictability and little creativity. **It did not provide much room for the player's natural reaction to game situations.**

In hockey, set patterns are needed to a certain extent, but by following **the principles of Read and React** (in this case, to the 0-1-2 Team Situations and to the 1-2-3-4 Playing Role Situations) the players learn to play the game efficiently and effectively. In other words, players **learn the game** faster and better and **learn to be more creative** in the process. They **understand the game** better.

Learning to play hockey is no different than learning anything else, whether learning mathematics or learning to play a musical instrument. In mathematics, there are right and wrong answers. In a hockey game, the answer and the outcome of the training or the game action(s) can be evaluated by **whether or not the puck is in the net.**

When the coach starts to follow the **Learn by Doing** principle it changes the coach's role. In the new role the coach allows **the game and the contest to take care of learning**. The result is winning more and losing less. When this happens, the coach's most important task is to **organize and manage the learning process**. Coaches must now create activities in which the players can learn from game-like situations. Coaches must ask the question, **"How do I get the players to solve problems**

by themselves?”

Playing Principles – Team Play

The great Russian coach and hockey teacher, **Vladimir Yursinow**, (over 60 of his players play in NHL) is a great student of the game. Learning from his experience, his coaching today is vastly different than it was in the past.

As a young coach he wanted to force the players to do things HIS way. Today **he wants the players to think for themselves and solve the problems.** Now, when he teaches the power play, he simply names 2 power-play units and **makes them find their own scoring solutions.** Only when the players want him to help does he show them some variations for solving the problem. He states “My role is just to decide which one of these two power plays is better. Similar to when I chose the girl I liked the most and asked her to be my wife.”

The coach or teacher is more and more **an information resource**, and less the star of the practice.

The answers to “**why**”, and “**how**”, become important, rather than the traditional “**what**”.

A knowledgeable coach looks for the best drills or games to manage the learning process, then makes the players work for themselves, **understanding why they must do certain things to be effective.**

This method motivates the players to learn more and provides an environment in which they learn faster. Additionally, and more importantly, it teaches **life skills that can be applied outside of the rink, in daily life.**

NATURAL PROGRESSION

Let’s read the game as a coach through the 4 game-situation roles. Reading the game always starts by reacting to the continuous loose-puck situations (0-game). This creates a 1-on-1 situation with game-situation playing roles 1 and 3 (1-3 game).

When this 1-on-1 is created, reading and reacting becomes an issue. * Hypothetically, if there was no support the game situation would remain 1-on-1.

*** The speed at which the 4 teammates without the puck react** in their offensive and defensive game-situation playing roles, **to give support** to their teammates in roles 1 and 3, is the decisive factor in a team’s success in any team sport.

A 1-on-1 becomes 2-on-1, or 1-on-2, or 2-on-2 depending on **how the closest supporting teammates react.** In other words, the game can be seen as a continuous **series of small games within the game.**

There are battles in small areas all over the ice, both on offence and defence, **to gain superiority** – trying **to outnumber** the opponent in an area or **regain** an even-number play situation.

In reading the small game, the players who are not involved **“in”** the small game are reading the game **“out”** of this situation from their position, and are ready to be part of a similar **“in”** game while their teammates now take on the role of playing away from the puck.

The key is to understand **the difference between** being in the battle for the puck (**game-situation roles 1 and 3**) and supporting the puck (**game-situation roles 2 and 4**). In practice it means triangles **all over the ice**. The rule is that if the player is **not playing** in those 2 immediate game-situation roles, he must support from an area away from the puck and **read and be aware of how many teammates or opponents he sees**.

The third player is in the key position to read the game (grey circle). If there are 2 attackers, then the closest offensive player should support to outnumber the opponents **3-on-2**, or the closest defender to a **2-on-3** situation should support to gain an even number, **3-on-3**, situation with the opponent.

The other 2 players on each team **farthest from the puck** should **see all their teammates** and support from a distance: on offense by backing up the attack; on defense **by covering a zone while still being responsible for 1 opponent who then covers from the defensive side**.

Playing Principles – Team Play

THE GAME

The game consists of the combined movements of the puck and the players who **share the simple objective of scoring and preventing the other team from scoring**. All of the player's actions should be focused on these simple objectives.

To achieve their objective, the offensive players try **to get into the slot for a shot** while the defensive players **prevent them from shooting from the slot**. The offensive team has the **puck as an extra tool**. If used properly it is the **fastest thing on the ice** and can give the attackers an advantage. If the puck is **carried too much**, then **the advantage is lost**; defenders can skate faster without the puck than the player with the puck can skate. **Puck control is the best defense** but it requires good individual skills and team cooperation. Carrying the puck to free ice and then passing to open teammates are the tools for puck control. Any development program must focus on these skills.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT PLAY

Hockey is now more of a transition and **puck-position** game than a **puck possession**

game. The defenders pressure the puck all over the ice to create turnovers, followed by quick attacks that can trap the players on the team that just lost the puck, and create a numerical advantage.

Playing decisions should be based on **“What happens next”**. Will there be a rebound, a chance for a second play, or what happens if the other team gets the puck?

To prevent losing the puck and being outnumbered, the rule for the offensive team is: **Only lose possession of the puck in areas from where you can defend without getting outnumbered.**

Losing the puck outside the big ice (the middle lane between the dots) is not as dangerous because the players have time to protect the middle and get on the defensive side between the puck and the net.

The most dangerous play is to lose the puck in an area that creates the situation that the puck-carrier's team is going one way and most of the team that just lost the puck is going the other way. This creates outnumbered situations and usually results in a good scoring chance. The rule is: **“Don't try to beat a player 1-on-1 if you are in a high-risk area.”** Get the puck in deep on the attack, regroup or get it over the blue line if you are on a breakout.

The most dangerous areas to turn the puck over are: **in front of your own net, from the defensive blue line to the top of the slot; on either side of the offensive blueline.** Shooting the puck to an opponent at the far blue line is a better play than losing it just inside the blue line. At least the puck is far from your net and all 5 players are in a strong defensive position. The team that can make the transition from defense to offense the quickest usually wins the game. So the key concept in team play is to: **“Attack so that if you lose the puck you are in a good position to defend and defend so that you can attack quickly on a turnover.”**

This means that the players must move up and down the ice as a compact unit in order to give quick support. **Close support allows short passes** and quick counterattacks that create 2-on-1s and attacking triangles.

TEAM PLAY STARTS FROM 1-ON-1 CONTESTS

The game consists of a **series of different movements of the puck and the players.** The main learner is not the team but rather **each individual player.** The better skilled a player is, the better that player can use his/her skills **in helping** the team achieve improved game results. All winning tactics are still based on this truth. **“It is the individuals who make the difference.”**

Playing Principles – Team Play

WHAT A 1-ON-1 GAME CAN TEACH

It is so much easier to destroy than to build. The systems based on defence can achieve occasional wins, but in the long run they will not win championships. When winning the game is the only thing on the coach's mind, he/she can be tempted **to play a simple defensive game**. Sometimes, if a team is unskilled, it is the only way to win. However, in any reasonable, long-term development program the emphasis should be **based on the development of puck-control skills**.

Knowledgeable coaches all understand that it takes more time to develop the skills to control the puck, i.e., stickhandling, passing and shooting, than the time it takes to just learn to play team defence.

Modern high-speed training does not just mean skating fast, but more the ability **of the whole unit to read and react**, to get the fastest object on ice, the puck, to do the work.

In a game, the difference between the time a team spends on offence and defence is the key to success. The difference comes from reacting to a loose puck situation (Game Phases 0).

The game has 3 playing phases: loose puck (0), offence (1), defence (2). In an average game, the team spends 30% of the time battling for loose pucks (0), 35% of the time playing with the puck (1) and 35% of the time playing without the puck (2). If a team can win more loose pucks than its opponent, the team spends more time on offence and has a greater opportunity to score.

WHAT ELSE 1-ON-1 TEACHES

Besides teaching the Game-Situation Roles 1 and 3, the 1-on-1 using a D2 crossice game, teaches the most important part of the game: **the transition from defence to offence and from offence to defence**.

The 1-on-1 also teaches the best and most effective way to score. The player must first defend, win the puck and then rush by the opponent. This creates a breakaway **because the original attacker lost defensive-side positioning**. From the reading point of view, it teaches the defender to **NOT** over commit and lose the defensive-side; it teaches the attacker to go to the net hard.

A 1-on-1 cross-ice game not only teaches the game but will also readily identify **the players' personal strengths and weaknesses**, teaching them the meaning and the necessity of the skill drills and games to improve his/her skill development.

1-ON-1 COMPETITION AS A LEARNING TOOL

Properly understood, competition and contests are the best tools to get players to concentrate on what they are doing.

Winning and losing is part of the game. It also teaches honesty. No excuses. However, **winning does not make the winning player a better person.** The winner was just better – this game, this time.

In a majority of cases, losing will motivate a player to listen as the coach explains that the defender must practice skating backwards, or that the attacking forward should work on puck-handling or puck-protection skills.

Individual or group contests can be used during practice as one way to get the players to focus on the essentials. 1 game or contest that can be used is to give points to the players, such as 2 points for a rebound goal

Another example is a simple 2-on-0 scoring contest, allowing the players a maximum of 2 passes. This will force the playing pairs to discover whether 1 pass, 2 passes, or maybe even no passes will produce the desired effect. **The right answer is found in the net – goal or no goal.**

WHAT A 2-ON-1 GAME CAN TEACH

The smallest team-unit is, naturally, 2 players. The immediate goal of an offensive “in” game (the game within the game) is to gain a numerical superiority. This means offering close support to the puck carrier in Game-Situation Playing Role 2.

By increasing the number of passes required, or allowing only one-timer shots before a goal counts, the coach activates the supporting offensive player. On the other hand, playing in “outnumbered” situations forces the defenceman to focus on the main task - defend and **stay on the defensive side.**

WHAT 1-ON-2 GAMES CAN TEACH

A 1-on-2 game, 1 forward versus 2 defenders, teaches communication between the defenders as well as double-teaming. The forward learns, as a puck carrier, to **use the open space by keeping his/her feet moving**, to protect the puck with the body, to get used to body contact and, when the puck is lost, to defend and play Game-Situation Role 3.

WHAT A 2-ON-2 GAME CAN TEACH

A 2-on-2 is actually 2, 1-on-1s. The 2-on-2 is the most important contest the coach can use to create all 4 game-playing situations and have the 3 phases of the game.

In the 2-on-2 you have:

The puck carrier (1), who needs all of the individual offensive skills and habits as tools to be successful.

His/her teammate (2), who tries to isolate 1 player and create 2-on-1s by using speed, deception, picks, screens and crosses. This supporting offensive player must be able to take a pass and shoot one-timers.

The closest defensive player (3) must do everything to get on the defensive side, and possess all the individual skills and habits to stop the puck carrier and regain the puck.

The other defender (4) must cover 1 opponent from the defensive side and know when to double-team or switch.

All 4 players will be constantly switching between the loose puck, offensive and defensive games, and will learn how to read and react to the ever-changing roles. Once the players can play "in" 2-on-2 situations they will be ready to be the "out" players as 3rd, 4th, 5th players closest to the puck.

SITUATIONS WITH MORE THAN 2 PLAYERS

When more than 2 players are involved, the game actually becomes a game of forming triangles, both on offence and on defence.