

AGES 14 AND UNDER
Small Area Games



LESSON WORKBOOK



ROGER GRILLO



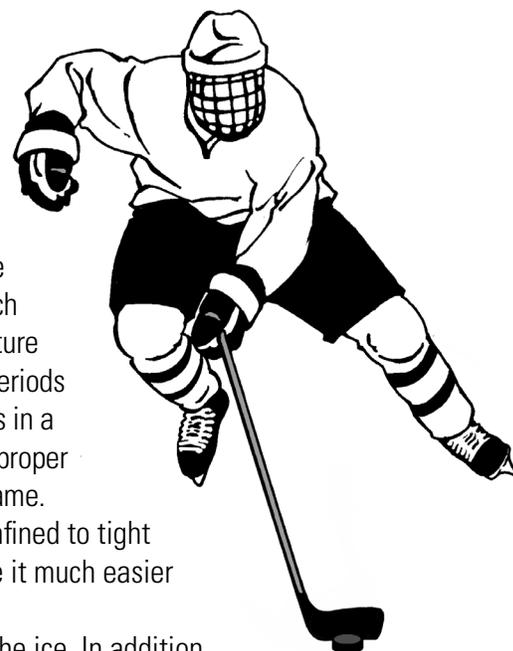


The players are the ones that need to learn to play the game, learn to be in the right place at the right time. When we have the players practice skills in game-like situations over all parts of the ice they will gain the ability to read and react in creative ways.

- Paraphrased from Finnish coach Juhani Wahlsten

Why use small area games?

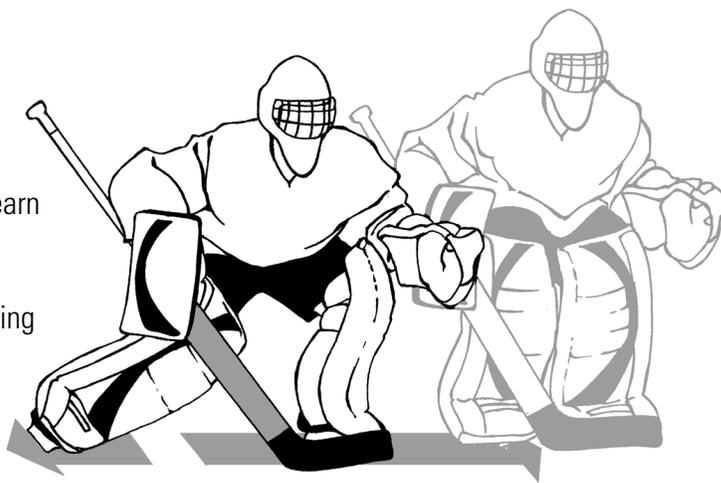
- Small area games inspire creativity and experimentation while accelerating development. Traditional drills often have pre-determined outcomes that don't present much of a challenge.
- A variety of teaching and learning scenarios will be presented to both coaches and players.
- As these games are played at a high pace with intensity, they eliminate the need for traditional conditioning. Players should train in the manner in which they play. Hockey players take short shifts (usually 30-40 seconds) that feature explosive, short bursts of power. Short shifts are usually followed by rest periods that are two to three times as long as a shift. Small area games put players in a situations where they are receiving intense training while maintaining the proper work to rest ratio. They also turn conditioning into a fun and competitive game.
- Small area games imitate various game-like situations as players are confined to tight areas and must make quick decisions. Games played in small areas make it much easier for more players to be involved.
- Development is maximized in both the offensive and defensive areas of the ice. In addition, many games feature quick transitions from offense to defense and vice versa.
- Small area games will keep more players active. . Drills often involve a few players while the rest stand in a corner or wait in line. Hockey is not played one player at a time and small games will maximize puck touches and keep more players active.
- Decision-making and anticipation skills (the development of hockey sense) will be greatly enhanced as players will be more familiar with various hockey situations.
- All players will improve. The more skilled player will flourish as he or she will be in competitive situations against other highly skilled players. The confined spaces of small-area games enable the weaker players to be more involved in the play and develop their skills at a faster rate.
- Players will have fun, thus increasing their love and passion for the game.
- Players will have more energy with which to improve their skills when they are skating the shorter distance across the ice surface instead of the longer length of the ice.
- With smaller group sizes, learning and teaching become more effective.
- It is much easier to design activities according to the varying skill levels of the players within the group.
- Decision-making skills are greatly enhanced. Players will make more decisions more frequently at a higher tempo.
- Goaltenders will be forced to read the play and react as game situations change often. Goaltenders will see more shots and make more saves.
- The games are full of continuously changing scenarios. This exposes players to transition hockey at the youngest ages.
- The speed of the game increases, forcing players to make quicker mental and physical reactions.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game.



Skill Work & Small-Area Games

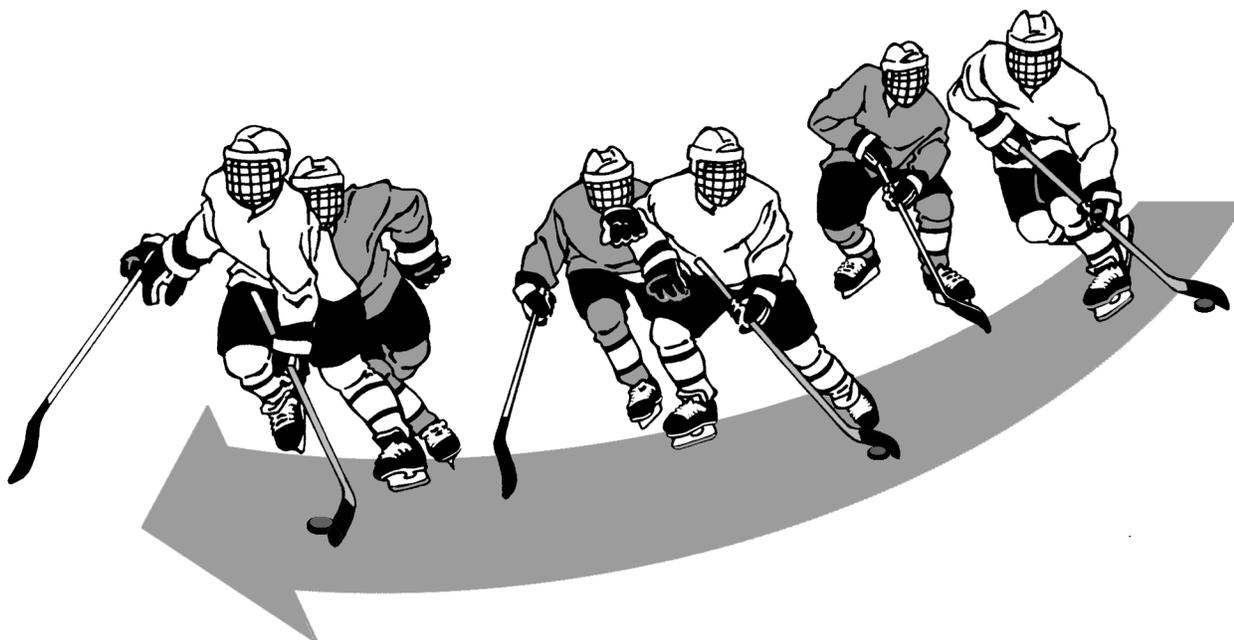
In addition to the traditional methods of teaching skills, small area games will provide the coach with additional opportunities to develop players in a fun and competitive setting. Small-area games give players the opportunity to learn by playing the game.

Skating – Small area games will involve every type of skating maneuver including stops & starts, tight turns, crossovers, forward stride, etc. both with and without the puck. Players will enhance agility, balance and coordination while changing directions with body control.



Puck-Handling – Players will have many opportunities to handle the puck in confined spaces. Puck battles are a consistent focus in small area games and the player will always be under pressure while handling the puck, giving the game a realistic tone.

Puck Protection – The confined spaces of small area games put an emphasis on puck protection skills. Players will have to use their bodies to protect the puck and create scoring opportunities both along the boards and in open ice. The development of contact confidence and puck protection skills will be of great benefit as players develop additional skills progressions.





Passing – Almost every small area game has passing as a key component. Many games have conditions that dictate a certain number of passes or have a certain player designated as support who must move the puck to teammates. Players will have multiple repetitions when it comes to passing and receiving the puck.

Shooting – Small area games allow players to take many shots under pressure in competitive situations. Confined spaces will encourage players to battle in front of the net where there are opportunities for tip-ins and rebounds. As is common in regular games, players will often find themselves (in small area games) in tight to the net trying to use quick hands and moves to beat the goaltender.

Transitioning – A defining characteristic of small area games are the constant transitions from offense to defense and defense to offense. Every player, regardless of position, will have to make quick decisions in order to create time and space and make plays.

Puck Support – With the many transitions in small area games, players will be trained to anticipate turnovers and support the puck. Playing in a confined space will encourage players to move quickly to get open (and communicate) and find open lanes in order to receive a pass.

Hockey Sense – Traditional activities are too often scripted where the players do not have to think and make decisions. The development of hockey sense is all but eliminated. Small area games give players extensive experience and repetition with hockey sense development. Players will have the freedom to learn by playing in a competitive environment without pre-determined outcomes.

Breakouts – The coach can save valuable practice time by incorporating breakout situations into small area games. Instead of using traditional drills, small area games can add an element of competition and pressure to breakout situations where more players can be involved more often.

Power Plays – Many games provide odd-man situations that closely resemble power play alignments such as the umbrella and the overload. Rules and conditions (such as number of players and positioning) can be implemented to meet specific needs.

2002 Puck Possession Study

In 2002, USA Hockey commissioned a comprehensive study to calculate how much time the best players in the world had the puck on their sticks at the Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City. During each game of the tournament, three players who were expected to be key performers for their teams were chosen for the study. The coaches calculated the length of each player's shift, how long they had the puck on their stick, how many passes they made, how many passes they received and how many shots on goal they attempted. The coaches also kept track of the number of un-timed touches; those when the puck hit their stick if only for a brief second.

Canada's Joe Sakic dominated play in the gold-medal game, registering two goals and two assists along with four shots on net. However, during that game he only touched the puck for 1 minute, 19 seconds. During the women's gold-medal game, Team USA's Cammi Granato led all players with 1 minute, 2 seconds of puck possession time.

The purpose of the study was to determine the best method to develop puck possession skills with young players. To follow up the Olympic study, USA Hockey volunteers conducted the same study at the 2002 Youth Hockey Tier I National Championships. Although the skill levels varied, the results were very similar. Even the best players at the youth tournament didn't handle the puck that much.

What conclusions can we draw?

- The numbers show that stick and puck skills can't be developed in games.
- You can accomplish a lot more with the puck in practices compared to games.
- Players get so few opportunities with the puck in games that they must be proficient when they do get it.
- Small-area games in practice provide players the necessary touches to develop stick and puck skills.



Coaching Points

- Communicate with the players to make sure they understand the rules and purpose of the game.
- Monitor the games to encourage players and provide individual instruction. The coach should watch to see that the particular regulations of each game are followed.
- Keep the length of games and shifts in mind. While playing one game for 20 minutes is probably too long, 2 minutes is too short. In general, game length of 8 – 12 minutes should be sufficient to provide each player a high number of quality repetitions. Shifts should be 30 – 45 seconds in order to emulate game circumstances as closely as possible.
- Allow players the latitude to exercise their creativity. Players should feel comfortable enough to make mistakes and try again. Allow for failure.
- Be detail oriented.
- Consider how often you are going to stop play in order to highlight teaching points. Point out the positives in addition to improvements to be made.
- Just as players should embrace creativity, the coach should add progressions and variations to activities and small area games that will promote development and fun.

Special Conditions

There are many special conditions that can be used in small area games. The coach should use creativity when implementing game restrictions and use these games to capture teaching moments.

- Confine players to a specific area of the ice. This allows you to create numerical advantages (3 on 2, 2 on 1, etc.) and create transition opportunities.
- Require some or all players to touch the puck before a shot. This forces movement, puck support, quick thinking, quick passes, etc.
- Create support players – these players can't be pressured and play on offense all the time.
- Restriction on passing – backhand passes only, no give and go passes, use only one touch passes, etc.
- Don't allow dump ins – players will have to use puck protection and deception skills, use screens, offensive creativity and quickness, etc.



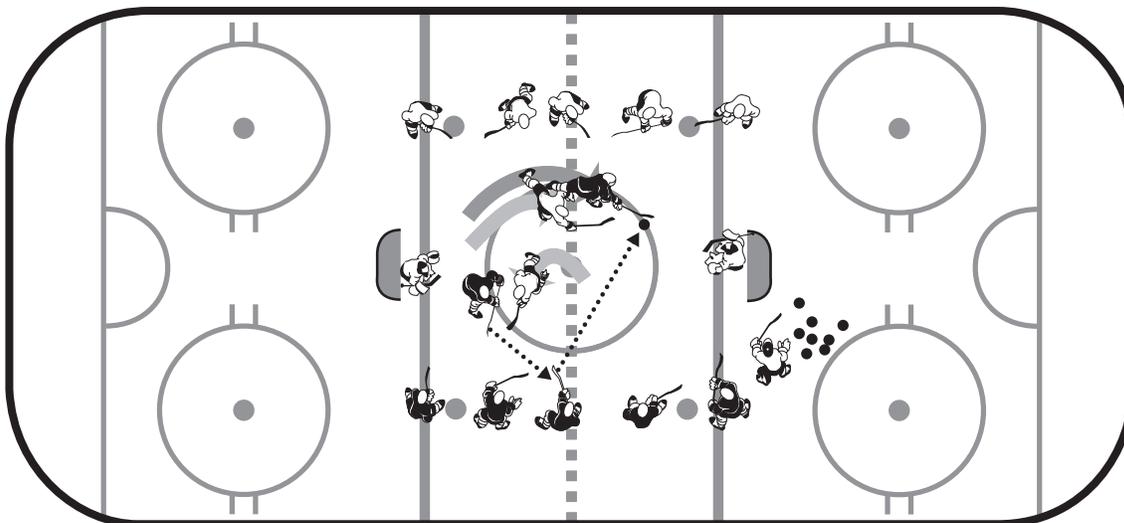
Small Area Games

- Place conditions on how a goal must be scored – plays must start from a corner or behind the net, only the defensemen can score, etc.
- Play with more than one puck, increasing the amount of activity.
- Allow players to score on any net or restrict teams to attacking and defending a designated net or nets.

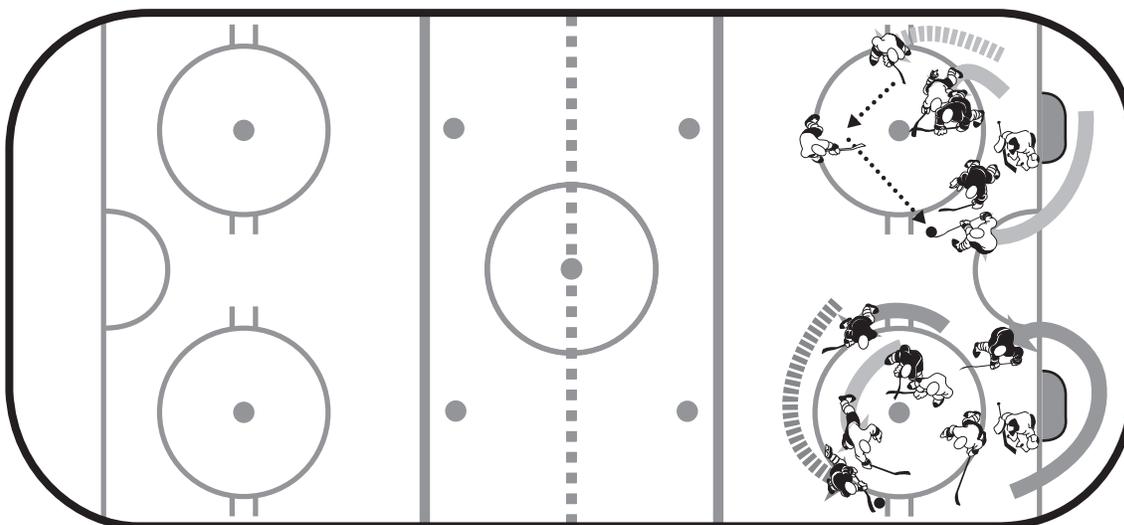
14U Recommendations

- The emphasis on team play and systems strategies can increase.
- Don't play games just to play them. Use small area games to teach skills, concepts and systems.
- Tempo, pace and execution should be held to a higher standard. However, the coach still needs to be patient. Allow mistakes for the sake of creativity and the development of decision-making skills.
- Teach players individually when they come out of the game to avoid stopping the game and the flow of practice. Explain to players why they were successful or unsuccessful.
- Design games based on the individual needs of your players and your team as a whole.
- Think of the conditioning element. Enhance the level of competition by placing consequences on the losing team.

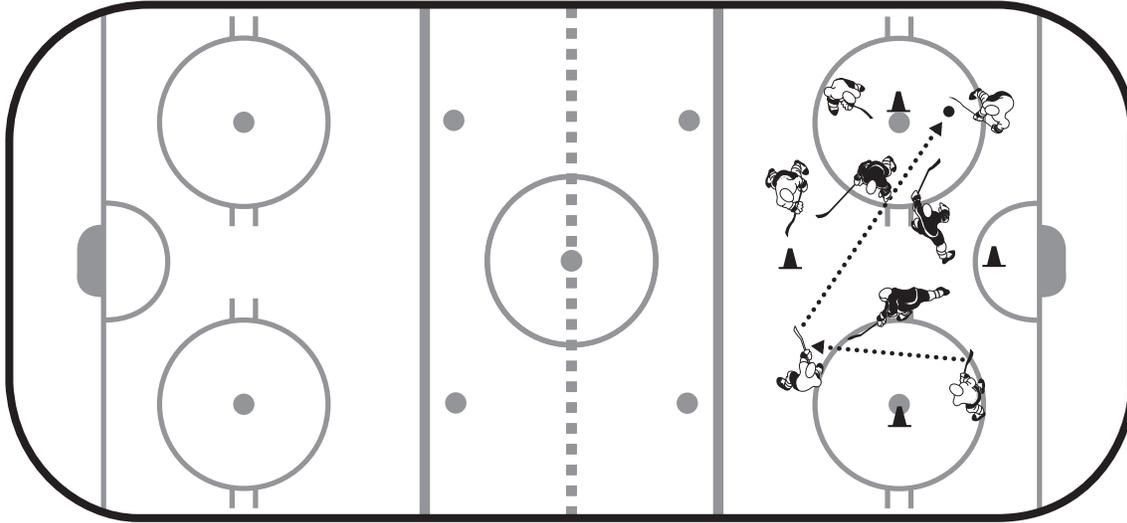
Games from USA Hockey's Small Area Competitive Game's Handbook



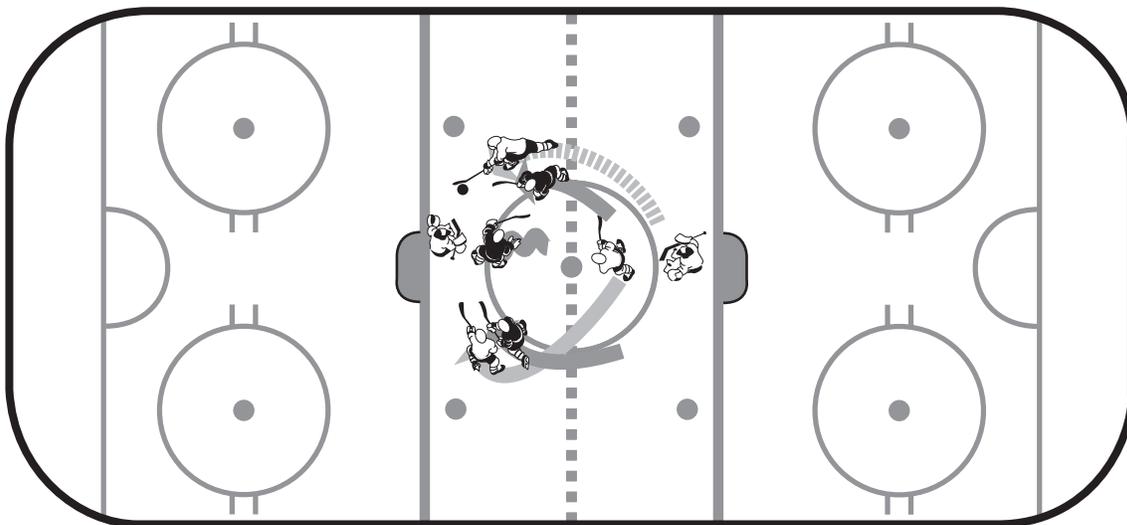
1. **Sideline Game** – Start the game by dividing the players into two teams. Players line up along both sides of the neutral zone. The coach calls out 1-on-1, 2-on-2 or 3-on-3, and that number of players begin play. The other players remain active with their sticks on the ice and are part of the game. The players in the middle can pass to them, and they can shoot, pass it back or even pass down the line to their teammates. Everybody is eligible to score. Change it up every 30-40 seconds. If the puck goes out of play, the coach dumps a new one in immediately and the play continues until the next change.
* Make the game competitive by playing to three. The losing team does laps around the net.



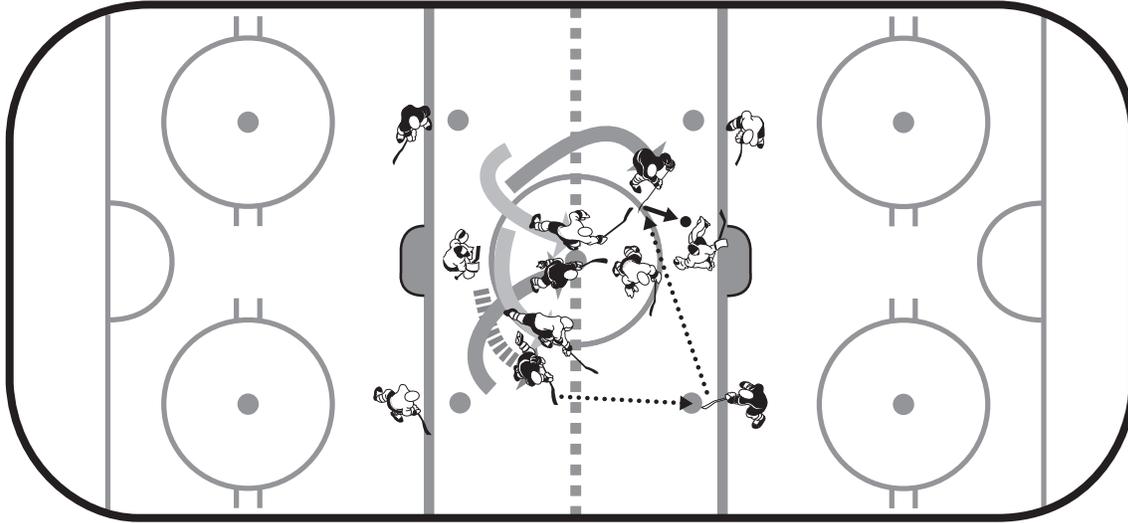
2. **4-on-2 / 4-on-3 Special Teams** – Divide the players into two teams with a coach monitoring each side. On one side, the players play 4-on-2 and on the other side they play 4-on-3. Players move the puck around and try to score while the defending players check them. The remaining players are out of the way but ready to go in on the next change. Change both sides every minute. If the puck goes out of play, dump a new one in immediately and continue playing until the next change.
* Encourage close, quick puck movement



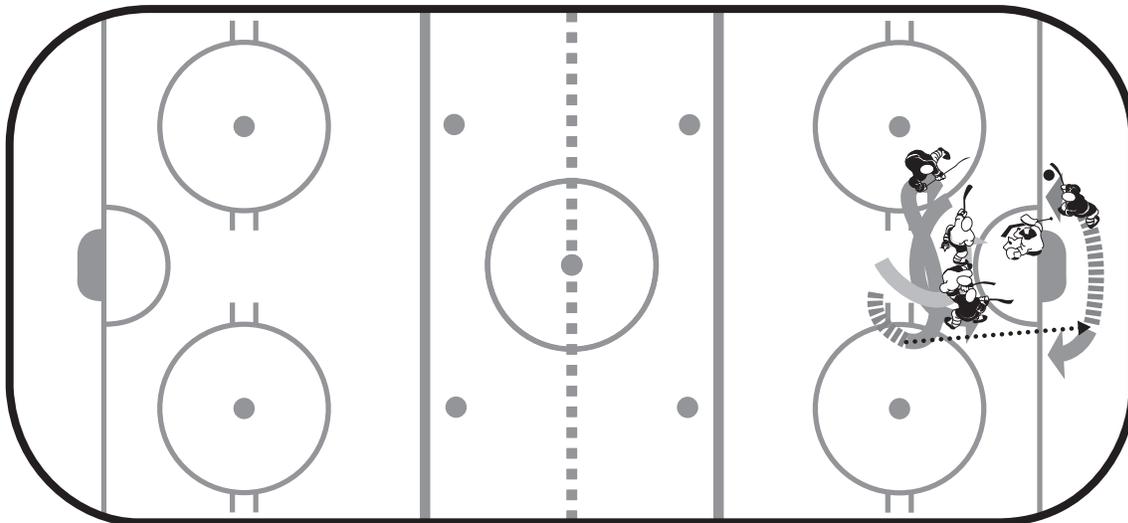
3. **5-on-3 Player in the Middle** – Set up four cones in a diamond formation. Three defensive players start in the middle and five offensive players surround the cones. The object is to move the puck around passing through the coned-off areas and through the defenders to a teammate. Change the game up using only on-ice passes and then only flip or saucer passes. After three pucks have been cleared (one at a time) change it up.
 * Develops heads-up passing and passing through seams



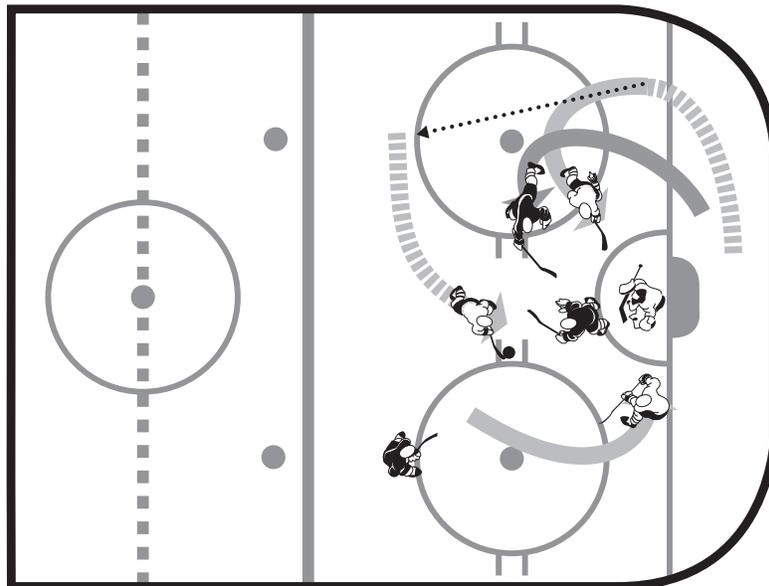
4. **3-on-3 Support Drill** – Place players on the ice in a 3-on-3. One player from each team must stay on the defensive side of the red line. The play becomes 2-on-3 in the offensive zone after transition. The game is played both ways with a constant 2-on-3 developing wherever the puck is. The players determine which of them is the one to stay back and play defense while the other two go into the offensive zone for a scoring chance.
 * 2-on-3 forces players to battle through checks to score. Play in situations where you do not have a numerical advantage.



5. **Mid-Zone 3-on-3 / 4-on-4** – Set up two teams playing either 3-on-3 or 4-on-4 in the neutral zone. Place one support player from each team in opposite corners behind the net. The players must pass to the support player behind the net before they can score. Change it up every 30-40 seconds.
 * Players must pass the puck and move to get open as the drill quickly becomes an odd-man advantage

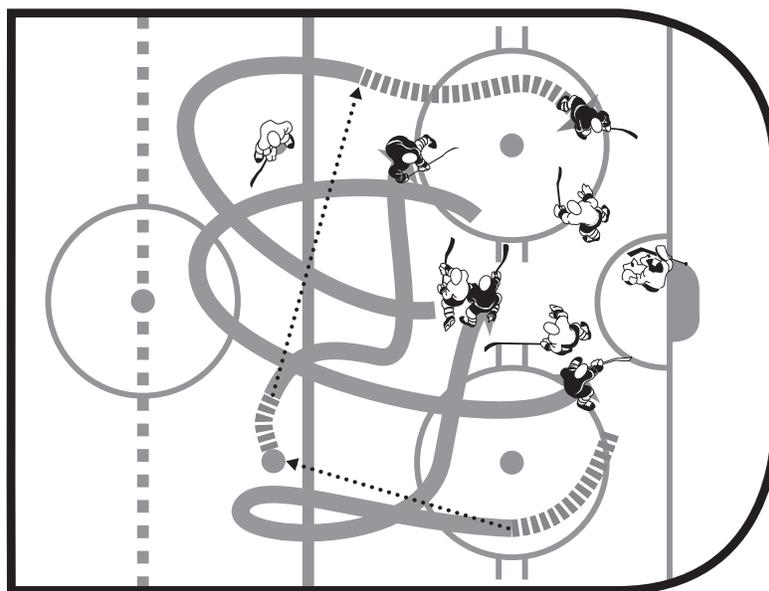


6. **2-on-2 Behind the Net Rover Game** – Players play 2-on-2 and battle for the puck in front of the net. A separate player behind the net known as the “Rover” can skate to either side to set up for the offensive team. The team that passes the puck to the Rover is on offense. If the other team gains control of the puck, they must pass the puck to the Rover and they are now on offense.
 * Creates fast transitions



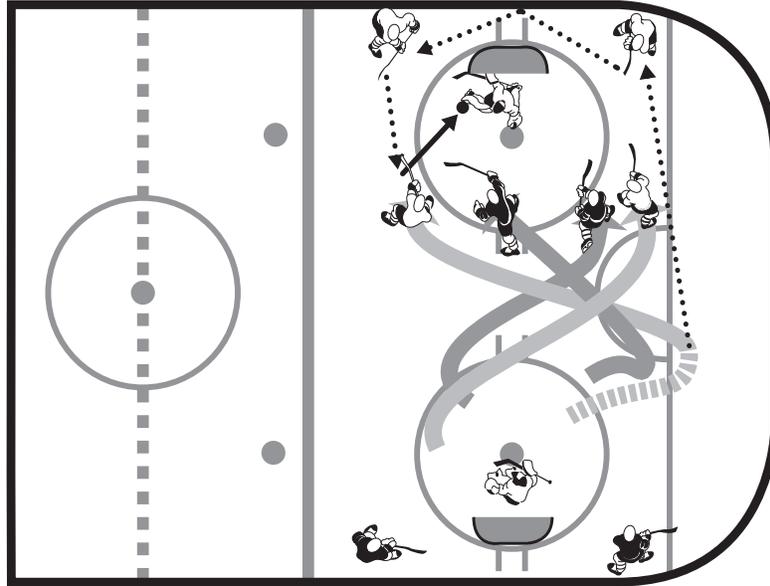
7. **3-on-2 Activate Game** – Place one stationary player from each team at the top of the face-off circle. The game starts out 2-on-2. The team with the puck passes to their stationary player who then enters the game, making it a 3-on-2. After a turnover the stationary player must return to the top of the circle, allowing the other team to utilize their stationary player for their own 3-on-2.

* Develops heads-up plays



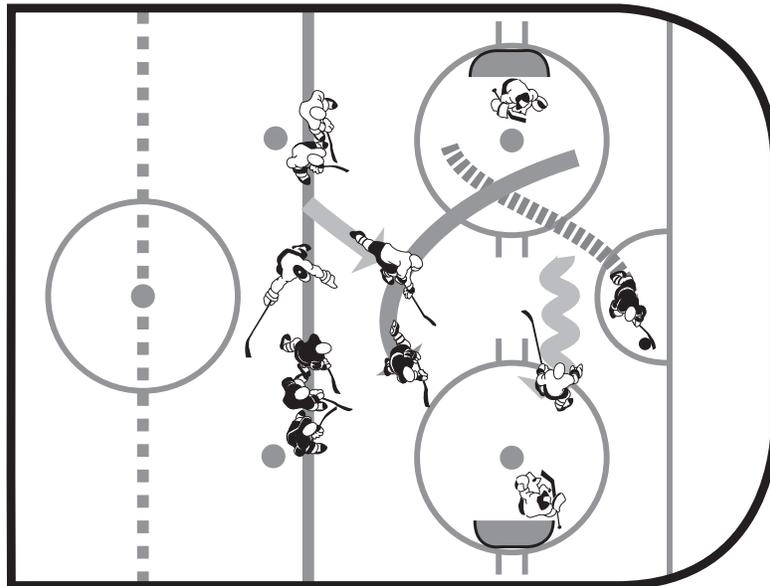
8. **4-on-3 / 5-on-4 Activate Special Teams Game** – Place one stationary player from each team outside the blue line on each face-off dot. The game starts out 3-on-3 or 4-on-4. The team with the puck comes out of their end, passes to their stationary player, re-groups and it now becomes a 4-on-3 or 5-on-4. After a turnover, the stationary player must return to the face-off dot outside the blue line, allowing the other team to utilize their stationary player for their own 4-on-3 or 5-on-4.

* Designed to enhance special team transition and attacking the zone



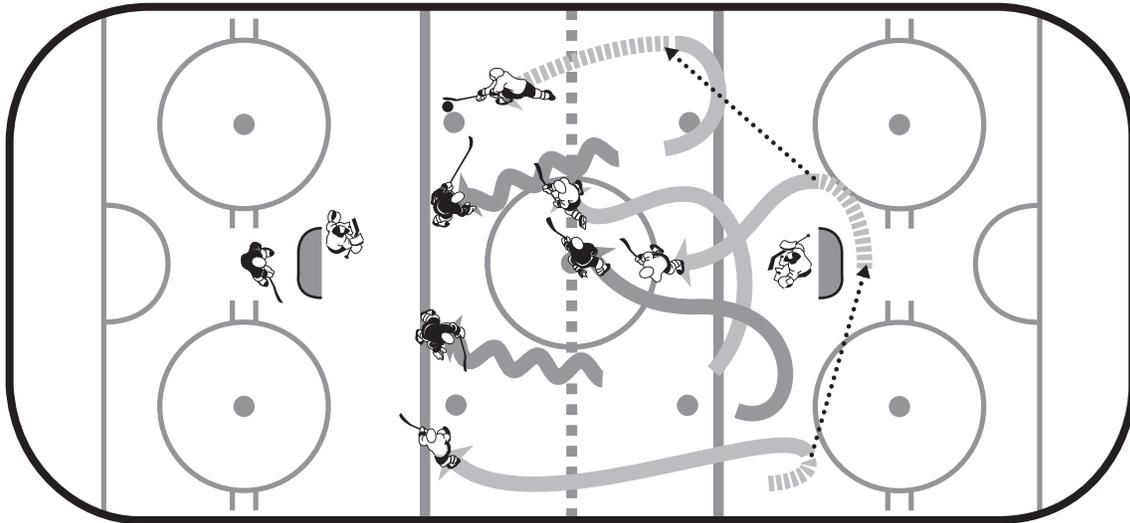
9. **4-on-2 Behind the Net** – Place two stationary players from each team behind opposite nets. The game starts 2-on-2. The player with the puck passes to either teammate behind the opposing net where they can pass to anyone on their team creating a 4-on-2. After one pass is made to a teammate behind the net the offensive team can then score. Change it up every 30-40 seconds.

* Special teams transition drill

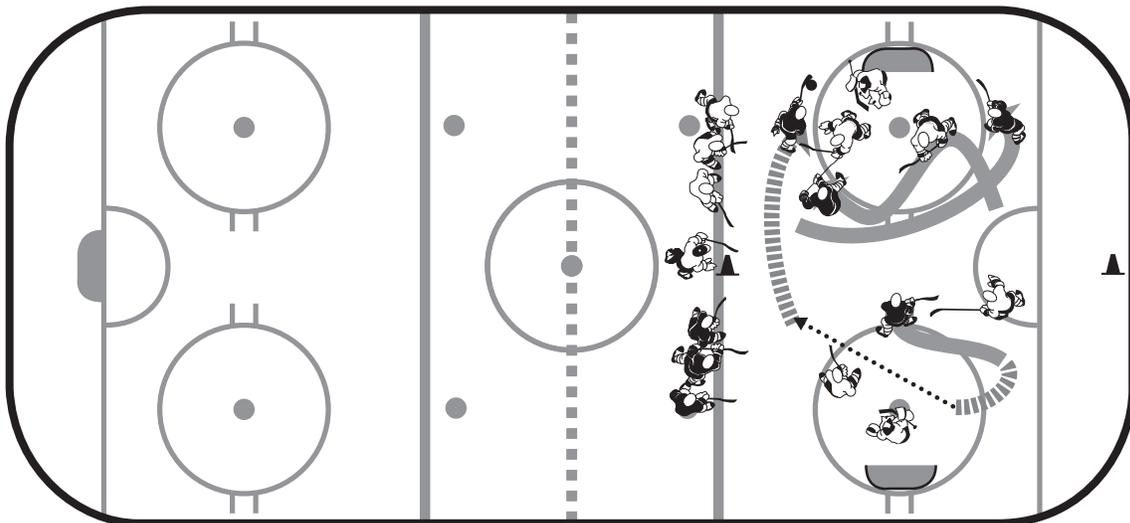


10. **Progressive 4-on-4** – Divide the players into two teams using different colored uniforms. The game begins as a 1-on-1. Every 10 seconds a new player enters the game creating a 2-on-1 then a 2-on-2, etc. until you get to 4-on-4. Once you reach 4-on-4, remove a player every 10 seconds until you're back to a 1-on-1. Change teams and go again.

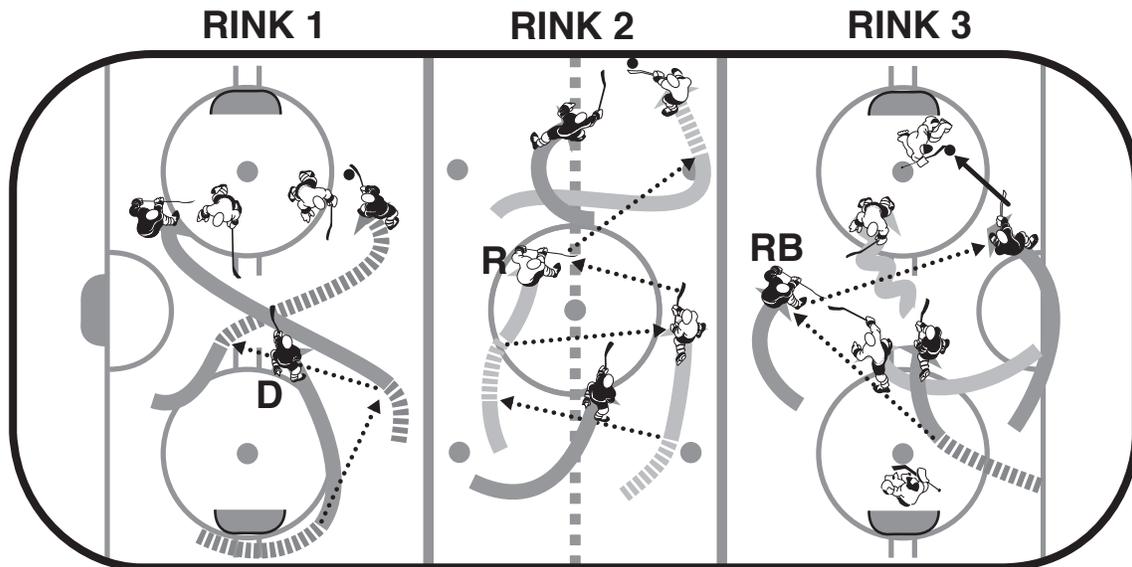
* Heads up progression identification drill.



11. **Mid-Ice 4-on-3 Breakout** – Place a stationary player from each team behind their net. The game starts 3-on-3. The player with the puck passes to his or her teammate behind the net and then breaks out. The player with the puck can pass, skate or shoot the puck but cannot cross the red line. A quick 4-on-3 develops and the team with the puck plays it out until they score or the puck is turned over. After the play is over the other team repeats the drill going the other direction. Change after every two breakouts.
 * Quick transition breakout drill.



12. **Breakout Forecheck 3-on-2** – Divide the players into two teams. The game starts out with eight players 2-on-2 at both ends. The coach dumps the puck in and the defensive team gets it. They turn to offense and make one pass. The player who receives the pass can then skate it out or pass to the other side and follow the play creating a 3-on-2. Teams can only go on offense when they have created a turnover and made one successful pass in their own end.
 * Quick transition defense to offense.



13. **Town Carnival** – Divide the rink into three zones. Depending on your numbers the games may need to be altered. (This is based on 15 players, two goalies and a shooter tutor).

Rink #1 – 3-on-2 cross-ice breakout drill. One player is designated as the breakout defenseman.

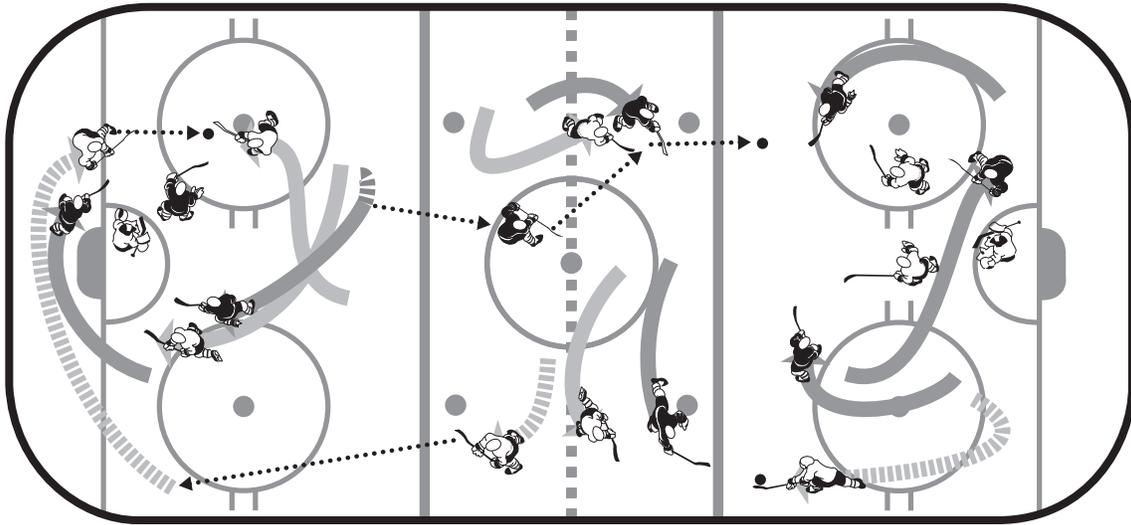
This player is rotated every two breakouts, one from behind each net so both teams play a 3-on-2. After breaking out, use a shooter tutor to shoot on.

Rink #2 – Cross-ice board scrimmage. The players staying inside the two blue lines play a 2-on-2 with a Rover. They must complete two passes to the designated Rover before they can score. (The Rover plays for whichever team is on offense). The only way to score is to press the puck against the boards with the blade of your stick, shooting is not allowed.

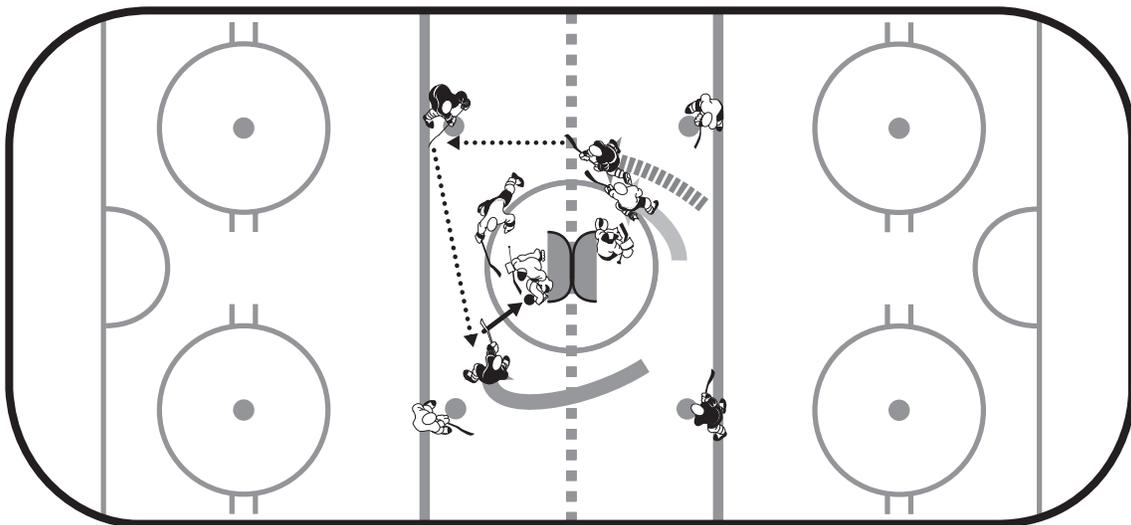
Rink #3 – Play the Red Baron game with one player always on offense creating a continuous 3-on-2.

Rotate players through stations every 5 – 7 minutes.

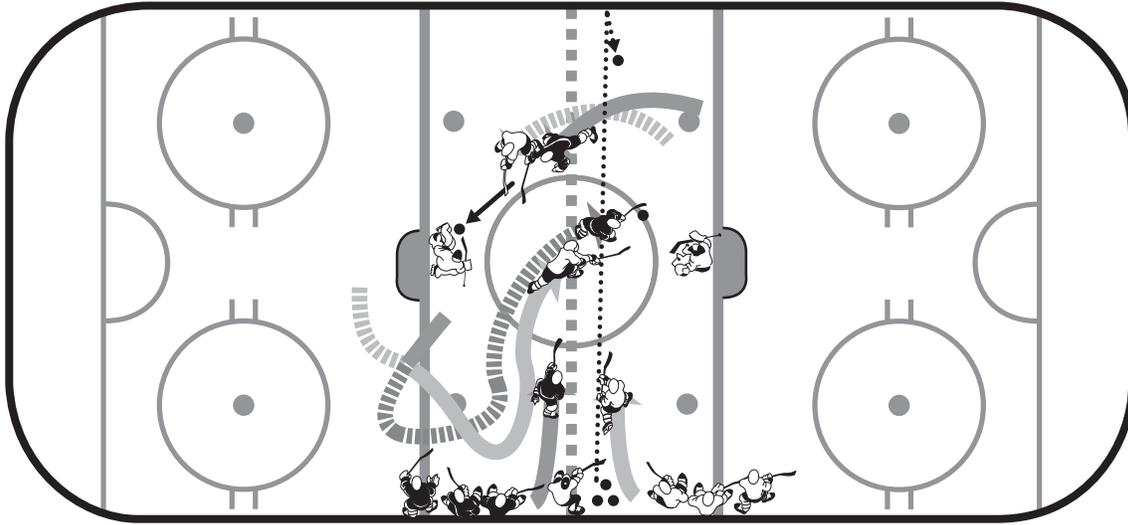
* Drill variation to improve quick thinking.



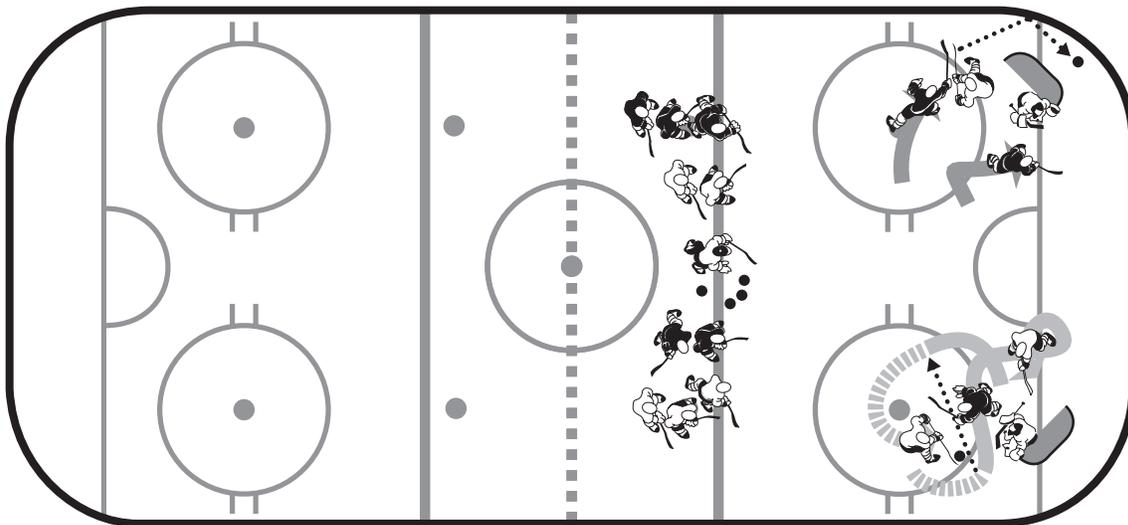
14. **Full-Ice Team Zone Scrimmage** – Set players up depending on how many are at practice. Play 3-on-3 in all three zones on the ice using the blue lines as dividers. The object is to score but the players cannot leave the zone they are playing in. Using three pucks and keeping score, the players in the defensive zone try to move the puck to the players in the neutral zone who then try to move the puck to their teammates in the offensive zone. Only players in the offensive zone can score. Switch zones every 3-5 minutes.
 * Promotes teamwork in all three zones.



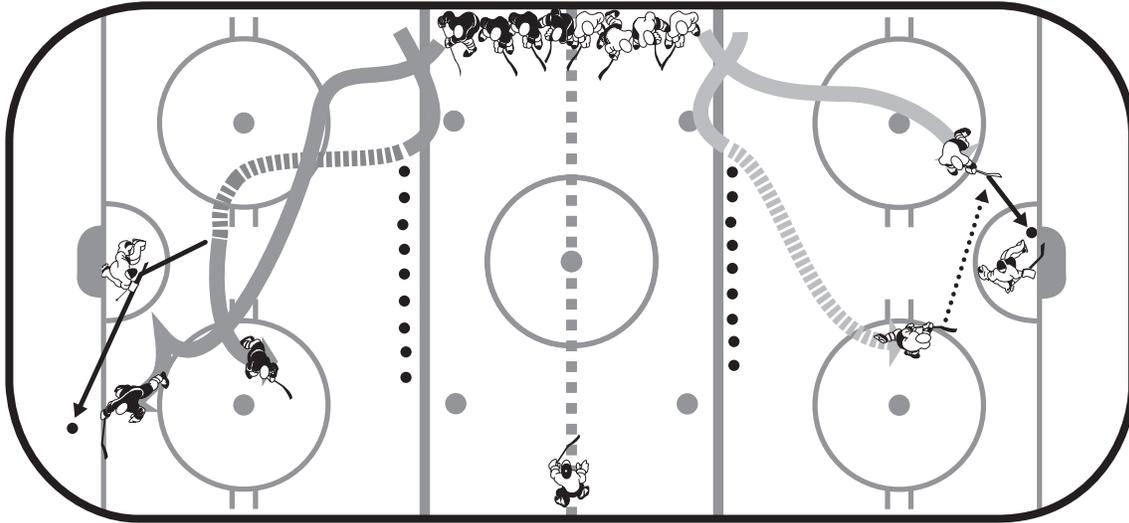
15. **4-on-4 Support Drill** – Set the nets up in the neutral zone back to back. One support player from each team is placed off to the side of both nets. The teams play 2-on-2 in the middle but must pass to a support player before being able to score. The support player can also shoot. Players can score on either net.
 * Heads-up scoring drill



16. **1-on-1 Survivor Drill** – Place the nets on the two blue lines. Players try to score on their opponents' net while playing a 1-on-1. Players cannot return to their line until someone has scored. Three 1-on 1's are being played at the same time. Once a goal is scored another puck is shot to the far boards and two new players enter the drill.
 * Heads up goalie and shooter drill.



17. **2-on-1 Relay** – Set the nets up in both corners in one zone. Divide the players into two teams. They play 2-on-1 until they score. After scoring, all players race back into line and the next players go. The defensive player can check but only he / she is allowed to push the puck behind the net to kill time.
 * Great way to start or end practice



18. **Ten Puck Relay** – Set up 10 pucks on each blue line. Play 3-on-0 or 2-on-0 depending on how many players you have. After scoring the next players in line can't go until the first two players skate back hard and pass the blue line. The winning team is identified after they have shot the last puck in the net and skated back crossing their blue line.

* Fun way to end or bring competition to practice.

Resources

Paul Cannatta. *The Value of Small-Area Games in Ice Hockey Development*.
[USA Hockey \(www.usahockey.com\)](http://www.usahockey.com)

Paul Willett. *The Hockey Coach's Guide to Small-Area Games in Practices*.
 Delano, MN; 2003; Willett International, LLC
[Paulwillett.com/Small Area Games.htm](http://Paulwillett.com/Small_Area_Games.htm)

