



Defensive Principles for Playing Without the Puck

In hockey, hundreds of turnovers each game and spontaneous puck races materialize approximately every 5 seconds out of these losses of possession. A team can be defending more than half of any given game as a result, suggesting that focus on defense is critical for success. Coaches must ensure their players are prepared to defend effectively and consistently, and executing on the following principles so their team can maintain control and mitigate scoring opportunities against them.

1. Position Before Possession in Puck Races

- Prioritize body positioning to gain an ice advantage over the opponent
- Anticipate the play and establish inside positioning to control space

2. Net Front Play in the Defensive Zone

- Focus on clearing opponents from the net-front area to reduce scoring opportunities
- Employ effective box-out techniques while maintaining awareness of the puck

3. D-Side Positioning During Scrums and Battles

- Always stay between your opponent and the net
- Maintain strong stick control and use body positioning to limit scoring threats

4. Shot Blocking

- Commit to the shot lane by aligning your body with the shooter's stick to block shooting angles
- Ensure your technique minimizes injury risks, do not turn away from the puck

5. Puck Retrievals

- Quickly identify the puck location and assess pressure from forecheckers, add deception when needed/required
- Hunt the puck aggressively while maintaining control and scanning for the next play

6. Five Hard Strides Back Through the Middle

- Transition quickly with a focus on protecting the middle lane, get above the puck on reloads
- Support teammates by staying connected as a defensive unit, track back with purpose