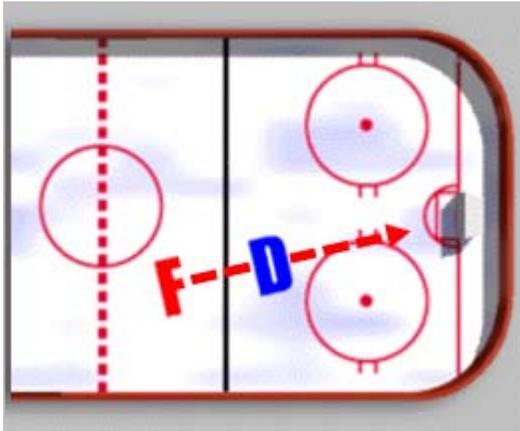


# How to play a one-on-one rush

*by Coach Larry Pedrie, University of Illinois at Chicago*



A difficult skill for a young defenseman (or forward if he happens to be caught temporarily in the defenseman's position) to learn is defending a one-on-one rush. Although there are many things that come into play in developing this skill, there are four basic principles I believe will greatly enhance success in this situation.

1. The first principle to be learned is very simple, however it is often overlooked and not executed. In defending the one-on-one, the defender must always keep his or her stick on the ice. That's it. But as simple as that is, quite often the young player doesn't remember to do this. Frequently, the defender in a one-on-one will put his or her stick in two hands at the waist. The reasons to follow this principle are:
  - It helps to control positioning of the forward by offering less ice for the forward to work with. The forward cannot carry the puck into ice that is occupied by the defender's stick.
  - It forces the forward to make his decision four-to-six feet sooner. By having the defender's stick on the ice and adding the length of the stick to the length of the defender's arm (without extending the arm), this distance adds up to somewhere between four-to-six feet away from the defender's body. This forces the forward into the confrontation sooner. If the stick is carried in two hands at the waist, the forward can then take advantage of that extra space and carry the puck right into the defender's feet.
  - It puts the defender in a position to pokecheck the puck away from the forward. It is difficult to pokecheck when the stick is carried at the waist.
  - It puts the defender in a position to block or deflect passes. When the stick is in the air, it is very difficult to interfere with the shot or a pass to a second rushing attacker.
2. The second principle to successfully defending a one-on-one is holding the middle of the ice in all one-on-one situations (see diagram above). If the defender maintains the middle or inside position on the attacking forward, one of two things will happen:

- The forward will choose to go outside, which now puts the defender at a huge advantage toward winning the one-on-one. The attacker's path to the net is now much further than the defender's. Or . . .
  - The forward will choose to go inside, which should bring the confrontation directly into ice covered by the defender, given proper gap control (principle No. 4), allowing the defender to win the one-on-one.
  - A second way of understanding holding the middle is to always be certain that the attacker's direct path to the net should always go through the defender. The defender should never align shoulder to shoulder with the attacker (unless the attacker is in the exact middle of the ice). A good gauge would be for the defender to align the outside shoulder with the attacker's inside shoulder. This alignment takes away the forward's direct path to the net and encourages him or her to go outside where he or she is less likely to become dangerous.
3. The third principle is even simpler than the first one: Make sure that you do not fish! This means be certain not to play the puck. If the defender chooses to play the puck and not the man, chances of winning the one-on-one are greatly reduced. This does not mean the defender shouldn't pokecheck. It means he or she does not focus their eyesight and put 100% concentration on the pokecheck. The defender should attempt the pokecheck without looking down at the puck. The focus needs to be on the attacker's body. However, playing the body does not mean hitting the attacker. While it was formerly thought that hitting the attacker was the way to play a one-on-one, it is now believed that this is incorrect. The defender's positioning has to be perfect in a one-on-one to initiate body contact. Trying to force a hit in all situations causes lunging, which usually equals failure in the one-on-one situation. Holding the middle and no fishing is far more important than hitting in learning to play the one-on-one rush.
  4. The fourth and most difficult principle is learning and maintaining proper "gap control." This involves both skating skills and intelligence. It requires a defender to be fairly adept at backwards skating. Once a player skates well backwards, the thinking aspect comes into play. The defender must gauge the attacker's forward skating speed against his own backward skating speed. The defender must attempt, by adjusting his or her speed, to be a short distance, five to 10 feet, from the attacking forward as the play nears the defensive blueline. Once inside the blueline, space between the attacker and the defender should continue to be lessened by the defender. As the play reaches the top of the circles, the gap should be closed and the confrontation should occur. However, it's important to remember that the confrontation should not occur by the defender lunging to make a hit. The confrontation should be a result of the attacker entering the space occupied by the defender as the attacker attempts to reach the net.

If these four basic principles can be learned and executed, a young player will have success defending a one-on-one situation.