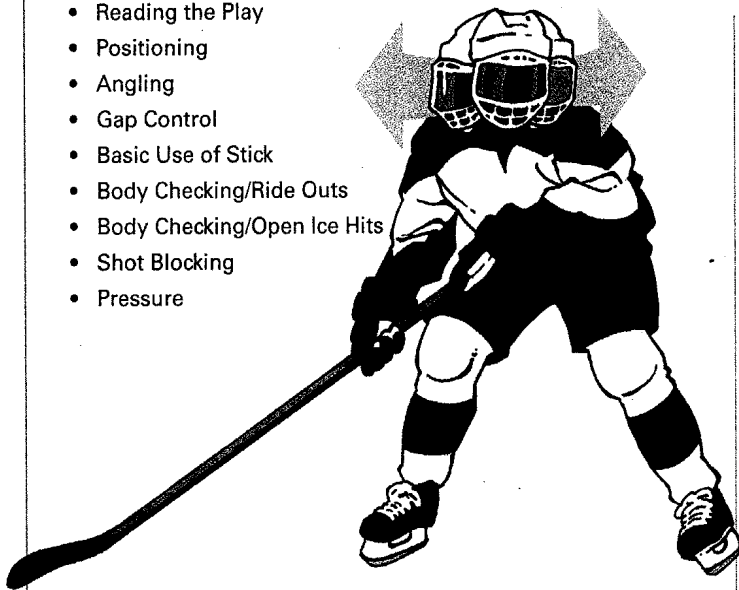


SOLID SKILLS AND GOOD SMARTS KEYS TO PLAYING DEFENSE

Playing good defense is all about hard work and discipline. In addition to developing solid fundamentals, there are also several tactical defensive skills that will help you become a dominant blue liner.

- Reading the Play
- Positioning
- Angling
- Gap Control
- Basic Use of Stick
- Body Checking/Ride Outs
- Body Checking/Open Ice Hits
- Shot Blocking
- Pressure



Reading The Play

- Playing swivel-headed is a vital tactical skill in defending both the initial rush and in defensive zone play situations
- Take multiple looks as situations can change quickly

Positioning

- Stay between the man and the net, and between the puck and the man
- Stay close to the most dangerous man
- Maintain inside out alignments, protecting the middle of the ice first
- Keep good gaps, both against the rush and in defensive zone coverage situations
- Make the puck carrier feel uncomfortable by eliminating time and space

Angling

- Limit the puck carrier's space
- Keep your stick on the ice to protect against the cut back in the offensive and neutral zones
- In 1-on-1 defensive zone coverage, drive the puck carrier down the wall rather than up the wall, so you can direct him to the area you want him to go
- Stick position is also a key to directing the puck carrier

Gap Control

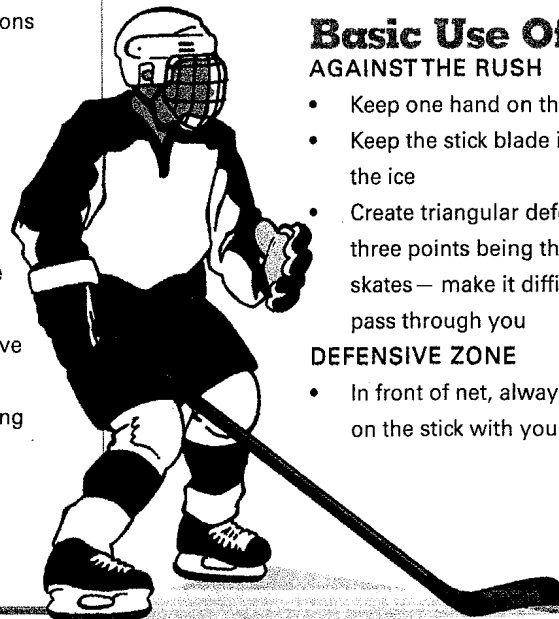
- The space between the defender and the attacker is critical to assert the maximum pressure on the offensive player
- Adjust your speed and position as necessary
- Decision time ... Neutral zone/blue line/top of the circles/face-off dots
- Establish a good approach when angling your opponent
- Be aware of offensive tendencies/off-wing shooter/change of pace/support, etc.

Basic Use Of The Stick AGAINST THE RUSH

- Keep one hand on the stick
- Keep the stick blade in front and always on the ice
- Create triangular defensive posture — the three points being the stick and both skates — make it difficult for a player to pass through you

DEFENSIVE ZONE

- In front of net, always start with two hands on the stick with your stick on the ice





Taken from Jim Johnson's presentation at the 2006 National Coaches Symposium in Rochester, N.Y. Jim Johnson is a 13-year NHL veteran and the co-owner of Flexxcoach, an interactive coaching software company.

Body Checking

- Body checking is just one of the weapons in the arsenal used to regain possession of the puck.
- It can also be used as a psychological tool making the game unpleasant for the opponent to play. Few players like to get hit when they touch the puck. Finishing body checks consistently through the course of a game can wear down an opponent physically.
- This is not about running someone into the middle of next week or separating his head from his shoulders. It's a very simple separation of the player from the puck to gain control.
- Checking space: The area between the bottom of an opponent's ribs to the top of the thigh area, which is also where the hands will be found when an opponent carries the puck. This is where you can control the player from gaining position on you.

Ride Outs

- This occurs when the opponent is carrying the puck near the boards
- Approach the opponent on an angle to negate a cut back move
- Keep the stick on the ice if possible; in a game situation as the checker approaches, the opponent will often try to make a pass or take a shot; the ideal scenario involves playing stick on stick and blocking the puck prior to finishing a body check
- The checker must get his hands and shoulders through the checking space, twisting the opponent away from his intended direction
- To pin the opponent temporarily, you must have one leg in front and one leg behind
- After finishing the check and pinning the opponent briefly, the checker must make sure he does not get beat back into the play; a heavy check that leaves the checker out of the play and the offensive opponent in good offensive position is not a sound defensive approach

Open Ice Hits

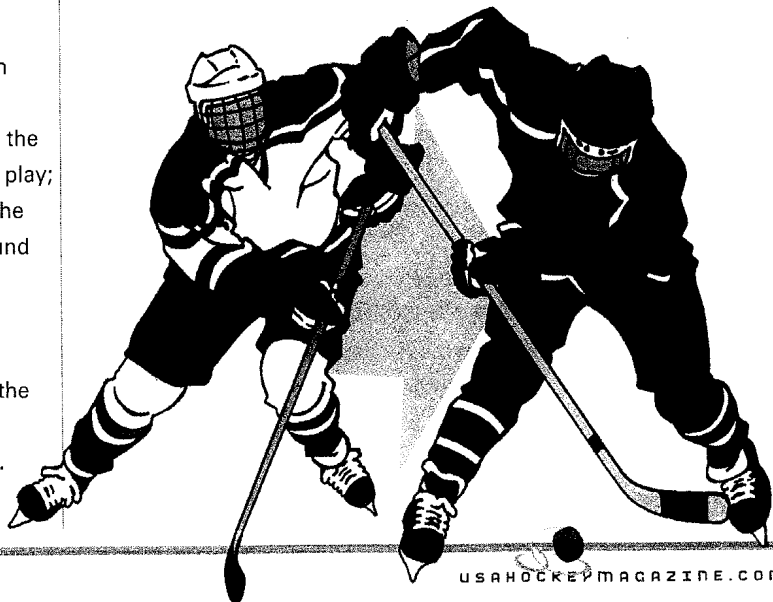
- An open ice hit is the most difficult type of hit because of the space available to the puck carrier to avoid contact, and because angling, anticipation, and timing must be perfect.

- The checker must keep the stick and elbows down and try to plant the cap of the shoulder pad into the chest of the opponent
- These types of hits usually occur when an opponent carrying the puck moves laterally through the neutral zone or has his head down
- Remember to keep the stick, hands and elbow down, as we want to keep the game safe

Shot Blocking

- Positioning is the key; it's much easier to block a shot if you are between the man and the net
- Close in on the shooter to cut down the angle
- Use the stick first as it provides four feet of additional reach
- The stick can be used to block or deflect the puck away from the net by angling the blade; using this technique, the defender would be approaching the shooter from the side so he doesn't take it in the head
- Avoid leaving your feet to block a shot; once on the ice, a fake shot renders the shot blocker useless
- If you do go down to block a shot, it is best to go down on just one knee thereby retaining mobility and making yourself look bigger
- If you choose to go down on both knees or slide, it's all about timing

Limit the time and space so that you can gain control of the puck as quickly as possible.



Principles/Concepts of Defensive Play

The objective of limiting the time and space of the puck carrier will be accomplished by the principles of:

TIME & SPACE

The goal is to limit time and space so you can gain control of the puck as quickly as possible

- Get on your opponent quickly before he has a chance to assess the situation and make a play
- Once you have proper coverage, you can quickly get on the puck carrier to limit the time he has with the puck
- Limit the space or deny use of the best space (Middle of the ice) until there's enough support to pressure the puck and thereby eliminate time.

PRESSURE

The decision to pressure will be based upon the closeness and relationship of the offensive players to the:

- Mid-ice corridor
- Goal/Danger zone area
- Slot area
- Danger of the opponent's attack on goal
- Number of defenders vs. number of offensive players
- The ability to close in on a player

Pressure Vs. Contain

PRESSURE WHEN

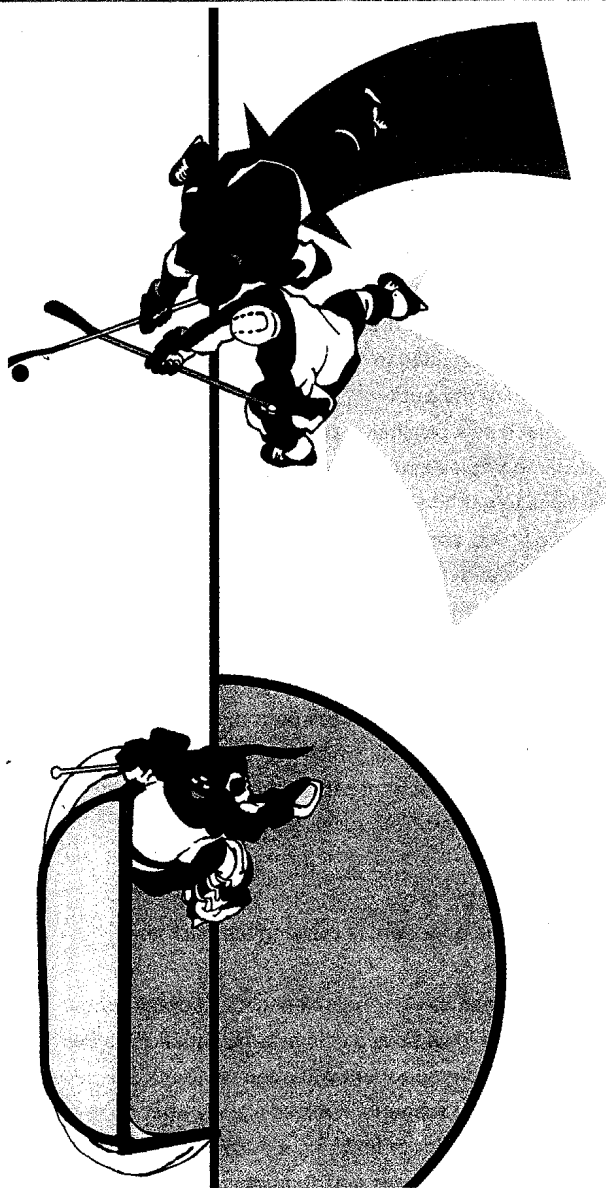
- The puck carrier has his back to you
- The puck carrier has poor puck control
- Support is available
- The puck carrier is isolated

CONTAIN WHEN

- There's no immediate goal-scoring threat
- The puck carrier is approaching
- The puck carrier has good puck control
- You have no support
- You need to buy time in outnumbered situations

THE OBJECTIVE OF REGAINING PUCK POSSESSION WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF:

- Approaching the opponent on the defensive side
- Approaching the opponent from the mid-ice corridor outwards
- Being able to close the gap when ready



THE OBJECTIVE OF FORCING THE OFFENSE TO POOR ICE POSITION WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE PRINCIPLE OF:

- Proper angling to delay, deflect and steer the attack

THE OBJECTIVE OF PREVENTING THE OPPOSITION FROM SCORING WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF:

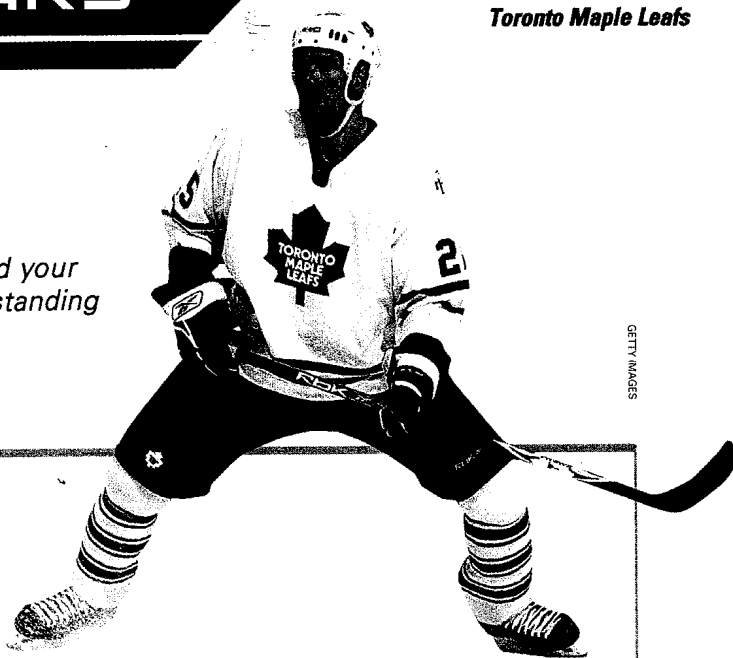
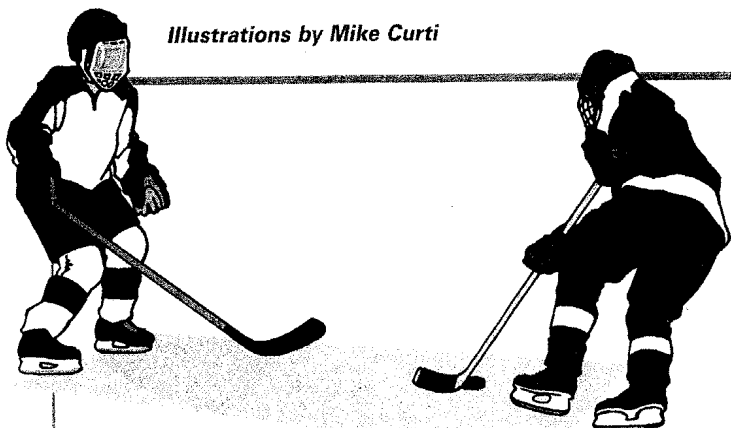
- Sound individual and team use of tactics
- Communication
- Providing support away from the puck. Through triangulation – the width, depth and concentration of defense
- The willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of the team in the defensive zone



PLAYING THE DEFENSIVE 1-ON-1

A one-on-one is the classic confrontation between you and your opponent. As a defenseman, you could be the only thing standing between the puck carrier and a great scoring opportunity.

Illustrations by Mike Curti



GETTY IMAGES

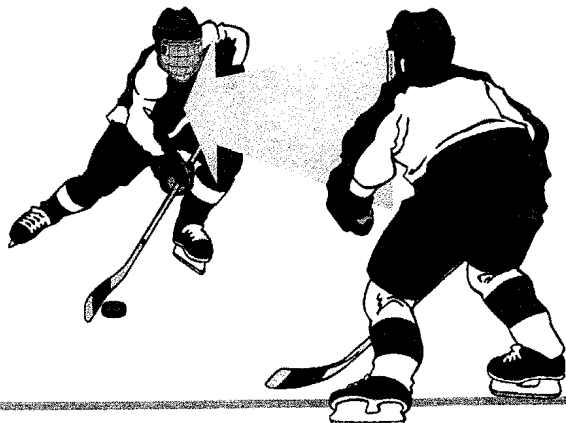
TIP #1

Gap control is the act of controlling the space between you and your opponent. It's the first step in containing your opponent and dictating where you want him to go. You want to keep the distance tight enough so he can't get off a good shot while using you as a screen. At the same time, you can't be too tight or he could go right around you, or get to the middle of the ice for a better shot on goal.



TIP #2

Taking away space allows you to make him go where you want him to. Line up your outside shoulder on his inside shoulder and try to force him to the outside, where he could be forced to take a shot from a bad angle.



TIP #3

The stick check is your first line of defense, but you have to maintain control of it. Don't be swinging it around wildly or you can be caught out of position or off balance.

TIP #4

Eventually you're going to have to make your move and confront your opponent. This normally happens somewhere between the blue line and the top of the face-off circle. By defending the blue line you slow down your opponent and can force an offside. By the top of the face-off circle you need to force a play because your opponent is now in close enough to have a good scoring opportunity.

REMEMBER THIS ...

Focus on your opponent, not the puck. The biggest thing I see with young players is that they get caught watching the puck instead of the chest. Line up your body on your opponent's body, and not his stick. ☺