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USA Hockey Recertification Program

Utilizing Cross Ice and Small Games in Your Program

Lesson Workbook



presented by



Presenter: Mike Eaves

Head Coach - University of Wisconsin

Presenter: Bill Beaney

Head Coach - Middlebury College

Utilizing small games in practice

Introduction

How can a player develop both skills and team play (concepts) in one or two practices a week? How can we create an environment that will encourage learning, creativity, enthusiasm and a sense of caring? These are two of the most difficult questions facing coaches throughout the world. There is no easy answer.

Here are some basic principles to follow:

- Hockey should be fun for all.
- Hockey is a simple game, don't make it difficult.
- Create high expectations and demand proper execution and technique.
- Understand that players have to make the decisions on the ice. Allow them to fail and learn the game is still the greatest teacher.
- Allow natural competition to increase practice intensity, "Game Speed".
- Develop a progression of activities that will enhance both skills and understanding of the game.
- The game is offensive support v. defensive support.
- Break the game down by the zones-offense, defense and transition. Concentrate on one area each practice, a "Major Theme".
- Successful coaches have the ability to reduce the game into its simplest components and recreate game situations.
- Off ice activities should include both physical and mental training.

The bottom line is: "Let the game be the teacher."

If we expect our players to be creative then we, as coaches must be creative. We ask our players to 'Read and React', but what do we do to enhance that ability? Do we create an environment that encourages good decision-makers and intelligent hockey players? Perhaps most importantly, are we reducing or increasing the enjoyment that each player gets out of the sport? The answers to these questions will tell you where you fit in as a coach.

Small games are not meant to take the place of skill-specific drills. We are really fortunate to be able to have access to a number of different drills from all over the world. We try to use these drills to compliment or complete the practice session. These games help the players understand how correct technique is useful in the game situation, and certainly gives more meaning as to why we run certain types of drills. More importantly, the desire to 'play the game' for a player is greater than the desire to 'learn the drill,' and the intensity of participation increases. Learning does occur in the modified game, however, because when players are in the right place at the right time, they meet with success. The game, and the exercise derived from it, is why people play sports.

Why use small games?

The reasons are many. Players like the idea of competition and the challenge it brings. Games keep more players moving than the traditional drills that bring a lot of waiting in line during precious practice time. Players learn best when moving and confronting different situations. With the use of games we can challenge each player to participate at his own level and also stimulate the growth of the multi-level players on each team. It creates a practice intensity that is only matched during actual contests. Lastly, your players will develop game strategies, make better decisions and have greater enthusiasm for practices.

Organizing small games

The games can be very simple with few players with an emphasis on one or two specifics, and can grow to more complex including the entire team. However, what is consistent most games is that technique and skill intertwine to help players improve all aspects of their game. It is important to understand that the game itself is the most important teacher. Allow for failure. The challenge for the coach will be to decide what role to take, how much will you control the game, will you keep score, do you stop play to illustrate a point or reinforce concepts. These are important questions that help shape your coaching style.

What is the purpose of the game? Decide what the theme of the game is and stay on task. (Be sure the players know what your goals are and why you have modified the game. This should help players understand the game and lay more within the framework you've established.) Hopefully, this will improve the skill performed.

Examples of conditions you can put on a game to achieve specific results include:

- Increase or decrease the area of play
- Put restrictions on touches or time with the puck
- Increase number of pucks
- Increase the number and relocate the goals
- Confine players to specific areas to create numerical situations and transition opportunities
- Specific types of passes
- Use support players outside area of play

There are several other conditions that you can put into a game to create the desired result. The only limit to the number of games is the coach's creativity.

Lastly, try to keep in mind the Russian training philosophy that is applicable to all continuous actions sports. A player should train in a small area, for a short duration at high tempo. This will help to bring about the desired skill development.

As Coaches, we often have a tendency to over coach players up to the age of 13 and maybe under coach players through the college age. Hockey is learned by moving. "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 Finish Coach Juhani Wahlsten)

Using small games in practice.

In setting up practice we break the session into four separate areas:

- Warm-up – Emphasize a movement and skill including goaltending
- Cooperation on combination training (1v 0, 2 v 0)
- Small games or game situations
- Cool down – usually very short.

Our general goal for practice is for each player to come away having been challenged to be a better individual and team player and excited about the next practice.

We try to create a bank of drills that the players know and understand so that they can run efficiently and without complications. This is a time when you want the players to meet with success, gain confidence and sort out any problems. Usually 1/3 to 1/2 of the practice time, we try to re-create specific game conditions and have them happen as often as possible in a short period of time. In placing our players in positions, we try to get them doing what they do best, most often. We can get specific to our needs be conditioning the game to our area of concern.

In setting these games up, we must decide what role we will take. Do you watch and let the players grow on their own, do you constantly stop play to point out specifics, or are you the ever-present cheerleader? Decide your approach before the game begins or you get caught up in watching. But about all, you have to be a student of the game, and its players.

Examples of a game include:

- Full ice with two or more nets
- Cross ice with two or three games, or in any other formation you choose

Special conditions for the game might be:

- Play with more pucks – increase the amount of activity and game situations (no slap shots or body checking). Use two or more pucks. Use any number of players, keep score, have goalies put pucks into play.
- Two nets at each end or three or four. Allow players to score on any net or restrict with nets to defend and attack.

Special conditions for an aspect of the game include:

- Players are confined to a specific area of the ice – this allows you to set up numerical situations and create transition opportunities.
- Require some or all players to touch the puck before a shot-movement, support and quick thinking.
- Restrict touches – one or two touch games.
- Create support players – that can't be pressured and play on offense all the time.
- Restrict passes – pass only to the closest player, backhand passes only, no give and go passes, etc.
- Don't allow dump ins – creates use of offensive picks or screening.
- Place conditions on how a goal must be scored – plays must start from behind the net, from the corner, or only the defenseman can score.

Coaches want players who are problem solvers, a situation, which occurs repeatedly in games but not in a structured drill.

- Practice games played to conclusion with consequences will build confidence, which, among other things, will help build 'gamers' and transition great practice players to 'gamers'.
- Put players in situations that they will find in games and help them solve them with guidance from the coach.
- Games for practices are easy and less time consuming to prepare that day. Looking at the game to determine the problems to solve, then create a practice game (must assume some level of competency from the coach). Teach coaches to look for the games within the games: 1v1, 2v1, 3v2.

Small practice games give a coach the ability to create effective practice in the reality of today's environment of increased pressure on ice time and multiple teams practicing simultaneously.

Skills, critical thinking and the understanding of game concepts will transfer effectively from small practice games to full ice competitive games.

Practice Key Components

- Make the need for players to improve skills relevant by putting them in game situations that require particular skills.
- Allow players to learn skill in short time blocks then put them back into modified games that provide for success with proper execution.
- There are many exercises for training, but common to all training is that exercises are done at game tempo. Shooting, passing, skating – everything done at the highest speed. Change exercise when speed gets slower. Mix heavy exercise with lighter types.
- Training should develop initiative, play understanding, tactics, speed and the ability to score goals. Fitness and strength are by products.
- Most exercises are done with partners and/or rivals.
- Players should have choices, must learn to make decisions. Quick thought to action (high speed).
- Emphasize play without the puck – players must free themselves to be a support (ability to initiate).
- Opportunities to score should be many and intensified for all players.

“If two teams have equal fitness and technique, the same strength and tactics, the team with the greatest joy of playing will win.” All training must be fun!

Individual skills for hockey players are so numerous that to try and “track” each one would create a hockey “school” atmosphere that would demoralize the players.

Instead of trying to cover every skill, this short list of emphasized skills (with modified games) will put players into situations that will need a solution. Together over the season, you find one. You have a hockey instructional outline to refer to. Use it when you see specific players in need of help.

Skill Development from Small Area Games

Skating:

- Quick Starts
- Crossovers
- Backwards
- Pivoting
- Strong on skates (balance)
- Moves to free yourself from defender

Shooting:

- Forehand
- Backhand
- Quick Release
- Tip-in

Puck Handling:

- Protection of puck
- Straight ahead carry
- Wide dribble (encourage creativity)
- Escape move
- Use of feet
- Attacking triangle
- Delay moves

Passing:

- Sweep Sauer
- Receiving
- Back Diagonal
- Indirect passing
- Recognizing hand of teammate

Checking: (when old enough, 13+)

- Giving and receiving of check
- Stick strength
- Use of stick as tool of checking
- Concept of angling and speed
- Board play
- Net front play
- The Games

The components of a practice game include:

- Two teams of one or more
- A consequence
- It must be played to a conclusion

Educational Foundation of Practice Games

Practice games are universal in appeal from Mites through NCAA Champions. The lengths of games are determined by the players' ability and motivation to keep working.

The most effective teachers relate to students' curiosity. To make learning exciting, permanent and challenging one must relinquish control and allow natural learning to occur. When a person asks a question, it is best to give them a way to find the answer, don't simply provide an answer.

Using small games to teach the game allows the integration of the educational principles above in a unique way, unavailable in traditional, predictable drills.

Conclusion

A coach can take the practice games in this book and apply them to teams by using his/her principles of play (through applying conditions to games) to meet his/her goals.

Build from simple to more complex games; modify based on a coach's principle of play to accomplish specific goals.

Addendum Cross-Ice Program

The Advantage of Cross-Ice Practicing and Playing

The USA Hockey Cross-Ice program is based on a model of practicing and playing hockey across the ice surface as compared to practicing and playing lengthwise along the full length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing and playing model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations in the world for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been shown that children who begin their hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience.

Parent may ask the question why should my child play cross-ice, what will this bring? I want my child playing like the professionals do, full-ice, because I want my child to experience "real hockey."

To help address these questions, let's think about a child trying to skate with a puck while performing a drill from one end of the rink to the other, how long will this take? How much energy will this require? Will the player's decision-making skills be enhanced more in the close action of the smaller cross-ice surface or in the wide-open area of the full-ice surface? In which situation will the child be more involved in the action?

A study of hockey games played on the full-ice surface by George Kingston in 1976 found the following:

In a sixty-minute running time hockey game between 6-8 year old children, the average player had possession of the puck for 20.7 seconds. Top National Hockey League and international players were also timed and no player exceeded 85 seconds of puck possession time. In a sixty-minute children's game the actual playing time of the game was 20 minutes and 38 seconds. Taking this into consideration, the individual player is only on the ice every third or fourth shift depending on how many players are on the team, resulting in even less ice time. An average of less than 0.5 shots per game for youth players and only 1.5 shots per game for junior and professional players.

The study concluded that:

For young players in the "full-ice game model" of development, the youngest players would require 180 games and the older youth players would require 80 games to enjoy 60 minutes of actual puck possession time to execute their stick handling, passing, pass receiving and shooting skills. Professional and international players would require 60 games to ensure 60 minutes of puck control skill development.

Many players never touched the puck in the game, especially in youth hockey.

USA Hockey firmly believes that by giving children the opportunity to participate in the Cross-Ice hockey program, which supports cross-ice practicing and playing, that their enjoyment of hockey as well as their hockey skills will be greatly enhanced.

To help you further understand the benefits of the cross-ice practicing and playing model, some of the advantages are listed below.

Practicing

- The children have more energy with which they can improve their skills when they are skating 85 feet across the ice surface as opposed to the 200 feet length of the ice surface.
- Group sizes become smaller which means learning and teaching will become more effective.
- The close feeling of belonging to a team will motivate a child to participate with even greater enthusiasm.
- Drills designed according to the varying skill level of players within the group are easier to organize.
- More puck contact, resulting in improved puck control skills.
- More repetition/frequency in drills in one ice session.
- Decision-making skills are enhanced, as more decisions must be made more frequently at a higher tempo.

Actual Game

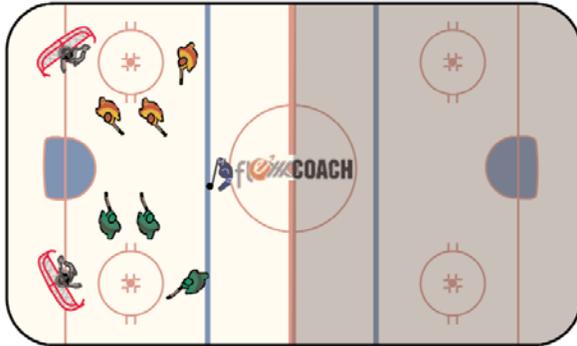
- Playing on a smaller rink results in increased puck possession time for each player.
- Individual technical skills develop more quickly.
- More frequent line changes in the game means more ice time for each player.
- Line changes are made quickly since the players are directly beside the playing surface.
- Each player's activity increases greatly.
- Scoring skills are enhanced since the players have more shooting opportunities.
- The goalkeeper's reading of the game and reaction to changing game situations become more effective.
- More repetition for goalkeepers.
- The game is full of continuously changing situations.
- The speed in playing situations increase, which will require quicker mental and physical reactions by the players.
- Due to increased tempo, all of the team members take part in solving the playing situations, which leads to a sharing of responsibilities between players.
- The feeling of being an important part of the action increases because of the small size of the rink.
- Hockey sense, or understanding the principles of the game, is being developed at a young age.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game (i.e. off-sides, icing).

General Organization

- More efficient use of ice time and space.
- The size of the rink is in proportion with the size of the players.
- USA Hockey recommends that teams play with two or three units of four or five players and one goalkeeper, which results in each player having more ice time.
- More ice time for practicing and playing is made available to more teams within a single association.
- Many teams can practice together by sharing the ice surface.
- General Spirit of Participation and Fun
- More children get a chance to play ice hockey.
- More children will experience a feeling of success when playing hockey.
- The same exciting and fun environment as in a “real” game is created.
- More and less gifted children will benefit from close/tight action on the ice.
- Children are excited and motivated to continue playing hockey.
- Hockey will be more appealing and rewarding to a wider range of children and their parents.

Drills

2 on 2 Support Game



Objective

- Offensive creativity, 3 on 2 situations

Two nets positioned at the goal line in each corner of one zone. Players divided into two equal groups, positioned at the blue line with the Coach in the middle of the ice at the blue line with pucks. One support player per team is positioned on the top of the faceoff circle on their side of the ice. Two players for each team start inside the zone, the Coach starts the drill by dumping the puck in off the end boards. The team that gains control of the puck and passes to their support player who then activates and becomes part of the game tries to score on the opposite net a 3 on 2 situation. Once the opposing team gains possession of the puck the support player drops out, and skates to the top of the circle from where he started. Now the team that gained control of the puck has to pass to their support player to activate him into the game to create a 3 on 2 situation at the other end.

Key Elements

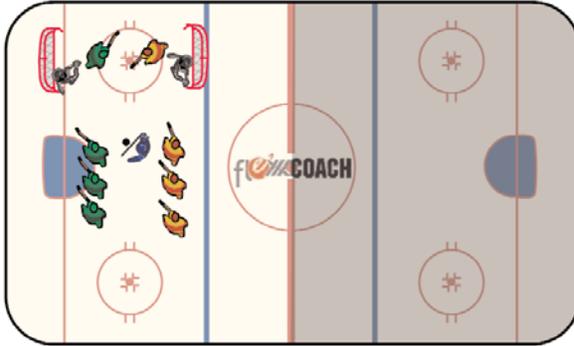
- Puckhandling
- Passing/Receiving
- Proper Receiving Angle
- Create Scoring Chances
- Creativity

Goalie

- Read rush, game like situation, puck carrier has several options and is under pressure.

Drills

Tight Area Game



Objective

- Teach players to make plays under pressure

The game is played in the corner of the rink, one net at the goal line, and the other net directly across from it, (just above the top of the circle) both nets facing each other. Teams stand in line next to coach. The coach sets up different scenarios example: 1 on 1, 2 on 1, 2 on 2, 3 on 2, 3 on 1. The coach then calls out the different scenario, and the players get in position and the coach dumps the puck in off the boards. The players read and react to the situation and try to score at the opposite net. When a goal is scored or the puck leaves the playing area, the coach can add more pucks to the drill to keep it going. 20-30-seconds

Key Elements

- Puckhandling
- Using The Boards
- Puck Support
- Passing/Receiving
- Shooting/Scoring

Variations

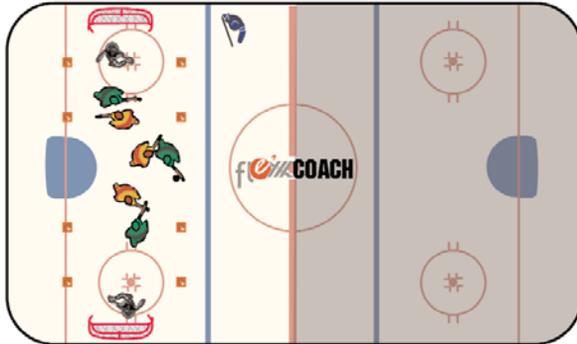
- This drill can be done without Goalies and use just cones to force the players to pass the puck through the two cones at each end 2 on 2 to develop good offensive instincts.

Goalie

- Read rush, game like situation, puckcarrier has several options and is under pressure. Goalies will see a lot of action, quick reaction

Drills

Multi Tasking 3 on 3



Objective

- Develop Skills and Fundamentals/Hockey Sense

Nets are placed along the boards in the end zone. 8 cones are placed evenly; 4 at the goal line and 4 at the top of the circles. 3 on 3 drill; after making a pass the player must skate to the nearest cone and perform a skill element; in this case it is a tight turn around the cone before the player makes himself/herself available again as a pass receiver.

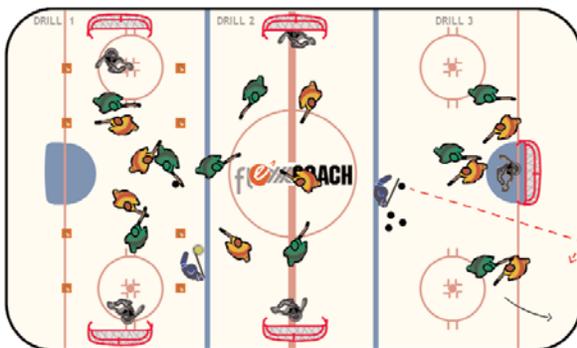
Key Elements

- Passing/Receiving
- Develop Skill Element
- Creating Scoring Chances
- Creativity
- Give and Go Passing

Goalie

- Read the rush, game like situation, puck carrier is under pressure.

Ice Utilization Small Games (6)



Objective

- Utilize the ice surface efficiently and effectively

Drill 1: Nets are placed along the boards in the end zone. 8 cones are placed evenly; 4 at the goal line and 4 at the top of the circles. 3 on 3 drill; after making a pass the player must skate to the nearest cone and perform a skill element; in this case it is a tight turn around the cone before the player makes themselves again an available pass receiver.

Drill 2: Players divided into 2 teams. Positioned outside the blueline. Start with 3 players from each team in the zone with 2 nets positioned at the side boards. The coach standing just outside the blueline with tennis balls. The coach throws in a ball and the players play a regular 3 on 3 game.

Drill 3: Divide players equally into two groups along the blueline. 3 on 3 attack the same net. The players must exchange the puck with the coach on a change of possession. If the puck comes out of the zone or a goal is scored quickly, the coach can add another puck. Shifts should last 30 seconds.

Key Elements

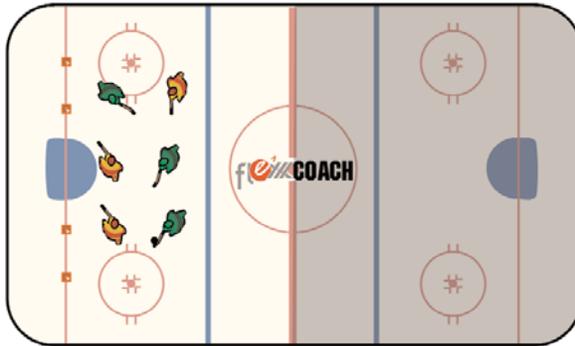
- Create Scoring Chances in small area
- Read and react to whats available
- Proper Positioning for good puck support
- Use of your body to create space for your teammates
- Strong on your stick

Goalie

- Up to five goalies can participate in this drill. in addition you can also use shooter tutors, Foam pads covering low part of the net or empty nets.

Drills

2 Passes - Pass Thru Cones



Objective

- Getting open to support the puck

Place 4 cones on the goal line resembling goals, as shown in the diagram. No net on this drill. 6 players, 3 on 3; contained from the top of the circles or the blue line down. The players are to make at least 2 passes and then pass thru the cones for a point. On any change of possession, 2 passes must be made before passing thru the cones.

Key Elements

- Passing/Receiving
- Puck Support
- Creativity
- Give and Go Passing

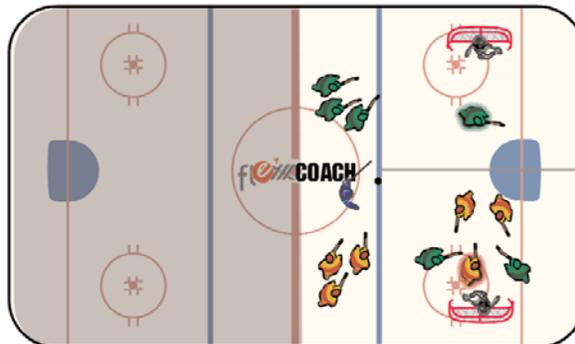
Variations

- This drill can be 4 on 4 or 5 on 5 to add more players.

Goalie

- No goalie needed for this drill. Can be working in the neutral zone with the other coaches.

3 on 2 Small Game



Objective

- Create Good Scoring Chances, Quick Transition

Key Elements

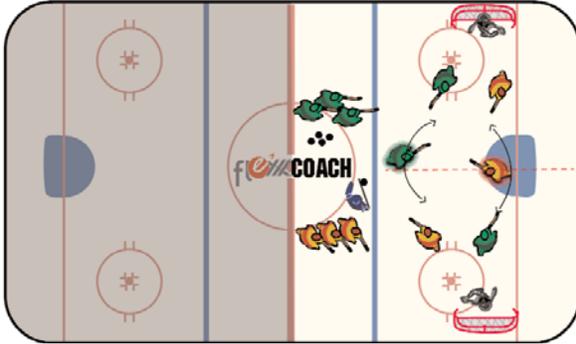
- Transition
- Create Odd Man Rushes/Scoring Chances
- Creativity
- Defensive Positioning

Variations

- This drill can also be a 2 on 2 to create 2 on 1's. One player has to stay on his half of the ice.

Drills

3 on 3 Game Rover



Objective

- Transition the puck to Create scoring chances with odd man rushes

Players divided into 2 teams. Positioned outside the blueline. Start with 3 players from each team in the zone with 2 nets positioned at the side boards. Both teams have a defender, offender and a rover. The defender stays on the defensive half of the rink. The offender stays on the offensive half of the rink. the rover can go on both halves of the rink.

Key Elements

- Skating
- Communication
- Protecting The Puck
- Create Scoring Chances
- Give and Go Tight Area Situations

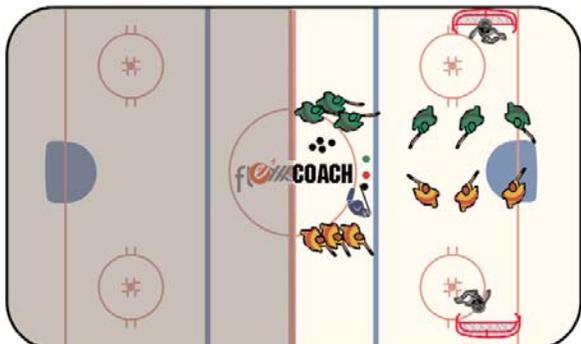
Variations

- Can also play this game with one player being the rover going both ways but he can't shoot just has to be a passer.

Goalie

- Develop awareness to various situations. Quickness, agility, balance. Quick reaction to a lot of shots.

3 on 3 Game - Three Colored Pucks



Objective

- Small area games, develop hockey sense

Players divided into 2 teams. Positioned outside the blueline. Start with 3 players from each team in the zone with 2 nets positioned at the side boards. The coach standing just outside the blueline has 3 pucks all of different colors; black, green, red. If the black puck is selected by the coach, the situation is played as a regular game. If the green puck is selected, the coach then designates one net to be scored on by either team. If the red puck is selected the situation is played as a regular 3 on 3 game with a designated scorer assigned to each team. (The players have to adjust to each situation as the coach randomly selects the various colored pucks.)

Key Elements

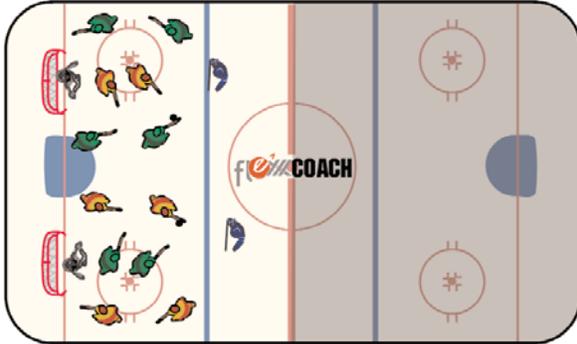
- Give and Go Passing
- Awareness To Different Situations
- Protecting The Puck
- Ability To Work in Tight Areas
- Create Scoring Chances

Goalie

- Develop awareness to various situations. Quickness, agility, balance. Quick reaction to a lot of shots.

Drills

4 on 2 Special Teams



Objective

- Read the play and reacting to what's available quickly

Divide the end zone in half, using 2 nets, placed in each half of the ice on the goal line. 4 on 2 in each half of the ice. The 4 players are to work the puck, reading the play to what is available. The other 2 players work on defensive skills; with an "active" stick, taking away passing lanes, forcing the 4 players to move the puck quickly, trying to get the puck away from the 4 players.

Key Elements

- Passing/Receiving
- Read and React
- Anticipation
- Heads Up
- Positioning with Good Support/Target

3 on 3 Two Pass (Attack The Same Net)

Objective

- Stressing Puck Support

Divide players equally into two groups along the blueline. 3 on 3 attack the same net. The players must exchange the puck with the coach on a change of possession. If the puck comes out of the zone or a goal is scored quickly, the coach can add another puck. Shifts should last 30 seconds.

Key Elements

- Defensive Awareness
- Offensive Creativity
- Creating Space for a Teammate
- Puck Protection
- Passing/Receiving One-Touch Passes

Variations

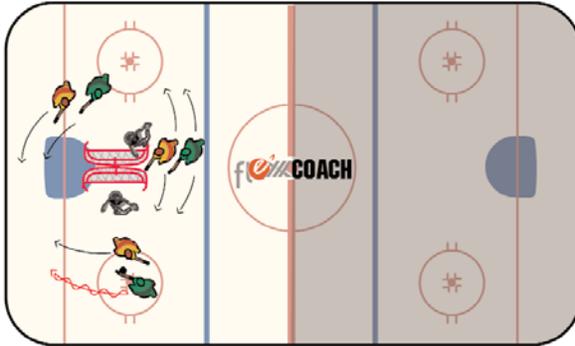
- Use the stationary coach to relieve pressure, when a team has control of the puck.

Goalie

- Game like situation, communicate with teammates, read and react to all situations.

Drills

3 on 3 Behind The Net



Objective

- Offensive and Defensive play from behind the net

In one end zone place the two nets in the middle of the ice, back-to-back, facing out towards the boards. 3 on 3 game; when one group of players have control of the puck they are trying to create scoring chances on their designated goal. The other 3 players are now in a defensive situation where they try to prevent that team from scoring. On a turnover the defensive team now becomes the offensive team, trying to score on their designated net.

Key Elements

- Create Scoring Chances in small area
- Puck Support
- Quick Transition
- Offensive/defensive awareness of the game
- Get the puck up high in tight

Variations

- A 2 pass senario can be added on the change of possession, before shooting.

Goalie

- Post to post play, head on a swivel, keep an active stick to deny the passing angles thru the crease.

Mid Zone Game



Objective

- Create Good Scoring Chances maintaining puck control

Mid-ice drill; two nets positioned at each blue line - Players are divided into two equal teams. Three players from each team start the drill 3 on 3. Coaches positioned as shown in the diagram. 3 on 3 game; the coaches are stationary but can be used by the team that has puck possession.

Key Elements

- Passing/Receiving
- Defensive Positioning
- Transition
- Puck Support
- Creating Space for your Teammate

Variations

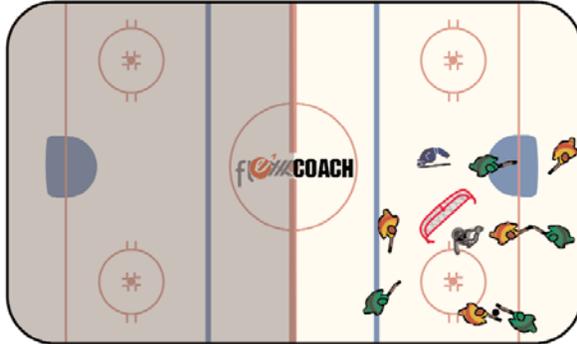
- The Coach can speed the game up by using one touch passes. 2 passes have to be made before passing to the Coach.

Goalie

- Read the rush, game like situation, puck carrier has several options and is under pressure.

Drills

2 on 2 Puck Protection



Objective

- To maintain control of the puck with good support

Place four players in any small area on the ice, with a net; using a border patrol pad or barrier of some sort; closing off a tight area. The four players are to battle 2 on 2 trying to maintain control of the puck while trying to create scoring chances on the goalie in the net.

Key Elements

- Protect the Puck
- Mobility/Foot Work
- Beat Pressure
- Create Scoring Chances
- Give and Go Passing

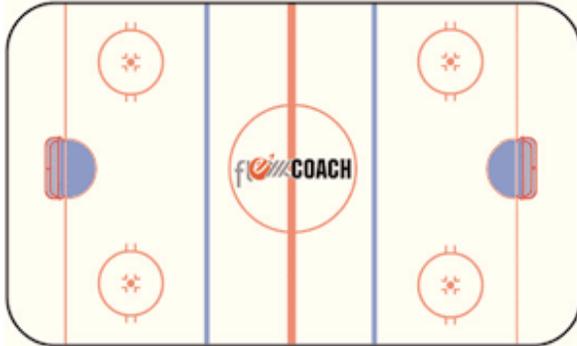
Variations

- Can use this as a 1 on 1 to get your players to compete in a tight area

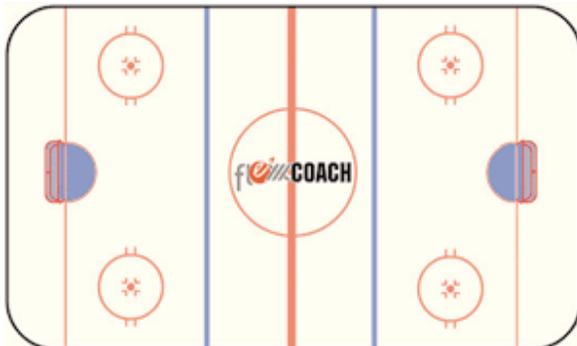
Goalie

- A lot of scoring chances, quick reactions by the goalie.
- Encourage the goalie to play the puck and keep the play moving.

On Ice Presentations

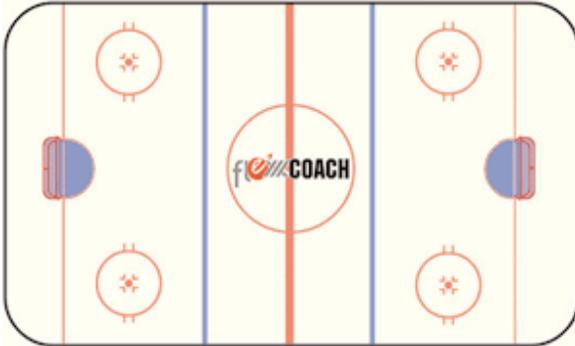


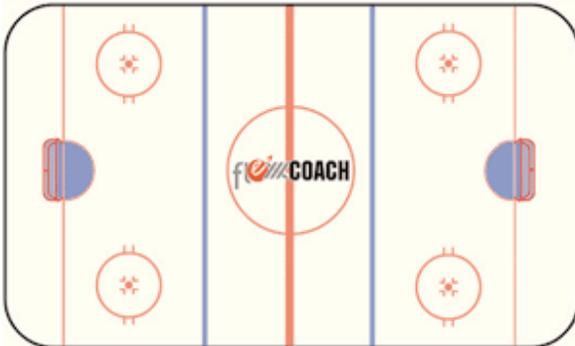


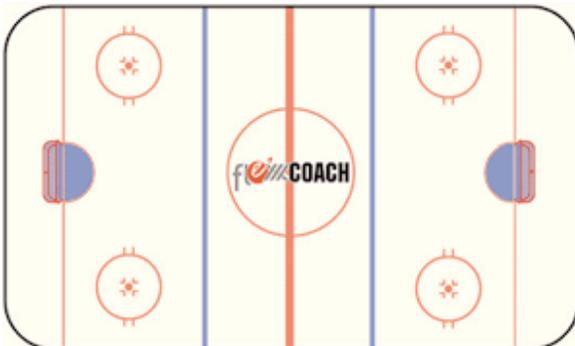




On Ice Presentations









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