



“It’s quite a different game when it’s played in a match box”

ALL ZONES – PLAYING ON A SMALL ICE SURFACE

When you walk into an arena in your own home town or on the road, the first thing players and coaches do is look at the ice surface and get an impression of its size and ice quality.

There are quite a number of variations in the dimensions of ice surfaces around including length and width and the size of the zones below the bluelines and in the neutral zone. Also, the location of the circles in each zone from the bluelines, and the distance between the blue lines should be noted as well as the distance behind the nets. There’s no need to get into measurement details here compared with NHL ice surface size, we all know a small ice surface when we see one.

Your pre-game talk with the team should in part deal with the strategy and tactics to adapt to the ice surface characteristics. For small ice surfaces here are some points to consider:

- Everything is going to feel like it’s happening faster and closer to the other team, that is, there will not be the usual time or space to make plays so reaction time will have to be faster everywhere
- Generally get ready for a much more physical close checking game
- If the distance between the blueline and the nets is much less than normal (you can usually see this by the very little distance between the top of the circle and the blue line), you should point out the following to the team:
 - If you are a forward with speed who can usually beat a defenceman wide and still cut in on goal for a good scoring chance, on this size surface after you go around their D you will just about be in their corner with no angle to get to the net or shoot so this play will not work as well as usual
 - On the other hand our D in our zone can just force their forward wide and protect the middle more
 - Forwards should get used to stepping over their blueline and shooting as your shot will come from just about the top of the circle. This is a very good scoring opportunity with a good hard well placed shot with team mates skating a short distance to screen and get the rebound
 - Forechecking their D will be easier after the puck is shot in given the shorter distance to get to the puck, the closer both half boards winger positions are to the forecheckers, the closer their D are when they set up for a D to D pass behind their net, and the closer our D are to their wingers at the half boards



- On the other hand our wingers should sometimes position themselves lower than the half boards in our end when our D has won the puck to make it harder for their D to pinch
- From our D's point of view easier forechecking for the other team means less time and space for our D to make a play or pass in our zone and so we will shoot the puck out more – dull but effective
- There will be hardly any room in the neutral zone for cross ice or cute short passes that could be intercepted so we will shoot the puck in deep from the neutral zone most times
- When neutral zone regroupings are being run with D to D passes at or just behind our blueline, our forwards usually will not have time or space to take the pass and skate with the puck so the best play many times will be to deflect the puck into their zone deep without stopping it - the other forwards should anticipate this play
- Running overload breakout plays from deep in our zone (“Strongwall” Plays) where 2 forwards end up in about the same place in the neutral zone to fight for the puck is a good idea as there isn't much room for the normal open breakout plays or stretch breakout plays
- On our 5 on 4 power play when we set up in their zone in our 2 high and 3 lower formation and they go into their box formation, there will be little room for anything other than passes to the point and passes to the forwards at the ½ boards and passes to the forwards deep below the goal line and wide. So, we should try less pretty plays, rather shoot from the points and ½ boards, screen their goalie, go for the rebounds and crash their net. In their corner we should bring the puck to the net for a wraparound or right out front for a shot on a bad angle and have all the forwards crash the net for the rebound. A lot of time can be wasted passing the puck around looking for a middle of the box or a back door passing play (see power play TIPS under OFFENSIVE ZONE) that just isn't there on a small ice surface as they play “protect the house”
- On our penalty kill, make it a pressure penalty kill quickly taking away their time and space all over the ice forcing them to rush their passes and shots and make mistakes
- From a goalie's point of view angles are different on smaller ice surfaces from various positions and there tend to be more goal mouth scrambles given less room around the net to the boards sideways. So if you have two goalies with about the same skill levels and save %, one who is a better stand up disciplined angles/white ice type goalie and the other is a more acrobatic, pounce on the puck blue ice type goalie, the latter will probably help you more on a smaller ice surface generally speaking