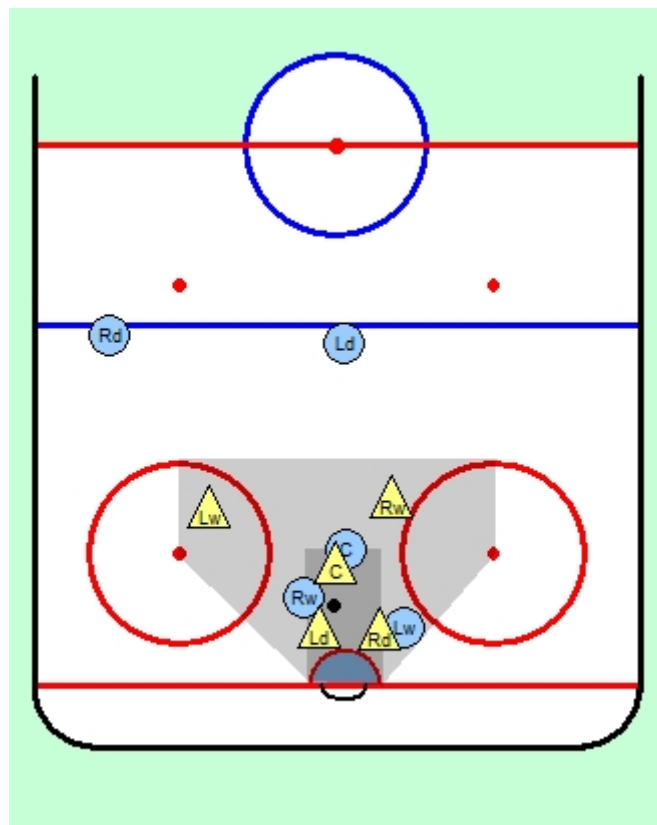




“Protecting the prime scoring area in front of our net is one of the most important elements of winning”

DEFENSIVE ZONE – NET FRONT COVERAGE – BOX OUT

When the other team has players in the prime “AA” scoring area immediately in front of our net (see darkest shaded area in diagram below), our defencemen or forward must position themselves so that if a pass to them is tried, we can lift their stick off the ice and make contact with their body, or better still intercept the pass and steer it to the corner.





Most times if you try to carry the puck you will be stripped by one of them. Don't carry the puck in traffic in the Dzone, pass it to someone clearly open with a clear passing lane or get the puck to the corner, and do it quickly.

What is the best coverage position net front? Some coaches say the best coverage position net front is in front of the player you are covering, skates facing sideways, shoulder to shoulder (at right angles) with their player behind you, head on a swivel reading their play, so you can turn and block a shot on net if it comes. Other coaches say get behind their player making sure he does not gain the top of the crease to force our goalie back on the blue ice, and to enable our defenceman to push their forward out sideways to allow our goalie to see the shot and take away the potential shot deflection. Other coaches say stand beside their forward so you can lift his stick off the ice and move him sideways to let our goalie see the puck.

My view is there is no magic position solution. Whatever position is chosen we don't want a shot being taken with 2 screens in front...their forward and our defenceman, nor do we want to deprive our goalie with getting to the top of the blue ice when a shot is coming from the side or point. And yes we want any shot blocked. A lot is happening in any battle in front with players spinning off checks and movements in and out and sideways. All coaches can do is set the objectives as outlined above in this paragraph for our players.

If the shot gets by our defenceman and our goalie saves it, our defenceman should spin in front of our goalie and their player, stick on the ice in case there is a loose puck and not allow him to enter any space in front of our goalie. That's called "boxing out".

If our opponent overloads in front with 3 or more players when for instance a shot is being launched from the point, both defencemen and our centre and our weak side winger should be down low to cover their players and avoid them screening our goalie, block the shot and clear any rebound to the corner, not forward towards their defenceman. In these circumstances it is very important for our players to talk with one another saying: "I've got 16" or "I've got 20" so two of our players don't cover the same opposition player, leaving another one of their players open.

And being in the vicinity of or just close to their players net front is not good coverage. Neither is ignoring what their player is doing and puck watching. If the player you are covering spins off your coverage, go with him and engage being careful not to draw an interference penalty.

If it is clear a shot is coming from say the point and they have only say 2 players in front of our net, our defenceman and forward on the side the shot is coming from should line up vertically in the shooting lane of the shooter to block the shot. Blocking shots effectively is one of the most important defensive skills, as well as clearing rebounds to the corner.