



*“Avoid sending 2 players to get the puck in our corner with only one of their players there, unless we can win the puck for sure, because if we can’t, it’s 4 on 3 elsewhere in our zone, and one of their players will be wide open”*

## **DEFENSIVE ZONE – 2 ON 1 CORNER COVERAGE IN OUR ZONE WHEN THE PUCK IS THERE – YES OR NO OR SOMETIMES?**

Sometimes.

One defensive zone strategy is to have the wingers take responsibility for the faceoff dots to the top of our circles and the points and have the centre be the extra defenceman in our zone as indicated in an earlier TIP. If the puck goes into our corner with **one** of their forwards, some coaches have the defencemen and the centre go to the corner together, 2 on 1, to increase our chances of winning the puck.

Sounds OK, and it is sometimes, but not always by any means especially as player skill levels increase. Our centre and defenceman must make a judgment and **READ AND REACT**. Their decision as to which one or both of them should go to the corner and leave coverage of one of their other forwards, depends. Depends on what?

### **#1 Will their forward get to the puck first ahead of either our centre or our defenceman?**

We will skate hard to prevent their player from getting to the puck in our corner first, but if their player will likely get to the puck first, there will be an open forward somewhere for him to pass to if we have two of our players on their way to the corner but not quite there in time to stop their pass. We can’t cover 4 of their players with 3 of ours if they know what they are doing. So against good teams, we better not use this option when they are likely going to get to the puck in our corner first.

Here are 2 examples of plays they can execute to give them great scoring chances if they get to the puck first to show the importance of usually our centre’s decision to go to the corner or stay put in his normal coverage, that is, covering whichever of their forwards is uncovered.

One of their forwards, one of our defencemen and our centre is in our corner to the right of our goalie. Our wingers are covering their defencemen at our blue line and can also cover a little bit more down low and still control the passing lanes to their defencemen. Our other defenceman is in front of our net covering one of their forwards. That leaves one of their forwards “loose”.







sending 2 of our players against one of theirs in our zone in the corner is a very high risk tactic many times.

Think about it. If this tactic is successful even 70% of the time, that means it fails 30 % of the time. So, in a game out of 15 puck dump ins or loose pucks in our corner, it can easily mean 5 great scoring chances for them. And what do we get on the 70% side, 10 breakout opportunities miles away from their net. It's just not worth it. Not even close. This high risk strategy is very similar to defencemen taking unreasonable pinching or lunging risks at their blue line or in the neutral zone and failing a number of times, thus giving them odd man rushes, sometimes with no forward coming back in time.

**Forwards on the other team love defencemen and teams who play high risk defensive hockey trying to win puck possession that produce great scoring chances for the other team occasionally. In close games, against good teams, this often is the difference between winning and losing.**

**#3 Will their forward and the 2 of our players get to the puck at about the same time?**

If they do, this tactic should work well because it's 2 on 1.

**#4 Will one or both of our 2 players get to the puck before their one player?**

If either is so, we don't need 2 players in our corner. If the centre gets there first he can make the first breakout pass, either to a defenceman behind our net or to the winger at the hash marks. If our defenceman gets there first, it's the usual breakout play with the centre going up ice anticipating a pass from the winger at the hash marks or taking a pass directly from our defenceman.

So, the general rule is that our 2 defencemen and our centre should each cover one of their forwards in our zone (3 of them and 3 of us) and not leave their coverages unless there is an emergency or a great opportunity, not just a better than even chance to win the puck in the corner. Play safe in our zone by using the strategy that each of our players has a specific coverage responsibility for each of their players. That doesn't mean non aggressive and soft play, not skating hard. Quite the opposite. Force them to make an outstanding play within the 3-on-3 down low coverage and with their defencemen at the blue line and make them really earn their scoring chance - they won't get even a good shot very often if we play hard, smart and physically one-on-one lifting their sticks off the ice as the puck comes to them.



## **PRACTICE DRILLS:**

- 1. Run 5 on 5 unit drill with “offensive” forwards and their defencemen starting at the red line in a line across the ice with the centre shooting the puck into the defensive zone. The “defensive” forwards and their defencemen are lined up on the defensive zone blue line so when the puck is shot in they have the advantage in getting to the puck and their positions before the “offensive” 5 player unit.**

**The “offensive” unit forechecks and tries to score, and the defensive unit tries to breakout. Keep score.**

**Give feedback including whistling the play dead in the middle of it having the players freeze in their positions, and then give feedback.**

**When the puck is out of the defensive zone or a goal is scored, repeat the drill.**

**Make sure each unit is wearing different coloured jerseys, and each player in each unit has the same coloured jersey, as we want high speed instant peripheral same team player recognition and it is almost impossible to accomplish this without jersey colour recognition.**

**Vary the starting positions of the offensive and defensive units and players (closer together or further apart) to reduce or increase the time the defensive defencemen will have to get puck control in their defensive corner or to go D to D behind their net. This will replicate “real” hockey conditions.**

**If we are teaching breakout or forechecking systems to players who are not familiar with the options, show them the options off ice on a hockey board, and walk them through the options on ice. Then run this drill with no resistance, then 1 player, then 2 player, then 3 player, and eventually 5 player resistance.**

**Keep running this drill at every practice so the options chosen both defensive and offensive become second nature depending on offensive and defensive positioning and “time and space”.**



- 2. Run 5 on 5 unit drill facing the puck off in the defensive zone with all players in their regular faceoff positions to practice breakouts and forechecking from more of a standstill start – much different from when the puck is shot in.**

**The “offensive” unit tries to score, and the defensive unit tries to breakout. Keep score.**

**Give feedback including whistling the play dead in the middle of it having the players freeze in their positions, and then give feedback.**

**When the puck is out of the defensive zone or a goal is scored, repeat the drill.**

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