



“When we have or don’t have the puck, player support for your team mates is one key for maintaining or gaining puck possession”

ALL ZONES – PLAYER/PUCK SUPPORT

What do we mean by “player support” with and without the puck? Some coaches use the term “puck support” but to my mind it’s really player support.

Player support is what players do with or without the puck to help our team gain or keep puck possession. It is fundamentally a team effort in reading and reacting to a developing play.

Some player support examples are:

1. One of our forwards is moving down the ice in the neutral zone with say two of his team mates, none of whom is open for a pass so our puck carrier’s best play is to shoot the puck into their corner. Our forwards without the puck seeing that our puck carrier’s best option is to shoot the puck in deep, accelerate and time their crossing of the other team’s blueline to coincide with the shoot in, in order to maximize our chances of winning the puck in their corner before their defencemen can get to it. Our forwards without the puck are said to be “supporting” our player shooting the puck in deep
2. Our forward who is the first man in on the forecheck in their corner when their player gets to the puck first, bodychecks their player dislodging the puck from their player. One of our other forwards comes in after our first forechecking player or at the same time and wins the puck. Our second fore checking player in deep is said to be “supporting” our first player to win the puck. This can of course occur all over the ice when there are puck battles. Support by another player becomes critical in our team winning the puck
3. By one of our players quickly joining the rush with a team mate who has the puck and creating a passing lane for a pass by our puck carrier, our player not carrying the puck gives the puck carrier an option and a lane to pass the puck, puts a little more pressure on their checker of our puck carrier, and therefore “supports” our puck carrier
4. On our 3 player cycle when we have the puck in their end, as we pass the puck among our 3 players, each of our moving and rotating players who cause coverage confusion for the other team by cutting in front of their defenders and getting open for a pass is said to “supporting” each of our puck carriers on the 3 player cycle
5. On a 3 on 2 when our right winger has the puck crossing the blue line and when our centre skates hard to the net creating space in the deep slot and when our left winger fades into this open space in the middle, our centre and left winger are “supporting” our right winger puck carrier by creating openings and coverage confusion among their defenders with our movements and positioning, and thereby create passing lanes and options for our puck carrier



6. On a D to D regroup taking place at or just behind our blueline, all our forwards come back hard towards our D as one forward passes the puck to one of our D to start the D to D regroup. All our forwards then pivot and turn up ice in the neutral zone, or cross getting open to allow our D time and space to pass the puck to one of our forwards. All our forwards are “supporting” the regroup play and our D who will be making the pass
7. When our defenceman starts to pinch at their blueline, and our forward on the same side and our other D on the other side recognize that the pinch is about to happen, our forward skates back hard to “support” or cover for our pinching D and our other D hinges back towards the red line in case our pinching D loses the pinch at their blue line. Both our forward and our hinging D are supporting the pinch
8. A very important player support role is screening their goalie or deflecting a shot or anticipating where a rebound will go as our player begins to shoot. It is usually too late to wait until after we have shot for our supporting player to move into a position to get the rebound. If the shot is low onto the goalie’s leg pads and their goalie can’t steer the shot into the corner, our supporting player should be ready for the rebound coming out further from the net than if the shot is higher off the goalie’s upper body in which case the rebound should drop down closer to their goalie’s skates.

When we have the puck in the above and other “support” situations, the critical mental processes or hockey intelligence in player support to make the support work for the team is for all players to instantly see or “read” the positioning of our and their players, in order to anticipate what team play options are available given the opposition’s coverages, pressure, positioning and speed. Then we need to adjust our positions with and without the puck to enable passes to our players and to create skating room for our puck carrier so we can maintain puck possession and move the puck down the ice. Rapid player and puck movements when our players are not close together are very difficult for the opposition to cover, particularly when our players are crossing with each other.

Supporting is not an easy skill to learn but it is a huge part of developing overall hockey intelligence. It starts with players seeing the whole ice. A player needs to understand why this type of “support” works in various situations and to understand the play options available. Chalk talks and game videos are very useful in slowly explaining and diagramming various support plays and how they will benefit team performance.