



“ If they have several key forwards who score a lot it makes sense to pay more attention to them defensively”

ALL ZONES - MATCHING LINES AND SHADOWING

Some coaches believe in spreading out their scoring talent balancing the lines between offensive and defensive skills and size. Others believe in loading a line with good goal scorers and puck handlers and shooters so they can execute passes and plays and become very offensively productive for the team in scoring goals. They also can play as a unit on the power play and over a season knit together as a cohesive unit and develop chemistry. Some coaches do not believe in chemistry making the group better than the sum of the parts, but I have found this not to be true.

In home games, the home team coach has the right to change last so he can match lines as he chooses. If a coach has the type of players who are very good skaters and checkers who see the ice well but are not gifted goal scorers a great role for them is to play against a top scoring line and stop them dead in their tracks. They also learn very strong defensive skills at the same time and have a lot of fun and positive team mate feedback in shutting down their opponent's top line.

You may even design different forechecks and coverages for them in each zone. One thing top offensive players do not like is no time and space to do their thing. If every time they get the puck someone is finishing his check on them it can be very effective for the team's success.

Assigning one player to “shadow” another is more difficult particularly if the player is a winger who rotates with their centre and other winger all over the ice. So, even if it's a one player great scoring line to stop, I prefer a defensive line assignment for the whole line rather than a shadow assignment for one player.

At lower levels of minor hockey there is a great reluctance to have a shut down line as all players need to develop as all around hockey players. In these situations some coaches only match lines in the playoffs and they discuss their strategy with the players in advance to get buy-in.

This strategy may not be for everyone but there is no doubt if executed properly it may be very effective.