



“The skills of each player on your 5 person unit compared with the opposition’s will determine only to a some extent which fore checking system to use”

OFFENSIVE ZONE – FORE CHECKING – WHICH SYSTEM WORKS THE BEST TO WIN THE PUCK IN THE OFFENSIVE ZONE?

Many coaches have a forechecking system for the team, either the high risk aggressive 3 - 2 or the aggressive 2 – 1 - 2 or the most conservative 1- 2 - 2.

When I get asked which fore checking system I prefer for the teams I coach I say it depends on:

- The situation - how far away are one or two of our players from the puck compared with one or two of their players – what is the % opportunity to win the puck?
- The skating, checking and puck handling skills and work ethic of the players on our 5 person unit, especially the speed of our forwards
- The skating, checking, passing and puck handling skills and work ethic of the players on the 5 person unit we are facing, especially their defencemen
- The type of break out system the other team usually uses to try to get out of their zone
- The distance from their blueline to behind their net (e.g. Olympic size?)
- Whether we are winning or losing
- The time left in the game

The key to which fore checking system to use under normal circumstances is for our forwards to understand the % chances of puck retrieval success instantly as they enter the opposition’s zone. If we can create at least a 50-50 % chance to win the puck it is worth the risk to use a more than a one player fore check down low in their zone because we can create a 2 on 1 re their defenceman. Making the wrong decision here can produce odd man rushes or easy break outs for them.

When the puck goes into their corner, and one of their players has or can easily get clear puck possession, there is no point in rushing 2 players at him in the hope of blocking or deflecting a pass. The overwhelming % is that he will be able to pass the puck past these 2 players either D to D or to the ½ boards wingers. So the 1 – 2 - 2 would be the best system to play under these circumstances (see previous 1 – 2 - 2 Tip). Get into position to intercept the pass he is about to make and have one of our players skate hard at the passer to try to make him make a bad pass in his zone.

If, on the other hand we have at least a 50-50 % chance at getting to and winning the puck first or covering their D to D behind the net pass, because of our speed crossing their blueline or getting to their corners, our puck handling and checking skills, we should commit 2 players (F1



and F2) to help make this happen with the other forward (F3) backing the play up on the same side in case we don't win the puck or if we do, so he can get into good scoring position (see previous 2 – 1 - 2 Tip).

If it's late in the game and we need a goal, or if we are on the power play, we might commit 3 players to the puck and to cover the D to D pass under these circumstances and have our defencemen get into scoring position when we win the puck (see 3 - 2 previous Tip).

If it's late in the game and we are protecting a lead, we probably will play conservatively and play the 1 – 2 – 2 aggressive system not wanting even a small chance of getting 2 forwards caught down low in their zone.

If our fore checking players are better and faster skaters than their defencemen and forwards, and are good checkers, we may decide to play the 2 – 1 - 2 almost all the time putting pressure on their defence and stopping them before they get started. But if the reverse is true the 1- 2 - 2 would be better.

If our fore checking players are about equal in ability to their defencemen and forwards, and are fairly good checkers, the 1- 2 - 2 would probably be more successful.

If their break out system is the house system with their centre covering the points and the wingers on either side responsible for down low if help is needed, 2 player fore checking pressure on their defence and their winger in the corner will often encourage them to pass the puck up the same side boards to our defenceman at the blue line just beside the boards because there is no other better outlet pass. It is very difficult for their centre to get over far enough and fast enough to cover our defenceman.

If their defensive zone system is for their wingers to cover our defencemen at their blue line and their centre covers down low, we can expect the puck up the same side boards or opposite side boards so a 1 – 2 - 2 forechecking system will be effective as we will have our same side winger covering their winger at the hash marks and our other winger expecting the puck around opposite the flow to their other winger. That leaves them with only a pass up the middle to the centre or a shot off the glass or for their defenceman to try to beat our one forechecking forward, a dangerous play in their own end.

If you notice a weakness in the size, skating ability or overall skill of one or more of their defencemen, this should affect your decision as you are going into their zone to forecheck especially if he doesn't have possession of the puck yet. Putting pressure on him can produce coughing the puck up the boards or in the middle or losing it in the corner.

So, teams may have different fore checking systems for different 5 person units (us and theirs), different game situations, and different opposition defensive zone systems, not just one fore checking system for the team.



Remember, if they have full puck control and players open for easy passes low in their zone, we should convert our forecheck to more of a defensive mode in their zone (1 – 2 – 2), and try to get the puck back in their zone off of their bad pass or in the neutral zone. The primary objective is to get the puck back, the secondary objective is not to let them gain the red line for a dump and chase or an entry play with possession into our zone.

**UNDER ANY SYSTEM HAVING OUR FIRST PLAYER IN THE
CORNER HARD TAKING THE BODY IS THE KEY**