



*“I hate using traps but they work so well to prevent controlled offensive zone entries because our opponent has to beat 5 of our players to gain controlled puck entry over our blueline”*

## NEUTRAL ZONE – WHY PLAY THE TRAP –TO MAKE THEM BEAT 5 PLAYERS

Where do the best scoring chances come from besides on power plays, lost faceoffs in our zone or turnovers in our zone? To name a few other plays that lead to goals:

- Odd man rushes against us, or
- Even man rushes 2 on 2, and 3 on 3 against us
- Other controlled entries into our zone

Measure this if you are skeptical of the above using the Data Collection Forms under Analytics in this site.

And how do the above controlled entries into our zone mostly come about? To name a few:

- Failed aggressive 2 man forecheck low in their zone leaving at least 2 of our players below the puck
- Failed ozone entry via a blocked shot or intercepted pass when trying to score leaving 2 or 3 of our players below the puck
- Failed pinch at their blueline

In summary, somehow our opponent gets the puck in their zone, moves quickly up ice, and only has to beat 1, 2 or 3 of our players to score, not 5.

NHL and high amateur level team studies have shown that controlled entries are at least twice as likely to produce goals as uncontrolled entries (i.e. Dump and Chase). Test this for your own team. The lower skilled the team is, the less this is accurate, as defensive zone mistakes happen more often with these teams, and goaltending is less efficient.

So, if we are winning and don't want them to score or for that matter get a controlled entry into our zone and we are satisfied not to try to score ourselves unless there is an exceptionally good chance to score like on a breakaway or a 2 on 1 or a 3 on 2, **why not make them beat 5 of us every time they get control of the puck in their zone and clog the neutral zone?** Makes sense if it works. And it does. I have tested the trap system in games many times with different levels of skill and player ages. There are lots of trap variations as described in this website. All have strengths and weaknesses.

Now, your standard for when you break the trapping system and commit players to score rather than just dumping the puck into their zone and making them beat 5 players every time depends on your risk assessment and willingness to take risks. If you plan on trapping the whole game and obviously need scoring chances you may release the players to try to score if they can gain a controlled entry into their zone or if on a dump and chase you have a better than 50-50 or 75-25 chance of winning the puck on an aggressive F1 and F2 forecheck. This may change later in the game if you get ahead or behind.



And in addition, if you are playing a team that has one stacked scoring line that gets huge %'s of their goals (say 35 – 40 %) why not trap them every time they get puck possession in their zone. Keep them off the scoresheet and make them beat you if they can with their less skilled forwards against your remaining forwards. And you will be surprised to find that if your trapping system is implemented properly you will turn pucks over to you in the neutral zone, giving you unexpected scoring chances. Traps are not just defensive tools they are offensive tools as well. Very helpful too when you want to cool down your opponent's momentum during a game or if your team tends to start slowly most of the time.

Why do the traps work so well? Fundamentally because they all clog the neutral zone with players who force our opponent to play dump and chase. They have little room to make good plays. The trap also provides layers of defensive coverage or overlapping coverages so if one player fails to stop the opponent's player, another player is there to help.

The discipline this approach requires is that whatever trapping system you choose (1- 2 – 2, 1 – 1 – 3, 2 – 3 or 1 – 3 – 1) with whatever challenging player movements you design, is to be consistent in using the trap as any deviation can be very costly and result in a good scoring chance for them. Each trapping player must know and practice his role and positioning and movements. Traps execution cannot be stationary to be effective.

I know, I know. Traps are perceived to be boring, when our hockey instincts tell us to be aggressive all the time. But being aggressive all the time is not smart hockey, and it is not winning hockey against teams that utilize both systems when they make sense.

Think of a trap like a PK whose really sole purpose is to stop a goal being scored against us, except with a trap we have 5 guys defending instead of just 4. Most teams in the league I coach in have a 75-90% successful penalty kill of the times they are shorthanded, and on average have around 200 times shorthanded in a 54 game season. So, 75 -90% of 200 is 150 – 180 successful kills or 20 to 50 unsuccessful kills, or 20-50 goals scored on 200 chances or in about 400 minutes in penalties. That's a goal scored every 8 – 20 minutes. And that's with only 4 players defending. With 5 defending in a trap, there should be many less goals scored in that timeframe. So as at least as a game closing strategy in the last 5 - 7 minutes it should prevent any goals being scored against us.

If you still have doubts about how effective a well run trapping system works, check out some video clips from Barry Trotz's New York Islanders in 2019 and when he won the Stanley Cup with the Washington Capitals in 2018.