



“Against highly skilled teams with clear puck possession in their zone, the 2 forwards offensive zone fore check combined with the 3 player neutral zone defence is a useful alternative trapping system to confuse their controlled breakout”

NEUTRAL ZONE – THE 2 - 3 TRAP

If the puck is in their zone and one of their players has clear possession with time and space, and they have highly skilled passing and skating players, it sometimes makes little sense to try a 2 – 1 - 2 fore checking system or even a 1 – 2 – 2 aggressive fore checking system against them as they have too many options down low for short breakout passes (remember they outnumber us down low 5 - 3) and particularly for stretch breakout passes into the neutral zone. If these stretch passes are completed a high percentage of time, their team could get high speed odd man rushes in the neutral zone and coming over our blue line.

If they do not pass consistently well or skate well, the more normal offensive zone fore checking systems will probably work well because they will not make good individual moves or good passes consistently down low in their end, and we will be able take advantage of their mistakes and increase their number of mistakes with pressure.

BUT ...

If they are highly skilled, we need to structure our fore checking formation in their zone and our defensive formation in the neutral zone to be able to make it difficult for them to get out of their zone with speed using either short or stretch breakout passing tactics.

Immediately falling back into the 1 – 2 - 2 neutral zone trap with 2 defencemen and 2 forwards waiting in the neutral zone forming a “bucket” or “trap” (see TIP on this web site) gives them their zone with little resistance with only one of our forwards angling and controlling. This enables them to try to beat the relatively stationary box 4 player trap in the neutral zone with the speed they can create in their zone by regrouping and passing down low where we are badly outnumbered 5 players to 1. If they regroup properly down low in their zone and are skilled, they should be able to create speed in their zone and in the neutral zone and then with short passes get over the red line using the opening in the middle of the box and chip passes from the boards wingers to the middle to at least shoot or direct the puck into our zone.

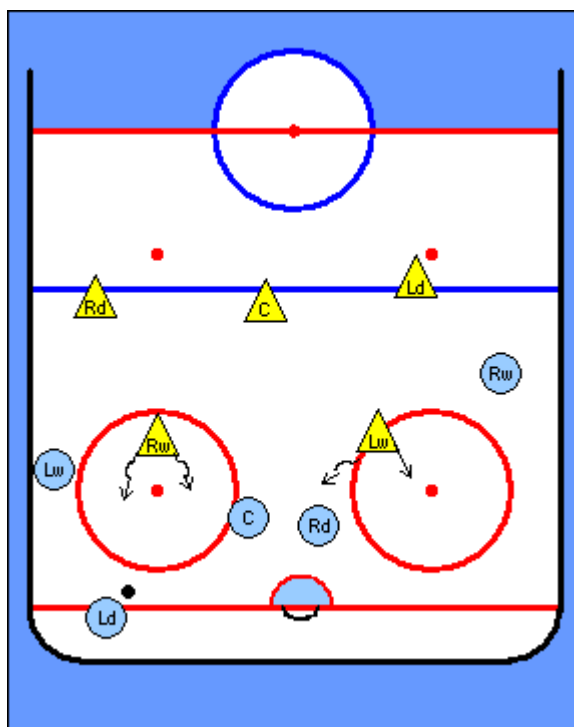
WE WANT THE PUCK BACK

So, if we commit 2 players to a fore check in their zone with a careful both sides of the ice covered containment type active fore check backing up into the neutral zone and keep our other forward high at their blue line with our 2 defencemen, we should be able at best to win the puck in their zone or in the neutral zone, prevent stretch breakout passes and odd man rushes.

Our forward hanging back high at their blue line may be any one of our 3 forwards depending on which side the puck is on deep in their zone and which of our forwards entered their zone first,

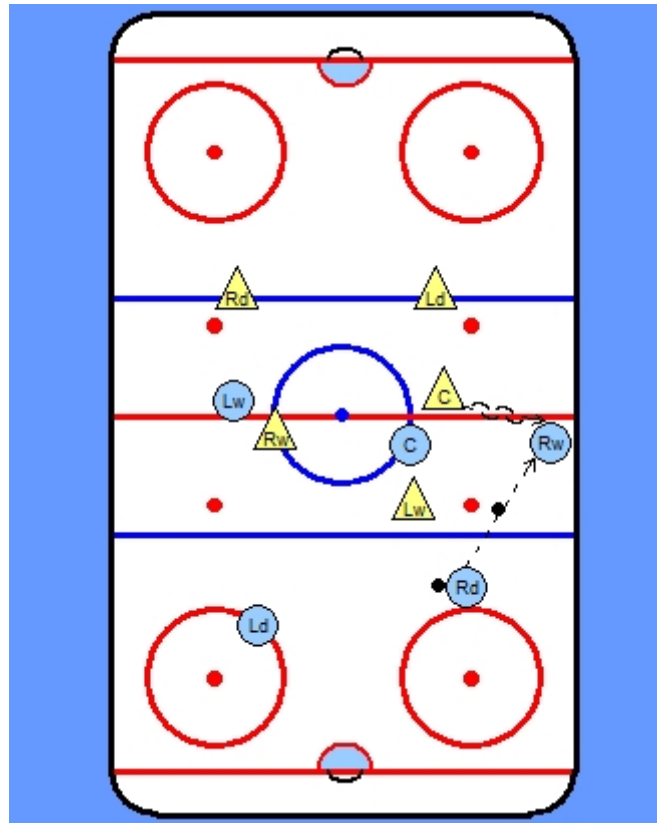


second or third. Generally the last forward to enter their zone usually a winger will be the high forward at their blue line. All 3 forwards must read what's happening in their zone and communicate well among each other. If either of our 2 fore checkers win the puck in their zone, our high forward can jump into the play easily.



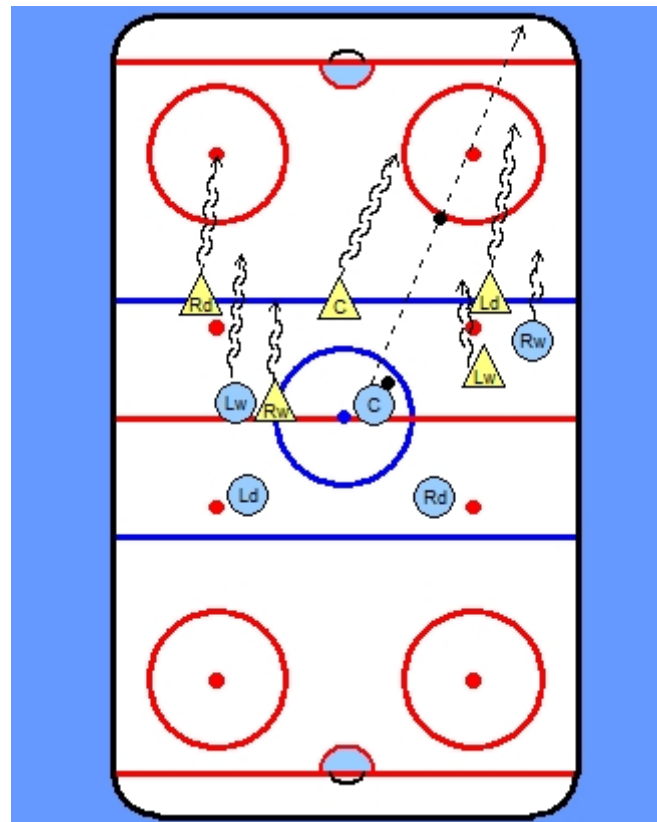
If they do get out of their zone with 3 forwards with speed we will always have at least 3 players as well in the neutral zone falling back or challenging and body checking in front of the red line (protecting the red line) and our blue line, preventing odd man rushes coming over our blue line. Our defencemen should be able to intercept their passes as we close the gaps in the neutral zone.

Also, our back checking forwards should be able to catch their forwards from behind as they move through the neutral zone before they get to the red line because our 3 neutral zone players will cause their forwards to slow down a little in the neutral zone.



So the “trap” in the 2 – 3 neutral zone system has 3 players in front of their players with the puck challenging them and slowing them down, and our 2 back checking forwards closing and catching their forwards from behind .

At worst the 2 – 3 trap if they win the red line allows them just to shoot or direct the puck into our zone (see diagram below). If we can prevent their entry into our zone without puck possession, we should be able to prevent them regaining possession in our zone more than 50% of the time (see Analytics TIPS on this site).



Some coaches feel this system is far too defensive minded when in reality it is the opposite. It's just that we will have a better opportunity taking the puck away from them in the neutral zone than in their zone because they have clear puck possession and more ice to execute passes in their zone than in the neutral zone when their players can't cross our blue line without the puck. Therefore they will run out of room and be "trapped". Puck turnovers and pass interceptions will occur all the time in the "trap" and will present great transition plays offensively for us with their 3 forwards caught too close to our blue line going the wrong way.

Again, it's great to sometimes use the 1 – 2 – 2 neutral zone trap and at others to use the 2 – 3 trap to confuse the other team by showing them different defensive structures. Develop code names for each so the coach can call out the code from the bench.

PRACTICE DRILL:

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 space advantage in getting to the puck and their positions before the “offensive” 5 player unit.

The “offensive” unit fore checks with 2 forwards and tries to win the puck and score, with 2 defencemen and a forward high at their blue line, and the defensive unit tries to breakout using established plays. Keep score and see how many times the defensive unit is able to cross the offensive team’s blue line with puck possession or with an odd man rush.

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 and the neutral 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 instantly without jersey colour recognition.

Vary the starting positions of the offensive and defensive units and players (closer together or further apart) to increase the time the defensive defencemen will have to get puck control with lots of time and space in their defensive corner, so the neutral zone trap play will easily develop. This will replicate “real” hockey conditions when this happens in games and prove to the players that hard 2 – 1 – 2 or 1 – 2 – 2 fore checking systems will not work well at all in this situation.

If we are teaching the 2 – 3 neutral zone trap system to players who are not familiar with what to do, show them off ice on a hockey board, and walk them through the various positions on ice before running the drill.