



*“Anticipate the regroup is coming when the puck goes back to their open defenceman in the neutral zone or just inside their blue line”*

## NEUTRAL ZONE – DEFENDING THE REGROUP

There are a number of situations where their player has or suddenly gains control of the puck high or low in the neutral zone, is about to get checked, and has no good option to “go forward” further in the neutral zone or into our zone:

- It could be their forward gets the puck right off a faceoff just outside our blue line, off a faceoff at centre, or off a face off just outside their blue line and is about to get checked
- It could be that their forward with the puck is just outside our blue line almost at a standstill, and neither of their other forwards are going full speed at our blue line to make a shoot in effective, or their forwards are covered by our players
- It could be that their forward with the puck is not in full motion and is about to be checked on their side of the red line with no open forward to pass to, and if he shoots the puck in, they will be called for icing

In all of these situations, they do not want to give up puck possession. So, what’s their best play?

Their best play, and we should read this the same time they do, in any of the above situations is to pass the puck back to one of their defenceman, if open, either in their end just inside their blue line or just outside their blue line in the neutral zone. This will give their 5 player unit a chance to “regroup” or attempt to reorganize with puck control. There are several good regroup plays that they can attempt as a result, so we need to understand what they are so we (in blue in diagrams below) can take them away before they (in yellow in diagrams below) get started:

1. **D to D Pass and Centre and Winger Rotation** – This play will begin with a pass back to their D, to be followed by a D to D pass with both their D backing up slightly and separating more if needed to create more time and space. There may be 2 D to D passes to allow more time for the regroup to develop. So, we need to send two forwards, usually the two wingers to cover or challenge both their D very quickly as soon as the pass back to the first D happens and we see their other D open. This will at the very least rush the passes of their D, and have these passes made before their forwards are really ready to receive them. They may turn over the puck to us as a result.

Now if we don’t get the puck while the above passing is happening, their forwards are using the time to do the following so we need to read and cover the play with speed as it develops.

If their centre skates back towards their defencemen and then curls towards the boards picking up speed and staying wide close to the boards (see diagram below with their



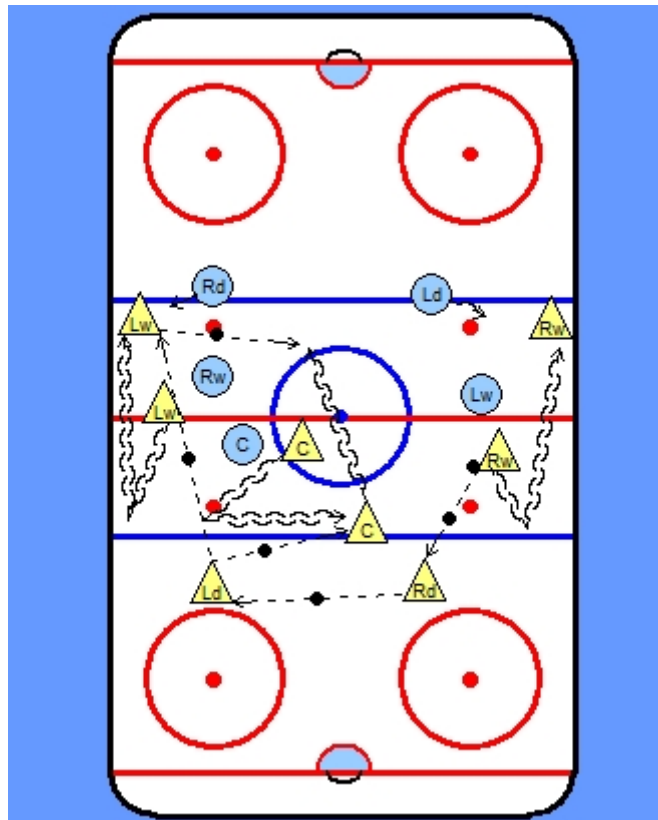


2. **D to D Pass and Centre and Winger Straight Up Ice** – This play will begin with a pass back to their D, to be followed by a D to D pass with both their D backing up slightly and separating more if needed to create more time and space. So, we need to send two forwards, usually the two wingers to cover both D quickly as soon as the pass back to the first D happens. This will at the very least rush their passes, and have the passes made before their players are really ready to receive them. They may turn over the puck as a result.

Now if we don't get the puck while the above passing is happening, their forwards are using the time to do the following so we need to cover the play as it develops. If their centre skates back angling slightly towards one of our defencemen and skates laterally and low in the middle, our centre must skate hard and cover him. Our two D and wingers must angle and close the gap between them and their two wingers and centre skating fast up.

These coverages may prevent the regroup pass up ice from ever happening. We cannot let the puck movement, rotation and speed cause us to miss defensive coverages in our lanes in the neutral zone by our centre and our D.

#### Lw to Ld to Rd to Rw or Lw





3. **D to D Pass and D Carries the Puck** – If their D has the time and space after the D to D pass, their D may try to carry the puck over the red line with their wingers and the centre using either of the above two plays, all at full speed. Their D may either try to shoot the puck into our zone hard around the boards to be picked up by one of their forwards, or pass off to one of our forwards (to their right winger in this diagram) cutting in at their blue line after forcing one of our players to challenge him. So, we need to have a forward (our right winger in the diagram below) challenge their D hard and fast so he can't get across the red line and so that he makes a rushed inaccurate pass.

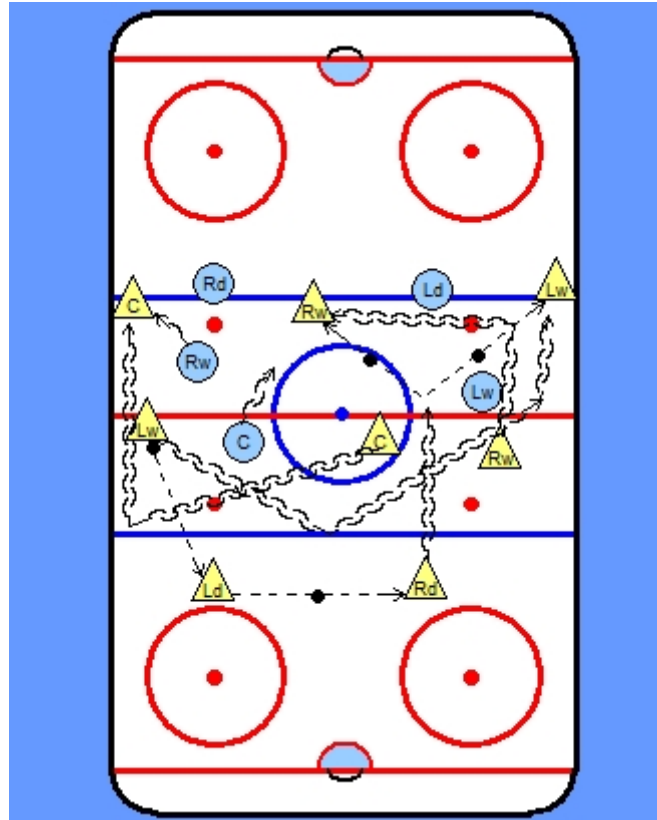
Now if we don't get the puck while the above passing and movement is happening, their forwards are using the time to do the following so we need to cover the play as it develops.

If their centre skates back towards their defencemen and then curls towards the boards picking up speed and staying wide close to the boards (see diagram below with their centre going up their left side boards), our defenceman on that side must angle, close the gap and cover their centre. At the same time their winger on that same side (left winger in the diagram) seeing their centre starting to do this may rotate into the opposite side of the ice crisscrossing with their centre. Our Lw must cover this rotating winger with speed as he goes up the other side of the ice. The other winger (right winger in diagram) may be skating fast up ice close to the boards and then cutting into the middle of the ice. He must be covered by our centre. These coverages may prevent the regroup pass up ice from ever happening. We cannot let the puck movement, crisscrossing and speed cause us to miss defensive coverages in our lanes in the neutral zone by our centre and our D.

If their D does pass wide along the boards on either side, our D must be prepared to bodycheck their player as he receives the pass separating him from the puck, and our forwards must be backchecking very hard to support this bodycheck and to pick up the loose puck up.



Lw to Ld to Rd to Rw or Lw



**THERE ARE MANY VARIATIONS OF THESE REGROUPS: READ THE PLAY AS IT DEVELOPS, COMMUNICATE WHICH PLAYER YOU ARE COVERING AND DISRUPT THEIR PLAY**

### **PRACTICE DRILL**

**5 player offensive unit (3 forwards and 2 D with same coloured jerseys), with 3 offensive forwards lined up across the red line facing our blue line, and 2 D of the offensive unit just inside of our blue line facing the red line and our forwards. A goalie is at the other end. There is a 5 player defensive unit (3 forwards and 2 D with different coloured jerseys) with the 3 defending forwards standing beside their respective checks at the red line and the two defending D standing outside their blue line. The forward positions should sometimes be changed closer to their own D to change the timing of the regroup.**

**On the whistle, the offensive centre passes the puck from the centre face off dot back to one of the offensive D and all offensive players try to execute one of the regroup plays. The**



**defending 5 player unit tries to stop them as designed above. When the offensive unit scores or are stopped the second whistle blows and the puck is returned to the centre dot full speed with all players stopped waiting for the whistle to start it again in the same positions as above. Only one shot and one rebound allowed.**

**At the other end, the remainder of the team can do a shooting or other drill going no higher than the top of the faceoff circles.**

**You can also run this drill using the full ice off a real faceoff at centre and practice getting the puck back to either D for the regroup off faceoffs.**