



# CREATING OFFENSIVE HOCKEY

Halifax Minor Hockey Association

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# DEVELOPING OFFENSIVE HOCKEY

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Many coaches start each season with an expectation that their team will be competitive and we all hope that our team will win more games than we lose. As the season starts off, we soon realize that we are losing close games and can't seem to get our offense clicking. Scoring goals and finding players that can score goals is not always easy.

Our first step may be to try to adjust our line combinations to will help us score. Putting our better players together and constantly changing our lines until we find a combination that works, we tinker with our line-ups hoping to generate scoring and offense. Perhaps we resort to matching lines with our opponents with the hope that we can get our better players out against their weaker players and, as a result, increase our scoring.

Finally, when all else fails, we turn to team defense to save our seasons. We teach our players to play safe, not take any chances with the puck, and work hard to stop the other team from scoring. Because defense is easier to teach than offense, we may gain a certain level of success by using this defense first approach. Although we aren't scoring many more goals, we are not allowing as many so our chance for victory increases and we may be able to save our season.

Then we all come back next season to find that there are not that many good goal scorers around and wonder why. As coaches, we must understand that if we want to have more offensive capability generated by players who can score goals and who are creative, we need to invest time and energy into getting this result.

Consider this:

- Offensive hockey is exciting...not just for the fans but for ourselves and our players.
- Players have more fun playing an up tempo offensive game.
- Parents enjoy the opportunity for their kids to get offensive opportunities.
- Memories are made from offensive play (that multi-goal game...the hat trick...).
- Teams that score early and have a first period lead win or tie 70% of games.
- Teams that challenge offensively draw more penalties.

To determine if your coaching philosophy is appropriate to be able to accomplish this, ask yourself these key questions.

Would you...?

- Pull your goaltender and make a 5 on 4 power play into a 6 on 4 power play?
- Allow your wingers not to come back in the defensive zone...to be a threat in the neutral zone for a quick counter?
- Play with 4 forwards and one defenseman?
- Pick a smaller more skilled defenseman over bigger grittier less skilled defenseman?

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- When down by two goals, pull your goaltender with five minutes left?
- Pull your goaltender with 8 seconds left in the period and a face-off in their zone?
- Allow your more offensive players to cheat to the offensive side of the puck or will all players have the same defensive responsibilities?
- Use forwards on the power play point ?
- Work on plays to score on the penalty kill?
- Allow your defence to jump into the rush indiscriminately?

## SEVEN KEYS TO OFFENSIVE SUCCESS

### 1. 70% Of Every Practice Should Be Skill Drills

- Each player should have lots of repetitions of passing, receiving, shooting and skating manoeuvres.
- Practices should be challenging and competitive offensively.
- You don't always need ice time to work on skills.
- Subtle skills like players presenting their forehand away from the puck and being prepared to shoot are important for coaches to teach.
- Practice scoring situations such as carry and shoot, shot off the pass, shoot through a screen, quick move quick release, deflections, rebounds, wrap arounds, up high in tight plays, and quick dekes.

### 2. Be a First Pass Team

- Defensemen need to look for the smart play.
- Allow passes to the front of the net or through the middle.
- Discourage the "dump out" or "no look rim" style of play...safe plays stifles creativity.
- An area pass is still a direct pass...utilize bank passes off the boards and laying pucks into open spaces for team mates to skate into.
- The players away from the puck have a responsibility to get their stick open and available for direct passes...(much like a receiver in football).
- Use of deception "look away" to have more time to make a play.
- Practice transition off the back check/turnovers and their rush chances.

### 3. Shoot the Puck and Drive the Net

- Sounds simple but volume of shots are key.
- Check the shot totals of the top scorers in the NHL...and also shots that miss the net or are blocked per game...the puck must get through.
- Defensive coverage often breaks down after a shot.
- Net drives off the puck create a play at the net but also openings in the slot. First two players away from the puck must drive the net with no hesitation (unless the puck carrier has the wide lane deep).
- Funnel shots and players to the net.

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## 1. Activate Your Defence into the Attack

- Encourage them to join and stay in the rush from the breakout... supporting the mid or wide lane up the ice.
- Often the net D will have an opportunity to move up ice before the low forward in defensive zone coverage.
- Make the attack an odd number by their blue line.
- Go after chips or dump in's when they have the speed.

## 2. Stretch Out the Offensive Zone

- Get the puck to the back of the net on the cycle and work plays from there... pressuring their coverage.
- On shots off the rush move the puck low/high right away and catch them over skating on the back check.
- On low scrambles move the puck back to the point quickly and catch the team collapsing.
- Players and coaches underestimate the danger of point shots.

## 3. Cycle With a Purpose

- Challenge their ability to contain by driving the seams and going to the net with the puck.
- Set picks and screens to open up ice for the puck carrier.
- Work the overload...once the puck is passed back to the corner that player needs to get into an overload position ready to shoot.
- Defence support the backside, back door pass, or mid ice seam. Practice plays involving the defence on the cycle.

## 4. Work Set Plays

- Have set face-off plays for each zone which will create an offensive advantage. Your centers should take responsibility for every set up... remember you can win the face-off by losing the draw.
- Control breakouts vs. low trap...work options off a set pattern.
- Power Play stretch breakout... which has the ability to score on the rush.
- Regroups geared to beat the trap and hit their blue line with speed.

## OFFENSIVE SKILLS WHICH NEED TO BE PRACTICED ON A REGULAR BASIS

- One time shooting (one timers).
- One touch passing.
- Deception, look away, fake shot, fake pass.
- Skating deception, change of pace.
- Timing to hit the openings with speed (Limits the defense response).

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## OFFENSIVE SKILLS WHICH NEED TO BE PRACTICED ON A REGULAR BASIS (Cont`d)

- Offensive anticipation... "thinking".
- Threat to score from a distance.
- Vision and pre play awareness.
- Strength on the puck (protection skills).
- Willingness to stay in front of the net and in front of shots.
- Triple threat position on the rush
- Get the puck on your forehand.
- Defence dragging the puck along blue line to find the shooting lanes and getting shots through to net .
- Open yourself up or uncheck yourself to be available in a scoring area.
- Ability to play rebounds.
- Shooting in stride...ability to beat players one on one and not allow the goalie to set.
- "Good quick stick" to steal pucks and create transition.

## KEY FACTORS IN OFFENSIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Read and react is the most important skill - do it quickly and it will make an average player a good player.
- Support the puck carrier by moving to open ice.
- Create an attack triangle - support the puck carrier on two sides.
- Communicate to your teammates.
- Protect the puck with your body and shield it away from your opponents.
- Keep control of the puck, don't just give it away.
- Use the boards to pass to yourself and to your teammates.
- Slow down to a speed where you can think (create).
- Don't limit yourself.
- Let the puck do the work.
- Have the courage to make mistakes.
- Use the whole ice surface to your advantage (i.e. boards, back of net, etc.).

## OFFENSIVE TEAM PRINCIPLES

- Play for puck possession
- Use everybody on the attack
- Use lateral and circular skating patterns as opposed to linear
- Be in constant motion and vary your speed
- Move with purpose (support position)
- Be an option more than once

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## OFFENSIVE TEAM PRINCIPLES (Cont`d)

- Be at the right place at the right time
- Always think one pass/move ahead
- Be deceptive and creative, not predictable

## TIPS FOR OFFENSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICES

- Increase the number of passes in each drill
- Play "keep away" style games with purpose
- Work on puck control skills with players out of their comfort zone. Helps to increase confidence
- Have giveaway rules, so players are encouraged and get used to playing with possession.
- Praise the offensive play when a goal is scored, don't focus as much on the defensive mistake
- Use flow drills that emphasize timing, passing, and support
- Practice being creative - you never know if something works until you try it