



**CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES
U7-9 HOCKEY
INFORMATION PACKAGE**

LEARNING THE GAME OF HOCKEY THROUGH PLAY

3 KEY THINGS TO HELP OUR PLAYERS AND OUR TEAMS REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.

1. Puck Pressure

This is the act of pressuring the puck when the other team has it. We need to sure to continuously remind our players to pressure the puck when the other team has it at all times. My rule of thumb is always have 2 players from our team pressuring the puck at all times. The term I use with young players is 'sandwiching' the puck carrier. This means we have one of our players pressuring them from either side creating a 'sandwich'. We are the bread and the opposing puck carrier is between us.

2. Puck Support

This is a tougher one to teach, but is very important. We need to teach our players to move to get open for passes. This typically means coming closer to the puck. This makes teams and players very difficult to play against because typically every time one of our players gets in trouble we have another player close by to either a) pass to b) help us win the puck back in a battle

3. Puck Movement

This is the act of moving the puck by passing it, dumping it, or shooting it. We need to help teach our players when they should:

- A) Shoot the puck: Teach them how to recognize where the scoring areas are on the ice so they know when they should be thinking shot (instead of pass or dump)
- B) Pass the puck: Teach our players when one of their teammates is in a passing lane, a better position than us, or when we are in trouble and at risk of turning the puck over.
- C) Dumping the puck: I am not a big believer in dump and chase hockey. I believe we should teach the kids the importance of puck possession, but it is also very important they understand why they need to dump the puck sometimes. With initiation hockey being cross ice and there being no off sides or line changes, the dump is less frequent because these are usually two of the most common times to dump the puck in. At the initiation level I feel it is important to at least let them know it is an option when they are under intense pressure from the other team and at risk of a costly turnover that could lead to a good scoring chance by the other team.

Our job as coaches is not to crush players creativity or punish them for making mistakes. We simply want to help players understand when their were opportunities to make better decisions. Many coaches get upset when a player attempts a deck called a toe drag, but then marvels at an opposing teams player that can execute this move effectively in games. If one of your players makes a mistake you need to ask how can I coach this player to understand when they should do certain things and when they should not. An example would be one of your players tries to toe drag an opposing player out front of your net. You should let them know that is a great move, but it is too high risk in the defensive zone. You should try to toe drag an opposing player to get a better scoring chance by our opponents net.

Other things that we need to teach our players to do:

1. **First on puck:**

This is arguably the most important thing we can teach our players. You have to want to be the first on the puck at all times. You have to want it more than anyone else. This means you have to be ready to do whatever it takes to get to loose pucks before your opponents. If you're a faster player, this should be easy for you. If you aren't, make sure you work on your speed and acceleration as it helps you win races to pucks.

2. **Attack the net:**

We need to teach our players to move their feet and take the puck to the net. We don't want to allow our players to be perimeter players (players who stay on the outside of the play). Perimeter players skate around the outside of the offensive zone instead of getting into the high scoring chance areas which are around the net.

3. **Get Back:**

This is something that is crucial for players to learn as they go through hockey. This skill alone will separate players from the rest of the pack. It is also refereed to as "back checking" at higher levels. Players will not make higher level teams if they are a liability to their team by not back checking.

4. **Confident Passes:**

Making hard passes is a must-have skill. We need to be sure to work with our players on their understanding of when to pass the puck and their ability to do so.

5. **Don't throw the puck away:**

Turn overs are the most dangerous plays in hockey. We want to teach our players how to protect the puck and make smart decisions that lead to less turnovers.

Here are some terms we need to begin to introduce to the players slowly throughout the season:

Back Check: Occurs when a player skates back to their own goal area to help the defense.

Breakout: Describes the act of a team moving the puck out of the defending zone towards the opponents goal (even in cross ice hockey breakouts occur).

Cover your Check: When a defending player marks an opponent resulting in the opponent not being able to participate in the play. If carried out to the extreme, the defending players may incur an interference penalty.

Dump the puck: When a player shoots a puck from the neutral zone in to the opposing teams defensive zone. either to allow time for substitutions or in the hopes of having one of his teammates gain possession of the puck deep in the zone.

Fore Checking: The act of checking or pressuring the opposing team while they are in possession of the puck in their defensive zone.

Passing Lanes: The area that is difficult for a defence player to defend with their stick or body. These include in front of the checker, either side of the checker, behind the checker in an area you can receive a pass.