

## **'What is Hockey'**

I think before we plan practice for skills or system it is important to define exactly what the game is. Here are some hockey facts.

### **Three Game Situations**

In a game between 2 equal teams with good skills you are on;

offense 35% of the time

defense 35% of the time

the puck is loose 30% of the time (not on someones stick) For low skilled teams the loose puck situation is much higher.

*The average for someone to carry the puck is about 2.5".*

*The average for the team to have the puck is about 4.5".*

*Each team has possession and loses possession of the puck about 180 times during a game. That means the puck changes hands 6 times every minute.*

### **What Happens Every Shift in a Hockey Game**

#### **'Hockey is a Game of Transition.'**

In a game the players are constantly transitioning between three situations, 0-Loose Puck 30%, 1-Offense 35%, 2-Defense 35%. On offense they are in one of two playing roles 1-Puck carrier, 2-Supporting the attack and on defense the two game playing roles are 3-check puck carrier, 4-cover away from the puck. (The video was prepared by Kai Katajalehto who coaches in Finland. )

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*In one minute of playing time I counted 7 loose puck situations, 3 times Pittsburgh was on offense and 7 times on defense and 7 times Detroit is on offense and 3 times on defense because they won the majority of loose puck situations.. This short clip is typical in a game and is a good example of the statement*

***So a hockey game is a constant transition between the 4 Game Playing Roles. Every player is always in one of these roles. There is never a time when a player has nothing to do.***

### **Four Game Playing Roles**

Role One: player has the puck.

Role Two: player supports the puck carrier, close player creating a 2-1 and farther away width and depth.

Role Three: player checks the puck carrier with either a pressure or contain decision..

Role Four: player gives either close or farther support to the first checker depending on whether the first checker pressured or contained.

If you look at the game in this manner then you realize that good habits like facing the puck, always having your stick on the ice, angling, moving to open ice quickly with the puck and again to open ice once you pass it are essential. It takes a team about 2" to get into good defending position after losing the puck, so quick transition to the attack is essential if you want to attack an unorganized defense as compared to an organized defense. Good technique at game speed are the tools you need.

The coach has to organize practices that not only work on one game playing role at a time but also on the constant transition between roles. Drills that work on one skill are fine for perfecting a technique but if you only do 1 on 1's in drills where the defender and attacker knows it is a 1 on 1 and after the shot they go back to the lineup then you are not practicing the reality of hockey which is a. both players read the situation. b. attack and defend with good technique. c. after the shot the attacker follow the shot for the rebound and defender deny a second shot. d. make a second play on offense or the defender start the breakout.

A coach who doesn't practice transition is missing the essence of the game.

Some other numbers to consider are:

1. A turnover in the offensive end followed by an attack the other way results in a scoring chance about 5% of the time.
2. Neutral zone turnovers give up scoring chances 7-10% of the time.
3. Defensive zone turnovers give up scoring chances about 25% of the time. In other words the farther the puck is from your net the more time you have to get back and defend. (so what is the point of the neutral zone trap being a team's only forecheck)

Also teams that play systems that are purely contain or totally aggressive also don't understand the game. The plan should be to pressure when possible (you are within a half stick and have a good angle) and contain when there is no chance for the closest player to get a stick on the puck and body on body.

So hockey is more like a tennis game than like basketball (power plays are similar to basketball). i.e. hit the ball-offense, ball in the air - loose puck - get in defensive position to hit - defense. Constant changing of roles. Our practices and our team play philosophy should prepare our players for this constant transition between loose puck, offense and defensive situations.