

# How to play a three-on-one

Offensively, hockey is a game of 2 on 1's. Players should be taught to create a 2 on 1, every time they, or a teammate has the puck. Players without the puck need to get in proper position, creating passing lanes, while the player with the puck needs to make the best decision, which will ultimately result in the best play. Easier said than done.

Making the proper decision with the puck is hard enough when you only have one passing option. Should you keep it or should you pass it? Add another passing option, and the decision becomes all that much harder.

Clearly, the advantage lies with the offensive team in a 3 on 1 situation. But only if they act quickly, and make the best available play. Too often in a 3 on 1 situation, players tend to overthink, or overpass, which slows the play down, and severely hinders its chances of success. From a defensive point of view, that is exactly what you want to do, slow down the play, in hopes that a teammate can get back to help out.

The following are key points to teach your players from both an offensive and defensive perspective.

## Offensive Keys

**SPEED COUNTS** – The puck carrier needs to move with speed for two reasons, first, to make it harder on the one defender who is back, but more importantly, to ensure that more defenders don't get back to help out. As happens quite frequently on power plays, when offensive players see they have advantage, they sometimes try to slow it down to make the play, which often causes them to quickly lose any advantage that they had.

**SPREAD OUT** – A 3 on 1 attack should have both width (across the ice) and depth so that it makes it more difficult for the one defender to defend. Typically, the one defender will stay in the middle of the ice, which means the puck carrier needs to enter the zone on the outside, on one side or the other. The second player across the blue line needs to provide some depth, toward the net. This player should attack the net, on the opposite side of the ice (providing some width to the attack – half the width of the ice surface) creating a passing lane behind the defender, with his stick on the ice ready to receive a pass and shoot. The third player provides depth, toward the blue line, shading the side of the ice that the puck carrier is on, to create a passing lane in front of the defender. Three attacking players too close together makes it easy for the defender to intercept passes or adjust.

**PASS WITH A PURPOSE** – The less passes the better. One should do the job, none are necessary. The more passes that are made, the more chance that the puck will be lost. If the defender is "overplaying" the other two offensive players, and leaves the puck carrier a lane to the net, he should take it and try to score himself. If the defender is "overplaying" the puck carrier, the "net" forward or the "high" forward, the puck carrier needs to recognize that and make the appropriate pass.

**OUTNUMBER THE DEFENDER FOR THE REBOUND** – Most goals are scored on rebounds. It stands to reason that most goals on 3 on 1's are scored on rebounds. In most instances, the goaltender will make the first save. All offensive players should converge on the net looking for a rebound, as they clearly outnumber the defender and have the better chance of coming up with the puck. But remember, if the shot never gets taken, or doesn't hit the net, there won't be a rebound.

## Defensive Keys

**TAKE AWAY THE MIDDLE** – The defender should be in a position in the middle of the ice, matching the speed of the puck carrier and forcing him wide. Always play to give up the least dangerous shot, which in most instances, would be a shot from a poor angle. By forcing the puck carrier to the outside, and taking away a direct lane to the net, it slows the play down somewhat and gives any potential backcheckers a better chance of getting back to help out.

**TAKE AWAY THE PASSING LANES** – The defender should keep his stick on the ice and position himself where he can use his skates, and/or stick to intercept or deflect any passes to either of the non-puck carrying attacking players. The slightest disruption or delay of a pass buys the defending team a little more time to get back and help out.

**TAKE AWAY THE MOST DANGEROUS OPTION** – By forcing the puck carrier to the outside and a poor shooting angle, the defender has limited that option somewhat. The next most dangerous option is the pass across to the player driving to the net. The goalie will be playing the shooter, and if the puck gets across to the player at the net it will be a sure tap-in for an empty-netter. The least dangerous pass to give up is to the high guy. This buys a little more time for the defensive team as this is the first player that any backchecker would be able to reach. If the high player is open and becomes the shooter, the goaltender has a little more time to react and the shot is from a less dangerous option than a tip-in at the crease.

**CLEAR REBOUNDS** – If the goaltender makes the first save, the defenders job is to clear the rebound quickly to the corner and give his team time to regroup in their defensive zone.

Clearly, a 3 on 1 is a great advantage for the offensive team. Offensively, the objective in every 3 on 1 should be a shot on goal. If that is achieved, chances are it will result in a goal, or a rebound or two. The chances of scoring increase

proportionately with the number of rebounds. Defensively, the key is to give the least dangerous scoring opportunity and hope for the best.