

Special Teams Practice



Tuesday, January 21st, 2025

Please Note: The Practice of the Week is designed to bring value across multiple age levels, but this practice is unsuitable for U14 and under. You can take simple concepts from this practice and identify other drills that work on them that might be more suitable for your team.

Overview:

This week's practice focuses on sharpening Power Play (PP) and Penalty Kill (PK) skills. The emphasis is on readiness to act on puck touches, moving to open space, and supporting teammates effectively. Whether on the PP or PK, players will learn to stay situationally aware, use deception, and maintain smart positioning to create and deny scoring opportunities.

Power Play Coaching Points

1. Know your next play before you get the puck

- Players need to be scanning and ready to act on their puck touches
- Decision-making should be quick: find the next pass, take the shot, or skate to open ice

2. Head Up and Scan the Ice

- Constantly look for open ice, defensive pressure, and teammate positioning.
- Keep your vision wide to maintain situational awareness.

3. Use Deception to Create Opportunities

- Utilize fakes with your head, eyes, body, or stick to mislead defenders.
- Open passing or shooting lanes by manipulating defensive positioning.

4. Move and Get Open Without the Puck

- Find soft spots in the coverage and make yourself an outlet for the puck carrier, especially when pressure is being applied
- Keep your stick on the ice and communicate with teammates.

5. Quick Shots After Passes

- Shoot quickly to capitalize on out-of-position defenders and goalies.
- Prioritize high-percentage shots and follow through for rebounds.

Penalty Kill Coaching Points

1. Defensive Readiness and Scanning

- Always keep your head up to anticipate the play.
- Be aware of your teammates' positions and the opposing team's puck movement.

2. Stick Positioning for Lane Control

- Keep your stick on the ice to block passing and shooting lanes effectively.
- Redirect pucks to less dangerous areas of the ice.

3. Smart Pressure

- Protect high-percentage scoring areas (inside the dots and net-front).
- Only chase the puck when there's a strong chance of disrupting the play or regaining possession.

Power Play Habits

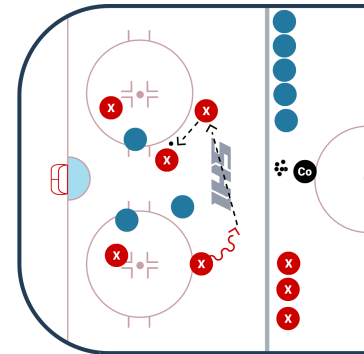
Larionov 5 V 3 Alternating Warm-Up Drill

Details:

The Larionov 5 v 3 Alternating Warm-Up Drill is a great activity to warm-up players at the beginning of practice. The drill can also be used to practice awareness, puck protection, passing and decision making.

Setup:

- In the offensive zone, set up a 5 on 3.
- On the whistle play keep away.
- Can make it a game - count the number of passes the offense has (can't pass to the same person 2 times in a row).
- Rotate players!



Coaching Points:

- Offense:
 - Players with the puck can use variable speed, cut-backs, tight turns, deception & fakes to create space and open up passing lanes.
 - Players without the puck should keep their sticks on the ice and work to get open, and use scissor / switch techniques with teammates to confuse defenders.
- Defense:
 - Use active sticks to disrupt passing lanes and work to keep the puck to the outside.

Variations:

- Can set this up in different areas of the ice.
- Can set up different player amounts.
- If defense is taking the puck away too much, you can have them flip over their sticks.

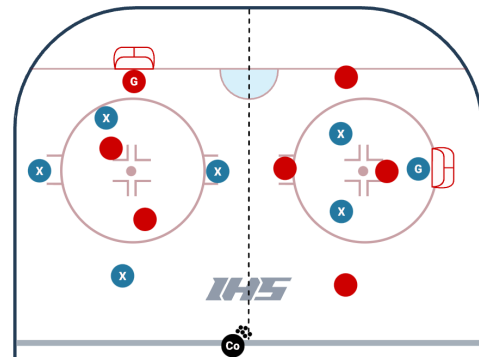
4 on 2 Split Power Play Drill

Details:

The 4 on 2 Split Power Play Drill from Cail MacLean allows teams to practice power play and penalty kill habits in a wide and narrow game setup. Teams that move the puck quickly and move around their area will be successful. Standing still will make it easier for a team to defend.

Setup

- Split the zone in two with cones or a rink marker. One side of the zone has a net on the goal line and the other zone has the net on the hashmark next to the boards.
- There should be a total of 12 players on the ice with 6 players on each side. Divide it up so each side is 4 on 2.
- The coach is at the blue line with pucks. On the whistle the coach fires a puck to one of the players or chips it into an area where players must compete for possession.
- The side with the puck begins 4 on 2 with the offense trying to score, and the defenders are trying to get the puck to their teammates on the other side of the ice.
- Make sure players get reps on both areas of the ice since each setup presents unique opportunities, situations and challenges.



Coaching Points

- The team with the 4 players should work hard to use the 4 v 2 to their advantage by moving the puck quickly and skating around the zone. Look for cross ice seams and quick shots on net.
- Defenders should not chase the puck too far, but stay in the middle of the ice with their sticks on the ice to block passing lanes.
- Defenders that get the puck should work hard to get their eyes up and make a tape to tape pass to their teammates on the other side of the ice.

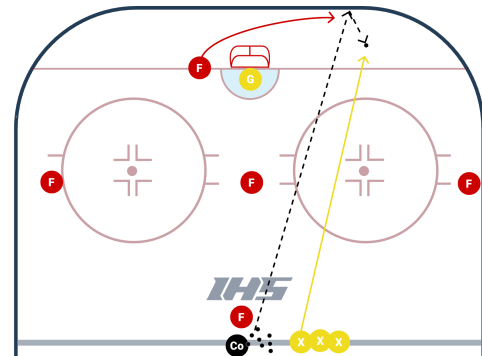
Variations

- Can play 4 v 2, or 3 v 2.
- Can set up the nets as shown in the diagram, or have them both on the goal line, or both on the hash marks.

1-3-1 Mad Attacker

Details:

This is a drill / game that allows you to work on your power play. This example shows a 1-3-1 power play but you can use it with any power play. Once you have established the players roles and they know the options they can run then it is good to gradually add pressure. This drill allows you to add pressure in stages.



Setup

- 5 power play members are set up in the position in the zone
- coach and the other players are outside the zone
- designate a group of "mad attackers" (penalty killers)
- the coach will dump a puck into the zone
- the coach will send in a "mad attacker"
- the "mad attacker" pressures the puck everywhere and tries to create a turnover
- the power play unit controls the puck and tries to use their power play options to score goals

Coaching Points

- "mad attacker" pressures everywhere with an active stick
- power play players need to retrieve the puck and outnumber the "mad attackers" on loose pucks until they get possession
- make simple passes instead of trying to go through the "mad attackers"
- players without the puck should move to support puck carrier so they do not have to make passes through "mad attackers"

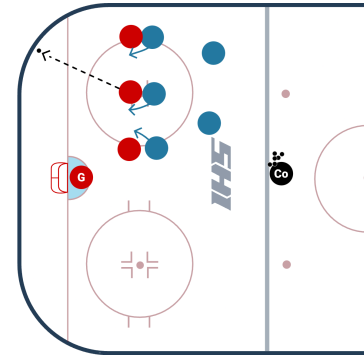
Variations

- add 2 then 3 "mad attackers"
- reward "mad attackers" when they create turnovers by making power play do push ups or skate
- create a scoring system so you get 1 point per goal for the PP unit and 1 point per turnover for the "mad attackers"
- can add a new "mad attacker" every 15 seconds, so you start with 1, then 2, then 3, then 4 and keep track of how many points the PP and PK get just like in the Power Play Competition Game from Wes Wolfe.

Power Play Face-Off Loss Drill

Details:

Power Play Faceoff Loss Retrieval Drill from Wes Wolfe simulates a common game scenario: your power play unit loses a faceoff, and they must quickly retrieve the puck before the penalty killers clear it. It emphasizes puck retrieval, inside body positioning, and efficient puck movement to maintain offensive pressure.



Setup:

- **Power Play Alignment:** Position your power play unit as they would be for a typical faceoff (e.g., traditional set or four up).
- **Penalty Killers:** Place three opposing players to simulate a penalty kill. Their objective is to slow down the power play but not actively clear or play the puck.
- **Coach:** Position the coach with pucks near the blue line.

Execution:

1. **Start the Drill:** The coach spots a puck into the corner as if the penalty kill has won the faceoff. Penalty killers focus on slowing the power play players as they attempt to retrieve the puck.
2. **Puck Retrieval:** Power play players work to bump and jump into inside body position to win back the puck. Encourage quick puck retrieval and immediate release to teammates to set up a play.
3. **Shot Creation:** Once possession is regained, the power play unit is encouraged to take no more than three passes before generating their first shot.
4. **Follow-Up:** After the initial shot, the coach spots a second puck (e.g., on a rim) to work on rim retrievals. Play continues live, allowing the power play unit to transition quickly into a scoring opportunity.

Progressions:

- Transition from a 5-on-0 setup to live scenarios:
 - **5-on-3:** Introduce full-pressure penalty killing to simulate game intensity.
 - **5-on-4:** Add defenders and play live.
 - **5-on-0:** Focus solely on puck movement and structure without defensive pressure.
- Adjust pressure from the penalty killers to focus on specific skills like puck retrieval or quick puck movement.

Key Teaching Points:

- Emphasize winning inside body position to regain control of the puck.
- Teach players to react quickly to lost faceoffs and prevent the penalty kill from clearing the puck.
- Focus on efficiency: retrieve, pass, and generate a shot within three passes.
- Reinforce habits that prevent wasted time or lost opportunities after a faceoff loss.

Variation:

- Adjust the alignment or defensive pressure based on your team's level. Incorporate different puck spotting techniques (e.g., rimmed, bouncing) to simulate game-like retrieval challenges.

View more content from Wes on his contributor page along with his presentation on Special Teams Practice at the Brock University High Performance Hockey Conference.

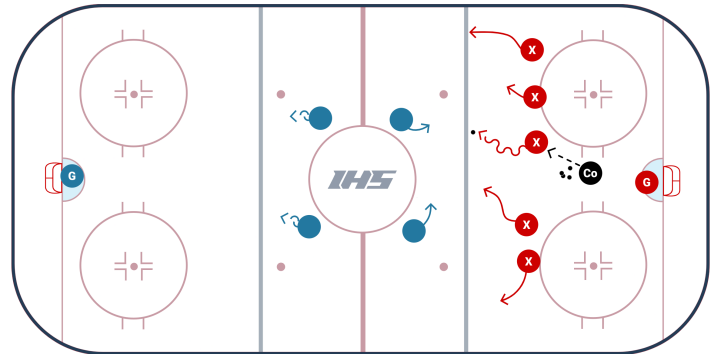
Elements of a Successful PP Breakout

Special Teams Entry Game

Details:

The Special Teams Entry Game from Coach TJ Manastersky is designed to increase the repetitions of the entry situation in special teams, both for the power play, and penalty kill teams.

TJ Manastersky shared this game with the IHS Community while he was an Assistant Coach at Union College. TJ is the Current Head Coach at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario.



Setup

- A coach has pucks in the defensive zone.
- 4 Penalty Killers are in the neutral zone.
- 5 players are on the Power Play are spread out and stationary on the top of their defensive zone circles.
- Coach starts the drill by giving the puck to one of the players on the Power Play. This begins the 5 on 4.
- The Penalty Kill works to ice the puck while the Power Play works to gain possession and score a goal.
- After the the rep plays out for a little while, the coach blows the whistle for a second time, and the Power Play returns to their own end to get a second puck from the coach and attempt to score another goal.
- Keep Score! Coaches can make the game more engaging for players by keeping score. You can give the defensive team a point for clearing the puck or forcing a chip / dump. The Power Play can gain a point by gaining possession of the line and/ or scoring a goal.

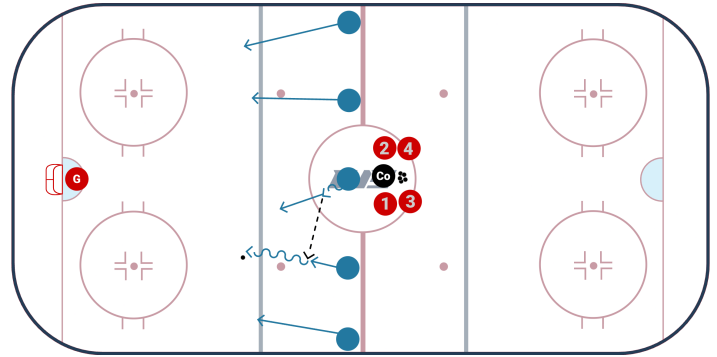
Coaching Points

- Penalty Kill should always keep their sticks on the ice and work to force chips and dumps.
- The Power Play is at a disadvantage because they do not have a lot of speed, so they must work to be creative to generate space and gain the offensive blue line.

Power Play Scoring Competition

Details:

The Power Play Scoring Competition Game from Wes Wolfe is a half-ice drill allows your players to practice live power play scenarios while progressively building intensity and complexity by adding 1 penalty killer at a time every 15 seconds. Power Play units compete to try and score as many goals as possible in 60 seconds. The game focuses on habits, execution, and game-like decision-making under pressure.



Setup:

- Set up your power play unit (5 players) in the offensive zone.
- Position a coach at the blue line with pucks.
- Penalty killers wait in line to be initiated into the drill.
- A goalie is positioned in the net.

Execution:

The drill runs for **60 seconds** and progresses in **15-second increments**:

1. **First 15 seconds:** The power play unit works 5-on-0, focusing on zone entry and setting up their power play structure.
2. **Next 15 seconds:** The coach whistles, and one penalty killer enters the zone, creating a 5-on-1 scenario.
3. **Subsequent 15-second increments:** An additional penalty killer joins at each whistle until the drill concludes with a live 5-on-4.

Zone Entry:

- Encourage players to enter the zone as they would in a game, executing planned routes (e.g., double-drop passes, kick-outs). Outside players finish their routes to the boards while supporting the puck carrier.

Puck Management:

- If the power play scores or the goalie freezes the puck, the coach initiates a new puck immediately.
- Use a variety of puck types (rimmed, bouncing) to simulate realistic retrieval situations.

Scoring Competition:

- Track goals scored by each power play unit.
- Each unit completes three 60-second rounds.
- The unit with the most goals wins, and a reward can be given for added motivation.

Key Teaching Points:

- Emphasize quick decision-making and efficient puck movement.
- Focus on puck retrieval skills, especially with imperfect puck scenarios.
- Teach players to adjust to increasing defensive pressure as more penalty killers are added.
- Reinforce habits for successful zone entry and sustained puck control.

Variation:

- Increase or decrease the time for each progression (e.g., 10 or 20-second increments) based on skill level or focus areas.

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