

Small-Area Games

Why use Cross-ice or Small-area games in practice?

It should not have escaped anyone's attention that over the past 10-15 years, Europeans have come to dominate the game of ice hockey at every level. How have the Europeans accomplished this feat? Skill development.

While American coaches and parents clamor for more games for kids as young as five, the Europeans focus on the development of skills while inserting competitive situations into their practices. Most European players do not become involved in competitive leagues until they are Pee Wee age or older.

It's time for us to take a page from the European playbook. The following guide provides 10 different games (and variations of these games) that can be used in practices to further skill development and optimize the use of practice ice. Consider using these games in your practices – or develop some games of your own. The kids will have fun, work harder, learn more and become better hockey players!

Small-Area Games

Benefits of Using Small-Area Games:

- **Creates an environment that promotes creativity and experimentation.**
- **Creates a competitive practice environment that is proven to accelerate development.**
- **Creates teaching and learning situations for coaches and players.**
- **Eliminates the need for traditional “conditioning” drills.**
- **Players learn to excel in small areas and tight situations.**
- **Stimulates development in both ends of the ice.**
- **Allows players to develop and improve individual skills**
- **Fosters a love and enjoyment of the game because players (and coaches) *have fun!***

Small-Area Games

Areas of Consideration for Small-Area Games:

- Be creative! Sometimes the worst-looking drills can be the most effective for your players.
- Each game must have a minimum of one coach to monitor the game and enforce rules, technique and player discipline.
- Know your players. Games which are too easy can be boring and games that are too hard can be frustrating.
- Length of the game. Some games can be run for a longer duration than others. Gauge the ability and attention span of your players.
- Length of shifts. Keep the shifts short and allow for sufficient recovery time between shifts.
- Make sure the games are fun and challenging.

2 on 2 “In the Box”

Goal: Players must work to find openings and create passing opportunities. Players get comfortable handling the puck in a small area while under pressure.

Time: 8 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on each face-off dot.

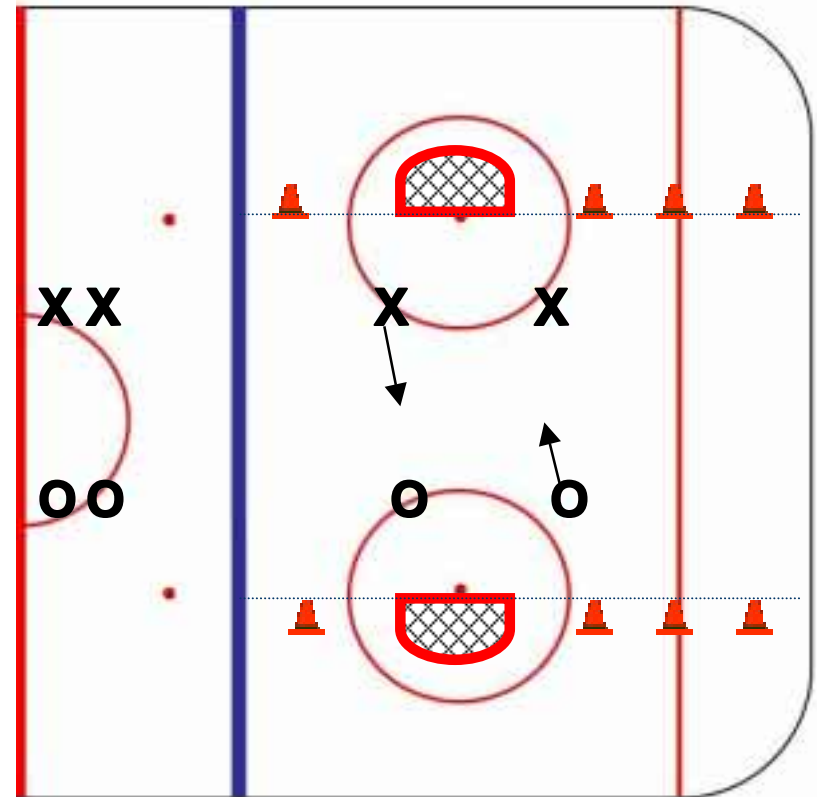
Teams: Two teams; begin from neutral zone.

Rules: Players skate a 2 on 2 game. Puck cannot cross the imaginary “goal lines” crossing the face-off dots. Place cones along this line to avoid confusion. If puck crosses the line, coach must call for a “new puck” and shoot one in.

Teaching Points: Players must focus on puck protection and support. Players must continually use crossunders to move throughout the box while trying to find open ice.

Progressions:

- 3 on 3. Adding a third player to each team will shrink the area of open ice even further.
- Add support players behind the nets. Leave the support players as an option or require a pass to the support player before attempting a shot.



3 on 3 “Safe Zone”

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players work a give and go from the offensive corner leading to a shot on net.

Time: 8 to 12 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on the outside of face-off circles.

Teams: Two teams. Begin from neutral zone.

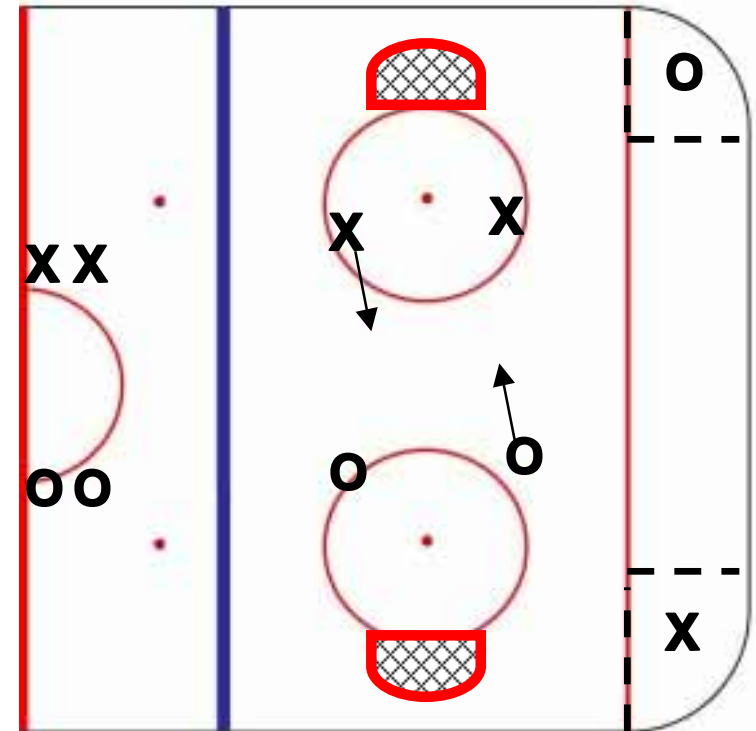
Rules:

- One player from each team is in the “safe zone” – the area in either corner of the rink (marked in the diagram). These players should be in place before their teammates enter the play.
- “Safe zone” players cannot be pressured and may not leave the corner to retrieve the puck.
- “Safe zone” players must touch the puck before a shot can be attempted. If the shot fails to score, another pass to the “safe zone” is required.

Teaching Points: Players must react quickly and move to open ice after making the pass to the safe zone. Use area behind the net effectively.

Progressions:

- Require that players make one-time passes.
- Add a support player at the blue line to create additional give-and-go situations.



2 on 2 Single Support

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players work a quick give-and-go to create scoring opportunities.

Time: 8 to 12 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on the outside of face-off circles.

Teams: 2 teams. Begin from neutral zone.

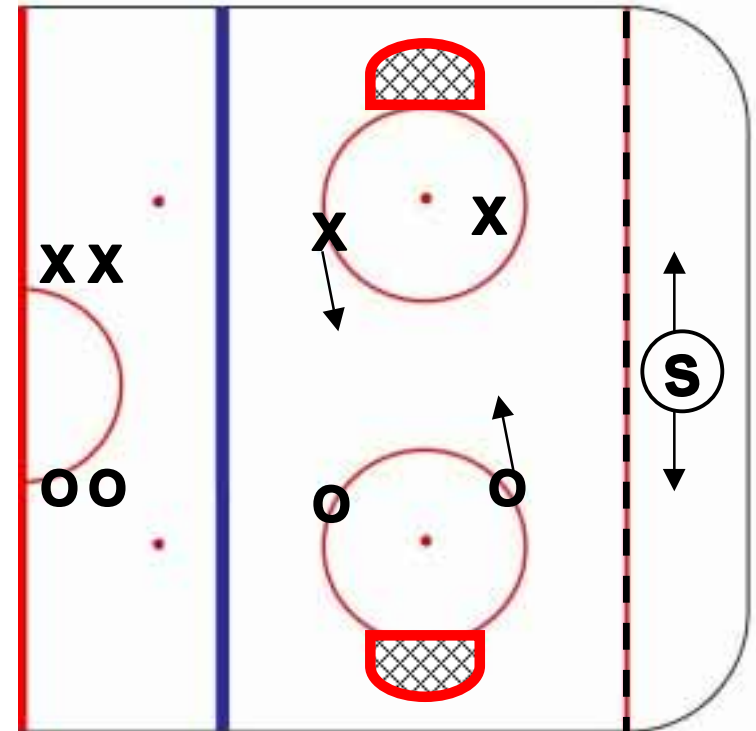
Rules:

- Players play a 2 on 2 game with the ability to use a support player to create give-and-go and breakout-like situations. Players can move freely between the blue line and goal line.
- Coach makes the decision on whether a pass to the support player is mandatory.
- One support player plays for both teams. Support player is not allowed to cross goal line.

Teaching Points: Players are forced to handle the puck and think creatively. Puck movement and support is the key to success.

Progressions:

- Add a support player above the circles. Players are allowed to use either support player.
- Add a player to each team for a 3 on 3 game.



2 on 1 “Rover”

Goal: To simulate 2 on 1 game situations.

Time: 6 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on the outside of face-off circles.

Teams: 2 teams. Begin from neutral zone.

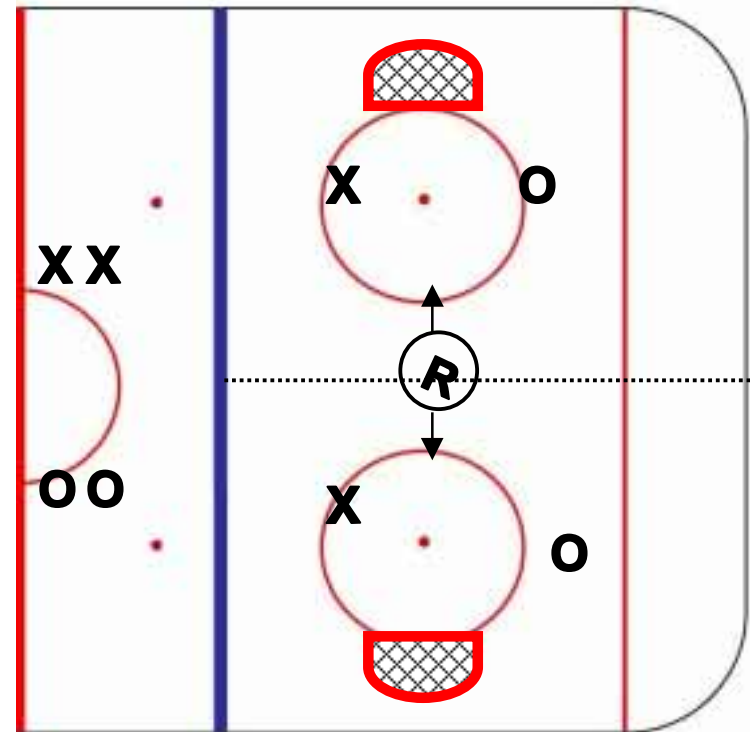
Rules:

- One offensive player and one defender are placed on each side of the ice. These players must stay on their side of the ice.
- An extra player – the “Rover” – is placed in the middle. This player can attack on either side, creating a constant 2 on 1 situation.

Teaching Points: The “Rover” will often be behind the play as the puck is passed from one end of the ice to the other. This will force the offensive player to delay and handle the puck while waiting for the “Rover” to join the play and create a scoring opportunity. Defenders will get multiple opportunities to defend a 2 on 1 in game-like situations and make long breakout passes.

Progressions:

- Add a third player to each team to create 3 on 2 situations.
- Add a support player below the face-off circle.



“On the Dots” 3 on 2

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players are operating with a 3 on 2 advantage in a small area

Time: 8 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on goal line, in line with face-off dots.

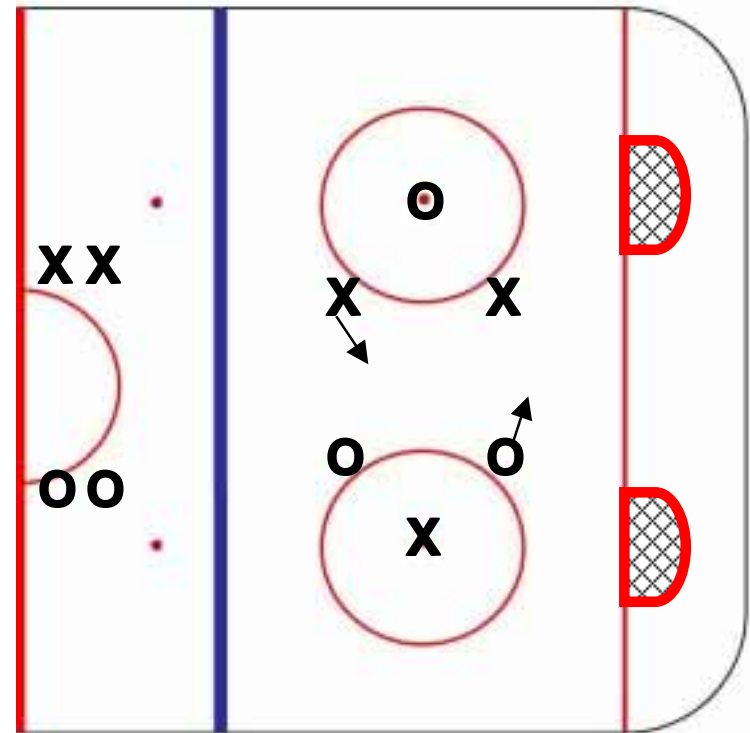
Teams: Two teams. Begin from neutral zone.

Rules:

- One player from each team must stay positioned on the face-off dot in front of the net their team is attacking.
- Players on dots are stationary. They are not allowed to shoot, only give and receive passes.
- Other players move freely and may shoot.
- Player on the dot may not be pressured.
- Coach has the option to require a pass to the player on the dot before a shot is attempted.

Teaching Points: Use the player on the dot to create scoring opportunities in front of the opponent’s net. Manage tight odd-man situations in both offensive and defensive zone.

Progressions: Allow the player on the dot to take one-time shots.



Backdoor 3 on 3

Goal: To simulate game situations that force skaters to spread the ice and create scoring opportunities from behind the net. Also provides a great workout for goaltenders.

Time: 6 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed back-to-back between face-off circles.

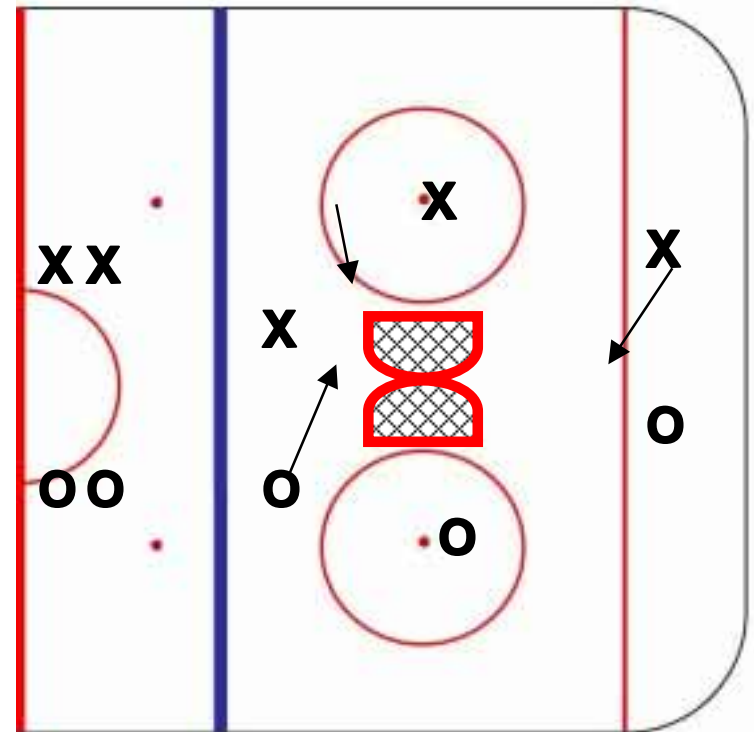
Teams: 2 teams. Begin in the neutral zone.

Rules:

- Three players from each team play a traditional game of three on three from blue line to goal line.
- One goaltender covers both nets. If two or more goalies are available, switch every other shift.

Teaching Points:

- Use of one goaltender improves goalie's timing and skating ability.
- Placing the nets back-to-back will encourage players to find open ice and move the puck.
- The use of one goaltender should provide the opportunity for quick puck movement and one-time attempts on a partially open net.



Continuous 3 on 2

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players are operating with a 3 on 2 advantage.

Time: 6 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on outside of face-off circles.

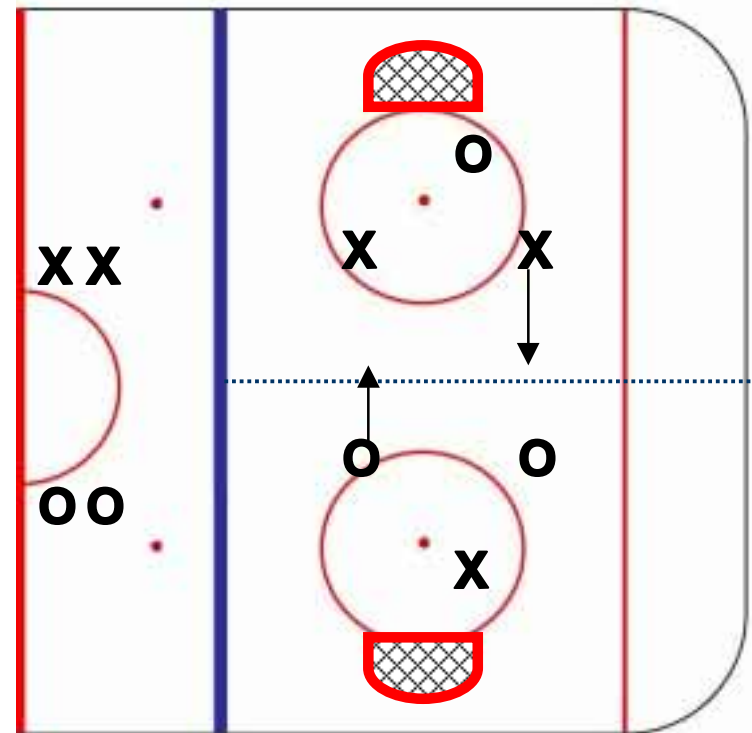
Teams: 2 teams. Begin from neutral zone.

Rules: One player from each team must stay in the offensive zone at all times. They are not allowed to cross the center of the ice. Other players can move freely. This creates a continuous 3 on 2 situation in both ends.

Teaching Points:

- Players learn how to manage an odd-man situation in a small area, whether attacking or defending.
- Encourage players to spread the ice and use the available space, including behind the net.
- Encourage the incorporation of cycling into the drill.

Progressions: Add a fourth player to each team to create 4 on 3 situations. This really shrinks the area of available ice and forces quick puck movement and creative puck handling.



3 on 3 Transition

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which utilize the point to create scoring opportunities.

Time: 6 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

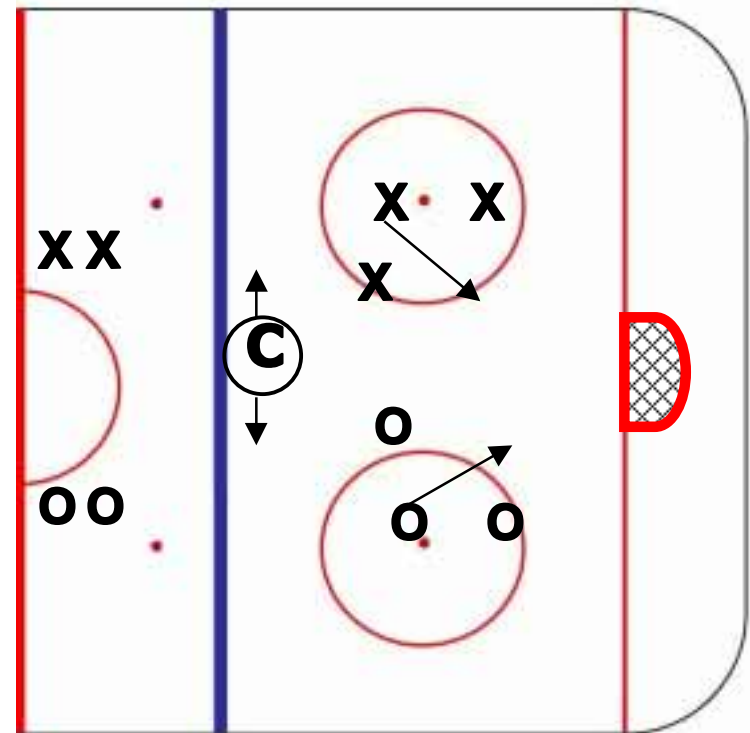
Nets: One net. Placed in traditional position.

Teams: 2 teams. Begin from neutral zone.

Rules:

- Coach calls for 3 players from each team to enter the zone. Coach passes to puck to one team to start play. That team is on offense to start.
- Offensive team tries to score, while defensive team attempts to create a turnover.
- The coach patrols the blue line. Either team can pass the puck to the coach.
- If the defensive team creates a turnover, they *must* pass the puck to the coach. If they complete the pass, they are now the offensive team. Players must move to open ice. The coach will look to make a pass and create a scoring opportunity or throw the puck deep in the corner.

Teaching Points: This is really a true 3 on 3 scrimmage situation with D support. Coaches should emphasize points of their systems that are relevant during this game.



3 on 3 “Score Anywhere”

Goal: To allow players to think creatively and teach players to “see the ice” better.

Time: 6 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 30-45 seconds.

Nets: Placed on outside of face-off circles.

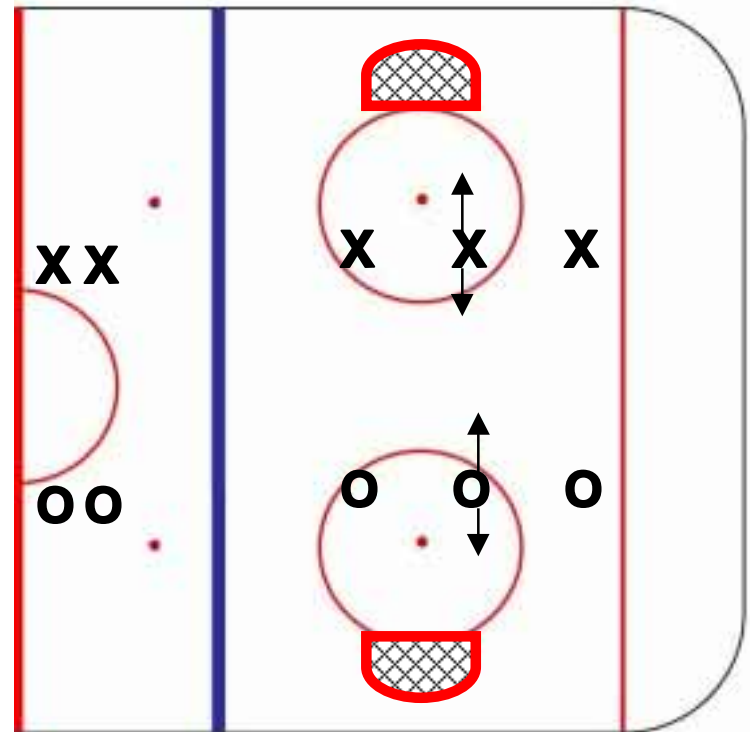
Teams: Two teams. Begin from neutral zone.

Rules: Players skate a 3 on 3 game in which they can score on either net. All rebounds are fair game for both teams.

Teaching Points:

- Puck carriers must keep their eyes up and be prepared to make passes to open teammates. Players should be encouraged to make long passes and constantly change direction.
- Players should attack the net on rebounds. This is great rebound work for goalies!
- Creativity makes for better hockey and better hockey players!

Progressions: Add a support player for each team – one below the goal line and one above the tops of the circles. Players must pass to support man before taking a shot on either net.



Tight Area 2 on 1

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players work a 2 on 1 in a very small area.

Time: 6 to 10 minutes. Player shifts: 25-35 seconds.

Nets: Placed just inside face-off circle, facing corner.

Teams: 4 teams (2 in each corner). Teams begin from lines at the top of the slot.

Rules:

- Two forwards (X) and one defenseman (O) enter the corner to begin play.
- Play begins when the forwards receive a pass from a coach (C) stationed behind the net.
- Attackers move to get open and create shots in the small area available to them while the defender tries to prevent a goal.
- Coach passes in pucks quickly after a shot either scores, goes wide or is held by the goalie. Rebounds are live and should be played.

Teaching Points: Forwards need to support the puck carrier and move quickly into scoring position. Defenders must make quick coverage decisions and communicate with goaltender.

