

OFF ICE CHECKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT

by Bjorn Kinding
Hockey Alberta

WARM-UP

Light Jog

Run a few laps around the gym to increase the body temperature and loosen up the muscles.

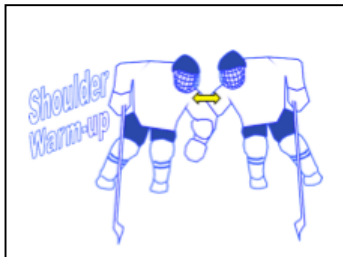
Stretching

Stretch out the major muscles (chest, lats, thorax, abs, back, gluteus, abductors, hip flexor, quads, hamstring and calves) carefully.

Agility

Take a wide leg stance in a squat position (90° knee bend). Remain in this position and move lateral, forward backward and do quick turns.

Shoulder Warm Up



- Make various crawling exercises to increase the temperature and the fluid in the joints.
- Pair-up, press each other's shoulders together.
- Hook elbows together and pull, so the shoulders make contact (illustration 1)
- Grab each other's over arm and elbow. Pull and hit shoulder against shoulder.

BALANCE AND POWER

Tripod vs. Pushes

Take a wide leg stance in a squat position (90° knee bend). Hold the stick firmly in two hands and on the floor, so the feet and stick forms a triangle (tripod).

- One player pushes on the shoulders and tries to the opponent off balance.
- Same as above, but this time the player pushes the hips.
- Stand side-by-side and lean into each other, making a solid contact with the sides of the shoulders, the elbows (which are tucked in tight against the ribs) and the hips. Both players push as hard as possible, with- out losing the balance.
- Same as above but face each other lean forward and make solid contact with the top of the shoulders.

Demonstrate

Take one pair of players who have done the first drill well to demo the drill. Point out how the players have:

- Solid tripod stance, using the stick as an additional leg
- Solid foot support
- Bending the knee and getting low on the contact side
- Form a straight line with their support leg from the foot to the contact area.



Teaching Checking: A Progressive Approach

Repeat the demonstration with another pair for the other three drills and note:

- How much easier it is to move when pushing on the hips instead of the shoulders (drill 2).
- How the player with the lower target area is more likely to overpower the opponent.

Leg Drive

Place the top of the shoulder right in the chest under the shoulder pad of the opponent with the head just to the side of the partner's upper arm. The checker drives with leg power and forces the opponent to back-up. The partner gives adequate resistance, but makes sure the checker has a chance to drive forward.

BODY CHECKING TECHNIQUES

Front Check

The two partners stand in a wide stance, facing each other and a short step length apart. The checker leans forward so that the shoulder top almost touches the partner's chest, right under the shoulder pad. The "receiver" (target) has bent knees but a straight upper body. Both players have their hands on their backs and are ready to tighten up their muscles to withstand the impact.



Remember:

All checking drills are partner drills, where two players are working together on developing checking and receiving skills. The emphasis is clearly on the receiving skills, so the checker can never use more force than the receiver is willing to take.

One coach supervises the drill, and on the go, the checker moves the closest foot forward, places it between the partner's feet and makes contact with the shoulder. The checker continues driving with two more steps and checks through the partner, forcing a backward step.

Side Check

Bump

Two players are standing side-by-side in a wide stance, with their knees well bent (90°). The stick is held in two hands with the blade solid on the floor in front of the player. Together with the feet the blade creates a tripod stance. (Alternative: The drill can also be done without sticks). The players touch each other with the closest feet. The players count together: "1, 2, 3". On "3" they extend the outside leg (the foot is still solid on the floor), lean into the partner and make contact with the side of the shoulders, the upper arms, the elbows (which are tucked tight into the ribs) and the hips. The closest knee stays bent at 90°, so the entire power from the extended leg is directed sideways (into the partner) and not upwards.

Power Bump

Use the same starting position as described above under "Bump". From this position both players move short two steps sideways, and bring their feet together. It's important that the players remain

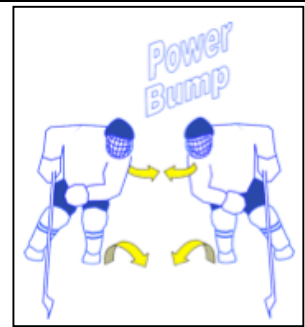
Teaching Checking: A Progressive Approach

in a deep stance (knee bend 90°). The players now count together: “1, 2, 3” and take sideways steps at the same time.

“1” = Lateral step (knee bend 90°)

“2” = Bring feet together (knee bend 90°)

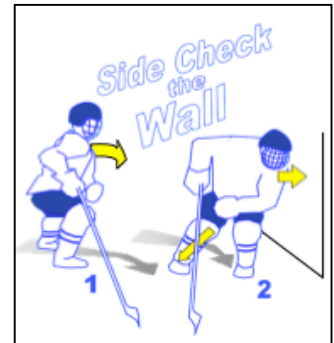
“3” = Lateral step and make contact the same way as described above under “Bump”.



Hit The Wall

The player is facing the wall and stands one short step away in a low (knee bend 90°), wide stance. The purpose is to (with a solid side check) hit the wall and hold a powerful pressure against the wall for three seconds. To do this, the player takes one step forward, rotates 90°, places the foot parallel next to the wall and extend the outside leg while remaining in the low position. Make contact with the wall, with the outside of the shoulder, the upper arm, the elbow (which is tucked tight into the ribs) and the hip. Hold this position and continue to generate pressure into the wall.

It is important to start slow, and with almost no impact at all. The wall is more solid and the pads less protective than one might think.



Pinning

Work in pairs. One player faces the wall. The partner tries to pin. Hold the stick with two hands and press it against the upper leg of the opponent. The feet form a “T”, with the front foot in between the other player’s feet (T-lock).

The pinning player tries to hold the pin four 3 seconds. The pinned player is trying to break loose.



Hold the Pin Competition

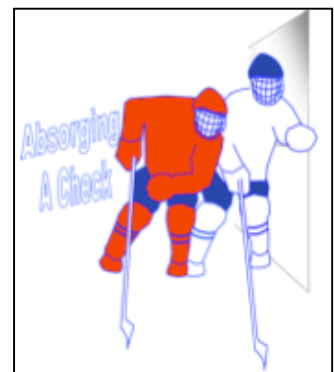
Two pairs of players are competing against each other. In Pair 1, the red player is pinning the white, and in pair 2, the white player is pinning the red. If the red player manages to free himself from the pin before the white player, the red team gets a point.

ABSORBING A CHECK

Board Protection

Get up tight against the boards with your inside foot, knee and hip. Keep your hands in front of your body and the inside elbow resting on the top board. Keep your knees bent, but your back straight, so your head is held high and protected by your shoulder pad. Be aware of what’s happening around you at all times.

At the moment of the contact, turn the shoulders and hip towards the checker to make use of these body parts as our contact areas. We do not want to expose our chest, stomach or ribs. Forget the puck for a second. We should hold our breath and tighten up muscles. Don’t leave the boards,



Teaching Checking: A Progressive Approach

but lean into the check, and do not duck. Ducking could expose our head and risk getting it squeezed between the checker and the boards. Finally, unload the weight from the inside leg. This will ease the impact on the knee.

One player is standing in above described position up against the wall. A partner is in the ready to check position as executed in the hit-the-wall drill (facing the wall, one short step away). The checker executes the same motion as for the hit-the-wall drill, but instead of hitting the wall, contact is made with the shoulder and hip. Both players keep their elbows tucked in tight against their ribs.

Push Free

The checker finishes the check by holding the pressure for three seconds, whereas the receiver tries to break free.

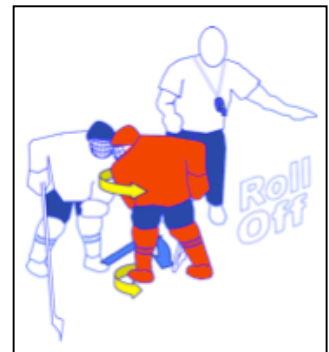
Check Back (or strike first)

Same set up the drill as above, but the receiver will not only lean into the hit, but checks back. When the checker makes the first move, the receiver pushes off with the elbow on the wall (still keeping the foot, knee and hip tight against the wall), and pushes back, or more correctly, strikes first. This will take some of the checker's momentum off, and reduce the impact that has to be absorbed.

Roll off

There is only one way to completely avoid body contact. Don't play! If we want to play, we will experience contact. The best we can do is to limit the frequency and the impact of the contacts and checks we will receive.

Two players face each other. A short step apart and slightly leaning forward, so the right shoulders (or left shoulders) almost touch each other. Knees are well bent in a ready-to-go position. A coach (or a teammate) calls the name of one of these players. That player takes a powerful step with the right foot (left if the left shoulders are touching) forward and executes a front check (football check) and drives through. The other player reacts and rolls off the check.

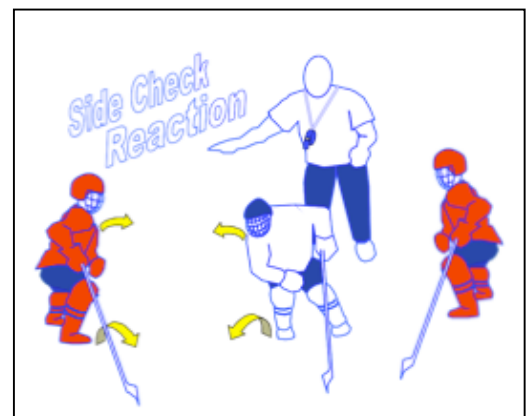


As an alternative, the coach (teammate) can tag the player with the hand, instead of calling out the name. Begin with using no stick, and then alternate keeping the stick in one hand and in two hands.

REACTIVE AND COMPETITIVE DRILLS

Side Check Reaction

Three players are lined up in a straight line, and 2-3 meters apart. The outside players are facing each other and the middle player is turned so the shoulders line up with the two other players. All players are in a deep knee bend, alert and ready to go.



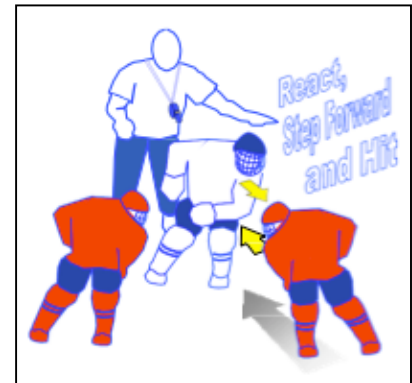
Teaching Checking: A Progressive Approach

Behind the player in the middle there is an instructor who will give a sign that the player in the middle cannot see. The two other players will react to the sign. Whoever is chosen by the instructor will take 2 – 3 steps forward and execute a side check on the player in the middle who reacts as quickly as possible to the checker, take a lateral step and “checks back”. The drill could be done with or without sticks. If sticks are used, make sure they stay on the floor at all times.

React, Step Forward and Body Check

Three players are lined up in a triangle line, and 2-3 meters apart. Two players are facing the middle player. All players are in a deep knee bend, alert and ready to go.

Behind the player in the middle there is an instructor who will give a sign that the player in the middle can't see. The two other players will react to the sign. Whoever is chosen by the instructor will take 2 – 3 steps forward and execute a side check or a front check on the player in the middle who should react to the checker as quickly as possible, take a step forward and “check back”.

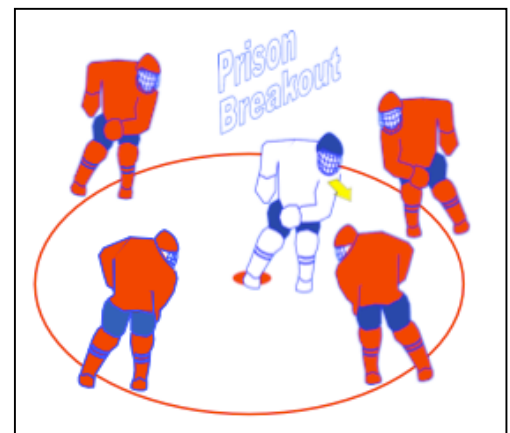


The drill could be done with or without sticks. If sticks are used, make sure they stay on the floor at all times. The distance between the players should not exceed three meters to prevent runs and or the use of excessive force and momentum. Secondly, it would also give the player in the middle too much time to react, and the purpose of the drill would be lost.

Prison Breakout

One player lines up in the middle of a circle. In a gym the basketball circles are of suitable size. All the others place themselves around the circle with one foot inside and one foot outside. The illustration shows only four players, but 10 or 12 players work better. Everybody is ready to go in a deep knee bend position.

The player in the middle starts from the centre dot and tries to break through the line of players by executing a body check against one of these players. If there is no breakthrough on the initial body check, the player cannot continue, but rather has to back up and try again. Before starting a second attempt to break out, the player has to return to the middle, seek a new player and try again. Each attempt starts from the middle. This is to prevent the player from taking a run and build up excessive momentum as well as giving the players on the circle less time to react. For a breakout to be considered successful, the player breaking out has to be able to place both feet outside the circle.



The purpose of the drill is to be competitive not to run over a smaller player. Therefore the player in the middle should seek a challenge and try to body check a player bigger or equal in size. The players guarding the circle must hold their ground. Do not duck, roll off or step aside.

Teaching Checking: A Progressive Approach

PLYOMETRICS

by Cathie Filyk, M.Kin.

Brandon Bobcats, CIAU (Canada West)

Brandon Wheat Kings, WHL

1. **Skaters low power stride:** Stride side to side, keeping their body low (the length of stride will depend on their leg length). The players can stay on the spot or move forward or backward. For variety and added intensity, these can be done on a hill.
2. **Skaters power leap:** As above, but this time the players will leap up and over to the other side. They will explode up and land in a squat. Watch the landing – make sure that they are tracking their ankles, knees and hips just like they would when performing squats in a gym**.
3. **Running up and down on a platform or stairs** – Try to find a platform that is about 4 – 6 inches off the ground (or use a stair) and have the players run up and down as fast as they can. Try to ensure that they land softly with their feet to absorb the impact. Have them land only on the balls of their feet, both stepping up and down. Have the players stay close to the platform and keep their chest and head up**.
4. **Two-footed hop over a hockey stick** - anywhere from 2 - 12 inches off the ground (depending on the age of the player). Have the players bend their knees upon landing, to absorb the impact, tuck their knees up as they jump over the sticks. For added intensity, do this exercise one foot at a time**.
5. **Forward lunges**– Lunge forward, one leg at a time. The movement is much like a cross-country ski motion. The weight on landing should be through the heel of their front foot. The knee, ankle and toes should be in alignment, travelling forward as they do these. To increase intensity for this exercise, add power to the movement.
6. **Reverse lunges** – As above, but lunging backwards. Watch their alignment. Have the players land with their weight going through the heel of their front foot. This exercise is advanced and is not recommended for younger players.
7. **3, 2, 1 Tuck jump** – Have the players start off standing, with knees soft (slightly bent). They should pulse down for a count of 3, 2, 1 and then tuck jump (knees to your chest). Land quietly and absorb the impact by bending into the landing.
8. **Quick taps on a platform or stair** - Instead of running up and down, the player taps the ball of their foot up on the platform - alternating each foot as they do it. The players should try to keep as quick a pace with this as they can. This is much like running on the spot.
9. **Skipping** - As fast as the players can.
10. **Squat thrusts** – Have the players start in an upright position, then drop to all fours and thrust their legs out behind them (they are now in a push-up position), then quickly pull their legs back in and return to an upright position.

Teaching Checking: A Progressive Approach

- 11. Leap frogs** – Just as the title says. Go for height or go for distance**.
- 12. Crossovers** – Staying low, cross one leg in front of the other and travel for 10 – 15 crossovers in one direction. Walk back to the start point and repeat with the other leg. These can be done on a hill for variety and intensity.
- 13. Stair running** – Find a long flight of stairs (a stadium, arena, etc.). The players can run up and down them; bound two by two; three by three; one-legged; hop up; use both feet; or the crossover technique**.
- 14. Cones** - Set up 6 to 10 cones or pylons (6 to 18 inches in height - depending on the age of the players) in a row and have them tuck jump forward over each cone with both feet. To add variety to this exercise, arrange the cones (pylons) in different patterns, space them farther apart (more distance in the jump for strength), closer (more for quick feet and agility)*.
- 15. Directional Change Shuffle Drill** – Have the players stand in a “ready position” (eyes looking forward, knees bent and butt down). The idea of this drill is to get the players shuffling back and forth, side to side and diagonally as fast as possible, to enhance their foot speed. They are to keep low during the drill. A coach instructs the players on what direction they are to be moving. Keep the drill moving at a quick pace. This is good for reaction work. Stick handling with a tennis ball can also be done with this drill.

** Any of these exercises can be done backwards, as hockey players should develop strength and agility in both directions.

Note: The duration of each of these exercises will depend on the age and fitness levels of your players.