

THE HOCKEY COACH'S GUIDE TO
**SMALL-AREA
GAMES**

24 Small-Area Games Designed
to Develop Individual Skills &
Improve Your Hockey Team

*A Practical Guide to Implementing
Small-Area Games in Practices*

PAUL WILLETT
Hockey Skills Instructor & Consultant

THE HOCKEY COACH'S GUIDE TO SMALL-AREA GAMES

A Practical Guide to Implementing Small-Area Games in Practices

Copyright © 2003 by Paul Willett

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or retransmitted by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system for the purpose of publication or profit without written consent from the publisher. *However, hockey coaches are allowed and encouraged to copy and share this information for the purposes of working with their hockey teams or associations.*

Published by:
Paul Willett International, LLC
1370 Fox Street
Delano, MN 55328

Phone: (763) 972-6490
Email: paul@paulwillett.com

Toll-free: 1-888-881-7042
Fax: (763) 972-2429

Acknowledgements

Selected ideas in this work were adapted from: Bill Beaney, Paul Cannata, Bruce Crowder, Doc DelCastillo, Roger Grillo, Bjorn Kinding, Ken Martel, Mike Sullivan and many other coaches who have taken the time to share their knowledge and experience.

Outstanding Small-Area Game Resources:

Bill Beaney and Tim Gerrish. *Championship Hockey Drills Series: 15 Cross-Ice Games.*
Video. Ames, Iowa: Championship Productions
Bruce Crowder. *Championship Hockey Drills Series: 6 Small-Sided Games for Hockey.*
Video. Ames, Iowa: Championship Productions

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
What Are Small-Area Games?	4
Why Use Small-Area Games?	6
What Skills Can Be Taught Using Small-Area Games?	10
Organization of Small-Area Games	12
Conditions and Rules of Small-Area Games	14
Conclusion	16
<i>THE GAMES</i>	17
2 on 2 In The Box	17
Backdoor 3 on 3	18
3 on 3 Safe Zone	19
2 on 2 Single Support	20
3 on 3 Score Anywhere	21
2 on 2 No Passing	22
3 on 3 Transition	23
Tight Area 2 on 2	24
2 on 2 Two Touch	25
Half Court 3 on 3	26
Continuous 3 on 2	27
2 on 1 Rover	28
2 on 2 Double Support	29
On The Dots 3 on 2	30
2 on 1 Transition	31
Tight Area 2 on 1	32
3 on 3 Circle Shooter	33
Four Corners 2 on 2	34
Three Zone 3 on 3	35
Bruin 3 on 2	36
Progressive 3 on 3	37
Even/Odd 1-2-3	38
Continuous Mid-Ice 3 on 2	39
Mid-Ice D Support	40

INTRODUCTION

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn wrote a landmark book entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which he defined and popularized the concept of the “paradigm shift.” Years later, Dr. Stephen Covey brought the concept of paradigms and paradigm shifts to a much broader audience with the publication of his bestselling work, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

In its most basic form, a paradigm can be defined as a model of something, or a very clear and typical example of something. Therefore, a paradigm shift takes place when the usual and accepted way of doing or thinking about something is changed. Quite simply, a paradigm shift is a change from one way of thinking to another.

I'm sure you're asking yourself what any of this has to do with the sport of hockey. A great deal, actually. Over the past twenty years, our society has been constantly changing. Massive paradigm shifts have taken place in all aspects of society and sport. Think about the advances in technology and communication. In the early 1980's, only a small group of believers could see a vision of a future that included things we now take for granted such as cell phones, laptop computers and the world wide web. Up until a few years ago, a large portion of the population still had not changed their belief that the internet was just a fad that was only of use for a select few.

Now think about the advances that have taken place in the areas of sport science and athletic training. Athletes today are bigger, stronger and faster than ever before. Strength and conditioning programs are now sport-specific. Sport scientists on the cutting edge are constantly redefining the accepted theories on optimal athletic training and improving both the athletes and the sports in which they are involved. In reaction to both scientific and common-sense realizations, many sports now contain practice routines that look vastly different from what they may have twenty years ago.

I will now ask you to think about the typical hockey practice in our country. Does the typical practice session look any different than it did twenty years ago? I would argue that it does not. Hockey is one of the few sports in the United States that has not embraced change. Many of today's hockey coaches, from the youth levels through the

THE HOCKEY COACH'S GUIDE TO SMALL-AREA GAMES

professional ranks, hold fast to the belief that what worked for them twenty or thirty years ago will work for today's players.

If we define a paradigm as a typical example of something, then what is the American hockey practice paradigm? In watching hundreds of hockey practices every year, I am amazed at the similarities most practices contain. Here's what I see:

- A slow moving warm-up that typically includes stretching muscles while sitting or lying on the ice.
- Skating drills that are not specific to game situations or designed to build and improve technique.
- A few flow drills such as 2 on 0's or 3 on 0's which typically result in players skating at much slower speeds than they would in a game situation and making passes and taking shots that would not be an option in actual competition.
- A number of different team drills, such as 5 on 0 breakouts, which consume a great deal of time and don't allow for the number of quality repetitions players need to fully develop a skill or grasp a concept.
- Practices finishing with traditional conditioning drill such as Herbies or sideboards. Even though we're training for a sport that requires quick bursts of power and energy, and science has proven that skating technique begins to break down after about 20-25 seconds at top speed, our coaches insist on skating players in a single drill for up to two minutes to "condition" them.

Does any of this look familiar to you? As a coach, do you see practices that are run like this? Do you run your practices like this?

Our current paradigm is outdated. Twenty and thirty years ago, players could overcome the type of practice routine outlined above by developing their skills on the pond or the outdoor rink. Outdoor rinks would be crowded with kids of all ages, developing and honing their skills while playing the game and having fun. No adults to organize and criticize. No whistles, no talk, no overzealous parents screaming from the stands. Just

the players and the game.

Society has changed and hockey has changed along with it. Players are no longer spending their days on the pond or the outdoor rink. There is too much structure and too many other options to occupy their time. Every day coaches in our country have conversations lamenting these facts and longing for the good old days, wishing things would return to the way they were. But we all know that things are not going to go back to the way they were. Rather than giving in to this realization and deciding that there just isn't anything we as coaches can do about it, I would argue that we need to be more creative with our practice time. It is up to us to help our players learn the skills and hockey sense that once came naturally from time spent on the outdoor rinks.

It's time to make a paradigm shift. It's time to make small-area games the cornerstone of our hockey practices. Using small-area games in your practices is a great way to bring the feeling of the outdoor rink indoors. Players work harder, learn more and have more fun when practicing with these drills.

This guide will take a look at the what's, why's and how's of small-area games as well as provide you with twenty-four different games that you can begin to use in your practices today. Make the paradigm shift. Your players will thank you for it.

WHAT ARE SMALL-AREA GAMES?

Before examining the reasons for using small-area games in practices and the benefits these games provide, we must first define what a small area game is.

Small-area games are game-like competitive drills that utilize a playing surface that has been reduced in size. A typical small-area game will be played in one end of the ice and can be played cross-ice, between face-off dots, in one corner, below the face-off dots or in any other number of areas, including the neutral zone.

The area of the rink being used is dependant upon the skills being taught. Most games are designed to teach a combination of individual skills and are most easily played in a cross-ice format. However, some games will be moved into a much smaller section of the rink to create a smaller playing surface while other games will take advantage of a much larger area to teach team skills such as breakouts or power plays.

The number of participants is lowered in small-area games. Any combination of players can be used. Again, it depends upon the situation, the level of play and the skills being taught. Teams can have anywhere from one to four (or more) players and will compete against other teams that may or may not have the same number of players. Coaches can choose to add support players or station themselves in a position to become part of the game to receive and give passes or create any number of potential odd-man situations within a game.

Special rules and conditions are applied to small-area games. Even though I am dedicating a section to this topic later in this guide, it is important to mention here that small-area games are created to mimic different situations that are seen in a regular game. While games can be played without any special rules or conditions, it is usually these small modifications that keep the games fresh and allow players to see many different offensive and defensive situations.

Small-area games are designed to focus on multiple skills and situations, increasing puck touches and situational repetition. During a small-area game, players will have more puck touches because of the reduced size of the playing area, the reduced number of players and the special conditions placed on each game. At any level of play, an

average player may only have control of the puck for a few seconds during the course of a game. Depending on the game being played, that same player may have over a minute of competitive puck-possession time while taking six or seven shifts in just one ten-minute game. Within every small-area game, players are also placed in more tight situations and have more attempts on net than in any traditional drill I've seen – all while competing and having fun.

An often overlooked benefit of small-area games is the positive effect they have on goaltenders. Goaltenders, arguably the most important part of any team, are often the most neglected players in practice. Most drills provide shots that either don't challenge the goaltenders, come so quickly that the goaltender does not have time to recover properly, or come at a pace that does not adequately duplicate conditions seen in a real game. Goaltenders thrive in small-area games because they are seeing live competition and – much like a skater getting quality puck touches – can face as many shots in one ten minute small-area game as they will see in an entire regulation game.

So who uses small-area games, anyway? Small-area games are nothing new to the Europeans. They've been successfully using competitive games in their practices for years. Recently, small-area games have become more commonplace in North America as well. They are used extensively in many professional organizations, colleges, junior programs and USA Hockey's National Team Development Program. Many successful high school and youth programs have implemented small-area games as a major means of teaching skills and team concepts as well.

WHY USE SMALL-AREA GAMES?

The reasons for using small-area games as the main teaching tool in youth hockey practices are numerous. We'll spend some time in the following pages looking at a number of great reasons to use small-area games.

Before looking at those reasons, though, we must take note of the fact that while using small-area games in practices is a relatively new concept, small-area games are not a new concept. Kids have been creating small-area games forever. Pick-up or shinny games on outdoor rinks or ponds have rarely featured the nets set nearly 200 feet apart. Street hockey games rarely cover half of a city block. These games, whether on ice or land, have traditionally taken place in a small area.

Not coincidentally, when long-time hockey coaches or enthusiasts discuss what is missing from today's game, the discussion often centers around the lack of shinny or street hockey that exists in today's society. Kids have interests and options outside of hockey and the world is a much different place than it was even twenty years ago.

With that in mind, coaches must find a way to bring the fun and skill development from the outdoor rink indoors. Small-area games are the most effective way to accomplish this important goal. Here's why:

Small-area games promote creativity and experimentation. Too many of the drills we use today are scripted and include a pre-determined outcome. Nothing in the game of hockey is predetermined. Full-ice 1 on 1 drills, 2 on 0 or 3 on 0 drills done at half speed and any number of other drills that are commonplace in our practices do not replicate actual game conditions. Through the continued use of these drills, we eliminate the thought process and decision making skills of our players. Small-area games produce situations that our players will see time and again in competition. Through trial and error, they will develop many different options to create plays and experience success.

Small-area games create a more competitive practice environment. Competition is fun. More than that, small-area games push players to work harder, compete at game speed and learn to succeed against competition.

Small-area games eliminate the need for traditional conditioning drills. Hockey is a game comprised of short, explosive bursts of power. Shifts are short – typically anywhere from 30 to 50 seconds – and are followed by periods of rest two to three times that long. Logic should tell us that we should train our players in the manner in which they will play. Unfortunately, that's rarely the case.

Many coaches insist on their players skating a variety of lengthy endurance drills – we know them by many names – such as Herbies and sideboards that force players to attempt to skate at top speed for up to two full minutes. Of course, we know it is physiologically impossible to skate at top speed for this long. Without going into a detailed discussion, what actually happens during these drills is that players will gradually lose knee bend in the skating stride, bend their backs and lose the ability to fully extend the stride leg at a proper angle. Thus, through the continued use of these endurance drills, coaches are actually creating slower skaters by systematically destroying skating mechanics.

Small-area games provide an intense environment in which to train while maintaining a proper work-to-rest ratio for players. Coaches using small-area games in place of traditional conditioning drills will find that their players are more willing to “work” in practice because they are having fun and competing. Players will almost always ask for one more shift in a small-area game. How many players are begging their coaches for a chance to skate six sideboards one more time?

Small-area games keep more players moving. Have you ever witnessed a hockey practice during which a drill is run with one player at a time skating through the drill while fifteen other players stand in the corner and watch? What are these drills accomplishing? The game of hockey is not played one player at a time. More than that, hockey is a sport in which skills can only be gained through continuous proper repetition. How many quality repetitions can a player gain in a twelve minute drill when only one player at a time takes part in the drill? As we've already discussed, there was a time when players could overcome this type of practice structure by going to the outdoor rink to sharpen their skills. Players rarely visit the outdoor rink anymore. Therefore, practices must be designed to allow players the quality repetitions they need to improve. A twelve minute 3 on 3 game played with eighteen players can give each

THE HOCKEY COACH'S GUIDE TO SMALL-AREA GAMES

player upwards of six competitive shifts in which they could have more than fifty puck touches and perform every skating maneuver imaginable. This is all done within a system that develops teamwork, camaraderie and hockey sense.

Small-area games develop and improve individual and team skills. Players can develop and improve every skill related to the game of hockey through the use of small-area games. The next chapter of this manual is dedicated to taking a look at a number of the skills that small-area games can be use to teach.

Players learn to excel in tight situations. The modern game of hockey is played in small areas and in tight situations. As players continue to get bigger, stronger and faster, the rink continues to shrink and there is less room to execute. Training to play in these situations through the use of small-area games will strengthen players and teams by practicing for these tight playing conditions on a daily basis. As players get more comfortable playing and practicing in small areas, they are better able to execute skills and systems in competition.

Your players will develop game strategies, make better decisions and have greater enthusiasm for practice. The bottom line is, when players see a situation develop in a game that they have seen hundreds of times before, they'll know how to handle it. Players can't be expected to make proper decisions and go to the right place on the ice during a game if they have never been trained to do it. Where does hockey sense come from? For some players it may be an inborn trait, but for most players hockey sense comes through experience. If they're not on the outdoor rinks playing pick-up hockey, where is that experience going to come from? It has to be built into practices.

Another common complaint from coaches is that kids don't want to practice; they just want to play games. "Practice is boring and the kids just want to have fun. The kids won't work hard at practice, so nothing gets accomplished." This may very well be true for a number of coaches and teams. It's true; if the kids aren't having fun they won't work as hard. If your players want competition, give it to them. Give it to them on a daily basis in the form of small-area games and watch as the attitude and the level of play consistently improves.

Players of all ability levels improve. I hear from many coaches, mainly at the youth level, that they feel they can't run effective practices because of the diverse talent levels within their team. Combined practices are another concern. How can coaches challenge all players and keep practices flowing? By using small-area games and pairing players of like abilities together, all players will be challenged, but not overwhelmed.

Small-area games are an outstanding option for both highly talented teams and in-house youth teams. Why? Better players are able to flourish and improve more rapidly when placed in competitive situations against other highly skilled players. They're constantly challenged to do more because of the small space in which the games are played. In small-area games, weaker players are going to be involved in the play more often and have an opportunity to develop their skills in a competitive situation. They'll improve over time while having fun and feeling more like a part of the team. Players of all skills levels will be challenged, competing and having fun.

Small-area games foster a love and enjoyment of the game because players and coaches *have fun!* Hockey is the greatest game in the world and it should be an enjoyable experience for everyone involved. Implementing small-area games in your practices will raise the enthusiasm level of your players and give them something to look forward to in each practice. Happy players fall in love with the game and will want to continue coming back to the rink. It's no different for coaches. You're a better coach if you're having fun and enjoying yourself. Teams model themselves after their coaches. A happy, hard-working coach with a great attitude will produce a team with similar traits.

WHAT SKILLS CAN BE TAUGHT USING SMALL-AREA GAMES?

As coaches, we all have our tried-and-true methods of teaching specific individual skills. In no way am I advocating that we dismiss traditional individual skill training and the drills that are used to teach those skills. Rather, I would make the argument that it's what we do in addition to our traditional drills and teachings that will have the most profound impact on our players. That's where small-area games come into play.

Virtually any individual or team skill can be taught through the use of small-area games. Of course, just as in a real game, virtually every skill imaginable is needed and will be practiced in a small-area game. This is accomplished in a learning-friendly environment in which the players are having fun. As a coach, have the courage to allow players to figure things out for themselves and let the game teach the game. Here's a very brief look at some of the skills commonly taught through the use of small-area games:

Skating. Every skating maneuver is needed in small-area games. Lateral movement, stops and starts, tight turns, transitions, crossovers and the forward and backward stride will all be practiced in virtually every game.

Passing. Nearly every game incorporates passing as an integral part of the game. Rules can be applied to games requiring a number of passes prior to a shot on net or require players to give and receive passes from support players.

Shooting. No traditional drill will allow players to attempt as many shots under competitive playing conditions as a typical small-area game. Players are encouraged and required to use a variety of different shots, including the nearly-ignored backhand, and attack the net to capitalize on rebounds.

Stickhandling. Every player has the opportunity to handle the puck a great deal in small-area games. More than simply handling the puck, they're required to do it in tight areas and under pressure. In my experience, this is the optimal way to become a better puckhandler.

Cycling. Many small-area games can be designed to give players the opportunity to work the puck low in the offensive zone. Competitive games allow players to develop

the ability to work together to control the puck deep in the offensive zone while under the same type of defensive pressure they would typically face in a real game.

Transitioning. One of the trademarks of small-area games are the continual transitions players must make from offense to defense. Forwards and defensemen alike are put into situations that they would rarely, if ever, see in a traditional drill; yet routinely have to face during actual competition.

Angling. Because defenders are placed into a variety of real-game situations in small areas, they learn to close gaps and cut angles with a great deal of skill.

Breakouts. Games can be designed to incorporate breakouts and forechecks. This creates an excellent opportunity for teams to practice specific plays during a live, competitive situation.

Power plays. Many small-area games provide odd-man situations that closely replicate typical power play alignments such as the overload and the umbrella. Conditions and rules regarding the number of players on each team and their positioning can be implemented to meet specific needs.

Puck support. To achieve success in most any small-area game, players must learn to properly support the puck carrier and position themselves to receive passes, anticipate turnovers and run interference for teammates.

Hockey sense. Hockey sense is a skill that a coach cannot teach. Players only gain hockey sense through experience and repetition. Over the course of a season, small-area games can give players hundreds of quality repetitions in various situations that are commonly seen in real games. Traditional drills are all too often scripted, eliminating the thought process and decision making skills. Outcomes of small-area games, while containing specific guidelines and rules, are never predetermined.

Remember, these are just a few of the numerous individual and team skills that may be learned and practiced through the use of small-area games in your practices.

ORGANIZATION OF SMALL-AREA GAMES

Simply using small-area games in practice is not enough. The coach must take steps to make sure that games are properly organized to ensure maximum player development and learning through maximum effort. Some of the important considerations in organizing small-area games include:

Be creative. Creativity is a key to keep small-area games and practices fresh and exciting. The types of games that can be played and the rules they are played by are limited only to the imagination of the coach.

Length of games and shifts. Coaches need to take the length of games and shifts into consideration when drawing up their daily practice plans. How long should a game be played? While two minutes is probably too short a time period, twenty minutes is probably way too long. Typically, durations of between eight and twelve minutes will provide satisfactory time for several quality repetitions while holding the interest and attention of the players.

The length of each shift is equally, if not more, important than the length of the game. Since we are trying to duplicate game conditions during practice, a good rule of thumb is to keep shifts relatively short – no longer than a typical game shift. In fact, given that most small-area games require even more effort and involvement than a typical game shift, small-area game shifts should be kept shorter to prevent a breakdown of technique. Thirty to forty second shifts are usually sufficient.

Teaching points. Every small-area game has a focus and points of emphasis relative to skill training and development. While many different skills and techniques can be taught within any small-area game, the coach must choose a small number of teaching points for each game and stick to those points. While it is natural for a coach to want to critique any and all areas where he or she sees a deficiency, it is important to keep players focused and the lessons each small-area game is designed to teach and not burden players with extra thoughts that will restrict creativity.

Enforcing rules, technique and discipline. The key to enforcing small-area game rules, as well as monitoring technique and discipline, is having a minimum of one coach

assigned to each game. It is the responsibility of the head coach to make sure that each member of his or her staff completely understands each game and is on the same page.

Know your players. In creating any practice plan and considering which drills are appropriate for a team, the most important factor for any coach is an absolute knowledge of his or her players. Small-area games that are too easy for players will get boring and games that are too hard and require players to perform tasks that are too advanced will lead to frustration and decreased effort.

Know yourself and your coaching style. To be an effective leader, a coach must have a true understanding of himself or herself. You can't improve on something you don't understand. As coaches, we are (hopefully) always seeking to improve. Many times improvement comes through mistakes that are made and recognized. Hockey players are no different. Players make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

Small-area games are designed to allow players to make – and learn from – mistakes. Coaches can certainly coach and point things out during small-area games, but should be careful not to overdo it. This is why coaches need to know themselves and have an understanding of their coaching styles. A coach that tends to over-coach or has a tendency to be very vocal will need to scale back on that behavior. Constantly barking orders during the games will only serve to distract players and reduce creativity and the learning process. Let the game teach the game!

CONDITIONS AND RULES OF SMALL-AREA GAMES

Every small-area game is governed by a number of conditions and rules that dictate how the game will be played and which skills and concepts will be highlighted. Conditions and rules must be closely followed; otherwise the game may not help players accomplish the predetermined goals.

Conditions and rules are what separate and distinguish one small-area game from another. Coaches must feel free to use their imagination and understand the needs of their team when designing a game. The only limit on the number or type of games is the coach's creativity. Here are just a few of the important considerations to make when applying conditions and rules to small-area games:

The placement and number of nets. Where the nets are placed and how many nets are used may be the most important consideration a coach can make when implementing a small-area game in a practice. The most common mistake made by coaches when placing nets in small-area game is to simply place the nets against the boards when playing cross-ice. Small-area games are used as a means of replicating real game situations and the nets are not placed against the boards during a real game. Unless there is a purpose for placing the nets against the boards, move them out and give players space to operate behind the net.

Another consideration revolves around the number of goaltenders that will be involved in the practice session. Many youth teams may only have one goaltender available at any given practice session. In these situations, implementing drills that only require one goaltender and/or having a quality net cover available for the second net would be advisable. Many high school or college programs, as well as youth teams sharing practice ice, may have three or more goaltenders on the ice at any given time. Again, the coach must plan ahead to ensure that each goaltender receives an adequate amount of work.

Increase or decrease the area of play. Expanding or reducing the area of play will have a tremendous impact on any small-area game. Reducing the area of play will require players to focus on puck protection, lateral movement, stops and starts and puck

support in addition to many other skills. Increasing the area of play will free up the ice, allowing players to carry the puck more, make and receive more passes and reach higher skating speeds while still having to function in a limited space.

Add support players. Many of the games illustrated in this manual allow for the addition of support players. Support players are typically added to create odd-man situations and opportunities in an even strength game. Support players can play for one or both teams and are typically confined to specific spots on the rink. Coaches can choose to have support players perform certain functions and may also choose to limit what support players may do, such as not allowing them to shoot the puck.

Increase or decrease the number of participants. A simple way to change the look and feel of a small-area game is to increase or decrease the number of participants. Adding players to a game will immediately decrease the amount of available space on the ice. Conversely, decreasing the number of players will open up the ice and allow for more free-flowing movement.

Confine players to specific areas. Restricting players to a certain area on the ice is an easy way to create mandatory odd-man situations for the offensive team. Players can be confined to one end of the ice, be forced to stay above the face-off circles or below the goal line, behind the net, in a corner or placed in a stationary position at any given location. Different rules and conditions may be applied to these players than are placed on other players in order to affect the flow of the game and target specific skills.

Require a certain number of passes or puck touches. Requiring each team or player to make a certain number of passes or touch the puck a number of times before attempting a shot on net is an easy way to work a number of skills including passing, receiving a pass, puck support, creating time and space and a better ability to read the ice. Placing these types of conditions into a small-area games force offensive players to work harder than usual to find open ice as defensive players are aware that a shot cannot be taken until the requisite numbers of passes or puck touches are made. Defensive players are more likely to play the man aggressively in these situations.

CONCLUSION

In the opening section of this guide to small-area games, we took a look at the current paradigm of American hockey practices. Hopefully, as you've begun to study small-area games and what they can do for your players and teams, you've experienced the beginnings of a paradigm shift.

As you introduce small-area games into your practices, I ask that you stick with them for a while. In the initial few practices in which you use small-area games, the games are sure to look like organized chaos. Most players, due to their lack of overall hockey sense and decision-making skills, will not know how to react to the play taking place around them. However, when given a chance to develop, these same players will begin to make plays, get themselves into position and display skills that were not visible only days or weeks earlier.

The following pages of this guide will give you twenty-four different small-area games that you can begin using in your practices tomorrow. Each game comes complete with illustrations and detailed rules. While these games are a starting point, I encourage you to create your own games and implement them into your practices. Know your team, know your players, be responsive to their needs and have fun!

One area that I have not addressed in this guide is the amount of practice time that should be devoted to small-area games. I intentionally ignored this subject because I believe that it is unique to each coach and his or her team. Some coaches use one game per practice while others practice almost exclusively with small-area games.

I truly believe that small-area games should be the cornerstone of your practice plans. At this point, if you still haven't experienced a true "paradigm shift", begin slowly by implementing one small-area game per practice in place of your traditional conditioning drills. Experience tells me that you'll soon be using this wonderful teaching tool as a much larger part of your daily practice regimen.

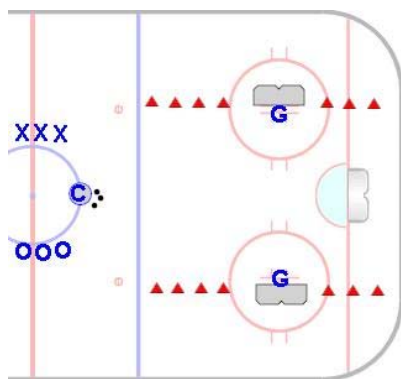
Beyond that, I wish the best of luck to all hockey coaches. Have fun teaching this great game and enjoy the young men and women you have the privilege to work with. You are a part of their lives and they will remember you. Make those memories special.

2 on 2 In the Box

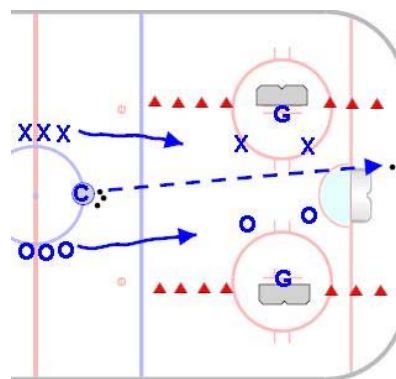
All Ages

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players must work to find openings and create passing opportunities and become comfortable handling the puck in a small area while under constant pressure.

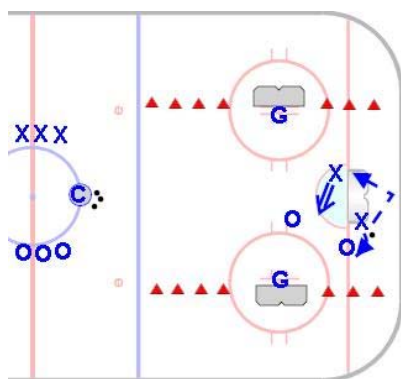
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 25 to 40 seconds



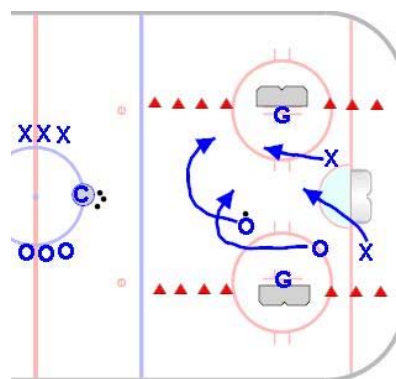
- Nets are placed on the face-off dots
- Cones are placed along the imaginary goal lines.
- The puck cannot go past goal lines.



- Coach shoots puck into zone and two players from each team enter the play.
- If the puck is shot or skated below the imaginary goal lines, the coach calls "new puck" and shoots a puck into play.



- Players controlling the puck must constantly move, using crossovers and lateral movement, to find open ice and create shots.
- Players must support the puck carrier and position themselves to receive the puck.



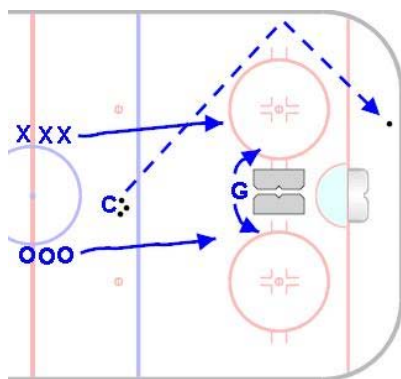
- Upon recovering the rebound or turnover, play moves in the other direction.
- A typical game will see numerous turnovers and calls for new pucks as well as many quality scoring opportunities.

Backdoor 3 on 3

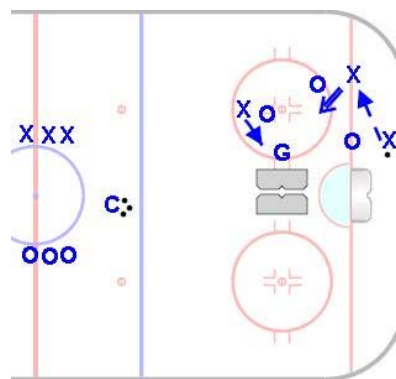
All Ages

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; helps with quickness and recovery.

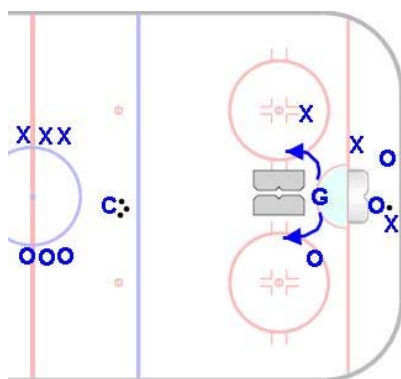
Time: 8 to 12 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 45 seconds



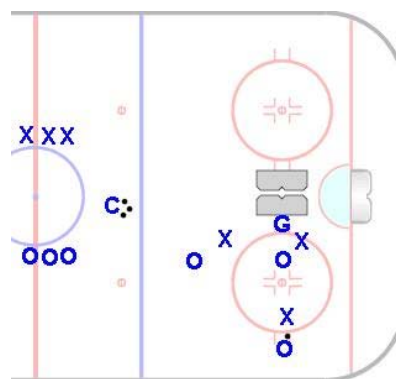
- Nets are placed back-to-back between the face-off circles.
- One goaltender covers both nets.
- Coach shoots puck in to start play and three players from each team enter play.



- Game is played from the blue line in. Players attack the nets opposite their line.
- Players should take advantage of the full ice surface. Spread the ice and move the puck.



- Goaltender must be positioned to cover both nets and quickly move between them.
- Players should be encourage to walk the puck in front of the net they're protecting to simulate play from behind the offensive net.



- Goaltenders should be alternated every other shift to avoid exhaustion and a negative impact on technique.
- As with all games, the puck is live until frozen. Players attack for rebounds.

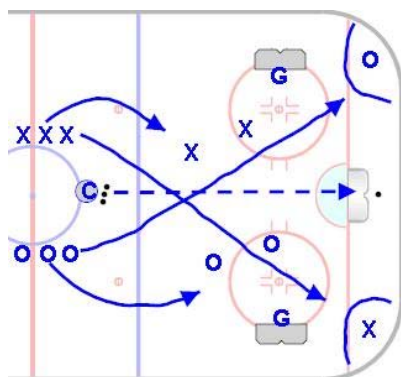
3 on 3 Safe Zone

All Ages

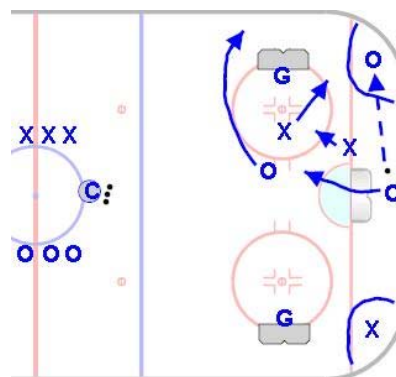
Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players work a give and go from the offensive corner leading to a shot on net.

Time: 8 to 12 minutes

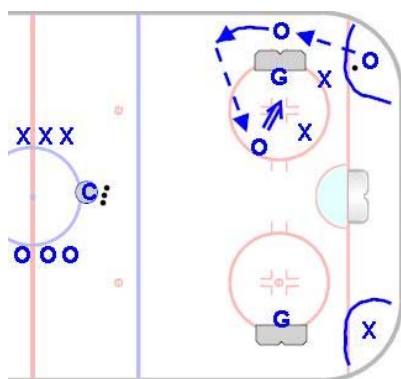
Shifts: 30 to 45 seconds



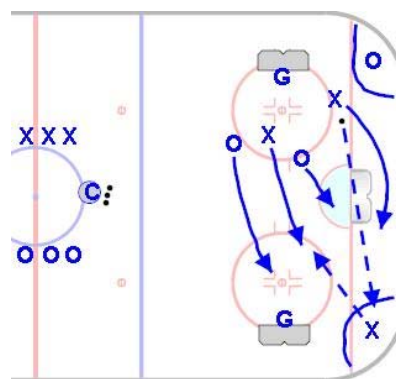
- Nets are placed on face-off circles.
- Play begins with the first player in each line entering the “safe zone” in opposite corners.
- Coach fires a puck into play and the next two players for each team enter the zone to play.



- “Safe zone” player cannot be pressured and cannot leave the corner.
- Before attempting a shot on net, players must make a pass to their “safe zone” and have the “safe zone” player make a return pass .



- Players must work to always keep their feet moving and find open space on the ice.
- Encourage players to use the area behind the net as well as other open areas on the ice.



- A turnover will result in the new offensive team making a pass to their “safe zone” and moving into position to receive a return pass.
- Players should hustle to take advantage of potential breakaway opportunities.

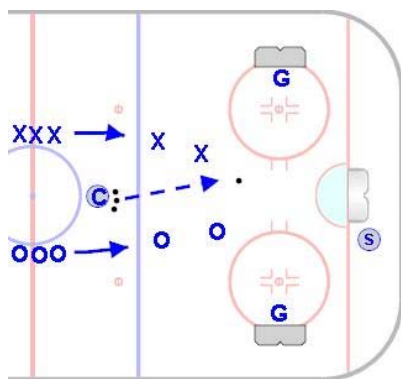
2 on 2 Single Support

All Ages

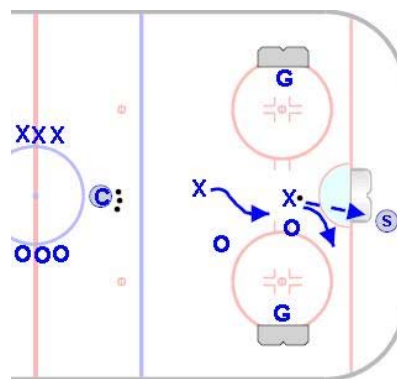
Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players work a quick give-and-go to create scoring opportunities.

Time: 8 to 12 minutes

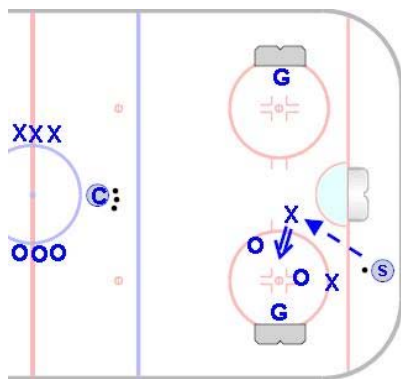
Shifts: 30 to 45 seconds



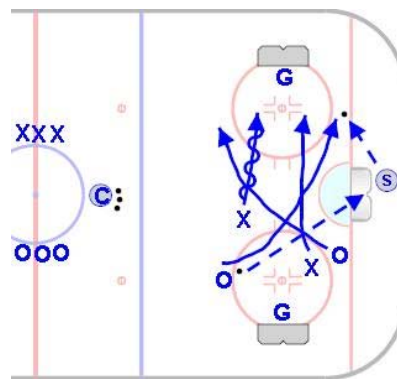
- Nets are placed on face-off circles.
- One support player is stationed (and must stay) below the goal line. Support player plays offensively for both teams.
- Two players from each team enter play.



- Players must complete a pass to the support player and receive a pass in return before attempting a shot on net.
- It is critical that players move to open ice, positioning themselves for the return pass.



- Use of the support player creates a constant 3 on 2 situation for the offensive team.
- Defensive players are not allowed to cross the goal line to pressure the support player.



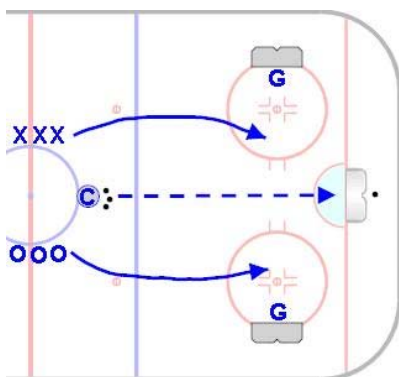
- After a turnover, the support player switches teams and play changes direction.
- After a save is made and the offensive team regains possession, they must complete another pass before attempting another shot.

3 on 3 Score Anywhere

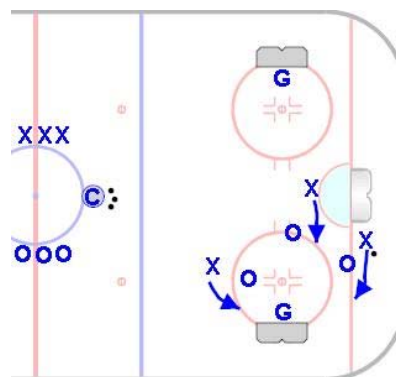
All Ages

Goal: To simulate transition and offensive attack situations that allow players to think creatively and will teach them to “see the ice” better.

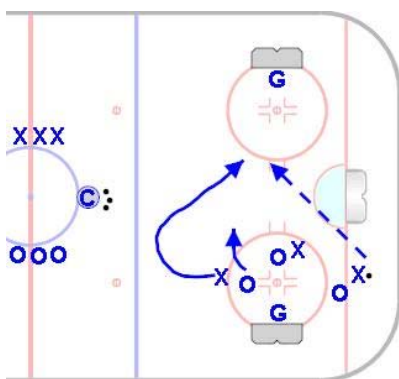
Time: 8 to 12 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 45 seconds



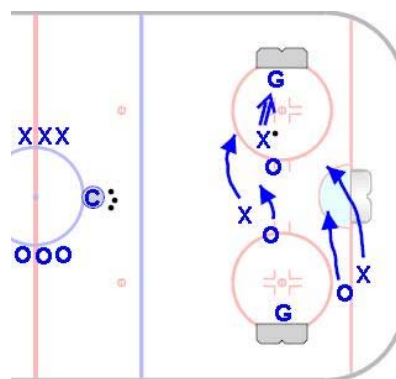
- Nets are placed on face-off circles.
- Play begins when coach dumps puck in. Three players from each team enter play.
- Players can score to either net.



- The team possessing the puck can choose to attack either net.
- Players will need to transition from offense to defense quickly on turnovers, as they may be defending the net they were just attacking.



- Play must stay within the blue lines. Players should use the entire available ice surface.
- Attack should frequently change directions, with players looking to create odd-man situations and potential breakaways.



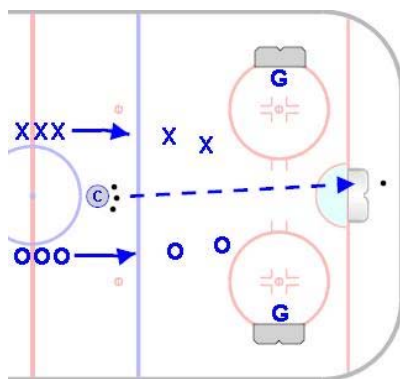
- All rebounds are live. Goaltenders should move to cover the puck quickly, as six players will attack for each rebound.
- Players must respect the goaltender and avoid actions that could injure them.

2 on 2 No Passing

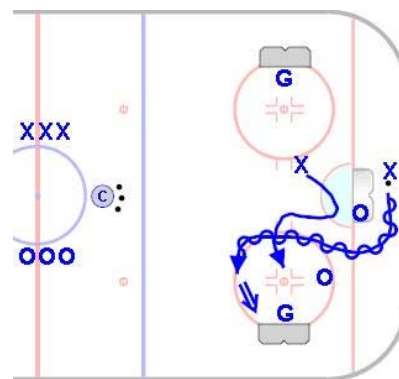
All Ages

Goal: To simulate a game-like environment in which players gain skill carrying the puck as well as learning to skillfully support the puck carrier.

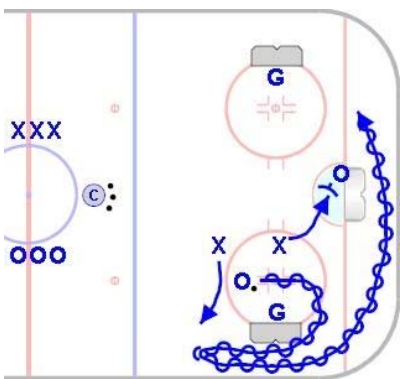
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 25 to 40 seconds



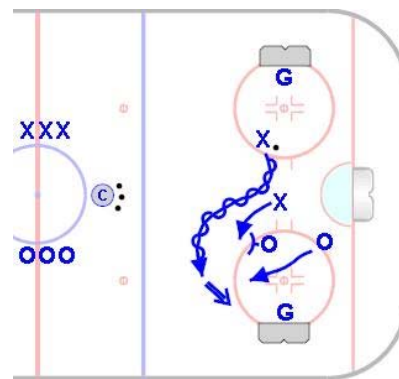
- Nets are placed on the face-off circles.
- Two players enter the zone and compete in a 2 on 2 game.
- Coach dumps puck in to begin play.



- Players are not allowed to pass the puck. The puck must be carried until it is lost or a shot is attempted.
- Offensive teammate must support the puck and get into position to pick up a loose puck.



- Puck carrier will be forced to constantly change direction and protect the puck. Use the full space available, including the area behind the net.



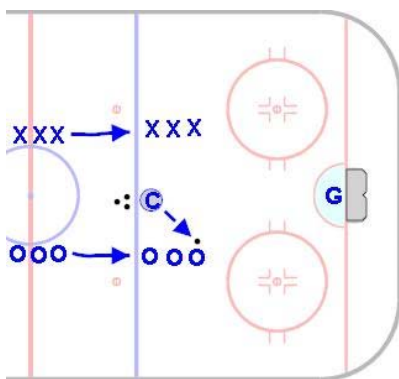
- Defensive players will work to close gaps and create turnovers.
- Offensive teammate must help to create space and open lanes for the puck carrier.

3 on 3 Transition

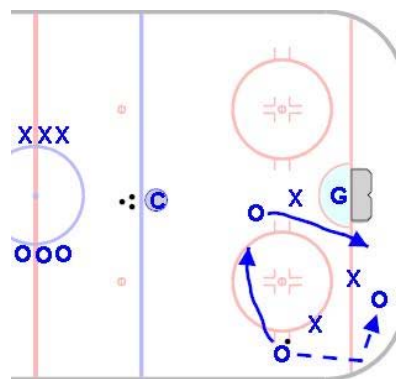
All Ages

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players must play both offense and defense low in the zone while utilizing the point to create scoring opportunities or simulate a breakout.

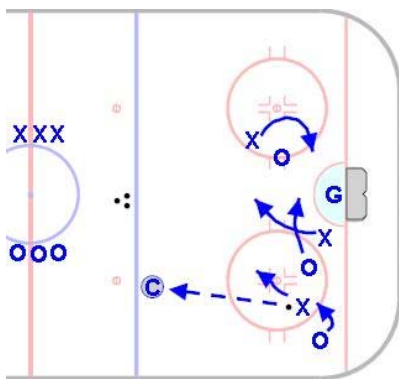
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 25 to 40 seconds



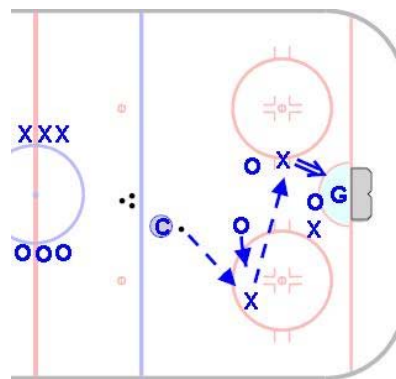
- One net is placed in the traditional position.
- The coach patrols the blue line and will act as the support player in this game.
- Game begins with the coach passing the puck to one team. That team is on offense.



- Coach has the option of moving across the blue line or remaining stationary.
- Offensive team should move throughout the zone looking to create scoring opportunities.
- Use this game to practice cycling the puck.



- Upon forcing a turnover, the defensive team must get the puck to the coach on the blue line. They are now the offensive team.
- Offensive team also has the option of using the coach as a support player.



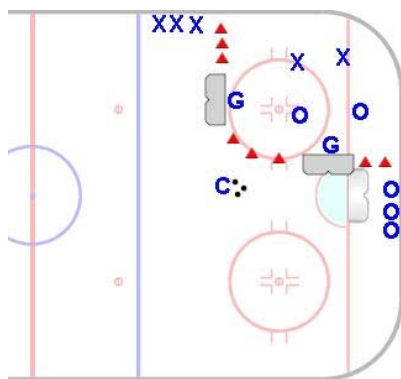
- Coach will make a return pass to the new offensive team.
- Players should react quickly to create scoring opportunities off of the transition.

Tight Area 2 on 2

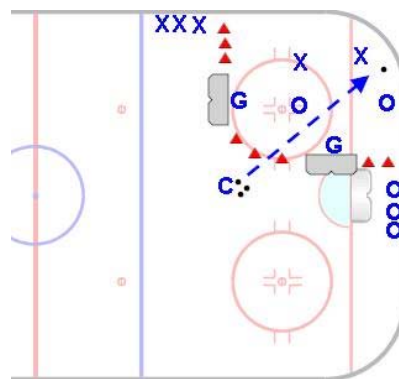
All Ages

Goal: To simulate game situations in which players must operate in extremely tight areas and create plays out of the corner. Also forces players to release shots quickly while under pressure.

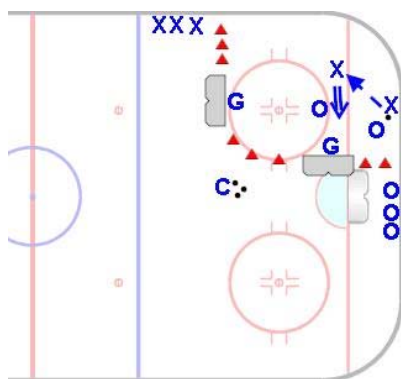
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 25 to 40 seconds



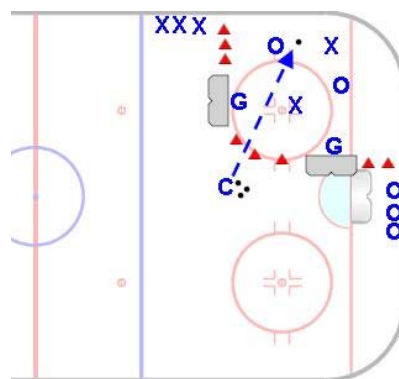
- One net is placed at the top of the face-off circle; the other net is placed on the outside of the circle just above the goal line.
- Teams start from boards as illustrated.
- Puck cannot cross border created by cones.



- Game begins with two members from each team entering play. Coach shoots puck in.
- Coach must keep eyes open for flying or deflected pucks.



- Players engage in a two on two game.
- Puck support is a key.
- Players must constantly move and position themselves to receive passes and create scoring opportunities.



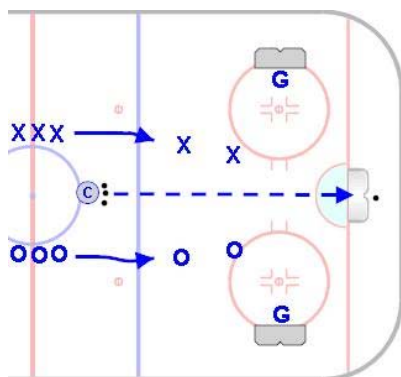
- Pucks will frequently leave the area of play. When this happens, coach will call “new puck” and send a puck in.
- Players will be forced to switch quickly between offense and defense.

2 on 2 Two Touch

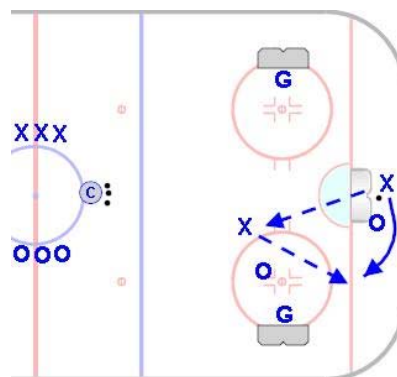
All Ages

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players have multiple passing and receiving opportunities.

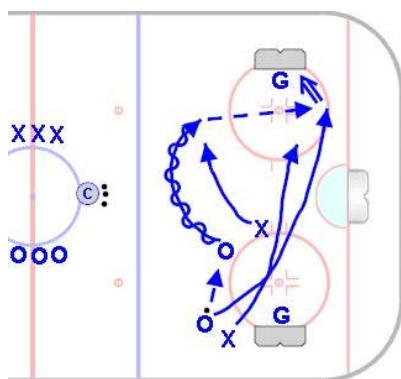
Time: 8 to 12 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 45 seconds



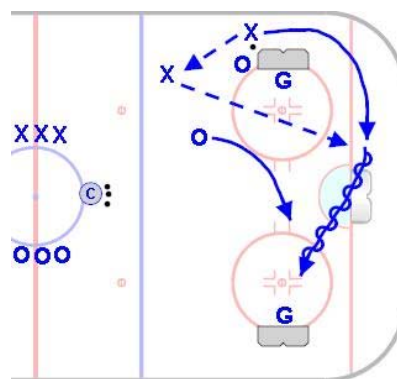
- Nets are placed on the face-off circles.
- Two players from each team enter play and play a 2 on 2 game.
- The coach dumps in a puck to start play.



- Players must complete two passes before attempting a shot on net.
- After the save is made by the goaltender, two more passes must be completed before attempting another shot.



- Players are not limited to two passes. They should be encouraged to make as many passes as necessary to create a good scoring opportunity.



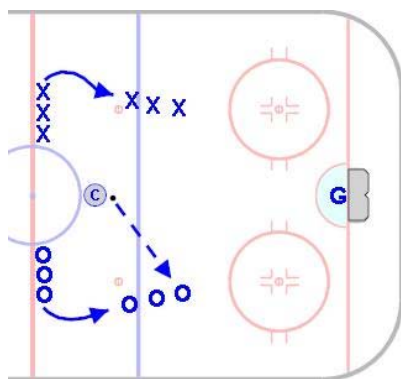
- Players should use all available ice, looking for open spaces to make themselves available for passes.

Half Court 3 on 3

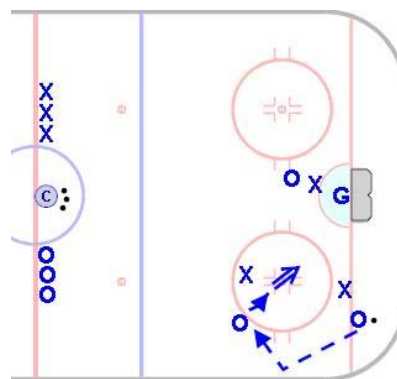
All Ages

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players must play both offense and defense, break the puck out of the zone and regroup in the neutral zone.

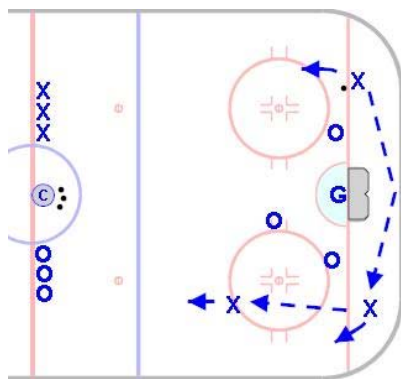
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 40 seconds



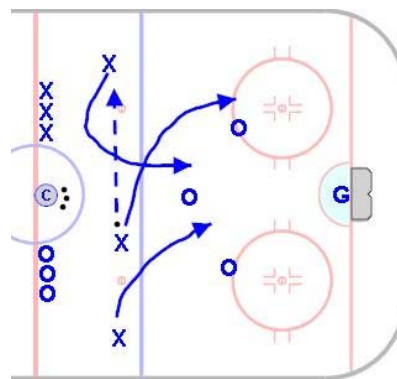
- One net placed in the traditional position.
- Three players from each team enter play. The game begins with the coach passing the puck to one team. That team is on offense.



- Players should be encouraged to cycle the puck and work the corners and behind the net in the offensive zone.
- The defensive team must create a turnover and get the puck over the blue line.



- Once over the blue line, the original defensive team will be on offense.
- Defensive players controlling the puck should treat the situation as a breakout, either skating or passing the puck out of the zone.



- Offensive players must regroup in the neutral zone and enter the zone onside.
- Defensive players are not allowed to cross the blue line in pursuit of the puck. Offensive team must be allowed to cross the line.

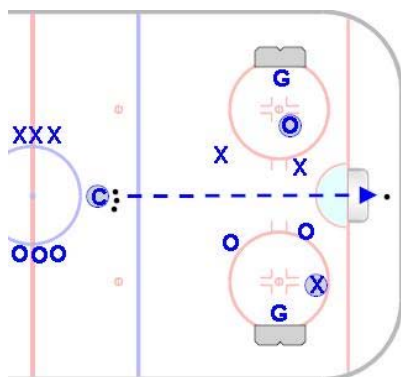
Continuous 3 on 2

Squirt & Older

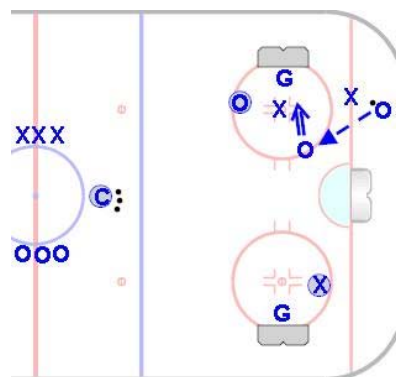
Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players are given the opportunity to execute and defend a 3 on 2 advantage in a small area.

Time: 8 to 10 minutes

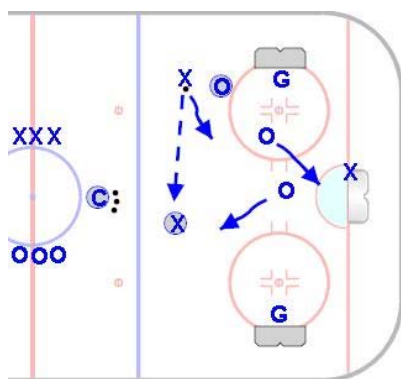
Shifts: 25 to 40 seconds



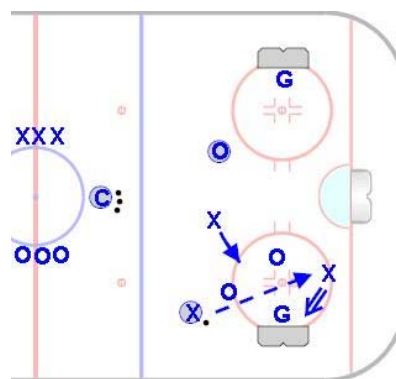
- Nets are placed on face-off circles.
- An imaginary line crosses the middle of the playing surface.
- One player from each team is always on offense and cannot cross the dividing line.



- Play starts with the coach dumping in a puck and three players from each team entering play (offensive players in their ends).
- Team controlling play takes a 3 on 2 advantage into their offensive zone.



- After the defensive team forces a turnover, they can move the puck up the ice to the full-time offensive player or skate the puck.
- The offensive player may have the opportunity for a breakaway.



- The offensive player may need to stall while waiting for teammates to enter the play.
- Players must support the puck carrier to create passing options.
- Players crash the net for loose rebounds.

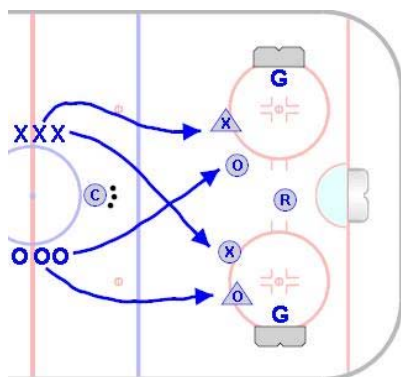
2 on 1 Rover

Squirt and Older

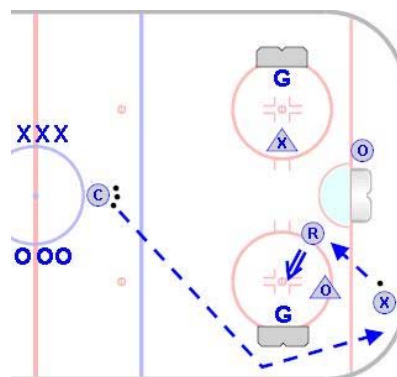
Goal: To simulate game-like 2 on 1 situations and teach players how to delay and support in an odd-man situation.

Time: 8 to 10 minutes

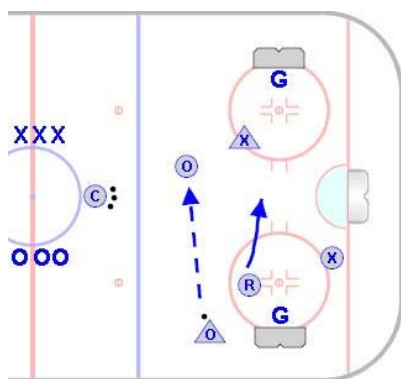
Shifts: 25 to 40 seconds



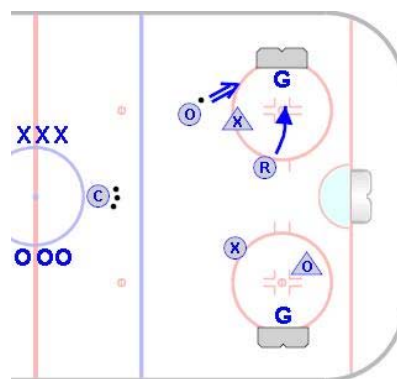
- One net is placed in the traditional position.
- One offensive and one defensive player from each team enters the zone. These players cannot cross the midpoint of the ice.
- One “rover” also enters play.



- The rover is allowed to go anywhere on the ice. The rover is always an offensive player.
- The coach dumps the puck into one end to begin play. The rover joins play for the team that gains control of the puck.



- Upon forcing a turnover, the defensive player will headman the puck. The rover again joins the team in control of the puck.
- The offensive player may need to delay until the rover catches up with the play.



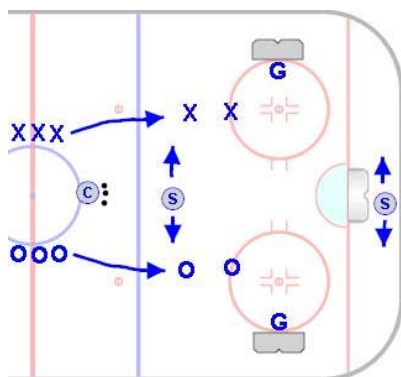
- It is important that the designated offensive and defensive players not cross the midpoint of the ice. Use cones as a reminder if needed.
- Be mindful of the shift lengths as the rover will tire quickly.

2 on 2 Double Support

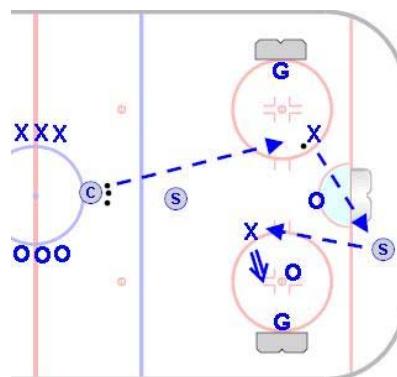
Squirt & Older

Goal: To simulate a game situation which gives players the ability to create give-and-go passing and odd-man offensive and power play-like opportunities.

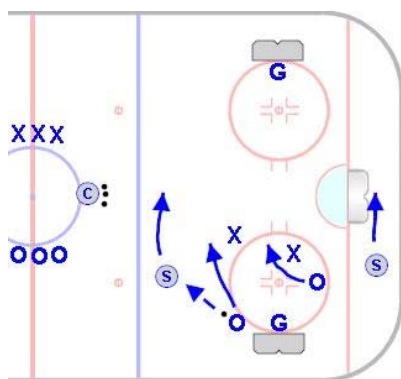
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 45 seconds



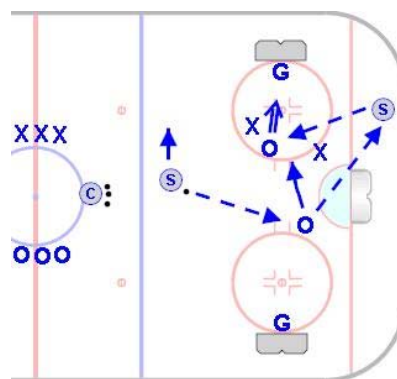
- Nets are placed on the face-off circles.
- Two support players are placed in the zone. One support player stays below the goal line and one remains above the top of the face-off circles. They cannot pass these boundaries.



- Two players from each team enter the zone.
- Coach begins play by passing to one team.
- Both support players are on offense and play for the team in control of the puck. This will create a 4 on 2 situation for the offense.



- With every turnover, the support players will change teams and remain on offense.
- Support players are not allowed to pass cross-ice to one another.



- Coaches have the option of requiring a pass to one or both support players before a shot on net is attempted.

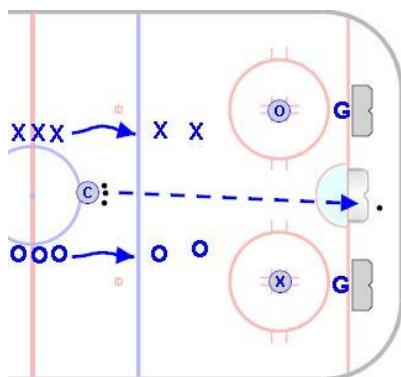
On The Dots 3 on 2

Squirt & Older

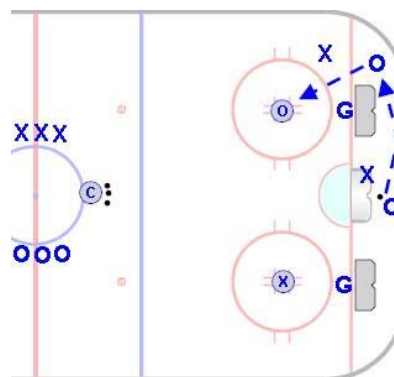
Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players are operating with a 3 on 2 advantage in a small area.

Time: 8 to 10 minutes

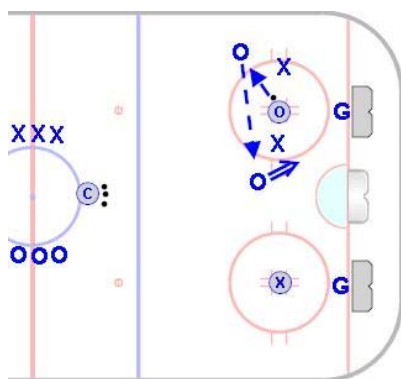
Shifts: 30 to 45 seconds



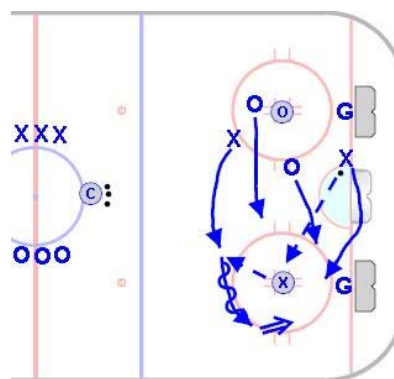
- Nets are placed on the goal line and in line with the face-off dot.
- One player from each team goes to the face-off dot opposite their line. They are “on the dot” and are not allowed to leave the dot.



- Two additional players from each team enter play and are allowed to skate freely.
- Players should use the player on the dot as a passing station to create give-and-go opportunities.



- Defensive players are not allowed to attack or defend the players on the dots.
- Players on the dots are not allowed to shoot the puck. As a progression of the game, coaches can choose to allow one-timers.



- Players are not required to use the player on the dot, but are encouraged to use them.
- Players on the dot can pass to either teammate, they are not required to return the puck to the player they received the pass from.

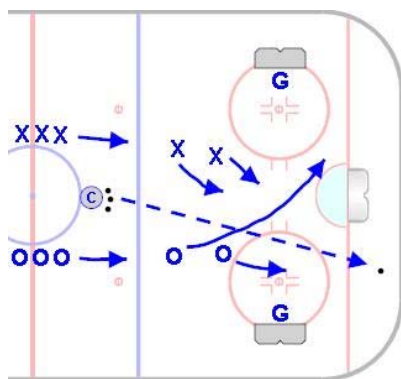
2 on 1 Transition

Squirt & Older

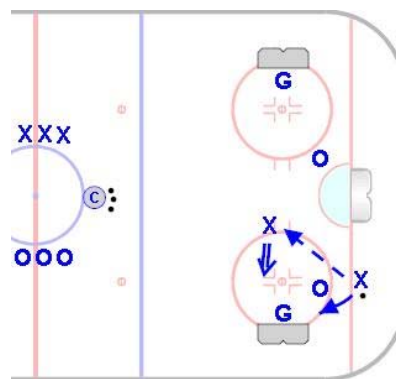
Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players are continuously involved in a 2 on 1, whether attacking or defending.

Time: 8 to 10 minutes

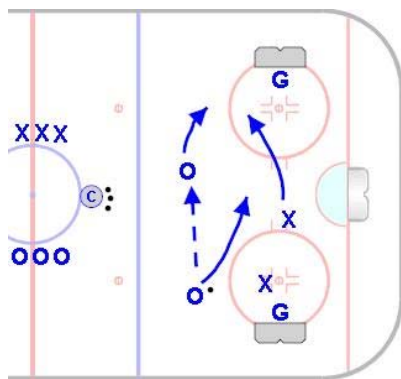
Shifts: 30 to 40 seconds



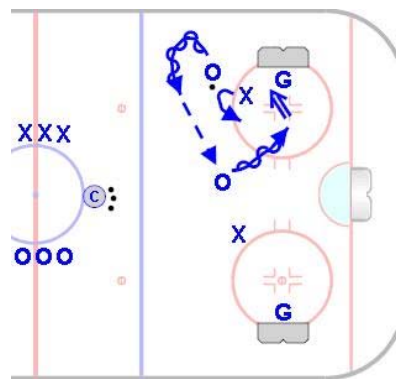
- Nets are placed on the face-off circles.
- To begin, the coach dumps the puck into one end. Two players from each team enter play.
- Each team must have one player in their offensive zone at all times.



- When beginning the game, the second player in line for the defensive team will become the designated offensive player.
- Players work a 2 on 1 in the offensive end of the ice.



- After a turnover, the defender looks to either skate or pass the puck out of the zone.
- The former offensive player nearest his/her own zone drops back to defend. Remaining teammate must stay in their offensive zone.



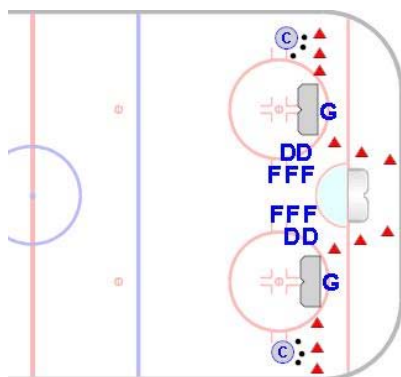
- Frequently, the lead offensive player will need to delay in order to create time for the trailing teammate to catch up with the play.

Tight Area 2 on 1

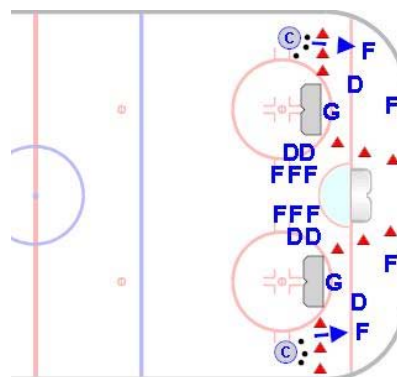
Squirt & Older

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

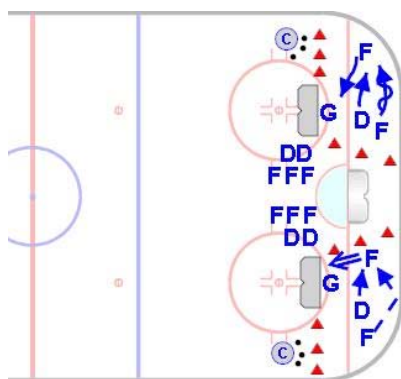
Time: 6 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 25 to 35 seconds



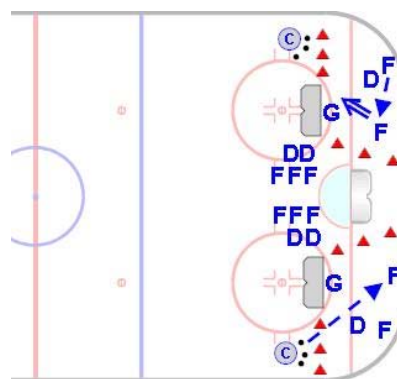
- Play takes place in both corners.
- Nets are placed just inside the face-off circles facing the corners.
- Cones are placed as illustrated to indicate the area of play.



- Forwards and defensemen are placed in lines as illustrated.
- Two forwards and one defenseman position themselves in the corners and coaches pass the puck to one of the forwards to start play.



- Coaches need to be aware of flying pucks. It is possible to be hit with a shot or deflection.
- Players work a 2 on 1 in the corner. Forwards are trying to create and convert as many scoring chances as possible.



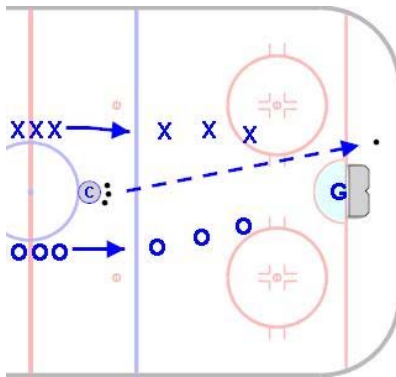
- With every puck that goes out of play, the coach will pass a puck in to one of the forwards.
- Defensemen attempt to clear the puck or redirect it out of play.

3 on 3 Circle Shooter

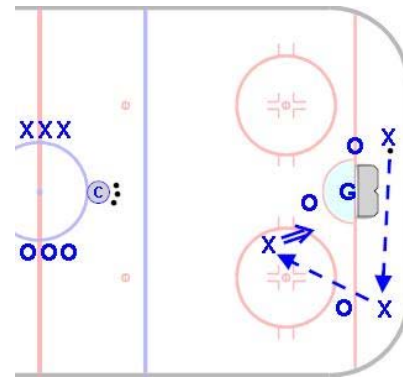
Squirt & Older

Goal: To create a competitive situation in which players must work the puck into a small, specific area (their designated circle) to create a shot.

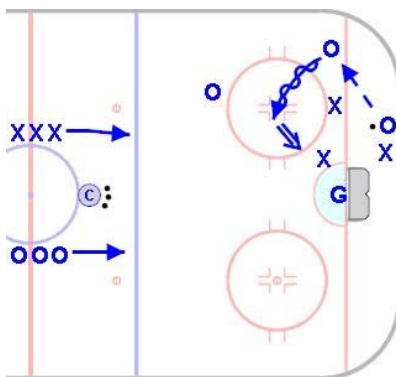
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 25 to 40 seconds



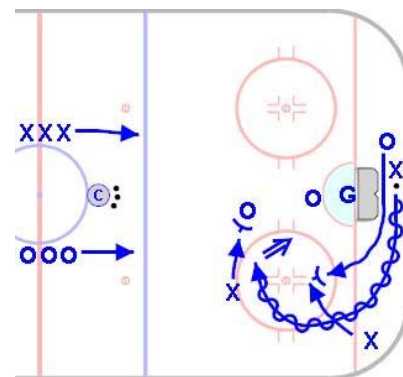
- One net placed in the traditional position.
- Play begins when coach dumps puck in and three players from each team enter play.



- Players are only allowed to shoot from inside the face-off circle opposite their line.
- Players will either skate the puck or pass it to open teammates in a position to enter their circle and attempt a shot.



- Offensive team will be able to overcome a passive defense by skating the puck into a shooting position within the circle.
- Players should work to use the offensive corner effectively.



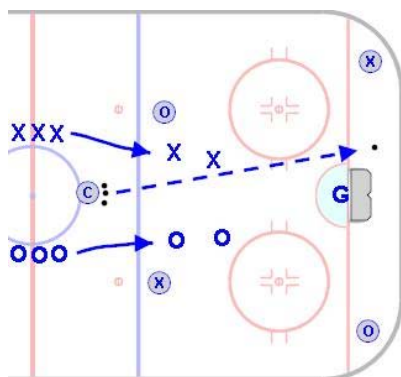
- Rebounds are not live. Players must work the puck back to the circle to shoot again.
- Teammates should create legal interference and block out opponents to create time and space for the puck carrier.

Four Corners 2 on 2

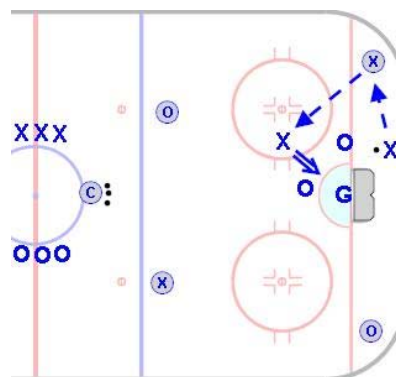
Squirt & Older

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players make a pass to the offensive corner or point and receive a return pass, leading to a shot on net.

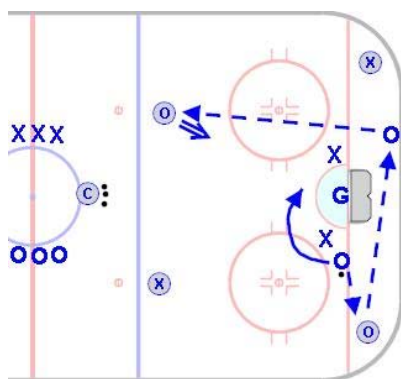
Time: 8 to 12 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 40 seconds



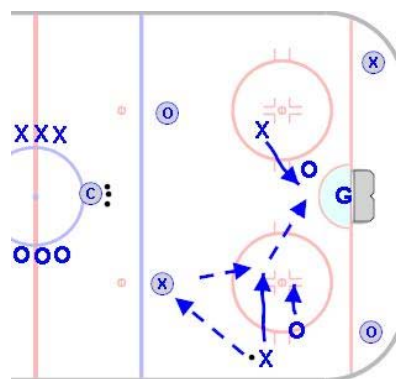
- One net is placed in the traditional position.
- Four support players are placed in the zone as shown in the diagram.
- To begin, the coach dumps the puck in and two players from each team enter play.



- Players play a 2 on 2 game with the option of using their designated support players.
- Support players are not allowed to pass to one another.



- Coach has the option of allowing the support players at the point to shoot the puck.
- Players should be encouraged to use the area behind the net and use the corner support to create give and go opportunities.



- All rebounds are live for either team to play. The goaltender should cover rebounds quickly.
- The coach has the option of requiring a pass to a support player before attempting a shot.

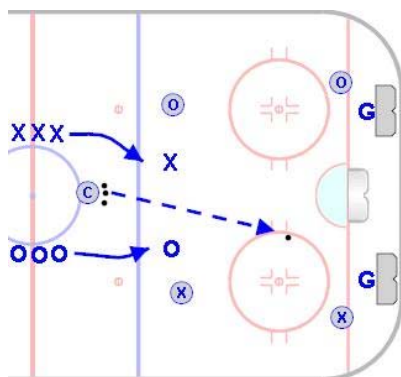
Three Zone 3 on 3

Pee Wee & Older

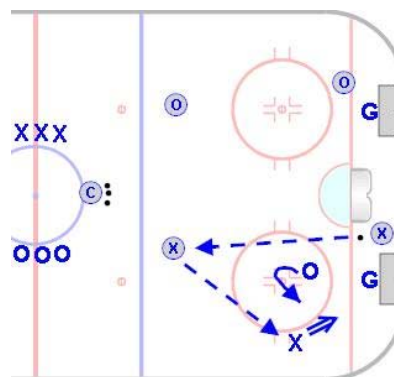
Goal: To create passing, shooting and scoring opportunities from various spots on the ice. This game is commonly used to simulate power play situations.

Time: 8 to 12 minutes

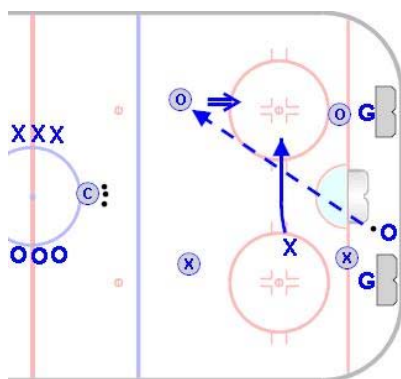
Shifts: 30 to 45 seconds



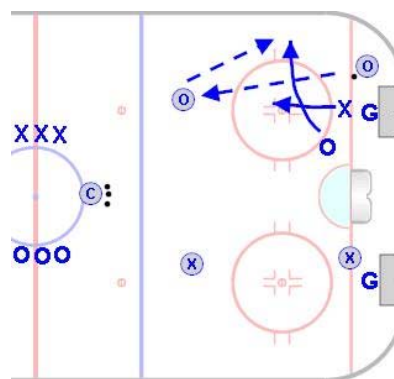
- Nets are placed against the end boards in line with the face-off circles.
- Three players from each team enter play. One player from each team is restricted to an area below the face-off circle and inside mid-ice.



- The other support players are confined to an area above the top of the face-off circles and inside mid-ice.
- The third player for each team can travel anywhere inside the blue line.



- Since both support players are confined to their offensive side of the ice, 3 on 1 situations are created.
- Support players are allowed to shoot and may pass the puck to one another.



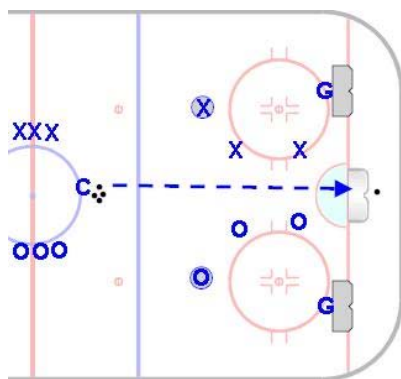
- The 3 on 1 situation allows teams to practice various power play situations, especially if the team favors an overload.
- Goaltenders should be active in attempting to cover or clear the puck.

Bruin 3 on 2

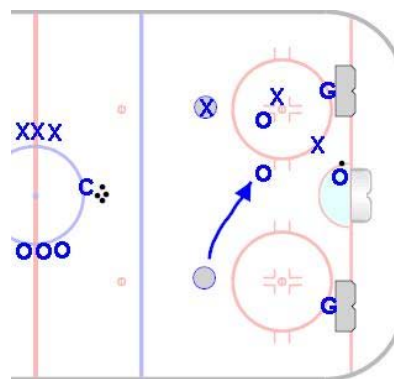
Pee Wee & Older

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players must attack with, and defend against, a 3 on 2 in a small area close to the net.

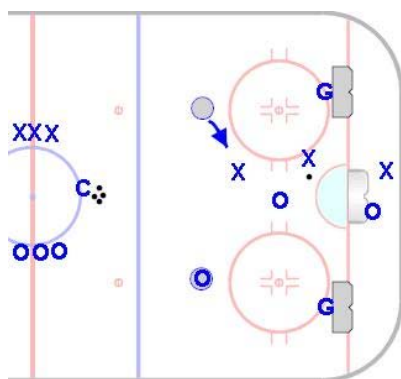
Time: 8 to 10 minutes **Shifts:** 30 to 40 seconds



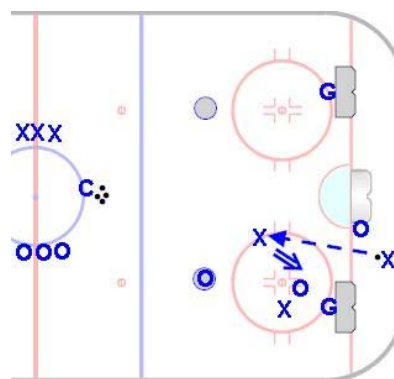
- Nets are placed just inside the goal line with the inside pipe in line with the face-off dot.
- One player from each team is in a stationary position just above the face-off circle nearest their team's line.



- Coach dumps the puck in and two players from each team enter play.
- Stationary player is allowed to enter play when his/her team controls the puck. This creates an instant 3 on 2 situation.



- When the puck is turned over, the stationary player must return to his/her position above the face-off circle.
- The stationary player for the new offensive team now enters the play.

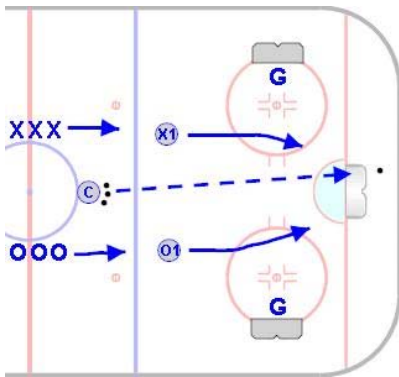


- The position of the net creates extra room behind the net. Encourage players to use it.
- While players are allowed to take the puck as far as the blue line, the majority of play will take place below the top of the circles.

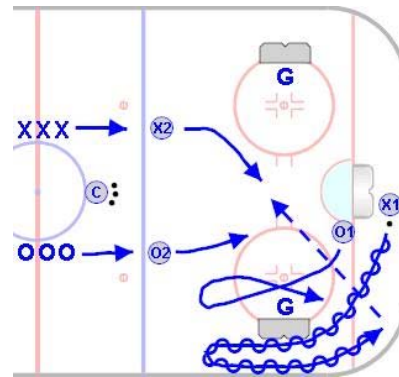
Progressive 3 on 3

Goal: To simulate a game situation which offers players multiple even strength opportunities. Players learn to support the puck and get into a proper defensive position when entering the play.

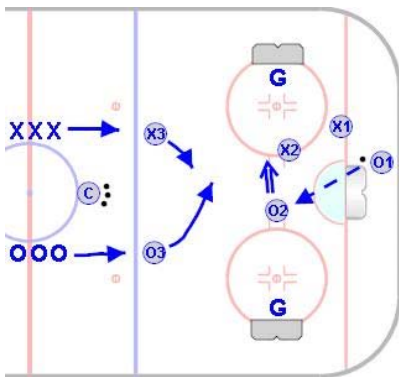
Time: 8 to 12 minutes **Shifts:** N/A



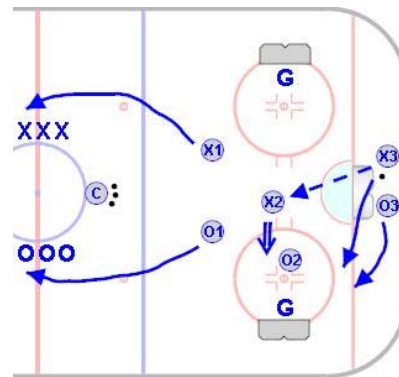
- Nets are placed on face-off circles.
- Coach dumps puck in and one player from each team enters play to begin the game.
- Game starts as a 1 on 1.



- After 10 seconds, the game becomes a 2 on 2 when one additional player from each team enters the game.
- Players work to attack and defend in an even-man situation.



- After 10 more seconds (20 seconds into the drill), one additional player from each team enters the game to create a 3 on 3.
- After 10 more seconds, the first two players into the game leave the play, creating a 2 on 2.



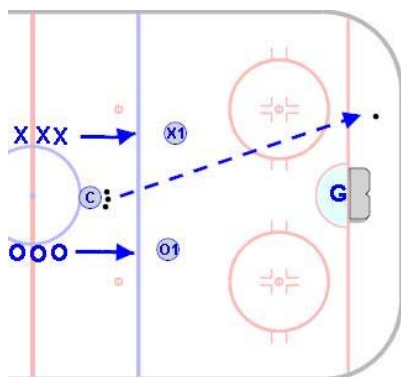
- 10 more seconds elapse and the second set of players leave to create a 1 on 1.
- The final 1 on 1 concludes after 10 seconds. No player skates more than 30 seconds. The entire 3 person shift will last for 50 seconds.

Even/Odd 1-2-3

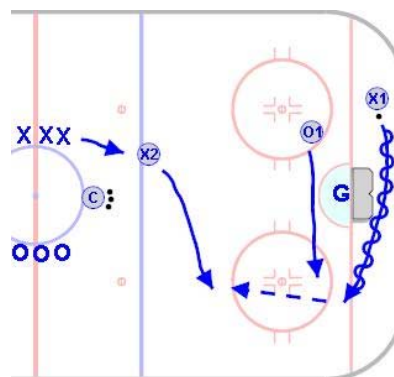
Pee Wee & Above

Goal: To create a competitive game which provides a variety of small-area odd and even man situations.

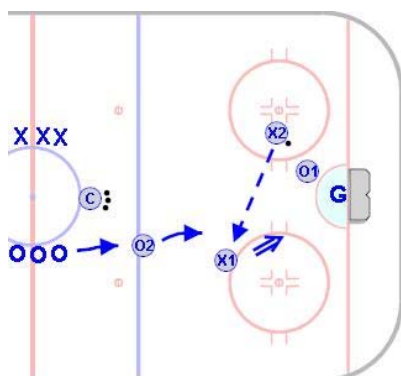
Time: 8 to 12 minutes **Shifts:** N/A



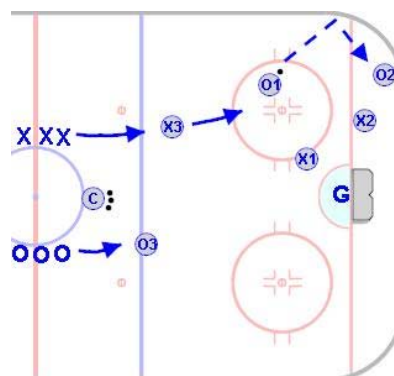
- One net is placed in the traditional position.
- Play begins when the coach dumps the puck in. One player from each team enters play.
- Players begin by playing a 1 on 1 game.



- Players play a 1 on 1 game for 10 seconds.
- After the initial 10 seconds, a player is added from one of the teams to create a 2 on 1 situation.



- After 5 seconds, a player from the other team will enter play to create a 2 on 2.
- All rebounds are live and can be played by either team.



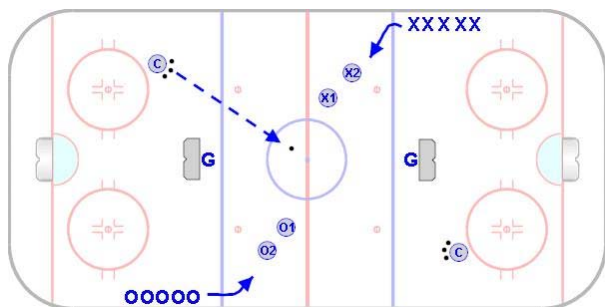
- New players are added every 5 seconds until the game is a 3 on 3. Finish the drill by playing 3 on 3 for 10 seconds. The entire drill will last for 40 seconds.

Continuous Mid-Ice 3 on 2

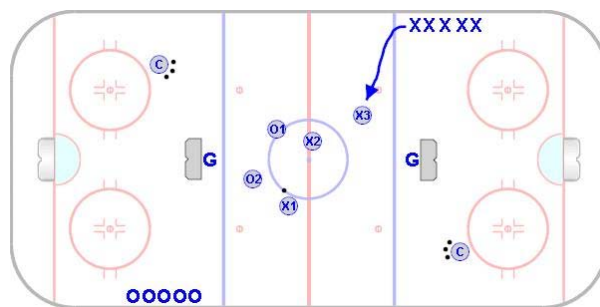
Pee Wee & Older

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players participate in continuous 3 on 2 offensive and defensive situations in a small area as part of a constantly changing, fast paced game.

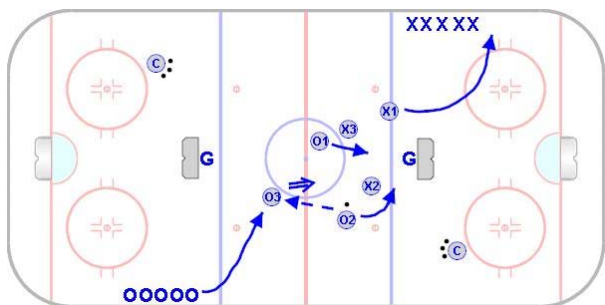
Time: 6 to 10 Minutes **Shifts:** N/A



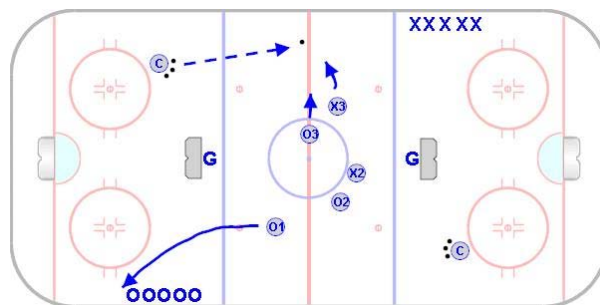
- Nets are placed a few feet inside the blue lines.
- Teams are lined up just inside each blue line on opposite sides of the ice.
- Coaches are stationed opposite the player lines as illustrated above.



- Coach puts puck into play to begin game.
- Two players from each team enter the play.
- The team which gains control of the puck adds a player from its line to create a 3 on 2 situation.



- When the offensive team loses the puck, their first player must leave the play and return to the end of their line.
- Upon forcing the turnover and taking control of the puck, the new offensive team will add a player to create a 3 on 2.



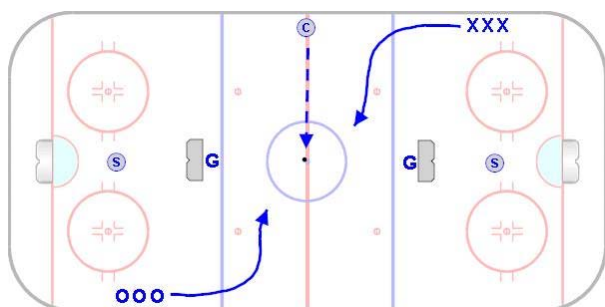
- If a goal is scored or the puck crosses the imaginary goal lines and possession is lost, the coach on the opposite side of the ice puts a new puck into play.
- In a situation requiring a new puck, the game reverts to a 2 on 2.

Mid-Ice D Support

Pee Wee & Older

Goal: To create a game-like situation in which players must simulate breakout situations and forecheck to defend against the breakout while playing a competitive 3 on 3 contest in a tight area.

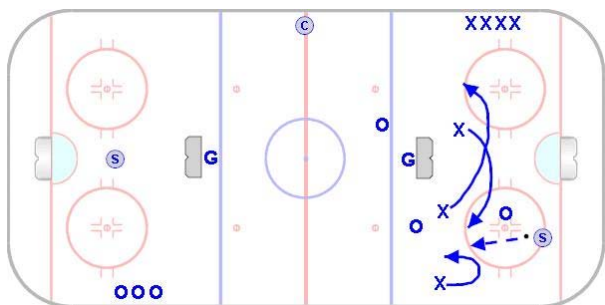
Time: 8 to 10 Minutes **Shifts:** 35 to 45 seconds



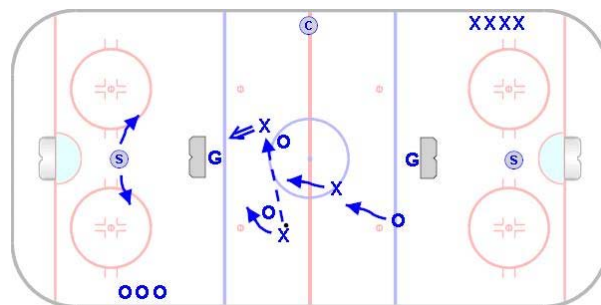
- Nets are placed a few feet inside the blue lines.
- Teams line up on the half-boards at opposite ends of the rink.
- Coach dumps puck and three players from each team enter play.



- One support person (typically a defenseman) is placed behind the net in the defensive end of the ice.
- Teams play a 3 on 3 game in the neutral zone.



- Shots or lost pucks that go wide of the net are the responsibility of the support player.
- The support player controls the puck while teammates move into breakout positions and the opposing team forechecks.



- The breakout pass is completed and the offensive team moves to create a scoring opportunity.
- Support players must remain ready and alert. They may not cross the imaginary goal line to enter play in front of their net.