



18. CHECKING SKILLS

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Checking is carried out to gain possession of the puck. However, before teaching checking, it is imperative that skating skills be taught as they are the base upon which checking skills are built. Elements of skating skills, speed, agility, balance and strength are key skills required in the art of checking. The coach must recognize that, before checking skills can be taught or developed, the player must be introduced to and have functionally mastered the basics of skating.

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be better prepared to:

- *relate skating skills to checking skills,*
- *instruct or teach checking skills in a progressive manner,*
- *instruct or teach protection skills,*
- *instruct your players in the rules pertaining to checking;*
 - *checking from behind*
 - *stick infractions*

18.1 Skating Skills and their Relationship with Checking

Section 16, Skating Skills, emphasized seven key skill areas:

- basic stance, edges, starts, stops, striding, turning and pivots.

Each of these skating skills has a direct relationship with checking skills. The majority of mistakes made when checking an opponent stem from incorrect body position on the skates, which is directly related to skating skill.

For example, when a two-foot stop is completed, both legs must be in a position to initiate the drive into the new skating direction. If the legs are not in a proper flexed position, both time and power is lost. The drive should be initiated by the back leg, so that at no time are the legs crossed. If the legs are crossed over at the precise time of a check, the attacking player has only to move to the side to beat the checker.

Fundamental body position errors and leg movement errors such as this example creates compounding problems in all other forms of checking skills, from the poke check to the body check. Therefore, skating should be taught in a progressive fashion (e.g., the basics of the forward and backward skating stride switch to speed of leg movements, correct body position for two and one-foot stops both forward and backward, quick starts, lateral movements, forward and backward crossovers, pivots from forward to backward), and once mastered a coach should start teaching checking.

18.2 Checking Without Making Contact

Angling can be considered as a player's first line of defense. Body and stick positions are important in checking without making contact. This section will examine angling as one technique of checking without making contact.

18.2.1 Angling

Angling is the ability to force an opponent to go in the direction you want. This would normally be towards the boards or to the outside of you.

Key Points:

- Remain between the puck carrier and the pass receiver, gradually reducing the puck carrier's space.
- Skate parallel to the opponent or in an arc or circular movement, but not in a straight line.
- Skate slightly behind the opponent, thus not allowing the opponent to turn up ice to the inside of you.
- Adjust your speed to the opponent's speed.
- Your stick is always on the ice in a position to intercept a pass and as a decoy to force the opposition to the desired direction.

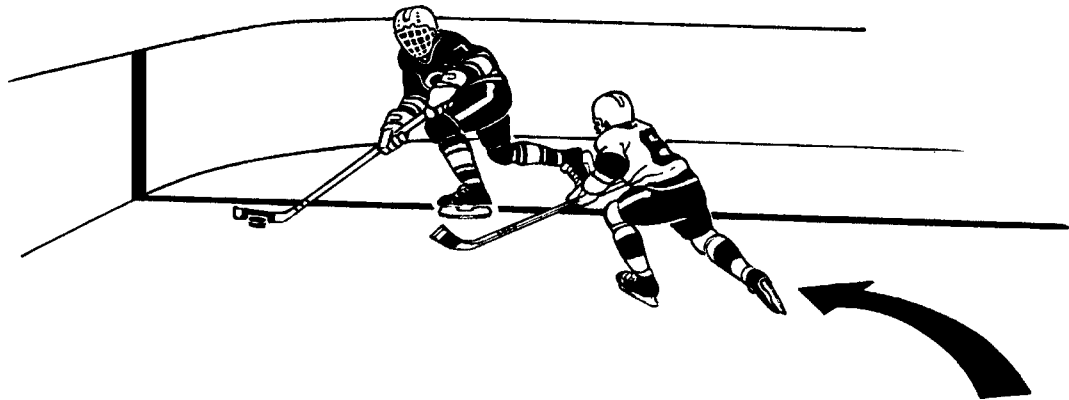


Figure 1: Angling

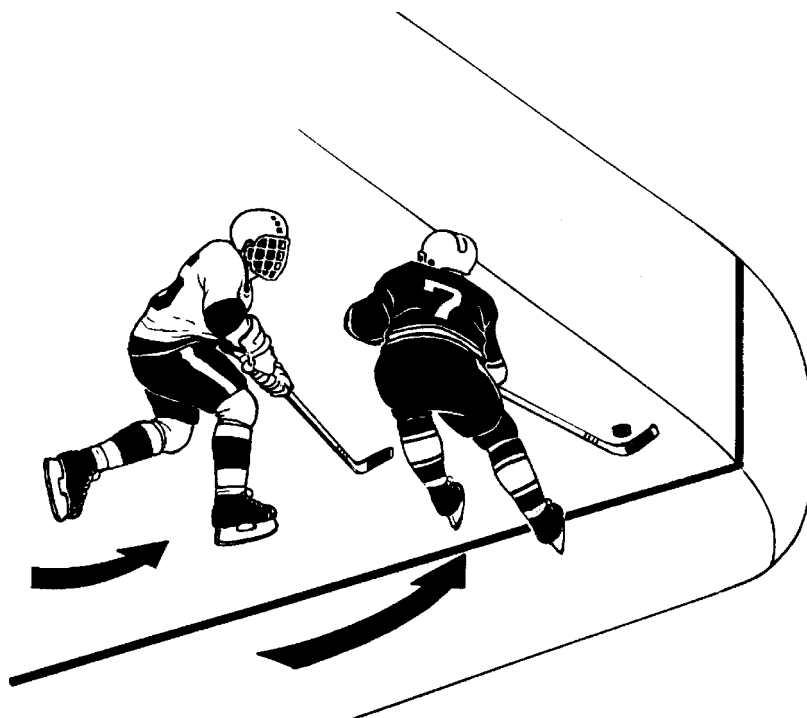


Figure 2: Angling: Closing the Gap

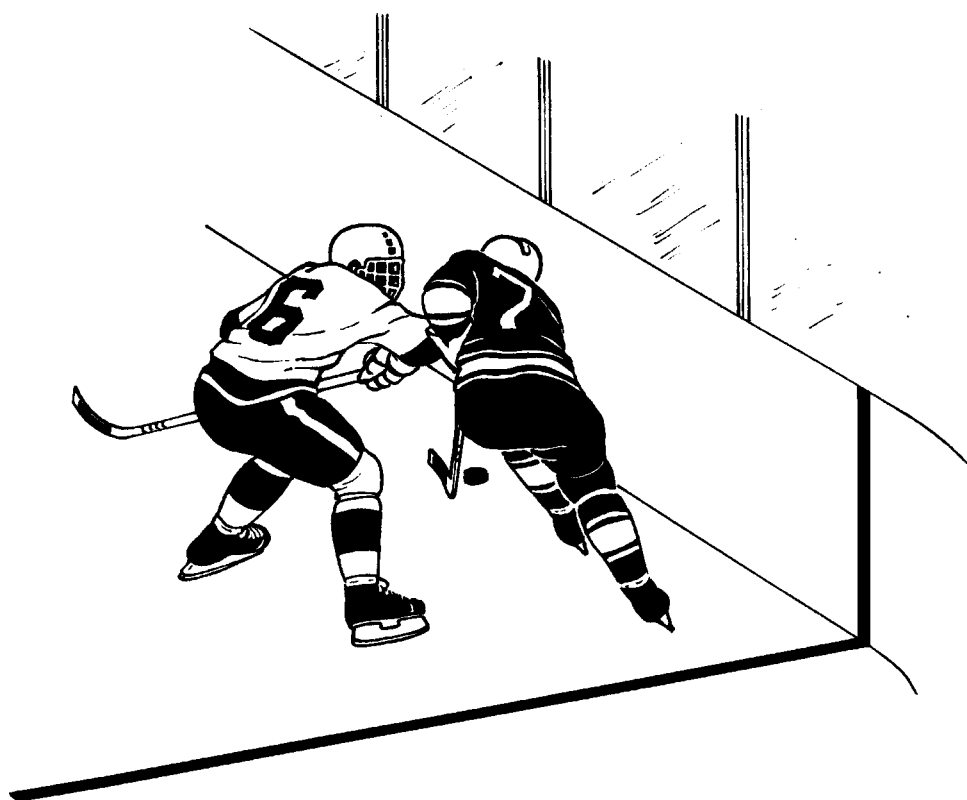


Figure 3: Angling: Establishing Contact

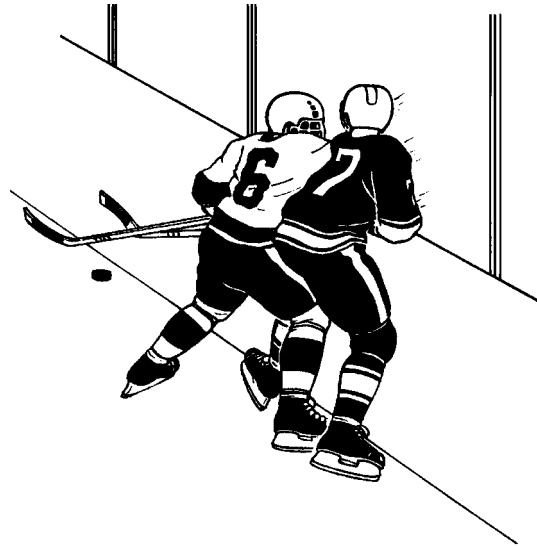


Figure 4: Angling: The Pin

18.3 Stick Checking

Stick checking may be considered the second line of defense as angling forces the opposition to a position where contact can be made with the stick.

When you stick check, you must maintain control of both you and your opponent's sticks. Sticks checks can be effective to:

- delay the advancement of the opposition,
- force a loss of puck control by the opposition,
- control the puck (become the offensive team) yourself (or a teammate).

This section will examine six types of stick checks: poke, sweep, hook, hit, stick lift, and stick press.

18.3.1 Poke Check

Key Points:

- Primary vision is on the player: peripheral vision is on the puck.
- Stick is held with one hand.
- Keep the elbow slightly bent and close to the body.
- Perform a quick extension of the forearm to poke the puck.
- Legs always remain in a flexed (bent) position.
- When required, keep skating.
- Maintain balance throughout the check.

Major Problem:

- Player lunges at the opponent, causing the legs to straighten, therefore leaving the defending player in a poor body position to react if the poke check is missed.

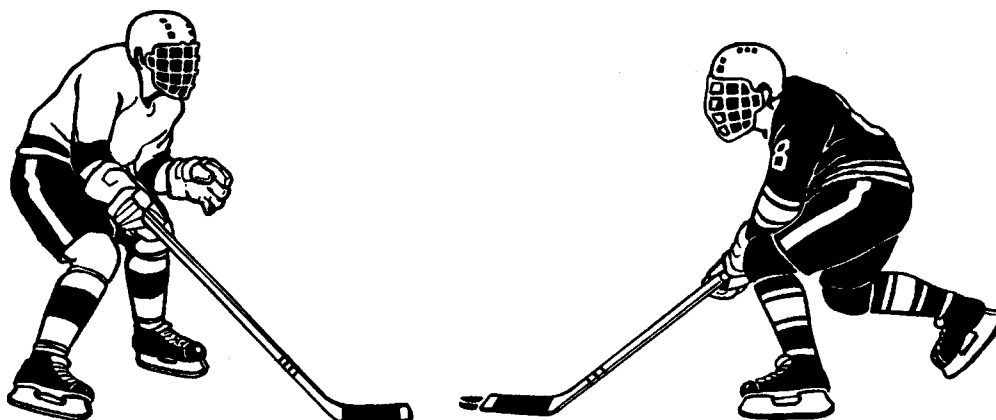


Figure 5: Poke Check



Figure 6: Poke Check

18.3.2 Sweep Check

This check is valuable in many different situations yet is often overlooked in the checking arsenal.

Key Points:

- The hockey stick and blade should be on the ice.
- Sweep the ice surface in a circular motion.
- Maintain movement while performing this check as it will enable you to back check or pin the opponent along the boards should you miss the sweep check.
- You should control this check with either hand, when possible.

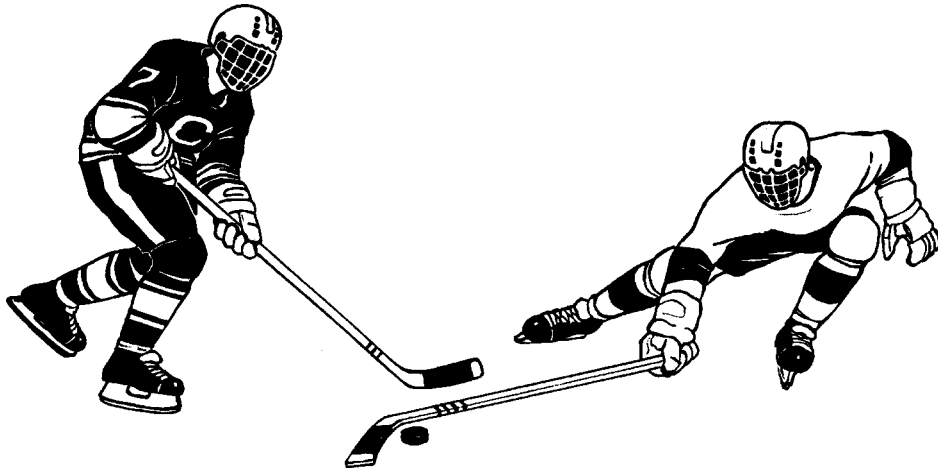


Figure 7: Sweep Check

The disadvantages of the sweep check, are that if you miss the puck and trip the opponent, you may be called for a tripping penalty. Also, you're out of position if you get beat by the puck carrier.

18.3.3 Hook Check

Key Points:

- One hand is on the stick.
- Stick blade is flat on the ice.
- The puck will be controlled by trapping it in the curve where the shaft meets the upper part of the blade.
- Hook the puck towards you.
- Can be executed from both a forward and backward skating position.
- To lengthen your reach you can perform this check while on one knee.



Figure 8: Hook Check

18.3.4 Hit (The Blade of the Stick)

Key Points:

- Skate parallel to the puck carrier.
- When the puck is on the puck carrier's stick blade, on the opposite side of you, hit the stick to provoke the loss of the puck control.
- To be effective, you must forcefully hit the stick near the heel of the stick blade.



Figure 9: Blade Contact

18.3.5 Stick Lift

Key Points:

- Approach the puck carrier from behind.
- When close enough, lift the shaft of the opponent's stick near its heel and compete for possession of the puck.



Figure 10: Stick Lift (From Behind)



Figure 11: Stick Lift (At an Angle)

Note:

If you are close enough to the puck carrier, you should position your body in front of the puck carrier. The stick lift may be done when approaching the opponent from an angle. Surprise and strength are key requirements for this skill.

18.3.6 Stick Press

Key Points:

- The stick is placed over the shaft, below the opponents bottom stick hand.
- Just as the opponent is to receive a pass or move to redirect the puck, press down firmly.



Figure 12: Stick press

18.4 Protection in Body Checking

It is very important to have the ability to avoid or prepare oneself for a check.

To avoid being checked:

- keep the head and eyes up, scanning the play,
- maintain movement or motion,
- don't reach back for a pass unless you are sure there is no opposition player in front of you.

To prepare to receive a check:

- maintain a wide stance by bending the knees and leaning in the direction from which the check is coming,
- initiate movement towards the checker just prior to impact and ensure low contact,
- wear the appropriate protective equipment,
- when falling down or colliding with the boards, absorb the shock with the largest available portion of the body,
- avoid falling on extended body parts,
- during off-ice sessions, enhance your strength and flexibility.

18.5 Body Checks

This section will examine five types of body checks: blocking or defending against the puck carrier, stick lift and shoulder check, block, hip, and roller.

A body check should be used when:

- you wish to separate the player from the puck,
- the opponent, in possession of the puck, tries to pass between you and the boards,
- an opponent is not fully prepared yet not in danger of injury.

18.5.1 General Principles of Body Checking:

- Once you have committed yourself to deliver a body check, complete it. Do not change your decision part way through the check.
- Keep your primary vision on the opponent at all times.
- Never attempt a body check if you are off-balance.
- Attempt to place the opponent off-balance while maintaining your balance.
- For better balance, assume a wide stance, bending the knees in order to ensure leg extension.
- Along the boards, you must neutralize the arms and stick of the opponent to avoid the possibility of a pass.
- During the body check, be sure to momentarily control the opponent by completing your body check
- To avoid penalties and injury, always keep your stick low.

18.5.2 Blocking or Defending Against the Puck Carrier

Key Points:

- Primary vision is on the opponent, peripheral vision on the puck.
- Attempt to hit the opponent's chest with your shoulder (Figure 13).
- Extend the legs when finishing the check.
- Precede the shoulder by placing the hands to the lower chest of the opponent to guard against a stick raise and to control the player.
- Prior to initiating the check, assume a solid base of support.



Figure 13: Body check

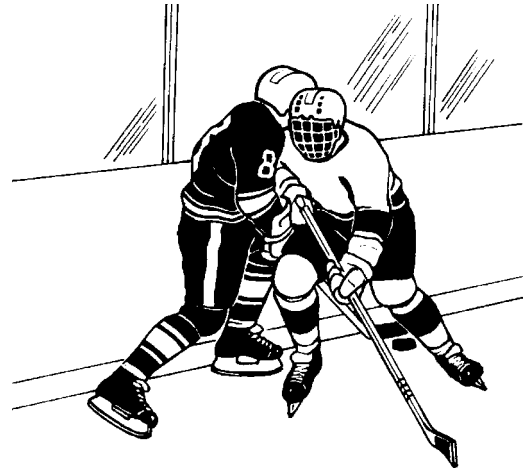


Figure 14: Shoulder check

18.5.3 Stick Lift and Shoulder Check (when the stick blade is directed towards the boards)

Key Points:

- Place the inside knee, bent, in front of the opponent.
- Place your stick under the opponent's stick.
- Lift the stick.
- Hit the opponent with the hip or shoulder (Figure 14).
- Momentarily pin the opponent's stick and arms on the boards.
- Recover the puck with your stick or skate.



Figure 15: Stick Lift and Shoulder Check

18.5.4 Block Check

Key Points:

- Widen the grip on the stick.
- Bend the inside knee and place it in front of the attacker.
- Hip and/or shoulder check.
- Momentarily pin the opponent's arms on the boards.
- Recover the puck with the skate.



Figure 16: Block Check

18.5.5 Hip Check

Key Points:

- It is important to be close to the opponent as momentary eye contact is lost during the check.
- Bend the trunk parallel to the ice.
- Bend the knees and hit the opponent at the hips and thighs.
- On impact, the checker rights oneself by pushing with and extending the outside leg.

Note:

The hip check is the most difficult of the body checks to execute, particularly in the mid-ice area and, therefore, should be handled with care in this zone (Figure 17). An extension of the hip check can occur along the boards by the defending player pivoting at the last moment and making contact with the hips or buttocks rather than executing a shoulder check.

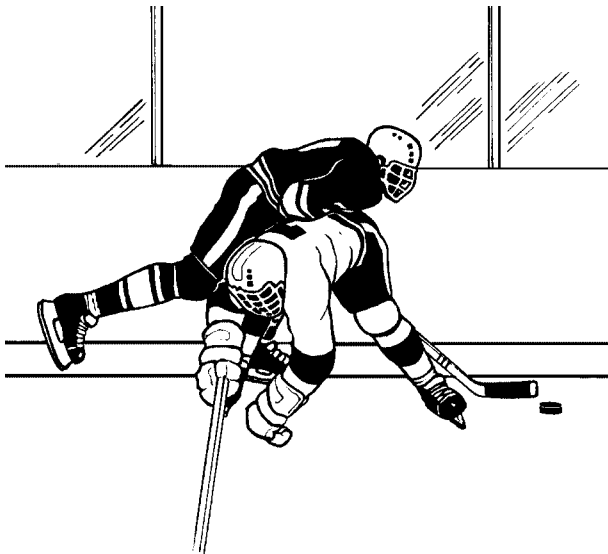


Figure 17: Hip Check at the Boards



Figure 18: Hip Check in Open Ice

18.5.6 Roller Check (along the boards only)

Key Points:

- Forcefully push the opponent with the forearm or shoulder to provoke contact of the hip and shoulders with the boards (Figure 19).
- The rubbing will cause a pivoting or rolling around the point of impact forcing the opponent's chest to the boards.
- Keep skating and take possession of the puck while the opponent is off balance.

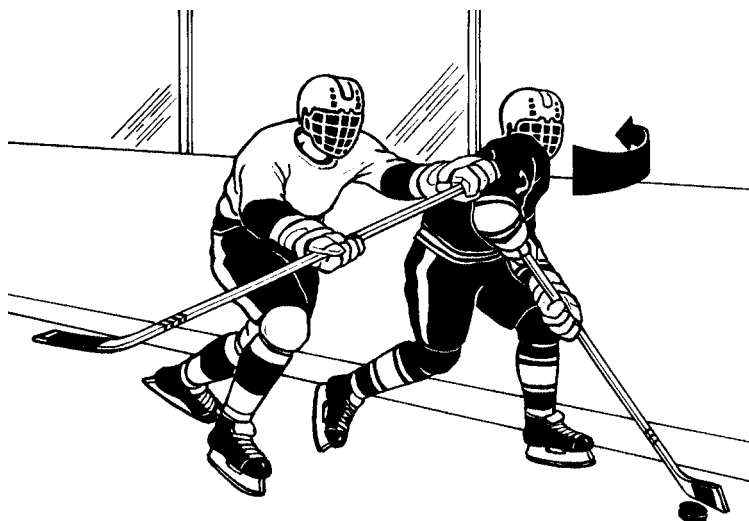


Figure 19: Roller Check

18.5.7 Pinning Technique

Key Points:

- Turn the opponent towards the boards by driving your arm and shoulder under your opponent's outside arm from the backside.
- As the opponent's body is rotating towards the boards, push with the legs and hips.
- Place the inside leg between the opponent's legs.
- Once against the boards, press in and up to lift the opponents skate blades slightly off of the ice thus neutralizing the opponent.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Stricter enforcement of the high sticking, cross-checking, slashing, and hooking rules.
- National Associations strongly support the officials who officiate games according to the recommended application guidelines.
- All National Association officials and coaching clinics specifically address the problem of stick infractions.
- All National Associations make a conscious effort to implement and/or strengthen their present referee supervision programs, with emphasis on stick infractions.