

Better Team Play through Passing

(Originally submitted as an article by Greg Siller for Hockey Player Magazine - www.HockeyPlayer.com)

During a recent professional roller hockey game that I attended in California, I was reminded just how important passing is to the overall success of any team. Why is passing so important? Because it sets up almost every scoring opportunity for your team. Passing is the quickest and most effective way to move the puck around the playing surface because puck movement is faster than player movement. There are many reasons for passing the puck during a hockey game; to quickly bring the puck out of your defensive zone, to defeat a defender and create a numerical advantage (an essential on a power play), or to set up that great scoring opportunity. Each type of pass serves a unique purpose in terms of catching your opponents' off-guard and gaining positional advantage. The speed and change in flow provided when making a pass allows your offense to open up many exciting opportunities to put the puck into a scoring situation.

Three factors to consider when executing an effective pass are accuracy, knowing when to pass, and deception. Also know that following a good pass, don't stand around congratulating yourself, and get back into the play!

1. **Accuracy** is essential when passing the puck. If you don't put the puck on your teammates stick, you may have just given possession to the other team. To be accurate, you must be able to lead a moving receiver with the puck; that is, you must pass the puck far enough ahead of the moving receiver to give him or her time to catch the pass.
2. **Knowing when to pass.** Deciding when to pass the puck should always be based on improving your *TEAM's* offensive situation (remember that there is a direct relationship between passing and team play!). If a teammate is in a better position than you are, you should pass the puck. Also know that, at times, passing the puck back (rather than forward) may be your best move to continue team puck possession.
3. **Deception.** Many players spoil their passing attempt because they *telegraph* their intention. Telegraphing a pass occurs when the passer is looking at the potential receiver and lining up the passing play without any deception. This gives a defender an easy opportunity to *steal* the puck. Passers can use their peripheral vision or a deceptive move to confuse a defender; providing valuable time and space for the receiver.

Three passes that you can use to catch defenders off-guard include the flip pass, around-the-boards pass, and give-and-go pass.

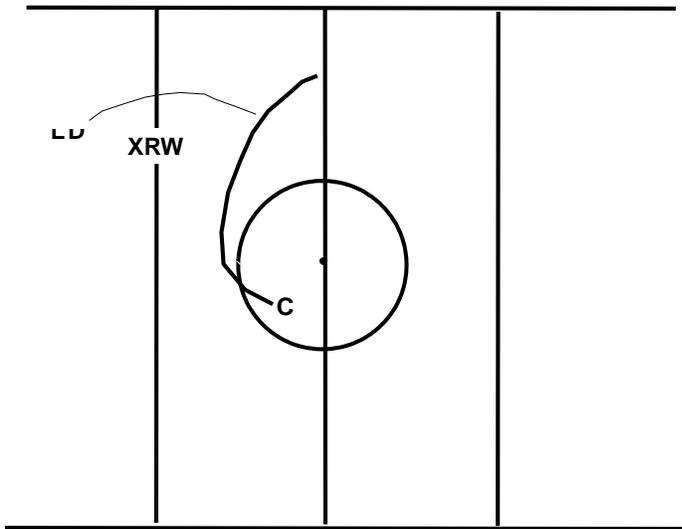


Figure 1; Flip Pass

The **flip (or saucer) pass** is one technique that can be used when you cannot make a direct pass to your receiver due to a defenders stick. The key to making an accurate flip pass is rotating the puck, which is created by rolling the puck from the heel of the stick blade to the toe as the pass is made. This will ensure that the puck lands flat and does not bounce or roll. The flip pass requires a short follow-through to put the puck 6-18" off of the playing surface and over a defenders stick. No deception is needed with this type of pass as the puck going airborne takes care of it. Figure 1 shows an excellent neutral zone penetration (flip)

pass; allowing the play to quickly move from your defensive zone to the red-line and around the defender.

Like the flip pass, the **around-the-boards pass** allows a passer to indirectly reach a receiver; and since you are using the boards as a guide, it is very accurate. It is particularly effective when used by a defenseman (D) to move the puck from behind the net to an open forward (F) positioned along the boards (as part of a breakout) or when moving the puck, in your offensive zone, to a teammate on the far side of the net (Figure 2). The pass should be low and not too hard so that the receiver can handle it. Since this pass goes around a defender, deception is built right in.

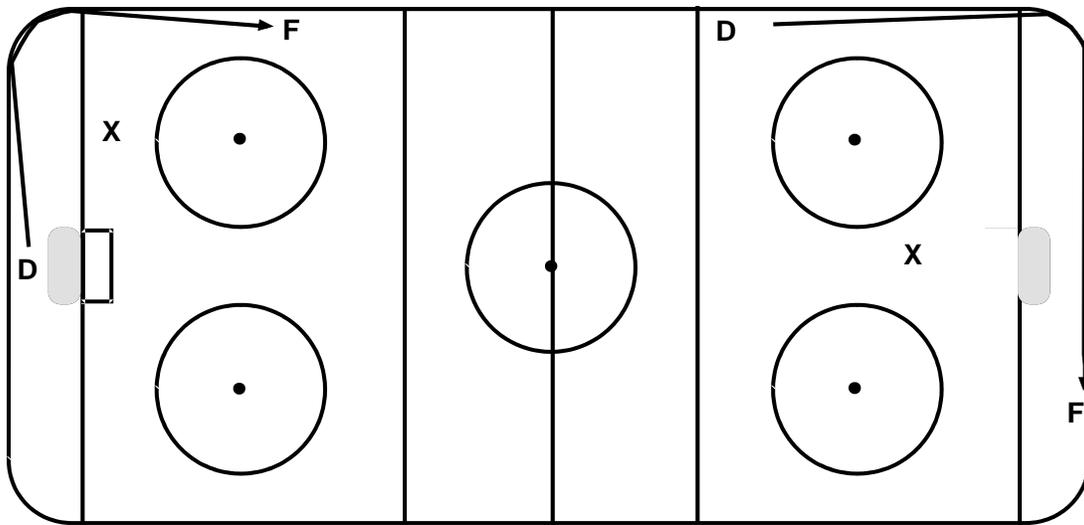


Figure 2; Around-The-Boards Pass

The **give-and-go pass** (really a passing play) is designed to deceive and defeat an opponent and move the puck into a scoring opportunity. The give-and-go pass can be used in any area on the playing surface. In the defensive zone, the pass can be used in conjunction with a breakout. In the offensive zone, it can be used as part of your offensive zone strategy. If the defender is expecting (reading) a give-and-go pass, you can still deceive him/her with a give-and-no-go (pass the puck and have the initial receiver fake the return pass). Figure 3 can be used to work the give-and-go during a practice. Make sure that each player gets the opportunity to be both the moving player and the stationary player.

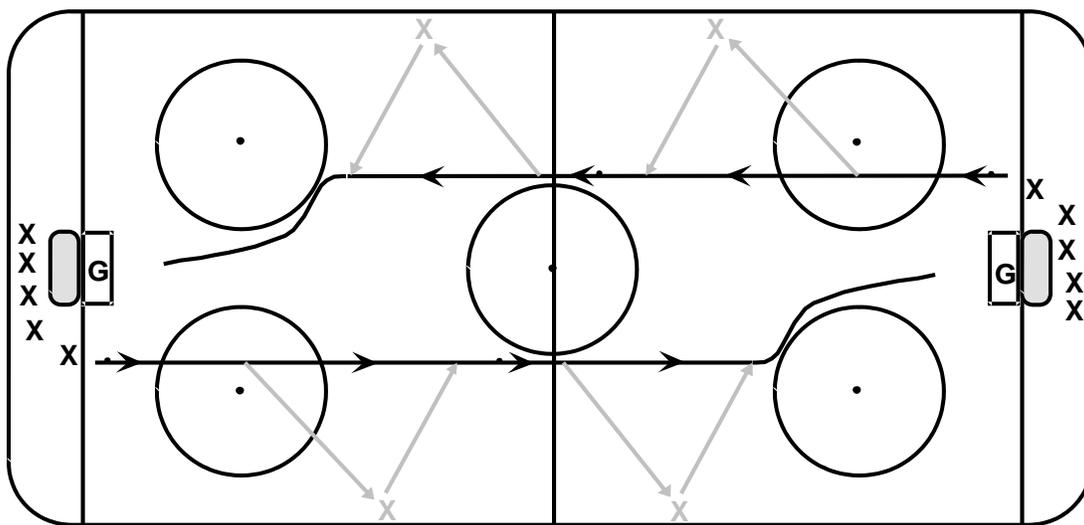


Figure 3; Give-And-Go Practice Drill

Perfect your passing technique (accuracy, knowing when to pass, and use of deception) and your team will improve its offensive effectiveness with the flick of a stick.

Greg Siller, founder of Pro Learning Systems (www.ProLearning.com), has put his 25 years of ice and roller hockey experience into authoring several hockey articles as well as two highly acclaimed hockey books; [*The Hockey Practice Playbook*](#) and [*Roller Hockey: Skills and Strategies for Winning On Wheels*](#).