

Underwater Hockey Beginner's Guide

Table of Contents

Underwater Hockey Beginner's Guide	- 3 -
What is Underwater Hockey?.....	- 3 -
Equipment	- 3 -
Individual Skills	- 5 -
Fitness.....	- 5 -
Puck Handling	- 5 -
Puck Rolling.....	6
Body Position vs. Puck Position.....	- 7 -
Curling.....	- 9 -
Shooting.....	- 11 -
Underwater Hockey Positions	- 12 -
Forwards.....	- 12 -
Mids.....	- 12 -
Backs	- 13 -
Underwater Hockey Formations	- 13 -
Underwater Hockey Zones.....	- 14 -
Defensive Zone.....	- 14 -
Offensive Zone	- 15 -
Positioning In the Water.....	- 15 -
Forwards in the 3-3.....	- 15 -
Backs in the 3-3.....	- 17 -
Positioning When Attempting To Stop A Goal.....	- 19 -
Positioning When Attempting To Score A Goal.....	- 21 -
Forwards.....	- 21 -
Backs	- 21 -
Positioning On the Strike	- 21 -
Positioning On An Equal Puck.....	- 22 -
Positioning On an Advantage Puck.....	- 24 -
Positioning On a Penalty Shot.....	25
Scoring a Goal	- 26 -
Subbing Out.....	- 26 -
Cycling and Breakaways	- 27 -
Set Play.....	- 27 -

Underwater Hockey Beginner's Guide

What is Underwater Hockey?

Underwater hockey is a fun, fast, three-dimensional game played on the bottom of a pool. Players wear fins, a mask, a snorkel, a protective glove, and headgear.

Two teams of six players face off against each other. The puck rests on the bottom of the playing area, and the two teams vie to control the puck and put it into their opponent's goal, which also resides on the bottom of the playing area.

The playing area is roughly 25m long by 15m wide and optimally 2.5m deep. There is a goal at each end of the playing area, which is a metal trough about 10 feet across.

The puck starts in the center of the playing area, and once a tone strikes indicating play has begun, both teams race from opposite walls to the center area and attempt to gain possession of the puck and then go on and score a goal.

The stick is short, approximately 1 foot long and made of wood or plastic polymer, and carried in one hand. The puck is heavy, around 3 lb. and coated with a protective layer of hard plastic.

The object of the game is to put the puck in the opposition's goal. There are a variety of strategies and formats teams utilize to be most effective. Play and strategy is similar to soccer or ice hockey except that the playing surface is at the bottom of a pool. The rules are "non-contact" and players generally cover zones around the puck. Success ultimately depends on teamwork, since no single person can hold his or her breath forever.

Equipment

Taken from the International Rules for Underwater Hockey, 8th Edition:

"Each player shall be equipped with a mask, which must have safety glass or other safety material fitter; a non-metal, pliable snorkel; a pair of conventional underwater hockey fins (made of rubber or other non-dangerous pliable synthetic material, excluding fiberglass) which is approved by the CMAS Underwater Hockey Commission; hand protection for the playing hand(s), and an underwater hockey stick. Head Caps with firm polyethylene or rubber ear protectors must be worn."

- **Mask**

The mask must be a dual lens mask unless it has a center divider/support that is part of the frame of the mask. You want a low volume mask, both for visibility and to decrease the chance of it flooding if it gets bumped. A low volume mask also will provide less drag underwater, increasing your speed.

- **Snorkel**

The most important thing is to get a snorkel with a soft mouthpiece so it doesn't hurt your teeth if it gets hit. Purges are fine; just make sure they are soft purges. Don't spend too much money on the snorkel as most players end up cutting the top 2-3" off of the snorkel to reduce the drag and make it easier to clear. Some of the really cheaper snorkels from Sports Authority and similar places are too constricted for hockey. Make sure you can fit your thumb into the top of the snorkel; otherwise the opening is too small. Make sure that the inside of the snorkel is uniform and doesn't have a connector that constricts where the two parts join. Another good idea would be to get a snorkel with a slender profile to reduce drag and vibration.

- **Glove**

Hand protection must not contain rigid or sharp reinforcing material. Gloves used for hand protection may not have webbing between fingers, or be of any design that would aid in swimming. Other than that, glove design is pretty flexible. You can make your own glove, or you can buy a glove from a bunch of different places. Most gloves are cloth layered with silicon rubber, but some people use nothing but electrical tape and other similar materials to create custom, lightweight gloves.



- **Fins**

If you are going to pick one area to spend the extra money and get quality gear, this is it. There are lots of different makes and models of fins out there but many of them do not work for Underwater Hockey.

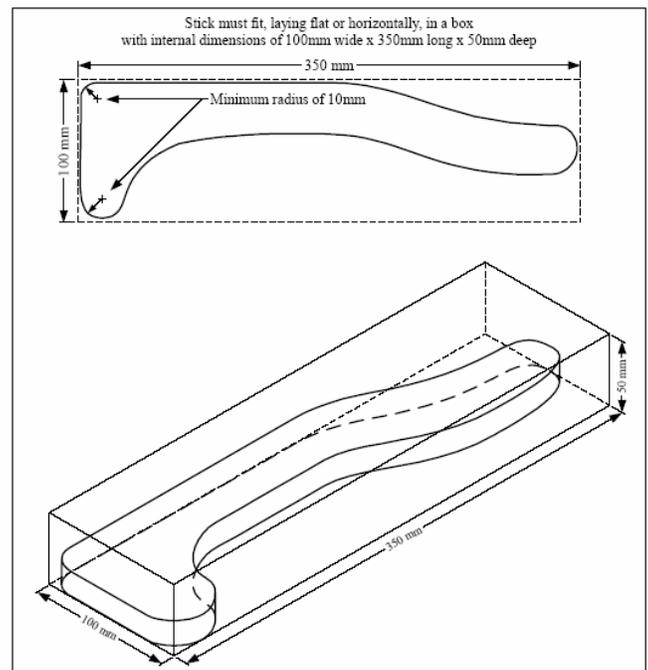
You definitely want to get full foot fins vs. the open heel scuba type. The short swimmer's fins and really long free diving fins are not good for underwater hockey.

One factor that makes the purchasing decision more difficult is what your skill level is now and what it will be later. Similar to buying skis where you don't want to buy ones that are too long now but too short later as you get better. If you are new to fin swimming, you don't want to buy fins that are too stiff now or too soft later. Some beginners who have not mastered fin swimming buy fins that are too stiff for them and end up spending all their time and Oxygen struggling with fins as they try to get to the puck. On the other hand, excellent fin swimmers can be handicapped by the quality of their fins.

If you are new to fin swimming, you should probably be conservative and get a pair of that are a bit smaller and easier to learn with. This way you can focus on learning hockey instead of struggling with your fins.

- **Sticks**

THE STICK



(drawing not to scale)

- The stick must fit in a box 100mm x 350mm x 50mm.
- Minimum corner radius around the perimeter edge of the entire stick is 10mm.
- Edges where surfaces intersect must be rounded.
- The stick must be uniformly black or white.
- The stick may be of any shape or design within the minimum and maximum dimensions given. The illustration is only a guide. Knob(s) on stick is/are allowed.
- The stick must not be capable of surrounding the puck or any part of hand, nor encapsulating the puck by more than 50%, or locking the puck to the stick.

Individual Skills

Fitness

You can't execute anything without a little of this so get out and swim, run, bike, play or whatever turns your crank. Working out will improve your ability to play hockey, and hockey will improve your ability to work out.

Puck Handling

Puck handling – one of the most basic and important skills you can master as an underwater hockey player. If you cannot control the puck you cannot excel at hockey. Luckily, puck handling is a skill you do not need to be in the water to master.

With all the following drills, you can grab a puck or a tuna can and practice these drills in your living room. Practice these drills until you get to the point where you can master the movements without looking at the puck.

It also helps to be laying flat over the puck while doing these drills, to simulate swimming underwater. Lie down on a stack of pillows, a bench, or something else to prop up your chest so

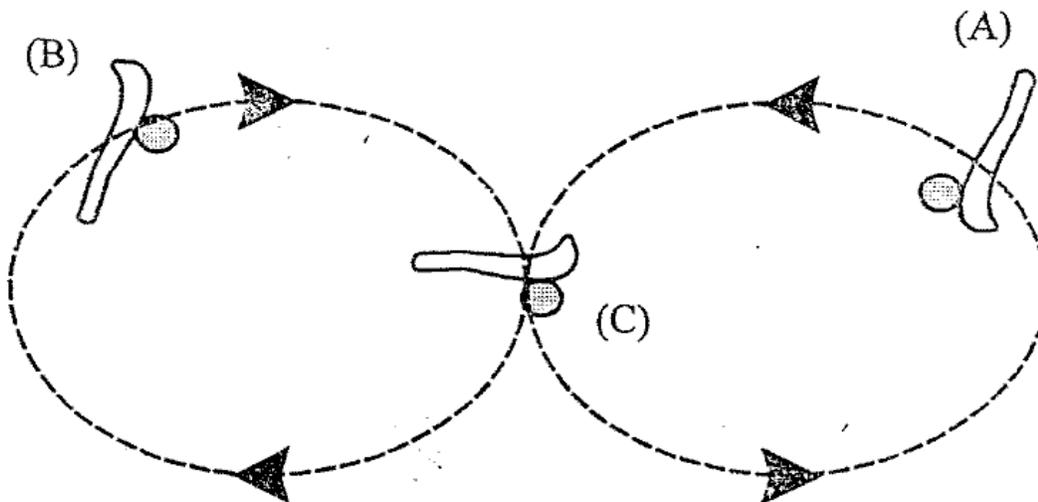
you can hover over the puck and practice your stick work.

Remember there are many playing surfaces to your stick, not just the front blade. Learn to use the sides and back of your stick as an effective weapon while you play.

Front of Stick:

Being able to control the puck on the front of the stick in any situation is a fundamental skill that every player should practice. Some of the benefits of this skill are:

1. You can keep your head up and your chest high off the pool bottom, thereby improving your vision. This simple attribute is what distinguishes the top playmakers in the game from the rest.
2. With the puck on the front of the stick, it is possible to flick the puck immediately when in danger. You don't have the delay associated with moving the puck from the back of the stick to a shooting position.
3. You can shield the puck without having to drop your head and upper body. You are also more likely to retain the puck if someone manages to poke check you.



The best way to practice front of the stick work is to do the Figure-8 drill shown in the diagram above.

In the Figure-8 drill, you move the puck in front of your body, from side to side. When practicing this skill, exaggerate the puck movement by moving the puck from the right of your right shoulder all the way past your left shoulder. Don't rotate your torso in order to get the puck to the extreme left. Keep your shoulders square with the pool bottom.

There are a few elements of the drill that are unfamiliar to many players.

- When you reach point (A), you'll need to release your grip on your stick somewhat. You'll end up holding your stick by only your thumb and forefinger at this point. It helps if you have your forefinger attached to your stick with an elastic band. This will allow you pivot your stick around your finger without losing it.
- At point (B) you need to "break" your wrist so that your knuckles start to point towards-you. The stick will rest in your fingers and no longer rest in your palm.
- The hardest parts of the drill are the transitions from (A-C) and particularly (B-C). When moving the puck from (B-C), the front of your blade and knuckles end up pointing towards your body.

Some of the important elements to concentrate on in this drill are:

1. Keep the puck on the front surface of your blade. Don't turn your stick on edge so

that the top face ends up playing the puck.

2. Make sure the puck moves all the way past your left shoulder without resorting to rotating your torso. Move it past your right shoulder by relaxing your grip on your stick.
3. Adjust your grip on your stick at each extreme.

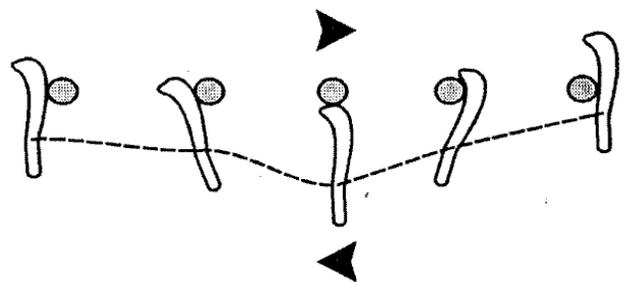
Once you can do the drill comfortably, speed up the motion and do not look at the puck. Add motion to the drill by swimming diagonally left and right while doing the drill.

Puck Rolling

Puck Rolling is the skill of 'rolling' the puck from the front of the stick onto the back portion of the stick and then back again, without having the stick or the puck come off the bottom of the pool.

Many players already incorporate some amount of puck rolling in their games. There are many different skills that are improved by adding puck rolling to them (curling, checking, puck protection, etc.) The main benefits of using puck rolling as part of your game are:

1. It causes opponents to misjudge your intentions.
2. It allows you to execute maneuvers quickly and efficiently.
3. It allows you to shield the puck.

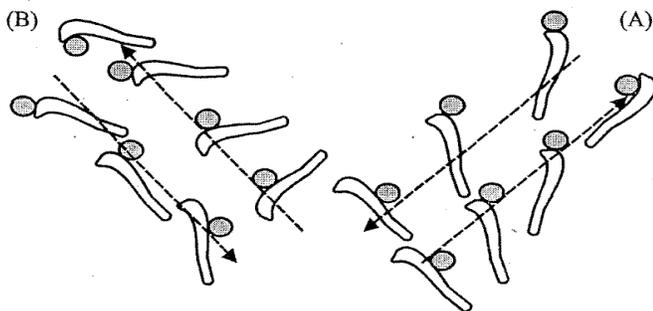


Important points to remember when doing the puck rolling drill:

1. The puck should never leave the blade.
2. It is important to put a hard spin on the puck. This forces the puck to stick on the pool bottom and prevents it from flipping on its edge as you drag it across.

Practice this motion so that you can execute it quickly without looking at the puck. You can add this skill to your game by rolling the puck from the back of the blade to front while curling, checking opponents by pulling the puck away, and executing quick left and right changes of direction.

A more difficult drill is to execute a "V" with the puck in front of your body while spinning it continuously. The motion of the stick and puck are shown in the diagram.



Important things to remember when doing this drill:

1. Do not lift your stick off the pool bottom. There is a naturally tendency to do so at points (A) and (B). Concentrate on keeping the tip of the stick on the bottom and feel the puck roll around it.

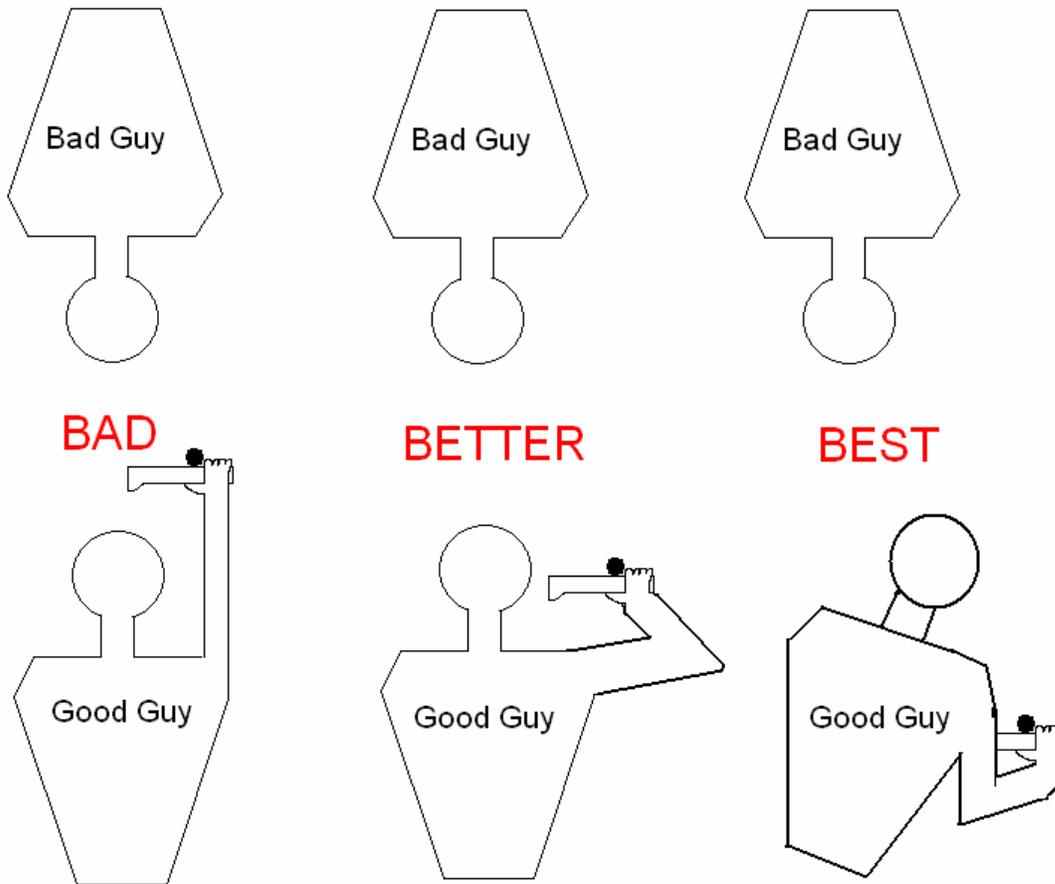
2. If you have an extreme hook on your stick you'll have to break your wrist more to keep the puck from spinning away.
3. The transition from (B) to the center is the hardest part of the skill. You really need to stretch your arm to reach around the puck and bring it back. If you do not reach far enough you will end up pulling the puck to your left hip instead of back to the center. Also, if you do not spin the puck hard enough in this transition, it will merely sit still and you end simply pivoting around the puck. This leaves you vulnerable to a check. Make sure the puck moves at least 15-20cm in the (B) to center transition.

Practice this drill slowly at first concentrating on your form. Once you can do it without looking at the puck, execute the drill while swimming. Pick a pair of lines on the pool bottom that are about two meters apart. Starting between the lines, swim diagonal cuts back and forth, rolling the puck as you go. Make sure each diagonal cut spans the 2-meter width.

Body Position vs. Puck Position

After mastering all the puck drills mentioned above, you should be able to swim with the puck on either the front or back of your stick, in front or behind your head, and on your left or right side. Moving the puck in relation to your opponents is vital to maintaining possession and advancing the puck.

Let's look at three examples where a player with the puck comes in contact with his opponent. In all three examples, assume both players are swimming at each other.



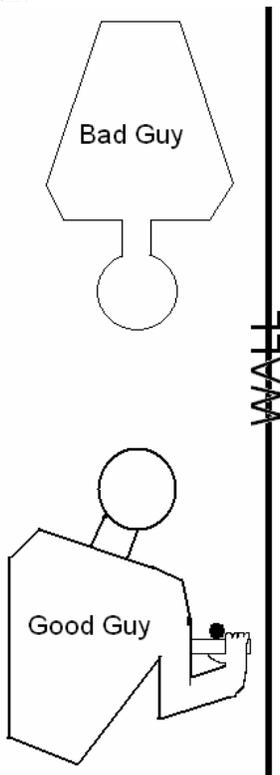
In the first example, the player swims forward with his arm fully extended towards the opponent. There are very few cases when this is a good idea when going against an opponent. All you're doing is limiting what you can do with the puck, and placing the puck closer to your opponent.

The second example, the player drops the puck back, and keeps going forward. This is better – the puck is farther away from your opponent, and because the player's arm is bent, they can do more with the puck. When the opponent gets close, the player could extend their arm, and hope that the puck is now behind the opponent and out of their reach. The player could shoot it past their opponent, and hope someone is there to get the pass. However, the puck is still out in front and visible to the opponent.

The third example, the player drops the puck completely behind their shoulder, keeping the

puck on the front of the blade, and turns their body slightly to shield the puck. The opponent now has to go over the player to get to the puck, as it is not directly in front of them, and the player's body is in the way of any direct action. Also, any of the moves that were available in the second example are available here. The player could bring the puck forward by extending his arm when the opponent gets close. The player could attempt to shoot over the opponent. The player could keep their body in between the opponent and the puck and keep swimming.

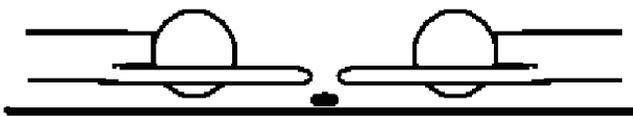
This third example is especially valuable on the wall.



The opponent cannot get to the puck from the right – the wall is in the way. If the player shields the puck from the front and left with their body, the only way the opponent can get to the puck is from the backside.

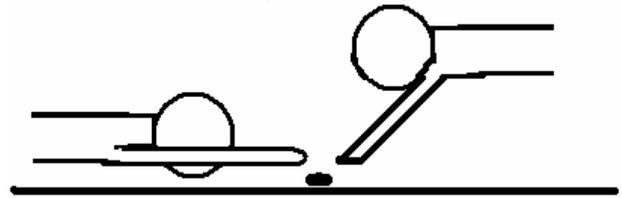
The thing to learn from these examples is that you want to keep your body in between the puck and your opponent. If your opponent is on your left side, have the puck on your right. If your opponent is behind you, bring the puck in front of you.

If you should have to run into your opponent head on, the key to your meeting is leverage. Assume the two players in the example below are of equal size, weight, strength, and speed, and are both racing for the puck. Who do you think would win the puck?



In this case, it's a toss-up. They both are in good

position, both right on top of the puck. How about in the following case? Which player do you think will come away with the puck?



In this case, even though they are both equal in every aspect, the player on the left has the significant advantage. Why? The player on the left has better leverage. If both players are equally strong, the player on the left will be able to exert more strength on the puck because his body is in a straight line, unlike the player on the right.

Try this out if you're not grasping this concept – lie with your belly on the ground, arms extended in front of your head. If you have someone push your arms towards your head, what happens? Well, if your arms are straight with your body, either nothing or your whole body slides backwards.

Now, lay on your back, and extend your arms straight into the air. Now, have someone standing up push your arms towards your feet. No matter how hard you try, your arms are probably going to move.

Always be the lower player in the water. Make sure your hips and lower body are on the bottom of the pool, especially in a fight for possession of the puck. If you can get underneath your opponent, you can muscle the puck by them, even if they are much stronger than you are.

Curling

Curling is one of the most basic and important skills. Curling is basically a tight, focused turn that results in a radical change in direction while maintaining possession of the puck. The direction change can be 180 degrees, 270 degrees, or a full 360 degree turn.

Curling is a valuable move to keep the puck moving in a crowd of players yet allows the

person with the puck to keep possession. By curling you can keep the puck shielded from other players while still moving to elude them.

One of the things that all players need to be reminded about is to kick through their curls.

What “Kick through Your Curls” means is that once you start curling, you should not stop half way through your curl. Begin and end your curl with authority. Swim hard into them, and then explode out of them. A player who stops moving while committing a curl is a target on the bottom on the bottom. A player should never simply sit on the bottom in the curled position and wait for something to happen to them.

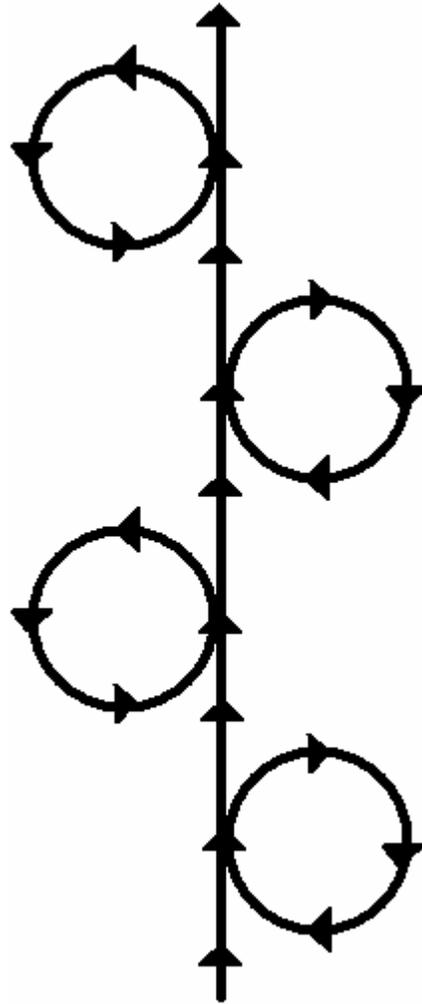
It is worthwhile to practice different curling drills in order to improve your form and efficiency, particularly on reverse curls.

A standard curling relay drill involving three players is done as follows.

Two of the players start on a wall and the third starts about 5 lanes down the pool. One of the players on the wall carries the puck executing four 360 degree curls on one breath as they swim to the player 5 lanes down the pool. They then pass the puck to the player five lanes down the pool. He then swims back towards the wall, executing the same four curls, and passes the puck off. Alternate the directions of the curls: forward, reverse, forward, reverse.

There are two variants to this drill: back of the blade and front of the blade curls. Most players carry the puck on the back of the blade while curling. It allows a quicker turn and a tighter curl. However, many players keep the puck on the back of the blade the whole way through the curl. If they need to pass immediately after their curl, they must first roll the puck to the front of the blade, by which time the window of opportunity might have passed.

Curling Drill



To avoid this, practice spinning the puck from the back of the blade to the front, half way through the curl. It will leave you ready to pass the puck and allow you to keep your head up at the end of the curl.

Do this on both your forward and reverse curls.

Curling with the puck on the front of your blade makes for a slightly slower curl but leaves with more options to move the puck or pass to a teammate while curling. This is especially true with reverse curls. Pay attention to where your head is when you reverse curl with the puck on the front of your blade as opposed to the back. You should notice that your head and chest are both higher off the pool bottom giving you better vision of potential passing options behind you.

You will also find that the puck is in front of your shoulder (rather than to the side), allowing you to make a much better pass.

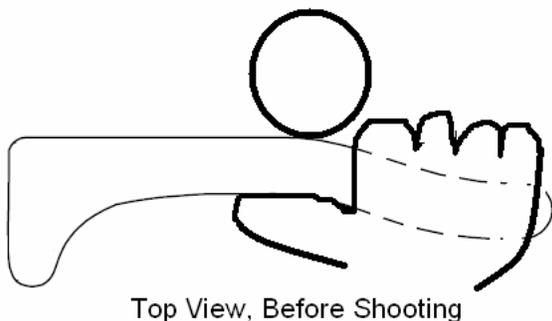
Some key points to remember when practicing the various curls:

- 1- For a right-hander, your right hip should be close to the bottom on regular curls and your left hip on reverse curls. This is to prevent your opponents from seeing exactly where the puck is while you turn and preventing them from reaching under your body and stealing it.
- 2- On reverse curls many players have the tendency to pivot around the puck. Make sure that the puck traces an arc of 30cm (a foot) or more. This makes curl as an offensive move and makes it possible to move the puck across the pool quickly.

Shooting

Shooting is the skill that everyone wants to learn but is also the hardest skill to teach. It takes time and a lot of practice to master. Almost all of the distance on the puck comes from the wrist flick. Your shoulders and arms only change the angle at which the puck is released. There are a few key elements to good shooting technique.

1. The puck should start right next to your hand before shooting motion commences.



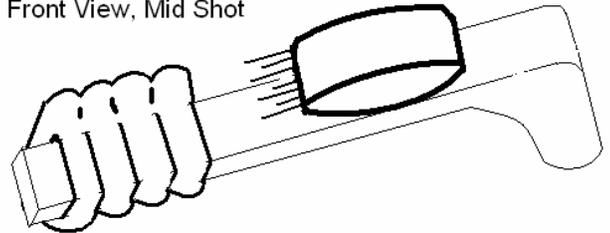
Top View, Before Shooting



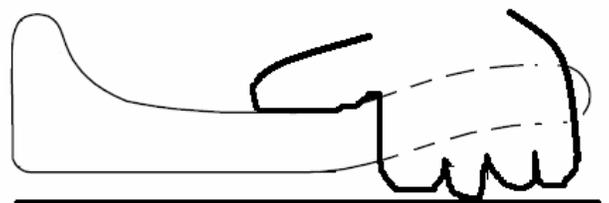
Front View, Before Shooting

2. The puck should roll along the length of the blade during the shot such that it is near the end of the stick when you snap your wrist. Also, the end of the stick should be rising off the bottom of the pool. This seems obvious, yet some experienced players who have trouble shooting do not do this.

Front View, Mid Shot



3. As you snap your wrist forward to shoot the puck, your wrist should rotate so your thumb ends up turning towards the surface and the front of the stick ends up facing the bottom of the pool. The stick should end up pointing forward with the blade facing downward along the pool bottom. Some people find it helpful to concentrate on starting with their elbow high off the bottom. The resulting motion causes the lower end of the forearm to turn upwards.



Side View, After Shooting.

The puck should end up in the direction the end of the stick is pointing.

Distance will come if you can become effective at getting the puck off the pool bottom. The best way to practice shooting for height is to use a barrier. Turn a goal trough upside down so that it forms a barrier (start with a lower barrier if necessary). For most people there is a "sweet spot", a distance where it is easy to get the puck over the barrier. Usually this distance is about a

meter or so. Start by moving the puck closer to the barrier and shooting over it. Eventually you will be just a few centimeters from the barrier with no room for any wind up. Shooting over the barrier from so close emphasizes the wrist flick. When you can shoot the puck over the barrier from very short distances, choose distances farther than the sweet spot. This will concentrate on the arm and shoulder mechanics and add height to your shot. Another difficulty to add to your shooting practice is to start your shot with your arm extended to your side and shoot sideways. It's a flick we often want to use in a game but don't often succeed.

Underwater Hockey Positions

There are three major positions in underwater hockey: Forward, Midfields (or Mids), and Back.

Forwards

The offensive players on the team – the main scorers. A forwards' job is to generate offense for his team. They are responsible for bringing the puck forward, and scoring the majority of the goals. They are an attacking position – always trying to get by the opposing teams defense and score goals.

Forwards are on the bottom more often than their counterparts, but usually the duration on the bottom is shorter. The key to being a good forward from a fitness standpoint is being able make many repeat drops – go down, take the puck, advance it, pass it off, get a breath of air, then go right back down to the bottom.

At the beginning of every game, the forwards are the ones who race for the puck in the middle of the pool (this initial rush is called the “Strike”). Usually, the center most forward is responsible for getting the puck in this situation – he is called the “Striker”. However, many teams rotate the responsibility of being Striker as it is physically demanding, and can exhaust a player in a high-scoring game.

Forwards should always be ahead of the puck. Their job is to accept passes from the players behind them and then bring the puck forward. Even though forward is an offensive position, and they should always be ahead of the puck, they can still play defense. Forwards swim back towards the puck and steal pucks from opposition players. Attempting steals and other such defensive moments also puts the forwards in close proximity to the puck, which is where they want to be. A good rule of thumb for the forward position is that they should never be more than a single pass away from the puck. A forward should not make their teammates swim to them with the puck; rather, they should swim towards their teammates.

In front of the goal, forwards should take longer drops to ensure the puck is put into the goal.

Mids

Midfields (or Mids) are the hybrid players on the team. They are responsible both for generating offense and defense. Depending on the formation, Mids can be the point guards on the teams – the main passers, not scoring a lot of goals but setting up the other players for goals. Mids can also be the first line of defense – the first player an opposing forward runs into once they get the puck. Mids can have both of these jobs at the same time and often do.

Playing Mid requires a player with outstanding fitness and the ability to recover quickly from long trips on the bottom of the pool. They have the worst of both worlds; they are on the bottom constantly like a forward, but they can also take long, extended drops like a back.

It is a standard line in underwater hockey that any player's best position is Mid – the thought being that you don't have to excel at goal scoring or goal stopping, just be good at both.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. To be a good Mid, and to play in a formation that requires Mids, you have to be excellent at both the

forward and back positions. Mid is the most demanding position in hockey. You have to help

your backs on defense, and help your forwards on offense. Many teams will play with one Mid if they have one exceptional player and many good players – to make that exceptional player the focal point of their team.

Backs

Backs are the main defenders of the team. The Backs job is to stop the opposition from bringing the puck forward and scoring goals. Backs are a defensive position – always between the opposition and the goal, trying to cause maximum disruption for the opposition team.

Backs, though usually not on the bottom as often as the forwards, are on the bottom for much longer. Their job is to not stop fighting on the bottom until their team recovers the puck. A back should not fighting to regain possession of the puck until they've passed the puck to one of their own players or another back has come down to relieve them. A back in front of his goal should not come up for air until the puck is away from the goal and out of harm's way.

Backs should always be behind the puck. Their job is to prevent the puck from moving backwards towards their goal. Even though the Back position is mainly defensive, and they should always be behind the puck, backs can generate a lot of offense, and even score goals. Once a back regains possession of the puck from the other team, their job is to hold onto the puck until another one of their teammates is ready to take possession. This can mean a back might swim the length of the pool until he sees one of his forwards, or even that the back takes the puck and scores if the opportunity presents itself. However, a back's first priority is stopping the other team's offense, not scoring, and should readily pass at the first opportunity.

Backs usually don't have as many subs as the other positions, and that is because they are not responsible for advancing the puck, just stopping it from moving. A good back should be able to

drop, regain possession of the puck, and then give it to one of his players.

Since backs usually don't have the same amount of subs as the other positions, it is vital to be efficient with your drops. Drop only when you need to, but once you drop, swim hard into the play and come out with the puck. Don't float around on the bottom, waiting for opponent's forwards to break out of a pack. Swim into the pack, take the puck from the opponent's forward, and swim out. Don't waste time on the bottom you will need later. If you can't get the puck back, at least disrupt what the other team is doing. Even though you're a defensive position, play your position aggressively. Dictate what the opponent can do, don't let him dictate what you should do.

Underwater Hockey Formations

There are numerous underwater hockey formations. I will not explain how each formation works, but I will attempt to explain what is meant by the 3-1-2 formation as opposed to the 1-3-2 formation.

Formations are designated by how many people are playing each position. The X-Y-Z formation indicates you are going to play with X forwards, Y Mids, and Z backs. Sometimes a team will come out in an A-B formation – which indicates that they are playing with A Forwards and B Backs, but no Mids.

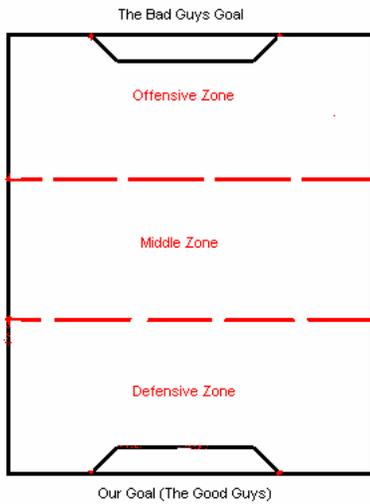
No formation is right for every situation, nor is there any formation which is wrong for any situation. The key is for each player playing his or her position well. The key to picking a formation is knowing your team's strengths and your opponent's weaknesses.

The most common formation for beginners to learn is the 3-3; three forwards and three backs. Some of the more advanced US teams play a 1-3-2; one forward, three mids, and two backs. Since this document is for beginners, it will focus solely on the 3-3 formation.

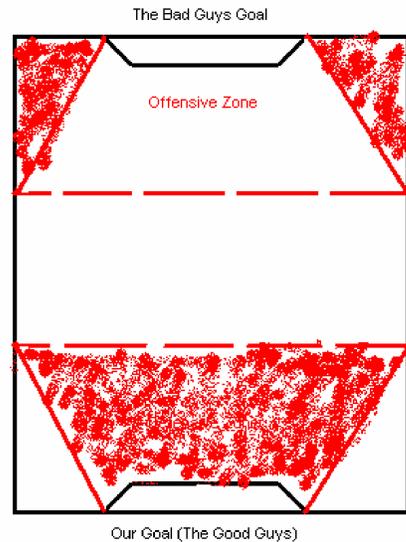
In a 3-3 formation, I will refer to the three forwards as the Left Forward, Center Forward, and Right Forward. The three backs will be Left Back, Center or Swing Back, and Right Back.

In other countries, the same formations can have slightly different names. In Canada, for example, the three forwards would be Left Wing, Center, and Right Wing, and the three backs would be Left Pivot, Swing, and Right Pivot. These are just terminology differences – these formations play the same all over the world.

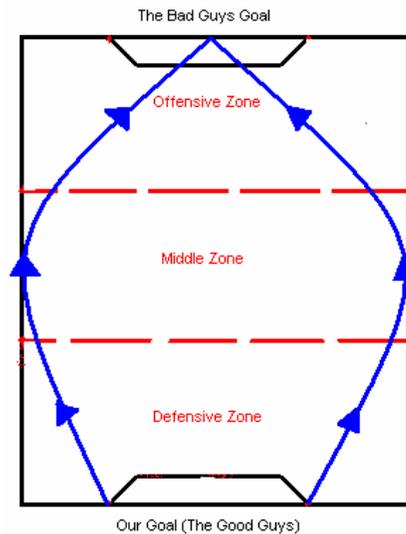
Underwater Hockey Zones



The pool is divided into 3 zones/thirds; defensive, mid and offensive (above). A team never wants to take the puck into the areas shaded red (below).



Teams move through these zones in a diamond pattern. Move the puck to the wall in the defensive zone, up the middle on the wall and then towards their goal in the offensive zone. Here's an example path the puck might take from one goal to the next:



Defensive Zone

You never want to bring the puck into the shaded red area in the defensive zone. Usually, when a defender brings the puck into this area, it's called "clearing to the goal" and usually results in the other team scoring. All movement should be away from this area into the white areas in the defensive zone. If you want to get rid of the puck, chuck it into a corner or along a wall, but never

throw it over the middle while in the defensive zone!

In the defensive zone you can take the puck towards the corner but you are best served to angle it up the wall quickly before getting stuck in the corner. Keep the puck moving forward and away from the goal. If your team is in trouble, has a penalty, needs to kill the clock (i.e. you have the lead and the clock is winding down), or someone is subbing out then the corner is your friend.

Offensive Zone

In the offensive zone, you do not go into the corners or head for the corners. This is where the other team wants you to be, you need to be swimming towards the goal. A team scores “in the goal” not “on the wall” or “in the corner”.

Your first move/instinct in the offensive zone should be to go towards the goal. Always check towards the goal and steer towards the goal. Don't get pushed to the corner and don't ever swim towards the wall or the corner in the offensive zone. If the other team has possession and goes to the corner then the forward on that side needs to get the puck out. The only person who should go into the corner is the forward on that side - otherwise everyone gets out of position and frequent 2 on 1s develop going the other way.

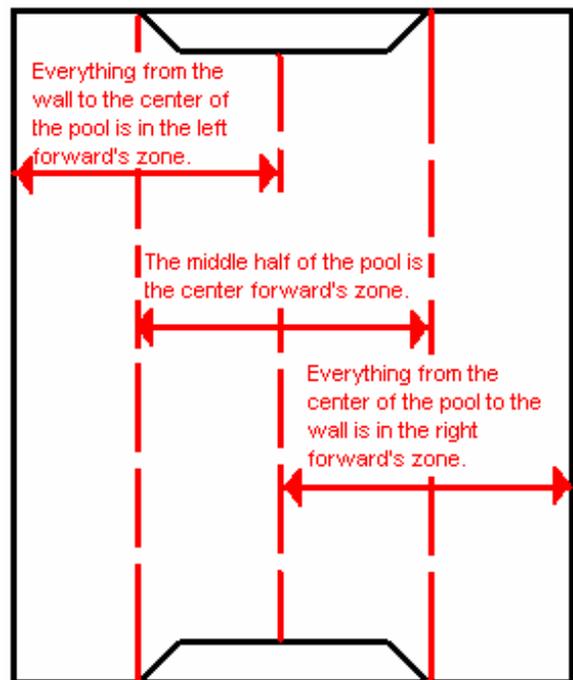
The hardest fight to the goal is straight up the back wall so always bring the puck out on a 45 degree angle from the corner of the wall, passing to the back that should be right in front of the goal waiting for the puck. The back then has many options for their next move. Assuming the back shoots/passes, all the forwards and the onside back follow the shot and make sure it goes in and we take away any possibility of clearing out the edge of the trough. Ah simple, we score, we feel glad, we rejoice.

Positioning In the Water

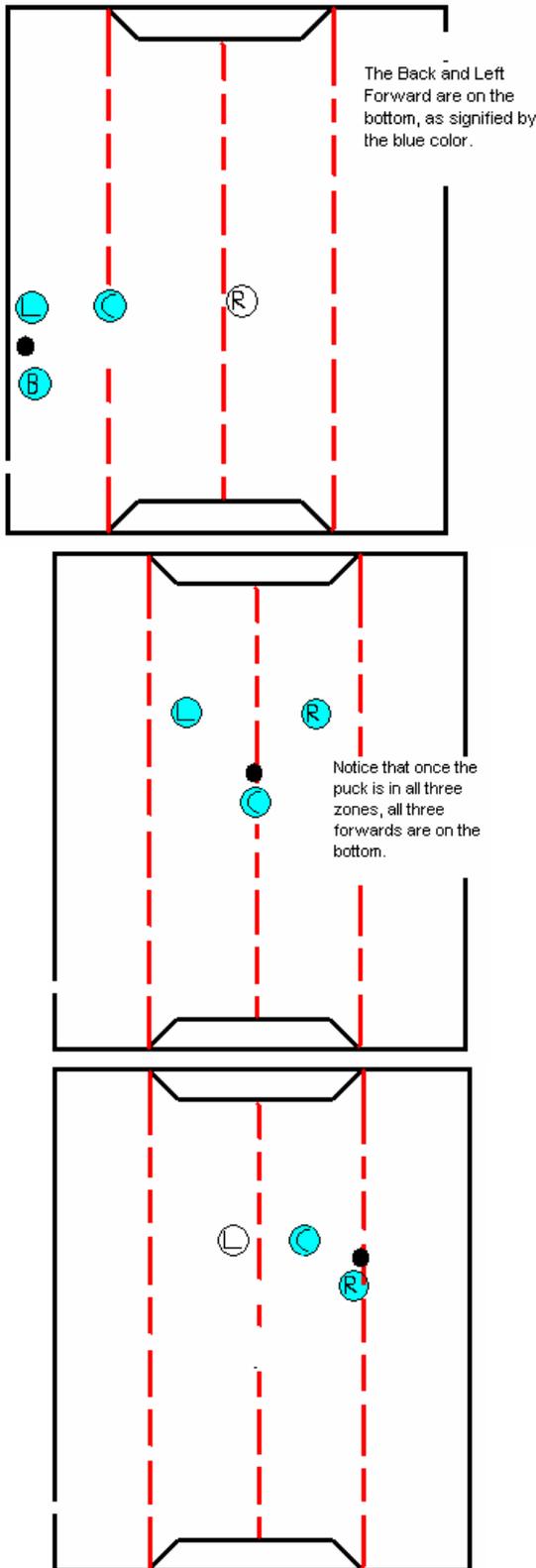
General Positions for Forwards/Backs in the 3-3 Formation

Forwards in the 3-3

Here are the zones each forward position plays in the 3-3 formation.



Some Examples of Forward Positioning:



When the puck is in your zone, you should be on the bottom ready to accept a pass and score a goal. When the puck is not in your zone, you should be on the surface getting ready for when the puck is in your zone, staying almost parallel to slightly ahead of the puck. If you feel you cannot get back to bottom when the puck comes back into your zone, sub out.

Always stay within 5 - 10 feet of the puck when it's in your zone. Closer when the puck is in traffic, farther away when you've got a breakaway situation. Don't ever count on a breakaway occurring though - start out at five, then adjust if a breakaway occurs. Think about like this - if you had the puck in the same situation as the person on the bottom, you would want someone to be close enough that you could pass it without moving any farther forward. You want to be at that distance. Don't make someone swim up to when they've already been on the bottom for 15-20 seconds and you've been watching the play from the surface.

Notice that there are at least two forwards on the bottom at all times. Forwards in the 3-3 formation play in pairs - one with the puck, the other getting in position to get the puck. When a forward passes to another, the forward who just had the puck should quickly get air, and if the puck is still in their zone, get back down on the bottom. The exception to this is in front of the goal. If the puck is in front of the goal, it's highly important that all three forwards be on the bottom. This will be covered in more detail later.

Don't expect the back or other forward to come to you. Make sure you're close enough so that at any time the person with the puck can pass it forward and it lands just *in front* of you. That way, you don't have to reach back and slow down, you can continue swimming forward.

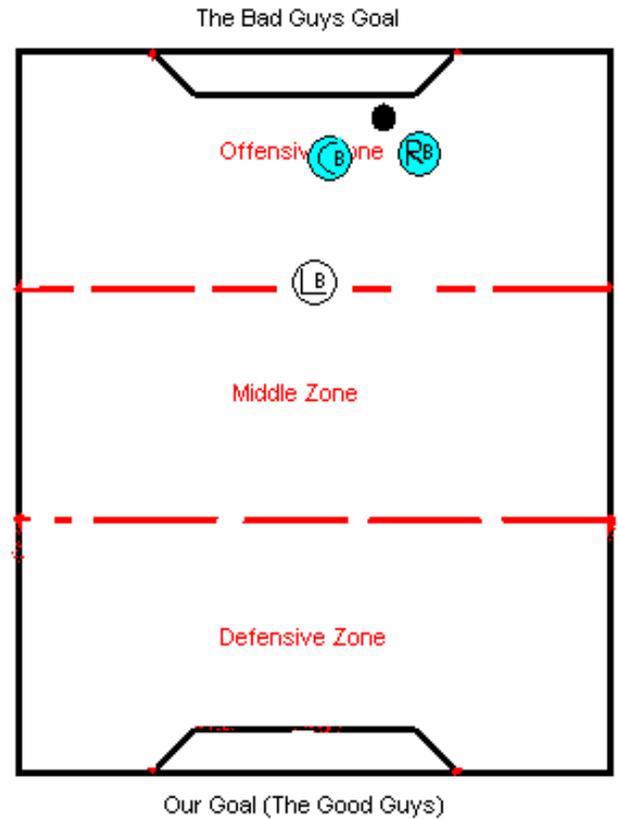
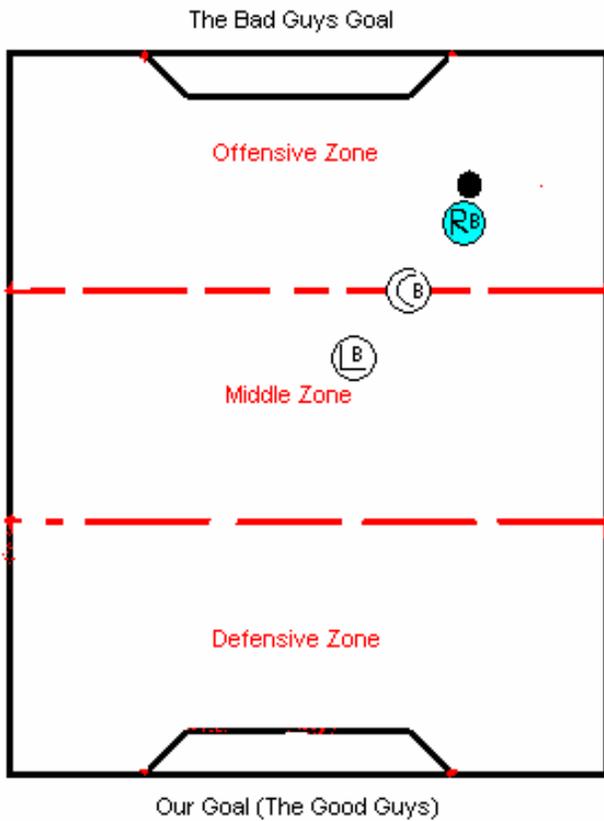
Don't pass laterally. Always pass at a 45-degree angle - lateral passes are the easiest to block or steal. If you throw it in front of you at a 45-degree angle and someone steals it, you're still in good position to recover the puck and try again.

If you throw it laterally to your left or right and someone steals it, it's off to the races.

When the other team has the puck, it's your job to backpick when the puck is in your zone. Go down when your back stops the opponent with the puck, sandwich your opponent, and make sure they have no where to go. Rip the puck off their stick, and watch for your back to knock the puck out and over to you.

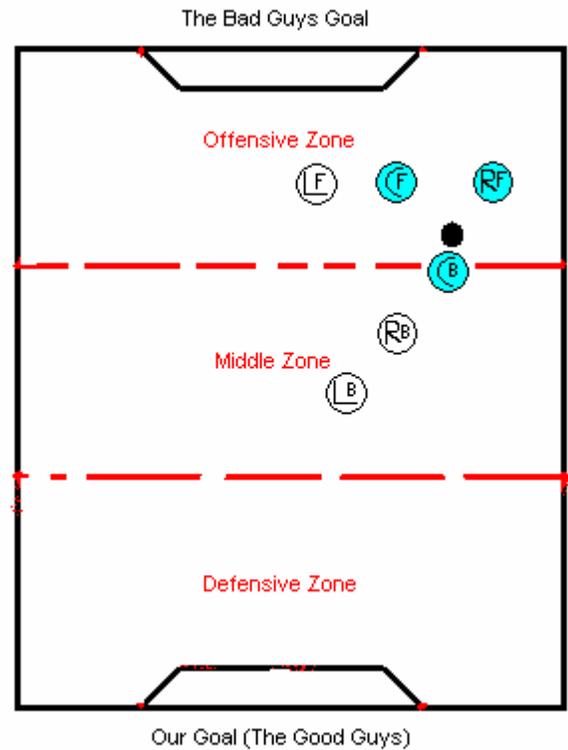
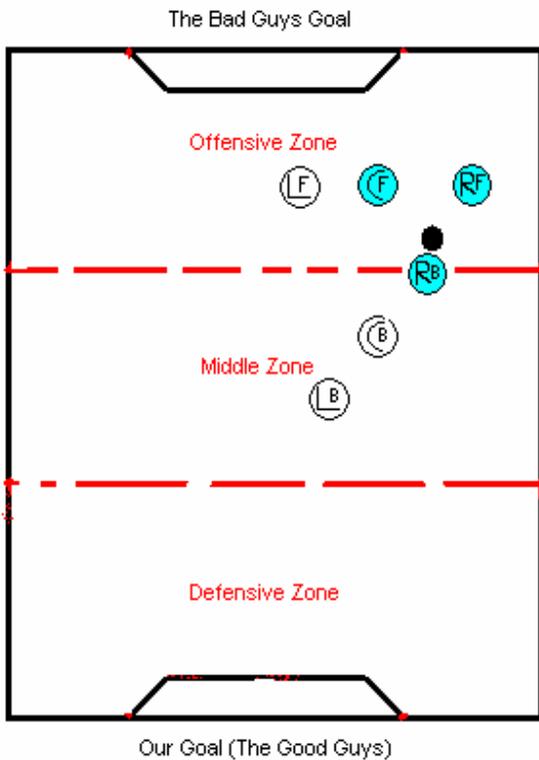
Backs in the 3-3

Here is how the backs should line up in a 3-3 formation.



In the 3-3 formation, backs line in up in what is called a "Seven" formation. The reason it's called a Seven formation is that it looks just like a seven when the right back has the puck:

The way to run this formation from the back's point of view:

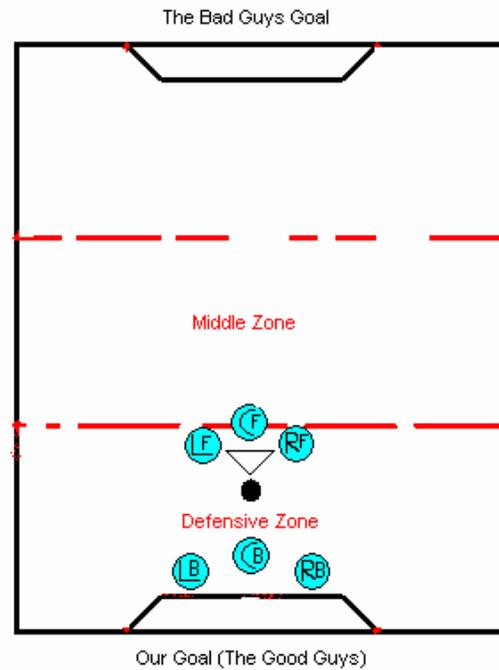
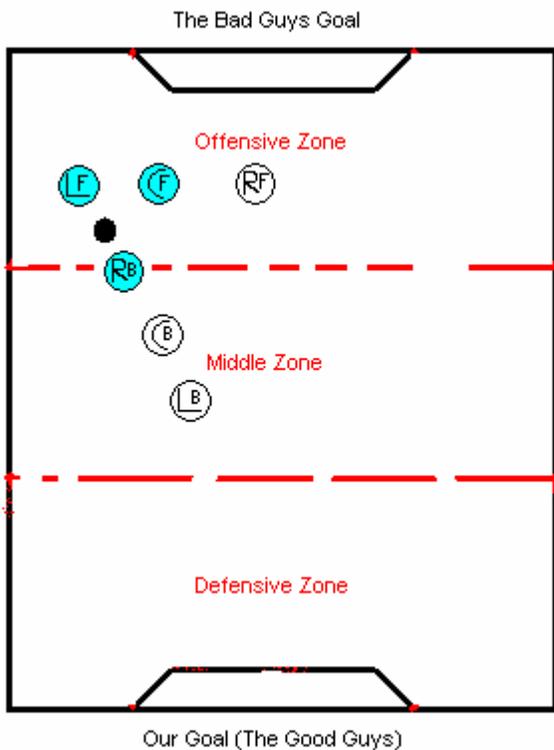


If the puck is keeping in relatively the same spot, the weak side back should be floating on the surface the whole time, watching for the puck to swing to his side, or watching for the time when someone beats both the strong and center back. Good cycling is vital to keeping possession and moving the puck forward.

The strong side back (the back on the side of the puck) will be on the bottom helping keep the puck moving forward. The Center Back (or Swing Back) will be between the strong side back and the center of their goal on the surface. The weak side back will be between the swing back and the center of their goal on the surface.

If the strong side back loses the puck or comes up for air, the center back should immediately be on the bottom in support (opposite). The strong side back should then slide into the position that the center back was at, and when the center back comes up for air, the strong side back would then be on the bottom again in support.

If the puck should swing from one side to the other, it's the weak and center back's responsibility to make sure the puck does not advance. In an ideal world, the weak back immediately goes to the bottom and swims into the play once the puck crosses to his side of the pool, the center goes in behind the weak back for support, and the strong back goes to the surface in the back of the formation. Now, the "weak" back has become the strong back, and the "strong" back has become the weak side back.



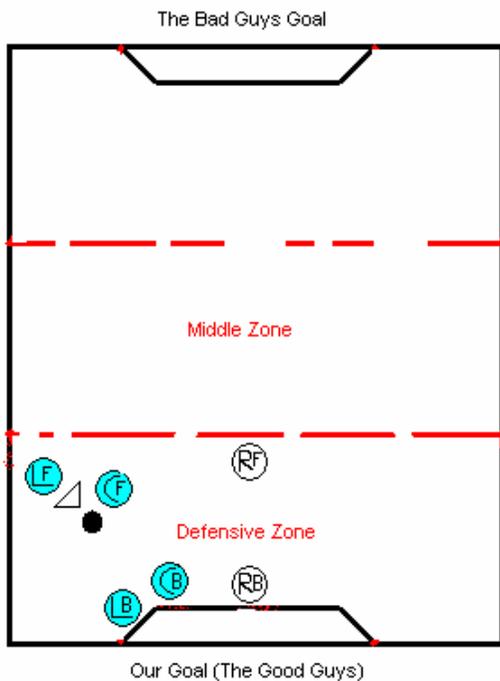
At least two of the three backs will be on the bottom defending the goal. When the other team is taking the puck in from one side, usually two of the three backs will be down, with the third back waiting to drop if the puck gets by one of the other backs or if it begins to come around towards the front of the goal.

If the strong side back looked back towards the center of his goal, he should see the swing back and weak side back in a perfect line towards the goal. Or, when the weak side back looks towards the strong side back, the swing back should be in a direct line between the two players.

Positioning When Attempting To Stop A Goal

When the other team is in your defensive zone, has the puck, and is charging the goal, the backs are going to be directly on the goal. The forwards should try to catch up, backpick the puck out, and swim the puck out towards the opponent's goal.

The floating forward's job when the puck is on one side is to prevent it from being brought in front of the goal. In the diagram below, the right forward's job is to contain the puck of the left side, making sure it does swing in front of the goal.

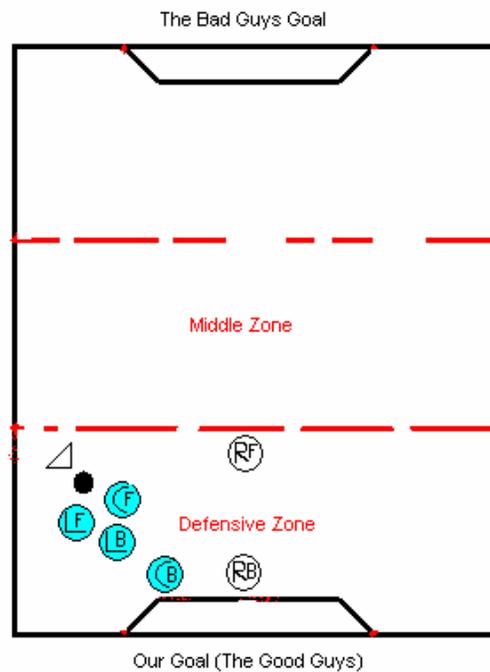


If the weak side forward fails at containing the puck on the one side and it gets brought in the front of the goal, all three backs should be down, trying to force the puck to go to one wall or the other.

Once the backs regain possession, they should then drive to the corner or the wall, where their forwards should take the puck back up the pool.

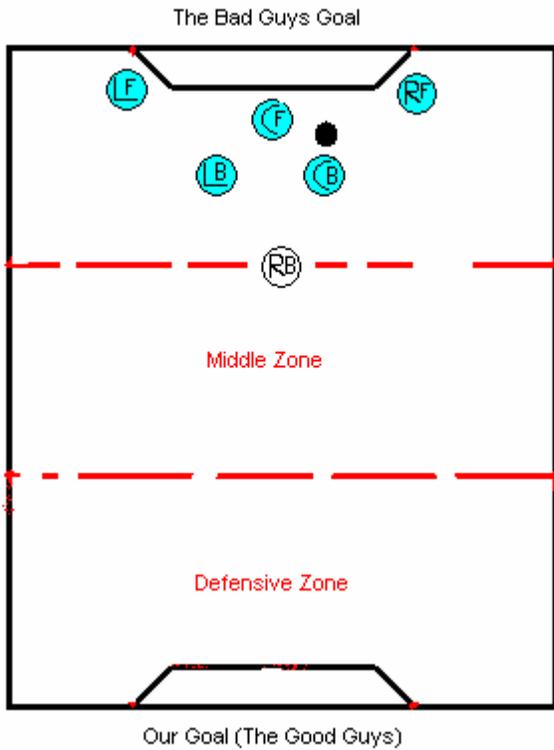
If the first attempt by the forwards to backpick the puck fails while the puck is within 5m of the goal, the forwards should drop behind the puck like a second line of backs and try to push the puck out away from the goal. The forwards should only do this once their attempts to backpick fails and the backs have driven the other team away from the goal but have not recovered the puck. The space generated by the backs in driving the other team away from the goal should then be filled by the forwards while the backs

swim towards the goal. This way, the puck is away from the goal, the forwards hold the puck away from the goal, and the backs can reset and get ready for another push.



The forwards should try to maintain enough distance from the backs that they are in a good position to receive a pass. The forwards should try to push the puck out, and once the backs engage the other team, the forwards should again slide in front of the puck so that they are options for passes. The forwards do not want to end up shoulder to shoulder with their backs.

Positioning When Attempting To Score A Goal



Forwards

Simply put, while on the goal all three forwards should be down and working until a goal is scored or the opposing team clears the puck. The Left and Right Forwards should camp the sides of the goal, making sure the any attempt by an opposition back to get the puck away from the goal does not work. *The outside forwards' job is not so much to score goals, as it is to contain the puck, keeping it from being put in a corner.* Every puck that comes the way of the outside forward should be thrown back into the middle or at the goal if the opportunity presents itself.

The Center Forward's job is to muscle and bash the puck into the goal. No Excuses, no puck handling, no fancy swimming is needed. Just get your stick on the puck and use some strength when it's in close.

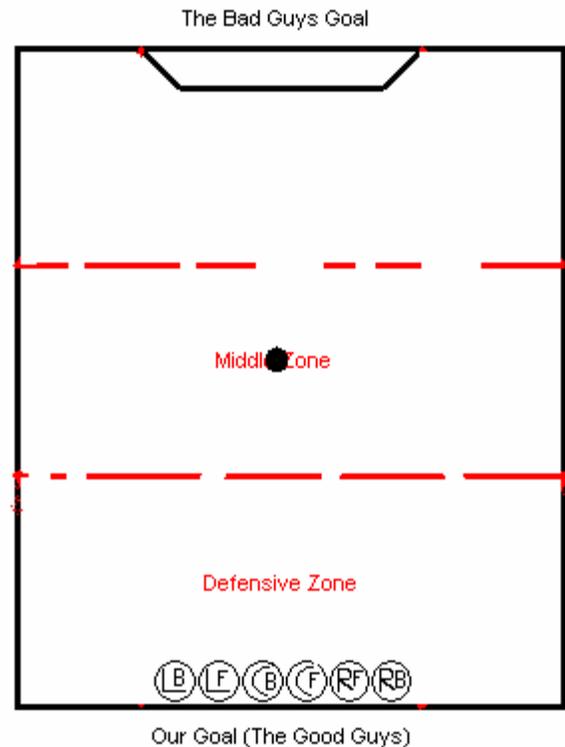
Backs

On an attempt at scoring a goal, two of the three backs should be down helping the forwards. The other back should be playing safety - way back, making sure any puck that escapes doesn't turn into a breakaway goal on the other end. Backs end up scoring a great deal of goals - when there is a fight at the goal, the three main options for scoring a goal should be the two backs and the center forward.

Positioning On the Strike

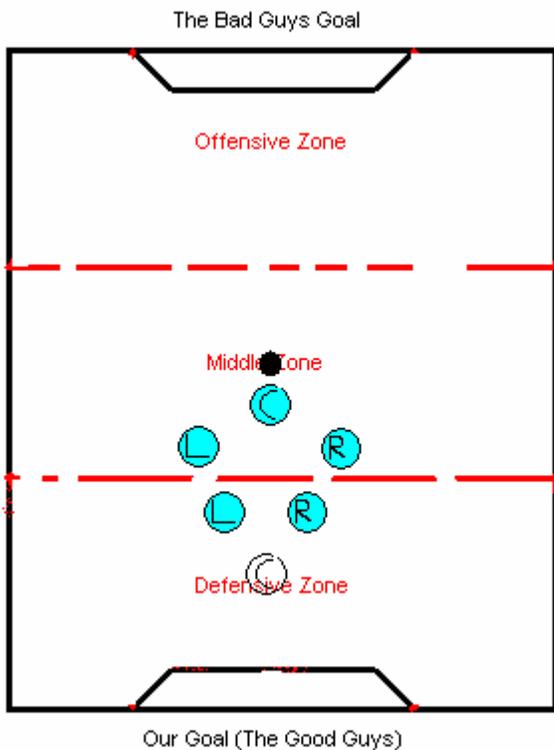
Good positioning on the opening strike is vital. The Strike is one of the most dynamic moments in a game – neither team has the puck, neither team has the advantage. Both teams are starting from scratch. Winning the strike is not an important as being ready for the other team to have the puck. Many teams win the strike and then lose the puck.

The team starts out by lining on the wall by their goal:



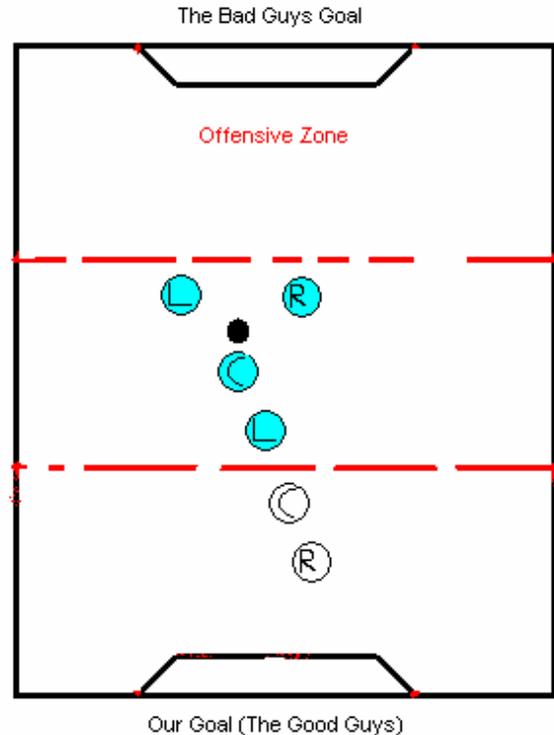
Notice that the center forward is lined up almost directly over the puck. The center forward should have a straight line to the puck (the shortest distance from the wall to the puck). The Left and Right forwards should also be as close as possible to the middle. Some teams have all three forwards next to each other, with the three backs on the outside.

Now, the tone is sounded, and play is started:



This shows the position the team should be in before possession is obtained. Notice that five players are on the bottom – all three forwards and the two outside backs. This is done both to give the center forward the maximum options with the puck and to make sure the other team has minimal options if it should win the puck.

Now, the Center Forward gets the puck, and starts to go to his left:

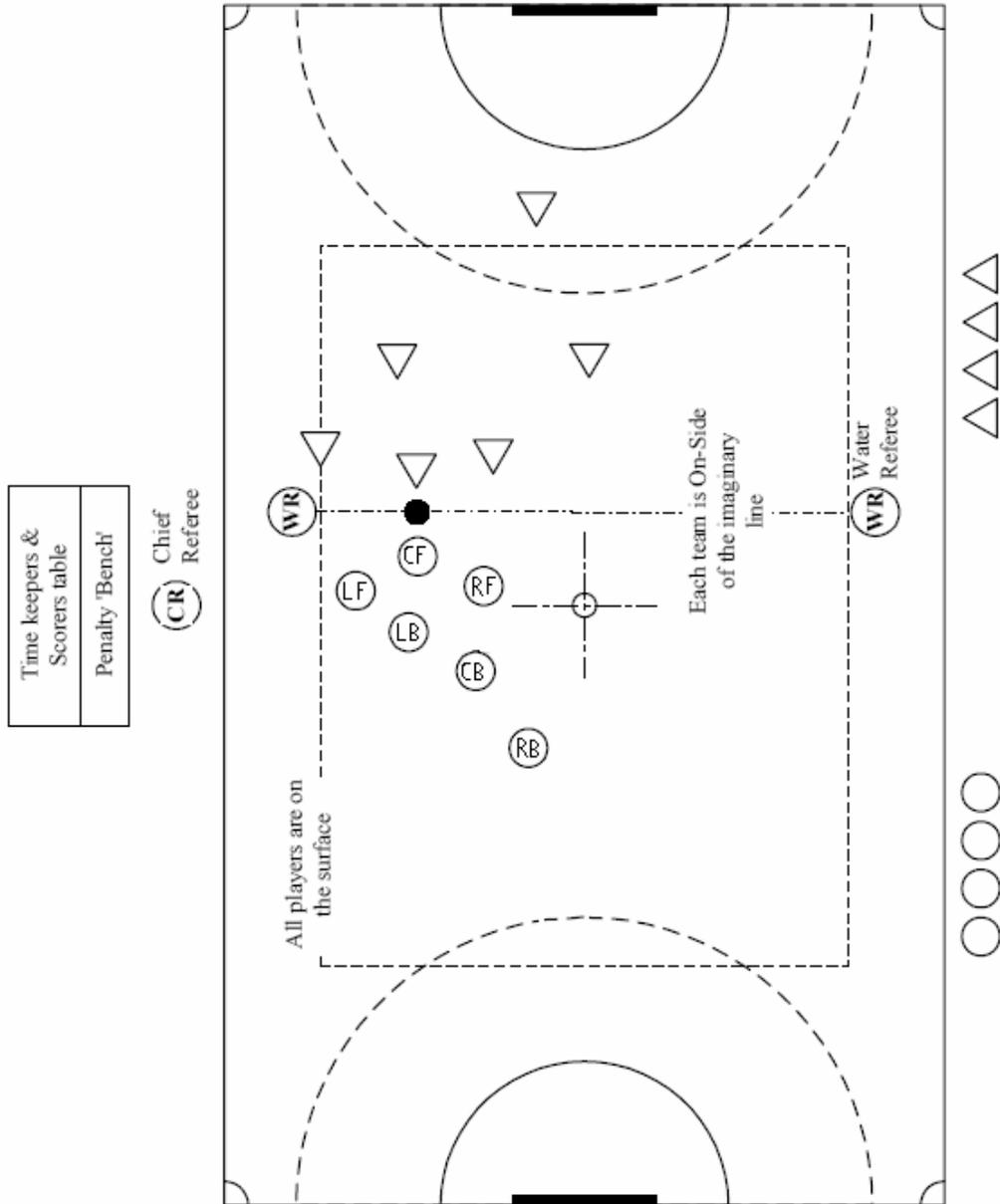


The Left and Right Forwards attempt to get ahead of the Center Forward and get in good position for a pass. As the puck went to the left, the left back will often follow the puck on the bottom to make sure the Center Forward does not quickly lose possession, and has an option for a back pass if he needs it. The Right Back drops back into a support position and gets some air.

Positioning On An Equal Puck

For minor or accidental infringements, or for any other reason the referee deems necessary, a referee may award an equal puck.

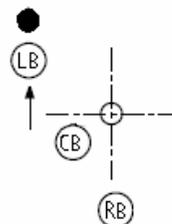
EQUAL PUCK



An equal puck lines up much like the initial strike for the forwards. The Center Forward should be directly over the puck, with the left and right forwards slightly offset behind. The back will play their usual positioning. The center forward should duck dive down to the puck.

Notice that the backs are not lined up in a true seven formation. This is done to compensate for the fact that the strong side back is going to charge forward. If the backs were in a true seven formation from the beginning of the play, the

strong side back would swim away from his other two backs, causing a gap to appear in the pay. With the center and weak side closer to the puck, as the strong side back swims forward the formation will naturally align into a seven.



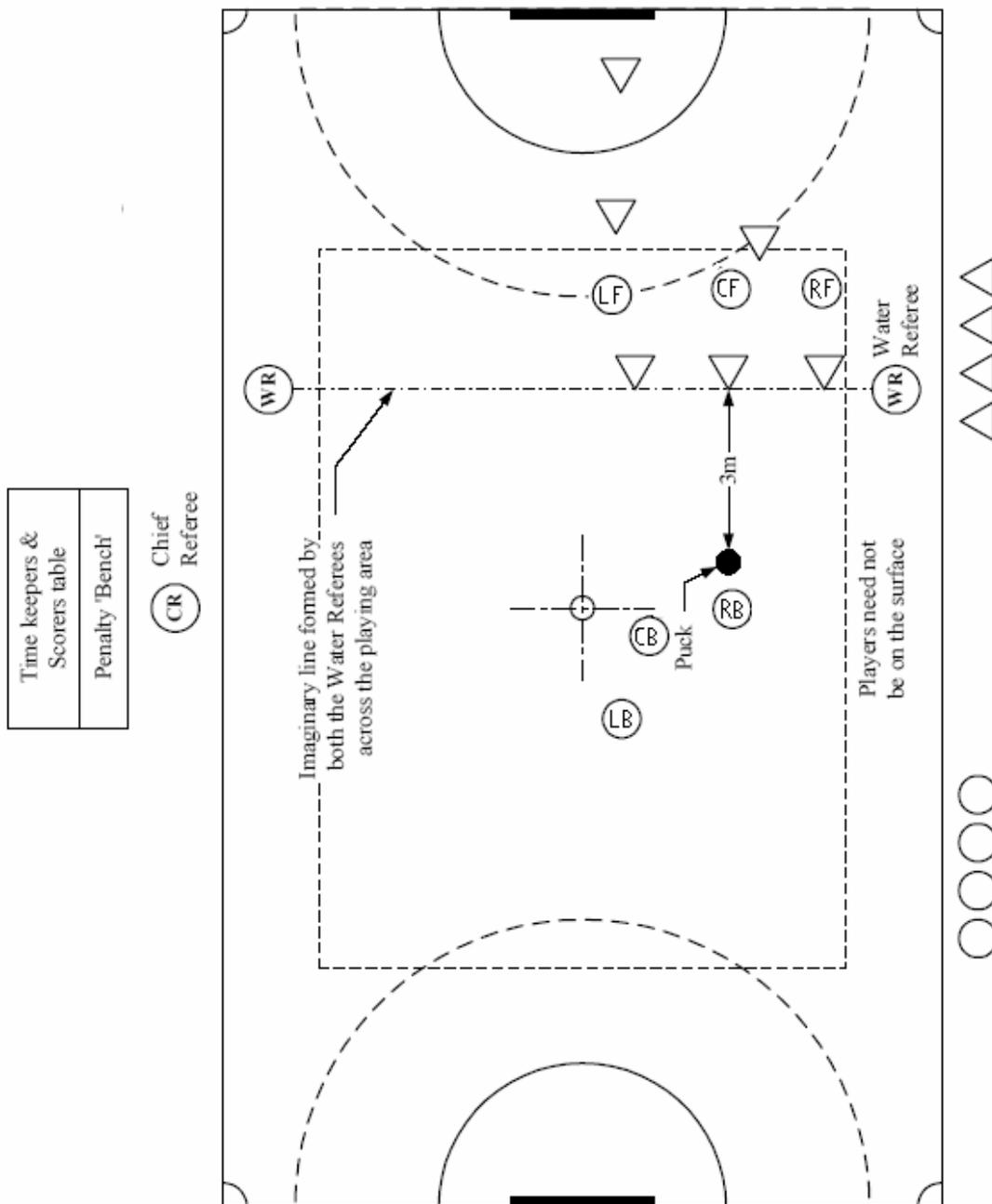
Notice how once the strong side back swims forward, the formation aligns itself.

This closeness by the backs helps if the center forward does not establish possession of the puck. Now, both the center and strong side back will be right on the play, ready to shut down the opponent offense.

Positioning On an Advantage Puck

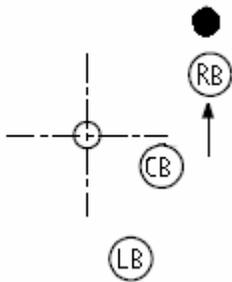
For any infringements a referee may award an advantage puck to the team the infringement was committed against. Advantage Pucks are great scoring opportunities, as they allow a team to position their players exactly how they would like them to be, and allows the team with the advantage to run set plays at the opposing defense.

ADVANTAGE PUCK



On an advantage, the forwards should be lined up behind the opposition players. The Back who takes the puck should charge forward and pass only once they encounter resistance. The Back should pass the puck over the defending opposition players and to one of his own players.

Notice that the backs are not lined up in a true seven formation. This is done to compensate for the fact that the strong side back with the puck is going to charge forward. If the backs were in a true seven formation from the beginning of the play, the strong side back would swim away from his other two backs, causing a gap to appear in the pay. With the center and weak side closer to the puck, as the strong side back swims forward the formation will naturally align into a seven.



Notice how once the strong side back swims forward, the formation aligns itself.

This closeness by the backs helps if the strong side back's first pass is intercepted by the opposition team. Now, both the center and strong side back will be right on the play, ready to shut down the opponent offense.

Positioning On a Penalty Shot

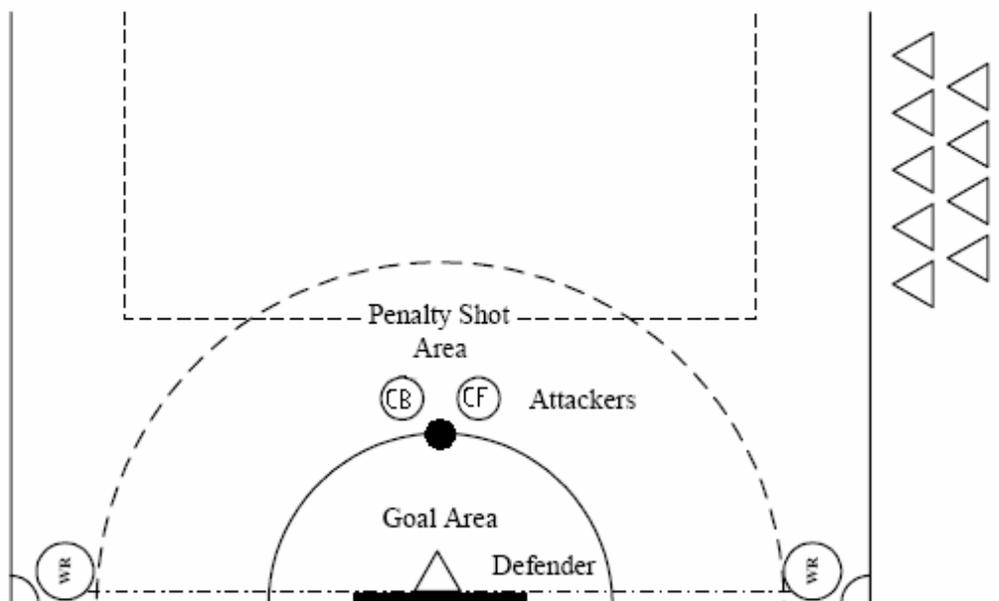
Should any infringement occur within the 3 meter goal area that prevents an almost certain goal, a penalty shot is awarded

A penalty shot is a two on one situation. The team with the penalty shot picks two players to take the shot – usually your best two players, and usually a back and a forward.

The team on the defensive usually picks their best player and lines them up to defend the goal attempt.

The referee will indicate start of play and the penalty shot will continue until either the goal is scored or the defender can move the puck beyond the 3 meter goal area, signifying that a goal has been stopped.

PENALTY SHOT

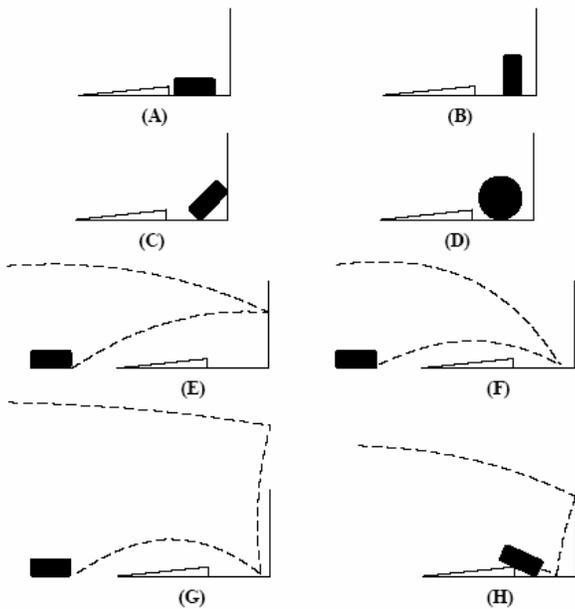


ALL OTHER PLAYERS MUST RETURN TO THEIR RESPECTIVE SUBSTITUTION AREA

Scoring a Goal

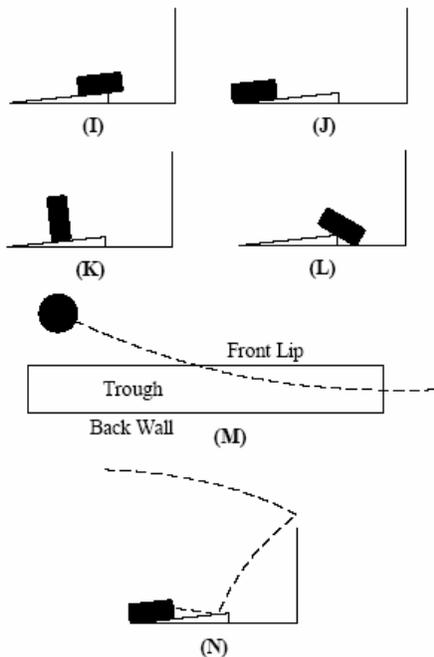
The following shots would be considered a goal:

GOAL



The following shots would not be considered a goal:

NO-GOAL



Subbing Out

If there is a time when the puck is in a position where you should play it but you're too winded to hold your breath and go back down to the bottom, you should sub out. Get a fresh player in the water. This is especially important around your goal. The sub box is right by your goal – make long, hard drops, and sub out. No need to make many short drops when you're swimming right next to your sub. Forwards will need to sub more often than backs – in most tournaments, the forwards get more subs than the backs just for this reason. Respond to having the extra sub by playing hard when you're in the water and subbing out quickly.

At back, when another back subs out, play it safe. Don't try anything risky until your team is back at full strength. Work the puck to the wall, throw it in the corner, and hang back a little farther. Be conservative, especially if you're the last man back on a play. Let the other team eat up a little pool, but keep them from getting a sure shot at the goal.

For whatever position you play, know who is in the water and who is subbing out. It's important that you know what your teammates are doing at all times in the water.

A great strategy when your team is playing in your defensive zone is to push the puck to the wall next to the sub box. This allows each player to completely exert him or herself, then sub out quickly and get a fresh player back on the puck.

When the puck is around your opponent's goal, be a little more hesitant to sub out. You are the farthest away from your sub box when you're at your opponent's goal. If you sub out in front of their goal, you're taking a person out of the play for an extended period of time (the time it takes you to swim back, and the time it takes your sub to swim in). Save the energy you would spend swimming back and help your team score a goal, then sub out afterwards.

Cycling and Breakaways

The problem with breakaways is when separation exists between the forwards and the backs when the play accelerates quickly in either direction.

For example, when the forwards get a breakaway and the backs don't follow quickly enough, a turnover usually results. The other team then pushes the puck through the gap created between the backs and the forwards and they gain back all the pool they have just lost (or should I say we lose the pool we have just gained).

The other case is when the other team gets a breakaway. The forwards hang back, waiting for the backs to bring the puck back up, and a huge gap develops between the backs and the forwards. Now, when our back regains possession and goes to find a forward to throw the puck to, there is no one on the bottom close enough to get the pass. Or, if our back stops their forward from breaking away, there is no one to back pick the puck, and the forward can wait for their backs to show up and start muscling the puck up the pool.

This divide occurs partly due to fitness but some of it is mental. I know it is difficult for a forward to have a big breakaway, then have to go right back to playing defense. (Especially if the other team has swam several zones away). It can be demotivating but everyone needs to get past this and force him or herself to get back into the action as quickly as possible. If you're completely spent, sub out.

The elimination of gaps between the forwards and backs is crucial in a high level game.

Set Play

This is an example of a good teamwork helping transition the puck from the defensive zone to a goal-scoring opportunity. The main focuses of this play are finishing at the goal and transitioning out of the defensive zone into the middle zone through a solid back. There are several things that have to happen in order to

make this play happen. Let's visualize that one of our backs has the puck and is clearing to the wall.

Transitioning from the defensive third/zone to the mid zone, and into the goal

- 1- Our back has to swim it up to the opposing player and draw them in - our back can either try to beat them or pass over them. The Back has to keep in mind that any premature shooting of the puck stalls the play and shooting on a bad angle makes it difficult to pick up and carry the momentum of the play. The shot should go straight through opponent (preferable aiming through their upper arm/shoulder as this is the hardest shot to block).
- 2- Two forwards need to be down and swimming hard at the opponent's defense. When our back shoots to either forward they need to pick up the puck and pull it through the opponent. Both forwards should be tight to the opponent and hold their position (maybe put a forearm up if you know your going to get abused).
- 3- As soon as one forward gets position of the puck they chip, punch, push or shoot the puck forward (as cleanly as possible) while the other forward pulls and digs for the puck until they get it free to move forward with. This can take several attempts by both forwards as the opponent curls and moves to find an opening. If this is effective their only recourse should be to go under their body between the forwards. This of course will be stopped by our back who has cycled into position perfectly and only has to pop the puck back up to the forwards to keep the play moving forward.
- 4- Now if our back or forward is able to break free of their opponent at any time then their partner forward must swim ahead for a nice lead forward pass shot straight threw the opponent (never laterally- easiest shot to block).

- 5- So now our forward has broken free due to excellent teamwork, extreme fitness and, of course, killer instinct and resolve and is now streaking down the pool but is running out of air. Now the offside forward (the one who has been enjoying the action on the surface) is either going to drop right beside the person with the puck if they're encountering resistance or is dropping ahead of the person with the puck moving into a solid position to receive a pass and continue the play into the goal.
- 6- While the forwards are all charging the goal, two of the backs have slid in behind the forwards to clean up any messes and pop the puck back up to the forwards.