



Teaching Checking - A Progressive Approach





FORWARD

Children learn best when expectations are explained, demonstrated, and practiced in a positive atmosphere, especially when there is a logical progression of skills suited to their skill level and needs. This introduction to body checking is a series of progressive drills developed by the Canadian Hockey Association to provide a sound curriculum for coaches to follow. It may be applied as presented or simply used as a guideline by the more experienced coach. Review this material carefully and you will find it very useful in assuring that your players successfully develop over the course of a hockey season.

Enjoy the coaching experience and be proud of your contribution to Canada's great game.

ENDORSEMENT STATEMENT

The sport of hockey has long been an institution in Canada and the continued provision of qualified, competent coaches is crucial to the ongoing success of the game. After all, it is the players who benefit from quality coaching, and therefore, any hockey series that will allow coaches to do a better job is of great merit. It is for these reasons that we are proud to support the creation of this valuable resource.

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Edited By: Dean McIntosh, Manager, Coaching Canadian Hockey Association

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION TO CHECKING

WHY A CHECKING MANUAL?

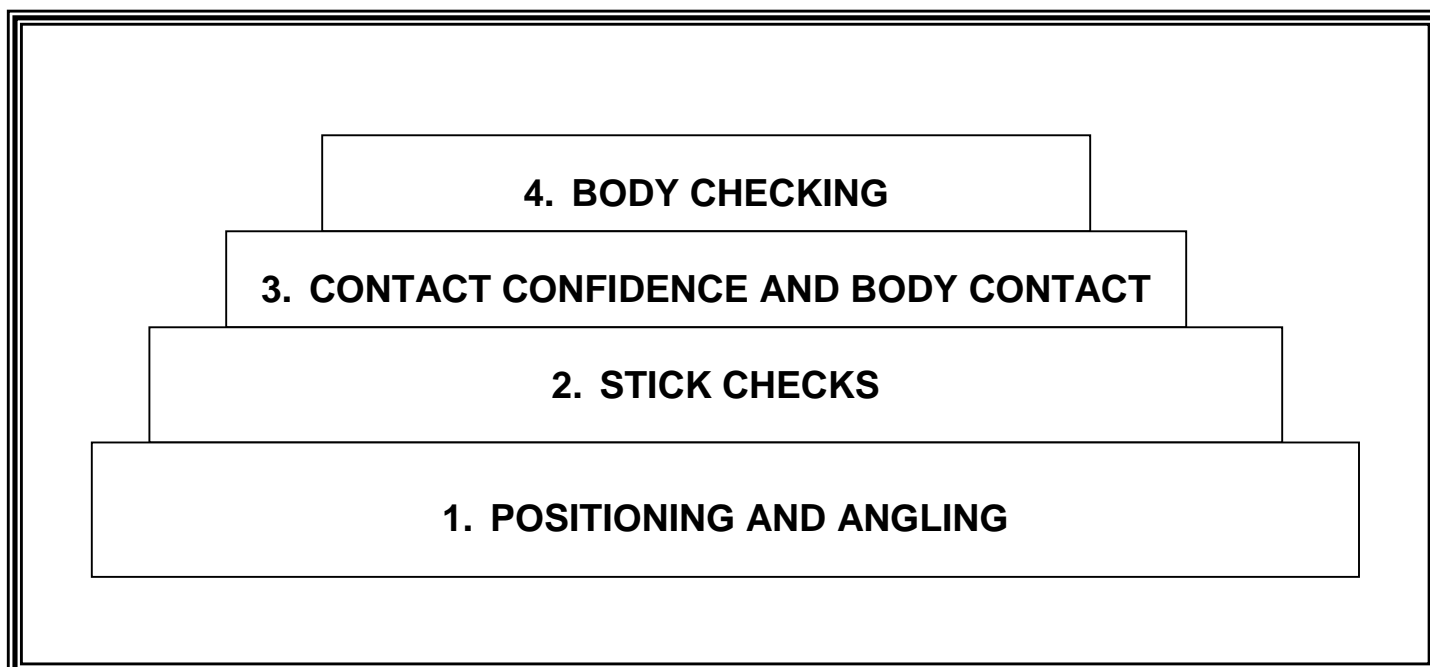
Checking is a critical skill in the game of hockey that when performed properly can create quality scoring opportunities or help a team regain control of the puck. Just like skating, puck control, passing and shooting there are key progressions to the skill of checking when taught effectively, can greatly enhance a player's enjoyment of the great game of hockey.

A common misconception is that the skill of checking begins at a certain age or age category of play. In fact, checking is a 4-step progression that begins the first time a young player steps on the ice. Body checking is the fourth and final step of a four step teaching progression.

The purpose of this manual is to provide coaches with an introductory package of information, which contains progressions for beginning to teach checking skills. The transition from non-contact to contact hockey can be very uncomfortable for young players but if coaches are able to effectively put the building blocks in place, players will be able to make a smoother transition.

Coaches are encouraged to take the time to become familiar with the material in this manual and to adopt the progressions that are presented. After all, it is the players who benefit from quality coaching and if we develop as coaches, then our players will improve. Remember, checking is a **4 STEP PROGRESSION**.

NCCP CHECKING PROGRESSION MODEL



OBJECTIVES OF THE MANUAL

1. To provide the logical progressions necessary for learning the skill of checking (Steps 1-4).
2. To enhance the safety of each player by ensuring that all those who play the game learn to give and receive body checks properly (Step 3-4).
3. To emphasize the importance of playing and staying within the rules of the game.
4. To improve the quality of hockey being played in the rinks across Canada and to place a focus on players demonstrating respect for one another.

HOW TO USE THE MANUAL

The manual is divided into 3 sections:

SECTION I . . .

. . . provides each coach with insight into a number of functional elements to this manual. Key areas covered include definitions, glossary of terms, coaching tips and off-ice drills to support player's ability to perform the key skills as related to checking.

SECTION II . . .

. . . introduces the 4-step model to teaching checking and explains each progression step by step. For each of the four steps there is an introduction to the skills, key teaching points, and the progression drills that can be used in teaching the skills.

SECTION III . . .

. . . provides each coach with access to additional valuable resources that will assist in the coach development process.

Please note: Please check with your local minor hockey association as to what age category of hockey and/or level of play body checking (Step 4) is permitted.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Angling | The ability to force an opponent to go in a desired direction. This would normally be towards the boards or to the outside. |
| Body Checking | A player's attempt at gaining the advantage on the opponent with the use of the body. Checking results when two opposing players collide while skating in opposite directions or when positioning and angling allow the checker to use the force of the body to gain the advantage. |
| Body Contact | Incidental contact of two opposing players in pursuit of the puck or position on the ice in the same direction. Body contact occurs as a result of movement by the offensive player. |
| Box the Hips | A pinning technique used to control the opponent's hips along the boards. Pressure is placed on both hips to eliminate movement and seal the player to the boards. |
| Bump and Roll | A technique used by a player who is about to be checked in order to roll off the pressure of the checker and maintain possession of the puck. |
| Closing the Gap | A retreating defender adjusts speed and skating pattern so the distance between the defender and the puck carrier is lessened in order to get the puck carrier within poke checking range. |
| Contact Confidence | A player's ability to play physical while maintaining safety in the play. |
| Contain | A defensive position/tactic which ensures the defensive player maintains a proper defensive position on the opponent (remaining between the offensive player and the net or between the offensive player and the net). |
| Control Skating | A method of skating used by a defensive player to ensure proper body positioning while maintaining a defensive side on the opponent. |
| Defensive Side | The checker always tries to maintain a position which keeps his/her body between the opponent, the puck and the checker's own net. |
| Gap Control | Maintaining a desired distance between the offensive and defensive players. A tight gap refers to very little distance between players. A loose gap refers to significant distance between players. |



| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Head on a Swivel | A technique utilized to observe and to read the entire ice surface, by quickly rotating the head and glancing over both shoulders. |
| Inside Out | Refers to defensive positioning where the defensive player keeps the offensive player to the outside. |
| Lasso | A technique used to wrap the opponent after a checker has angled him/her by steering into a no ice situation along the boards and the pin technique is used to contain the check. |
| Lift Check | A stick check used while checking the puck carrier from the side or from behind. The checker attempts to lift the opponent's stick on the shaft near the blade enough to sweep the puck and gain possession. |
| Mid Lane | An imaginary lane on the ice which extends from end to end and is the centre of three equal divisions running the length of ice. |
| Pressure | Eliminating the time and space of the opponent in both offensive and defensive situations. |
| Pin Technique | Used along the boards after a check has been made to control the movement of an offensive player by steering the player parallel to the boards, driving one knee between the player's knees, pressuring up with the power leg and boxing the hips with pressure. |
| Poke Check | A stick check used while facing the opponent and allowing the opponent inside the range to reach them with the stick. Top hand elbow is tucked in and then is extended with quickness straight to the exposed stick and puck of the opponent. |
| Press Check | A stick check used to stop movement of the opponent's stick by placing stick pressure over top of the opponent's stick shaft and blade. |
| Puck Protection | A strategy used to keep the puck as far away from the opponent as possible. Puck protection ensures that a player's body and stick are positioned between the opponent and the puck and that the puck is not exposed to the opponent. |
| Support | An offensive or defensive concept where players away from the puck position themselves to be available for a pass or take away attacking options for the opponent. |



- Steering** To shadow the offensive player forcing him/her into an area where the checker may eliminate time and space in order to angle the opponent to be checked.
- Sweep Check** A stick check used to check the puck from the opponent using a sweeping action by the checking player.
- Tracking** The individual skill of pursuing the puck utilizing the shortest possible distance.

COMMUNICATING WITH PLAYERS

Ongoing communication with players will be easier if time is spent at the beginning of the season to talk about goals, provide a outline, and to answer questions. The same type of meeting should be done with the parents on team.

Here are a few simple communication tips to help communicate effectively with players during practices and games:

- Arrange players in a semi-circle.
- Arrange players in a kneeling position to better control their actions and attention.
- Position them so there are no distractions behind the speaker.
- Scan the group while talking. Make eye contact with all players.
- Ask questions to make sure players understand and know what is expected of them.
- Give players an opportunity to speak or ask questions.
- Listen to what players say and how they say it. Use active listening techniques.
- Speak to players using words they understand (keep it simple).
- Bend down, kneel or crouch to speak to players at their level.
- Make an effort to speak to every player at every session.

GIVING FEEDBACK

Providing feedback to players is critical in developing skills. Keep these five points in mind at all times:

- Give the “good” picture. Demonstrate/explain what is required, not what the player is doing incorrectly.
- Be positive. Acknowledge what is being done well, then point out what should be worked on.
- Be specific. Demonstrate exactly what it is expected.
- Don't forget goaltender(s), they require equal feedback.
- Be patient and allow players to make mistakes at times and encourage creativity. It is a learning process.

SKILL LEARNING

Here is a good teaching sequence to follow:

1. *Explain the skill*
 - name the skill and describe it
 - tell why it's important and when it's used. Highlight the key teaching points (key words or phrases used in instructing and giving feedback to your players)

2. *Show how it is done*
 - demonstrate
 - state key points again

3. *Give time to practice*
 - get players to practice the skill right away
 - get everyone involved

4. *Tell them how they're doing*
 - move around to each player
 - give individual feedback
 - get assistants to help

PLYOMETRICS

by Cathie Filyk, M.Kin.

Brandon Bobcats, CIAU (Canada West)

Brandon Wheat Kings, WHL

1. **Skaters low power stride:** Stride side to side, keeping their body low (the length of stride will depend on their leg length). The players can stay on the spot or move forward or backward. For variety and added intensity, these can be done on a hill.
2. **Skaters power leap:** As above, but this time the players will leap up and over to the other side. They will explode up and land in a squat. Watch the landing – make sure that they are tracking their ankles, knees and hips just like they would when performing squats in a gym**.
3. **Running up and down on a platform or stairs** – Try to find a platform that is about 4 – 6 inches off the ground (or use a stair) and have the players run up and down as fast as they can. Try to ensure that they land softly with their feet to absorb the impact. Have them land only on the balls of their feet, both stepping up and down. Have the players stay close to the platform and keep their chest and head up**.
4. **Two-footed hop over a hockey stick** - anywhere from 2 - 12 inches off the ground (depending on the age of the player). Have the players bend their knees upon landing, to absorb the impact, tuck their knees up as they jump over the sticks. For added intensity, do this exercise one foot at a time**.
5. **Forward lunges**– Lunge forward, one leg at a time. The movement is much like a cross-country ski motion. The weight on landing should be through the heel of their front foot. The knee, ankle and toes should be in alignment, travelling forward as they do these. To increase intensity for this exercise, add power to the movement.
6. **Reverse lunges** – As above, but lunging backwards. Watch their alignment. Have the players land with their weight going through the heel of their front foot. This exercise is advanced and is not recommended for younger players.
7. **3, 2, 1 Tuck jump** – Have the players start off standing, with knees soft (slightly bent). They should pulse down for a count of 3, 2, 1 and then tuck jump (knees to your chest). Land quietly and absorb the impact by bending into the landing.
8. **Quick taps on a platform or stair** - Instead of running up and down, the player taps the ball of their foot up on the platform - alternating each foot as they do it. The players should try to keep as quick a pace with this as they can. This is much like running on the spot.
9. **Skipping** - As fast as the players can.
10. **Squat thrusts** – Have the players start in an upright position, then drop to all fours and thrust their legs out behind them (they are now in a push-up position), then quickly pull their legs back in and return to an upright position.
11. **Leap frogs** – Just as the title says. Go for height or go for distance**.
12. **Crossovers** – Staying low, cross one leg in front of the other and travel for 10 – 15 crossovers in one direction. Walk back to the start point and repeat with the other leg. These can be done on a hill for variety and intensity.

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

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

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

SAFETY TIPS

PLAYING AREA

Before each ice session, game or practice, carefully check the playing area to ensure that:

- ✓ there is no debris, dangerous ruts, bumps or bare spots on the ice surface.
- ✓ there are no protrusions from the boards, glass or screen.
- ✓ supporting struts for glass or upright posts for fencing are padded.
- ✓ there is no garbage on the floor of the player's bench area that may become stuck on the blades of player's skates ((e.g. tape) or other matter that may damage skate blades.
- ✓ the entire arena lighting system is turned on and functioning; always practice in lighting conditions similar to those which exist for games.
- ✓ all gates are securely and properly closed.
- ✓ the arena management staff has been monitoring air quality in the arena for dangerous gases.

As a coach you are responsible to:

- ✓ educate your players about the dangers of checking from behind; players should **NEVER** check, bump or shove an opponent from behind, especially one who is in the danger zone, the 3-4 metres in front of the boards.
- ✓ teach your players to always be aware on the ice, especially when in the danger zone; players should always keep moving when in the danger zone, and never stand still in this area. If ever checked from behind, players should extend their arms to cushion the impact.
- ✓ ensure that players are wearing proper full protective equipment, including CSA approved helmets, face masks and, where applicable, throat protectors, for all games and practices. Players who are required to wear face masks and throat protectors during competition must wear them during practices.
- ✓ prepare players for practices and games with proper stretching and warm-up routines, and encourage players to stretch following on-ice sessions.
- ✓ never allow players to go onto the ice until the ice resurfacing machine is completely off the ice surface and its gates are securely closed.

At all times during practices ensure:

- ✓ at least one coach is on the ice to supervise the players and that the coaching staff control all activities.
- ✓ that all drills are appropriate for the age and skill level of the players and utilize proper teaching progressions, especially while teaching difficult skills like body checking and backward skating.
- ✓ players play within the rules and that team rules are developed and consistently applied for a more effective and efficient practice.
- ✓ frequent rest periods are scheduled to allow players to drink from their own water bottles; remember, tired, dehydrated players are not alert or attentive and are more susceptible to injury.
- ✓ all drills are organized with safety of the players of prime concern ,i.e. players should be positioned at least 10 metres from the net during shooting drills; backward skating drills must be done in an organized method to avoid collisions.

OFF-ICE SAFETY

- ✓ that clear dressing room rules are established to prevent horseplay and other careless behaviour which could lead to injuries, and that the dressing room is well lit and the floor is kept free of tape or other debris. Players should never walk around the dressing room wearing skates while other players are still getting dressed.
- ✓ that the hallways leading to the playing area are well lit and that there is no debris, ruts or bumps on the floor. Ideally, there should be a rubber mat or other non-slip surface to lead participants from the dressing room area to the ice surface.
- ✓ that players are supervised at all times, including in the dressing room and while proceeding to the ice surface.