



# Teaching Body Contact & Body Checking

Excerpted with permission from  
USA Hockey's Checking The Right Way

## PRACTICAL SESSION Off-Ice (75 minutes)

### Expected Outcome for the Participants

- Teaching techniques for delivering a body check and how to give feedback during practice
- Teaching techniques for taking a body check and how to give feedback during practice
- Being able to safely lead and teach through 10 different body contact drills
- Being able to safely lead and teach through four competitive body contact games

### Equipment

- Every player must wear full gear including facemask and mouthguard (except skates and goaltender leg pads)
- Sock to cover the blade of the stick (or a plastic stick) to protect the floor
- 10-15 cones (if there are no lines on the floor that can be used as reference points)

## CONTENT

### 10 minutes

**Warm-up** – include shoulder preparation

### 15 minutes

**Balance and Power** – tripod vs. pushes, leg drive, thrust of war

### 15 minutes

**Body Checking Techniques** – front check, bump, power bump, hit the wall

### 5 minutes

**Water Break**

### 15 minutes

**Taking a Check** – board protection, push free, offensive check, roll off

### 15 minutes

**Competitive and Reactive Drills** – side check reaction, react, step forward and check, prison breakout, guard the lane

## WARM-UP (10 minutes)

### LIGHT JOG

Run a few laps around the gym to increase body temperature and loosen up the muscles.

### STRETCHING

Stretch out the major muscle groups (chest, lats, thorax, abdominals, back, gluteus, abductors, hip flexor, quadriceps, hamstring and calves) carefully.

### AGILITY

Take a wide leg stance in a squat position (90° knee bend). Remain in this position and move lateral, forward, backward and do quick turns.

### SHOULDER WARM-UP

1. Perform various crawling exercises to increase the temperature and the fluid in the joints.
2. With a partner, press each other's shoulders together.
3. With a partner, hook your elbows together and pull, so the shoulders make contact.
4. With a partner, grab each other's forearms. Pull and hit shoulder against shoulder.



## BALANCE AND POWER

(15 minutes)

### TRIPOD VS. PUSHES

Take a wide leg stance in a squat position (90° knee bend). Hold the stick firmly in two hands and on the floor, so the feet and stick form a triangle (tripod).

1. One player pushes on his partner's shoulders and tries to knock him off balance.
2. Same as above, but this time the player pushes the hips of his partner.

### DEMONSTRATE

Take one pair of players who have done the drill well and let them perform the drill in front of the group. Emphasize the following points.

- Solid tripod stance, using the stick as an additional leg
- Solid foot support
- Bending the knee and getting low on the contact side
- Form a straight line with their support leg from the foot to the contact area

Repeat the demonstration with another pair for the next drill and note:

- How the player is easier to move when pushing on his hips instead of the shoulders
- How the player with the lowest center of gravity is more likely to overpower his opponent

### LEG DRIVE

One player places the top of his shoulder right in the chest under the shoulder pad of his partner, and his head just to the side of the partner's upper arm. The checker drives with leg power and forces his partner to back up. The partner gives adequate resistance, but makes sure the checker has a chance to drive forward.



### THRUST OF WAR

Two players begin in contact with each other. Each starts with a wide base and shoulder-to-shoulder contact facing one another. On the coaches signal the players attempt to push each other out of their held space. This exercise focuses on using the lower body and legs to generate power throughout the contact point in order to displace the opponent. Players should keep their heads up and stick down throughout the drill.

The thrust of war, exercise can also be done from a side-to-side, shoulder-to-shoulder position.

## BODY CHECKING TECHNIQUES

(15 minutes)

### FRONT CHECK

The two partners stand in a wide stance, facing each other and a short step length apart. The checker leans forward so the top of his shoulder almost touches the partner's chest, right under his shoulder pad. The "receiver" (target) keeps his knees bent, but the upper body straight. Both players have their hands on their backs and are ready to tighten up their muscles to withstand the impact.

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*All checking drills are partner drills, where two players are working together on developing checking and receiving skills. The emphasis is clearly on the receiving skills, so the checker can never use more force than the receiver is willing to take.*

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One coach supervises the drill, and when he says "Go," the checker moves his closest foot forward, places it between the partner's feet and makes contact with the shoulder. The checker continues driving with two more steps and checks through the partner, forcing him to take a backward step.

Sticks can be added as a progression to this drill. Emphasis is then on the checking technique while keeping the stick blade on the ground and under control.

### SIDE CHECK

#### Bump

Two players are standing side-by-side in a wide stance, with their knees well bent (90°). The stick is held in two hands with the blade solid on the floor in front of the player. Together with the feet, the blade creates a tripod stance. (Alternative: The drill can also be done without sticks). The players touch each other with the closest foot. The players count together: "1, 2, 3." On "3" they extend the outside leg (the foot is still solid on the floor), lean into the partner and make contact with the side of the shoulders, the upper arms, the elbows (which are tucked tight into the ribs) and the hips. The closest knee stays bent at 90°, so the entire power from the extended leg is directed sideways (into the partner) and not upward.

#### Power Bump

Use the same starting position as described above under "Bump." From this position, both players move two short steps sideways and bring their feet together. It's important that the players remain in a deep stance (knee bend 90°). The players now count together: "1, 2, 3" and take sideways steps at the same time.

1. Lateral step (knee bend 90°)
2. Bring feet together (knee bend 90°)
3. Lateral step and make contact the same way as described above under “Bump.”



### **Hit The Wall**

The player is facing the wall and stands one short step away in a low (knees bent 90°), wide stance. The purpose is to (with a solid side check) hit the wall and hold pressure forcefully against the wall for three seconds. To do this, the player takes one step forward, twists himself 90°, places the foot parallel next to the wall and extends the outside leg. While doing this, he always remains in the low position. Make contact with the wall, with the outside of the shoulder, the upper arm, the elbow (which is tucked tight into the ribs) and the hip. Hold this position and continue to generate pressure into the wall.



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*It is important to start slow, and with almost no impact at all. The wall is more solid and the pads less protective than one might think.*

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## TAKING A CHECK

*(15 minutes)*

### **BOARD PROTECTION**

Get up tight against the boards with your inside foot, knee and hip. Keep your hands in front of your body and the inside elbow resting on the top board. Keep your knees bent, but your back straight, so your head is held high and protected by your shoulder pad. Be aware of what's happening around you at all times.

In the moment of the check, turn your shoulder and hip toward the checker to make sure you'll use these body parts as your contact area. Do not expose your chest, stomach or ribs. Forget the puck for a second. Hold your breath and tighten up your muscles. Don't leave the boards, but lean into the check, and do not duck. Ducking could expose your head and risk getting it squeezed between the checker and the boards. Finally, unload the weight from the inside leg. This will ease the impact on the knee.

One player is standing in the position described above up against the wall. His partner is in the ready-to-check position as executed in the hit-the-wall drill (facing the wall, one short step away). The checker executes the same motion as for the hit-the-wall drill, but instead of hitting the wall, he makes contact with his partner's shoulder and hip. Both players keep their elbows tucked in tight against their ribs.



### **Push Free**

The checker finishes the check by holding the pressure for three seconds, whereas the receiver tries to push free using the arm against the board and the arm closest to the checker. The receiver tries to push free and forward to escape the checking pressure.

### **Offensive Check (Strike First)**

Same set up and drill as above, but the receiver will not only lean into the hit, but hits back. When the checker makes his first move, the receiver pushes off with the elbow on the wall (still keeping his foot, knee and hip tight against the wall), and hits back, or more correctly, strikes first. This will take away some of the checker's momentum, and reduce the impact that has to be absorbed.

## Roll Off

There is only one way to completely avoid body checking – don't play! If you want to play, you will get hit. The best you can do is to limit the frequency and the impact of the hits you'll receive.

Two players face each other a short step apart and slightly leaning forward, so their right shoulders (or left) almost touch each other. Knees are well bent in a ready-to-go position. A coach (or a teammate) calls the name of one of these players. That player takes a powerful step with his right foot (left if the left shoulders are touching) forward and executes a front check and drive through. The other player reacts and rolls off the check.



As an alternative, the coach (teammate) can tag the player with his hand, instead of calling out his name. Begin with using no stick, and then alternate keeping the stick in one hand and in two hands.

## REACTIVE AND COMPETITIVE DRILLS

(15 minutes)

### SIDE CHECK REACTION

Three players are lined up in a straight line 6-8 feet apart. The outside players are facing each other and the middle player is turned so his shoulders line up with the two other players. All players are in a deep knee bend, alert and ready to go.

Behind the player in the middle there is a coach. The coach will give a sign, which the player in the middle can't see. The two other players will react to the sign. Whoever is chosen by the instructor will take 2-3 steps forward and execute a side check on the player in the middle. He should react to the checker as quickly as possible, take a lateral step and "hit back."

The drill can be done with or without sticks. If sticks are used, make sure the sticks are down at all times.



### REACT, STEP FORWARD AND BODY CHECK

Three players are lined up in an equilateral triangle 6-8 feet apart. Two players are facing the middle player. All players are in a deep knee bend, alert and ready to go.

Behind the player in the middle there is a coach. He will give a sign, which the player in the middle can't see. The two other players will react to the sign. Whoever is chosen by the coach will take two or three steps forward and execute a side check or a front check on the player in the middle. He should react to the checker as quickly as possible, take a step forward and "hit back."





The drill can be done with or without sticks. If sticks are used, make sure they stay on the floor at all times. It is important with both drills that the distance between the players not exceed eight feet. That would allow the checker to take a run and build up excessive force and momentum which could be hazardous.

Second, it would also give the player in the middle too much time to react and the purpose of the drill would be lost.

### **PRISON BREAKOUT**

One player lines up in the middle of a circle. In a gym, the basketball circles are of suitable size. All the other players place themselves around the circle with one foot inside and one foot outside the circle. The illustration shows only four players, but 10 or 12 players work better. Everybody begins in a deep knee bend position.

The player in the middle starts from the center dot. He tries to break through the line of players by executing a body check against one of these players. If he can't break through on the initial body check, the player cannot keep on pushing or wrestling his way out. He has to back up and try again. Before starting a second attempt to break out, the player has to return to the middle, seek a new player and try again. Each attempt starts from the middle. This is to prevent the player from taking a run and build up excessive momentum as well as giving the players on the circle less time to react. For a breakout to be considered successful, the player breaking out has to be able to place both his feet outside the circle.

The purpose of the drill is to be competitive, not to over run a smaller player. Therefore the player in the middle should seek a challenge and try to make his way out by body checking a player bigger or equal in size. The players guarding the circle must hold their ground. Do not duck, roll off or step aside.



### **GUARD THE LANE**

This competitive drill begins with two players facing each other but offset and about 20 feet apart. The offensive player attempts to drive by the defender through an imaginary lane. As the offensive player attacks this lane, the defensive player moves laterally to guard the lane. The defensive player times his movement to block the lane and make body contact with the attacker. The defender turns his body to the side and places a side check against the attacking player. Keep the head up and stick down through the contact.