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Understanding Hockey

By: Mike Svendsen

Hockey, a sport whose origins date back 4000 years, is a fast paced, high energy game in which two teams attempt to use their physical strength and agility to outscore their opponents. (www.historyofhockey.net) However, despite its ancient roots, hockey remains a mystery to many. This article will attempt to explain the basic components of hockey. After gaining a fundamental understanding of the sport, one can then begin to truly appreciate the speed, strategy, and intricacies of the game. In order to achieve this understanding, this guide will look at the layout of the rink, player positions, the officials, stoppages in play, game play, and penalties as they apply to the rules of the National Hockey League (NHL).

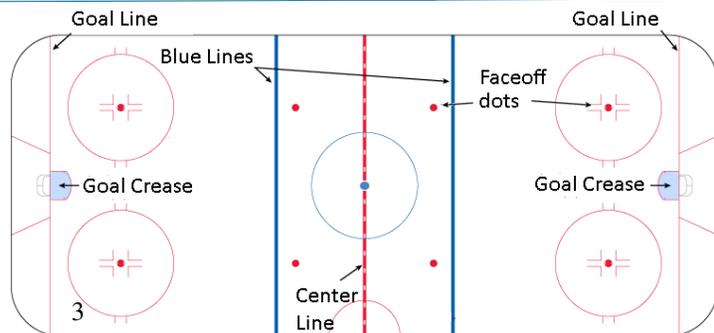
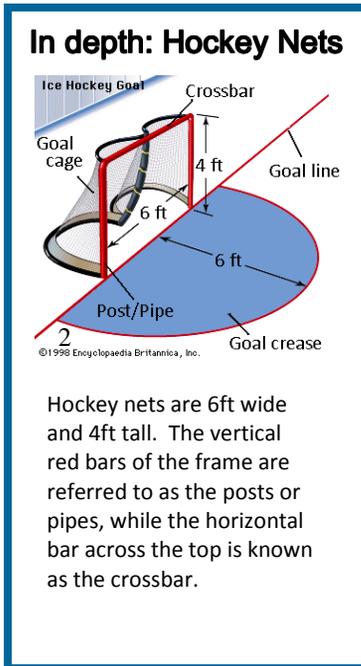


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Understanding the Ice Rink

Before delving into the rules of hockey, it is first necessary to understand the ice rink. Approximately two-thirds the length of a football field and about half the width, rinks are 200 ft. by 85 ft. as dictated by the NHL rulebook (p. 4). Similar to many other sport fields, there are numerous markings on the rink. These markings are best understood by examining the rink diagram at the bottom of the page.

Examining one of the more important features, the blue lines divide the ice into three zones. Each team calls the area which contains their net the defensive zone and the area with the opponent's net the offensive zone, while the area in between the blue lines is called the neutral zone.



Important features of a rink include: the goal lines, the goal crease, blue lines, center line, and the 9 faceoff dots (8 red and 1 blue).

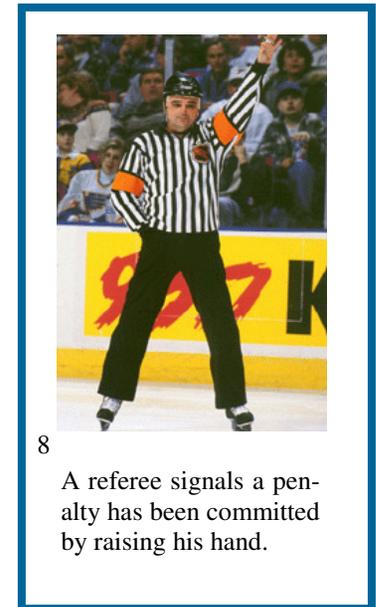
Understanding Penalties

Penalties play an important part in hockey games. The vast majority of these penalties are minor penalties. Minor penalties result in the guilty player sitting out for two minutes, while his team plays with one less player on the ice, a major disadvantage. These penalties can stack, meaning a team can be down two

players. However, no matter how many players commit penalties, a team can never be penalized more than two players at a time.

Furthermore, if scored against while down a man, the player with the least amount of time left on his penalty is allowed back into the game.

As mentioned earlier, referees call penalties and will signal one has been committed by raising his arm, as shown in the picture to the right. Play will stop when the guilty team touches the puck.



Concluding remarks

With a basic understanding of the rules of hockey, the sport seems to come alive and becomes much more exciting to watch. No more is there a reason to be confused about why the official blew his whistle, or why one team is down a player, or what happens if the game is tied. Using this newly gained information, go watch a few games and just appreciate the speed and intensity of this wonderful sport.

Understanding Stoppage in Play

A stoppage of play is an event in which an official blows his whistle, stopping the clock and essentially pausing the game. Play usually resumes within about 30 seconds with a faceoff. Stoppages can occur due to many events, however the more common ones are explained here.

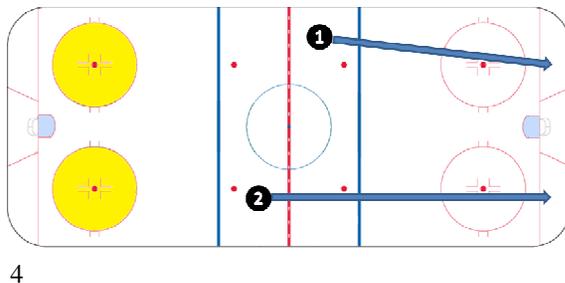
Puck leaving area of play — If a puck is shot over the boards enclosing the ice, the play instantly stops and a faceoff occurs at the nearest faceoff dot to where the player shot the puck from.

Goalie freezes puck — If a goalie catches the puck with his glove or covers it in some fashion, the puck is said to be frozen and a faceoff occurs at the dot to the right or left of the goalie.

Offside — A player is said to be offside if he enters the offensive zone before the puck does. However, if all players leave the offensive zone the team can get onside or “tag up” and nullify the offside call. Although if an offside player touches the puck play stops and resumes with a faceoff at one of the two dots closest to the blue line where the offside occurred.

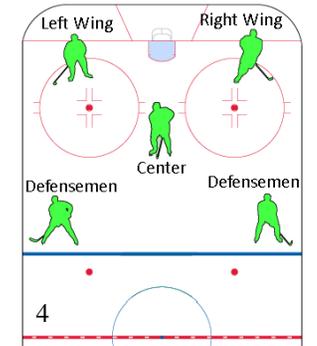
Icing — Icing occurs when one team shoots the puck from their side of center ice all the way down to the other team’s goal line, depicted by puck 2 in the figure below. In the case of icing, if the guilty team touches the puck before the opposing team the icing gets waived off. Otherwise, when the non-guilty team touches the puck, play stops and a faceoff occurs in the guilty team’s defensive zone.

In the figure to the right, puck 1 is not icing because it isn’t shot from the left side of the center line. On the other hand, puck 2 is considered icing, and if called a faceoff would occur in one of the two highlighted faceoff circles.



Understanding Positions

There are 5 positions in hockey falling into three categories: forward, defense, and goalie. Within the category of forward, positions further break down into right wing, left wing, and center. Generally responsible for scoring goals, these three combined create what is called a line and constitute 3 of the 6 players a team may have on the ice. Accounting for 2 more of the 6, the defensemen generally don’t venture far into the offensive zone, and work to counteract the opposing forwards offensive efforts. Meanwhile, the goalie’s sole purpose is to stop the puck from entering his net and is the 6th man on the ice.



General location of each position in the offense zone.

Understanding Officials

In hockey, a crew of four on-ice officials oversee the game. Of these officials, two are referees, easily recognizable by the orange bands on their arms, and whose responsibilities include calling penalties and signaling goals. The other two officials, responsible for calling stoppages in play, are linesman and lack orange bands (see picture to right).

In depth: Officials



The official on the left, wearing orange bands is one of two referees, while the official on the right is one of two linesman.

Understanding Game Play

With an understanding of several key components of hockey, it is now time to look at how a hockey game progresses. Broken into three twenty minute periods, games last 60 minutes. Each period starts with a faceoff at center ice. In a faceoff, an official drops the puck between each team's center who attempts to knock the puck back to a teammate, shown in the picture below. Following the faceoff, teams fight for control of the puck and attempt to score goals (See *In Depth: Goals* for more information on goals). Time only stops when a stoppage in play or goal occurs and resumes with a faceoff. This continues until the three periods expire.

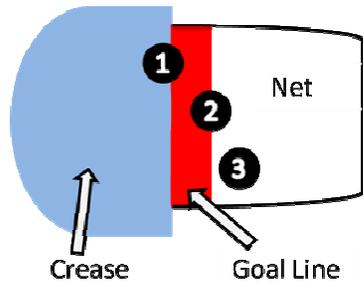


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Two centers square off for a faceoff and wait for the puck to drop

If at the end of three periods the score is tied, the game goes into a five minute overtime period. In overtime, each team is only allowed four men on the ice (excluding the goalie) and the first team to score wins the game. (*Understanding Game Play* continues on next page)

In depth: Goals



What constitutes a goal in hockey? A goal is scored when the puck **completely** crosses the goal line and enters the net. In other words, there must be white space between the puck and the goal line. This is contrary to football, in which the ball must only touch the goal line to count as a touchdown.

In the figure above, puck 1 and 2 are *not* goals because they are not completely across the entire line. Only puck 3 is considered a goal.

It is also worth noting, that it is perfectly legal to bat the puck in out of midair with a stick or to deflect the puck off of other players and in. However, a player cannot use his hand to bat in the puck or kick the puck in with his skate.

Understanding Game Play

If no team scores during the overtime period, the game progresses to a 3 man shootout. In a shootout each team designates three shooters. Each shooter goes one on one with the goalie and attempts to score (shown in the picture below). The team who scores the most goals in this fashion adds one point to their overall goal total for the game (i.e. a game going into a shootout with a score of 4-4 can only end up as 5-4). However, if after three shooters the teams have scored an equal amount of goals another round of shooters is added, this continues until a winner is decided. (See *In depth: Shootout example* to right for more details).

In depth: Shootout example

| Shooter | Team 1 | Team 2 |
|---------|--------|--------|
| First | X | O |
| Second | X | X |
| Third | O | X |
| Fourth | O | O |
| Fifth | X | X |
| Sixth | X | O |

X = Goal O = Miss

This table shows the results of a shootout. An X represents a goal scored, while an O represents a miss. Looking at the result of the first three shooters, each team scored two goals. This resulted in a fourth shooter being added, but both shooters missed, progressing the shootout to a fifth shooter. Both team's fifth shooter scored, thus again prolonging the shootout. Finally, team 1's sixth shooter scored while team 2's did not, meaning Team 1 wins the shootout and consequently the game.



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In a shootout, a player goes one on one with the goalie.