

A Picture is worth a Thousand words!

COMMON REOCCURRING SITUATIONS

ILLUSTRATION: CRAIG MACINTOSH, MINNEAPOLIS STAR & TRIBUNE



BOD O'CONNOR
 Hockey Resource
 Collection



Certainly most of the great players we know came from backgrounds where the coach allowed them to do their thing. Next time you see the Los Angeles Kings on TV, isolate on Wayne Gretzky and ask the question: what would a college or youth coach do if he had a youngster who tried to play like Gretzky? Would that player be given the freedom to create? Would he be allowed to make plays at the offensive blue line, or would his skill be hidden by the demand to 'dump it in deep?' Does a potential young Gretzky have to chip the puck out of the defensive zone whenever he touches it? Is he required to 'finish his check' when the real Gretzky would already be anticipating and moving toward the next play? Does he have to prove to his macho coach he is "tough" by looking for body contact instead of avoiding it, like the Great One he watches on TV?

How many coaches allow a player to hang out deep in the offensive zone when the opponent is breaking

**Why would
 any coach
 be so
 presumptuous
 as to demand
 that he
 do all the
 thinking?**

out at the midboard? Gretzky often hides behind the net to see if his linemates can successfully forecheck the puck loose. After all, the original purpose of a forecheck was to get the puck back in order to make a play. It has become little more than fulfillment of a job outlined in depth on a blackboard. Do we allow a young kid to fly into the neutral zone on the breakout, looking for a long breakaway pass? In an entire college season we might see only two long breakaway passes, because the coaches demand that everyone is back deep coming out together. We are basically telling young players to stop thinking, "I'll do the thinking for you."

Mario Lemieux gets several breakaway chances in the finals of the Stanley Cup when everyone in the building is watching him. The Oilers get ten breakaways against a team that prepared for this very thing. Some happen by design. Some happen because the player is brilliant, and has been allowed to play with creativity. I often wonder if Wayne