



Let the Game Teach Game

Small Area Competitive Games (SACG) maybe the perfect coaching tool for youth hockey coaches. Since players spend far more time on the ice during practice preparing for their 12 minutes of ice time during games, it makes sense to utilize practice to teach the players how to play the game. There are several

By utilizing the SACGC formations players will not only develop individual skills but more importantly they will be faced with common reoccurring situations found in full length games over and over again. It is this repetition of situations that will eventually be cemented into the sub conscious of each player so that when the "keep the score games" arrive the players use their developed skills and react instinctively. SACG also have one more often neglected benefit of placing players in a competitive environment. Most youth practices are not competitive in nature and as a result players do not learn to compete. They are also fun for the players and allows them to try new moves and hone their skills.

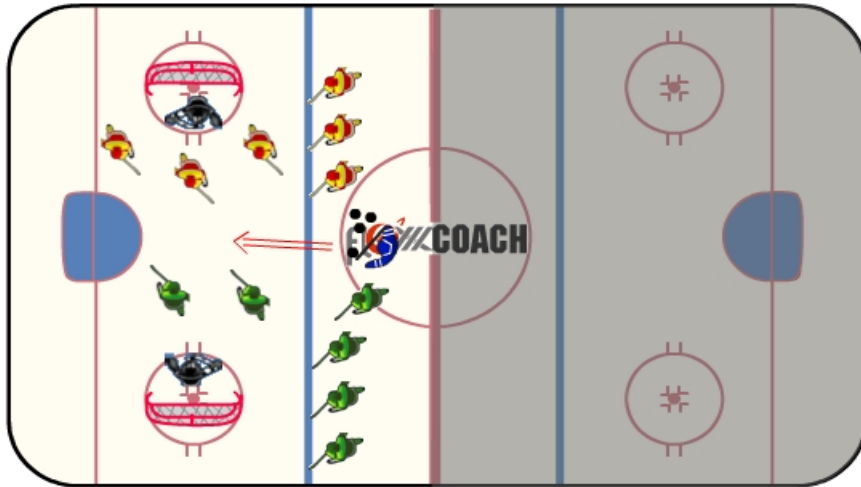
"Small area competitive games" is a concept developed in Europe and in recent years adopted here in North America. In essence the concept is to "let the game teach the game". This approach is still an after thought for most practices. Perhaps it is time to make the small area games the primary part of practice and other activities the secondary part.

There are a few items that make these games more beneficial;

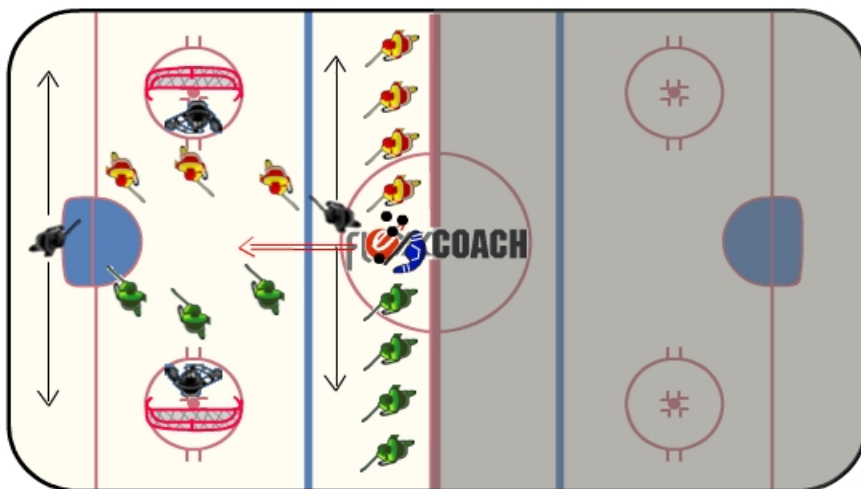
- 1) Keep score. This is important. Winning should have a reward, daily.
- 2) Use games that are representative of situations found in actual full ice games.
- 3) Try to make the games odd man situations and allow for transitions that require players to shift from offense to defense and back again several times per shift.
- 4) Allow the players to learn the games and do very little coaching during them.
- 5) Keep the "shifts" to 40 seconds or less.

Listed below are 6 small area games that you can use to get you started. Click the link for each one to see it diagramed. Thanks to Jim Johnson at Flexxcoach.com for helping out with these.

Drill 1 - 3 on 2 Alternate 3 on 2/ 2 on 3 Alternating – Play begins with the coach dumping the puck in and three players from one team and two players from the other enter the play. This creates a constant 3 on 2 situations for the team with 3 players. On the whistle the team that entered 3 players will now enter 2 and the team that started with 2 will now enter with 3 and continue this alternating throughout the course of the game.

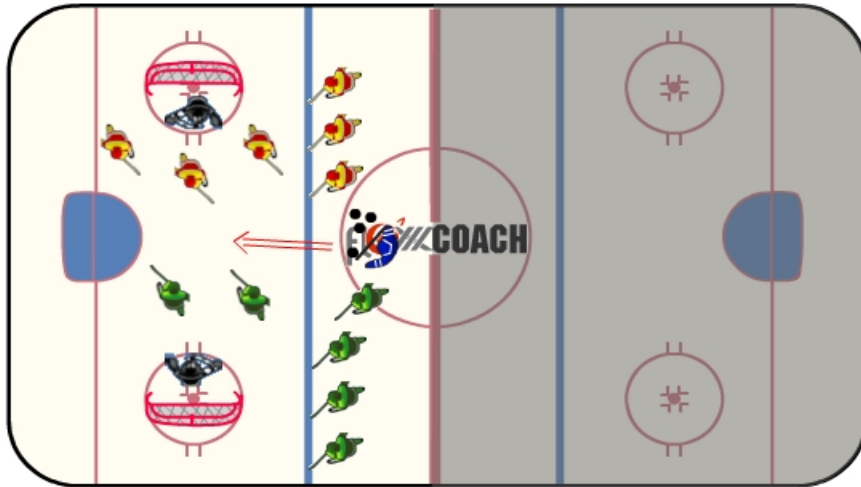


Drill 2 - 3 on 3 Support – One support player is stationed and must stay below the goal line. The support players play offensively for both teams. Three players from each side enter play. Use of the support player creates a constant 3 on 2 situation for the offensive team. Defensive players are not allowed to cross the goal line to pressure the support player. The players must complete the pass to the support player and receive a pass in return before attempting a shot on goal.

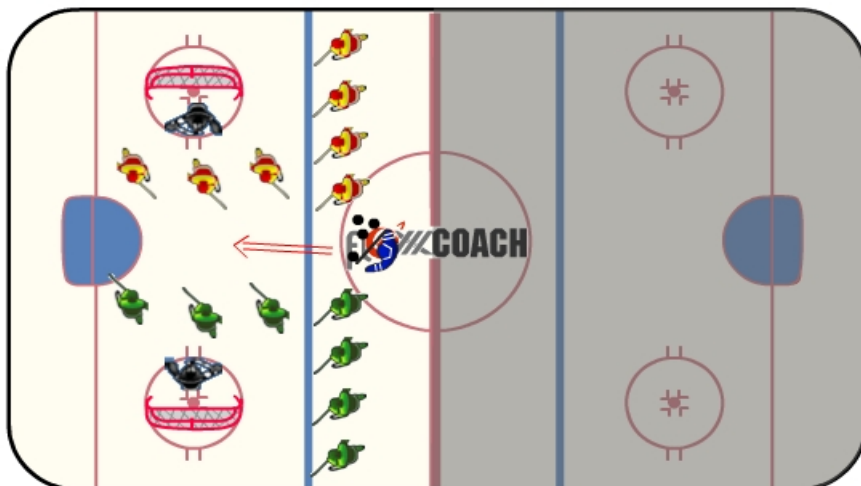


Drill 3 – 3 on 2 Offensive – The play begins with the coach dumping the puck in. 3 players from each side enter the play. One player from each team positions himself

behind the offensive net. The 2 others players will play 2 on 2 with the ability to create constant 3 on 2 situations with the use of the player behind the offensive net. The player positioned behind the offensive net cannot shoot the puck on goal and is only allowed to pass and receive. The 2 other players must use the player positioned behind the net with at least one pass before attempting a shot on goal.

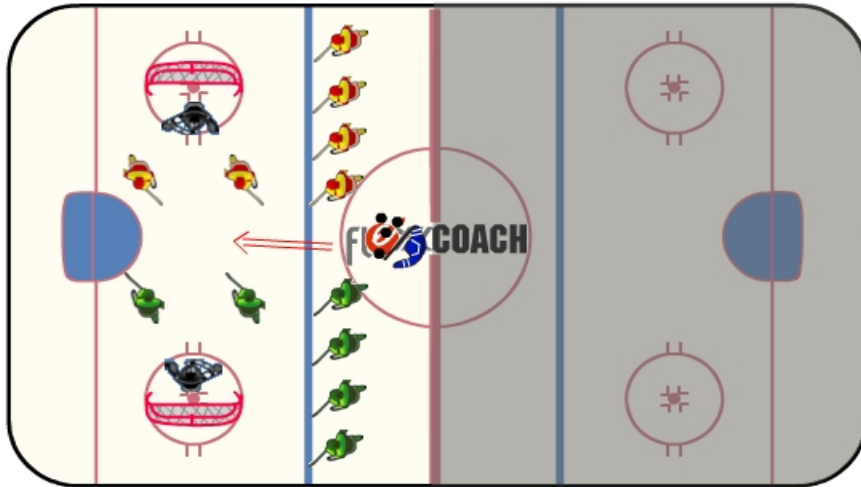


Drill 4 – 3 on 3 Score on any net – Play begins with a coach dumping the puck in and three players from each team enter the play. Players can score on either net. The team that possesses the puck can choose to attack either net. Players will need to transition from offense to defense quickly on turnovers as they may be defending the net that they were just attacking.



Drill 5 – 2 on 2 Activation Drill begins from a 2 vs. 2 cross ice format. Each team can activate additional players by passing to the first person in their team's line and receiving the puck back controlled. Once the player in the game has received the pass back passes

the next player in line then activates into the play and the next player in line gets ready as a possible outlet. There are no limits to the number of players a team can build up too during their shift. Each team can activate additional players by passing twice to the first person in their team's line. Once the player in line has received two passes he then activates into the play and the next player in line gets ready as a possible outlet.



Drill 6 – 4 on 2 Special teams - Divide players into two teams with two coaches monitoring each side. On one side the players play a 4-on-2 and on the other side they play 4-on-3. Players move the puck around and try to score while the defending players check them. The remaining players are out of the way but ready to go in on the next change. Change both sides every minute. If the puck goes out of play, throw a new one in immediately and continue playing until the next change. With one puck you may also let the defending players pass the puck to the other offensive players on the other side. This will allow the side that controls the puck have the opportunity to have more time with the puck.



Drill 7 - 4 on 3 Activate Special teams - Place one stationary player from each team outside the blue line on each face-off dot. The game starts out 3-on-3 or 4-on-4. The team with the puck comes out of their end, passes to their stationary player, re-groups and it now becomes a 4-on-3 or 5-on-4. After a turnover the stationary player must return to the face-off dot outside the blue line, allowing the other team to utilize their stationary player for their own 4-on-3 or 5-on-4.

A sample of SACG is available in the coach's resource center at www.minnesotahockey.org. USA Hockey has a great CD and manual that is available through your CEP instructors and USA Hockey. Minnesota Hockey has a DVD presentation available also through your local District Coach in Chief.

Have fun at practice.

Hal Tearse
Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey
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