

# BOB HALKIDIS

# Coaching Tips

**COMPETITIVENESS**  
*and*  
**SYSTEM FUNDAMENTALS**



# THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR SYSTEM

**CHEMISTRY:** There is a certain bond that permeates every championship team. Mental skills like respect, commitment, goal clarity, accountability and camaraderie are what makes that bond possible. These skills would be irrelevant without the confidence that rests on the solid foundation below.

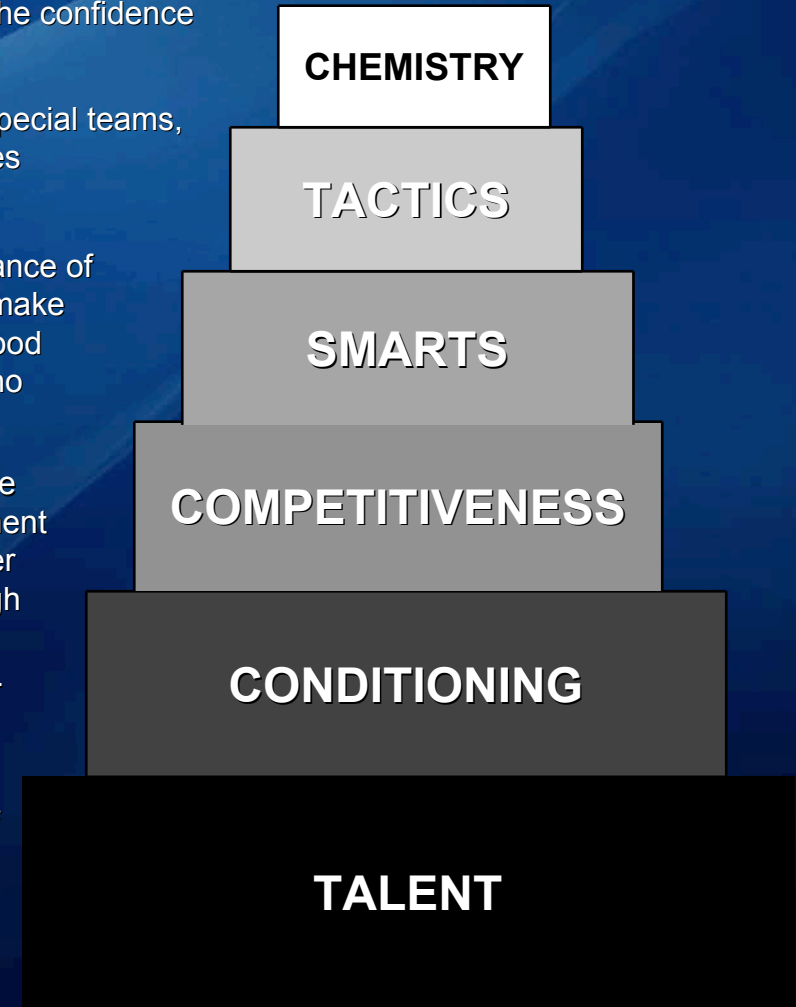
**TACTICS:** We have a plan for every situation, including even strength, special teams, in the defensive, offensive and neutral zones. When every player executes assignments perfectly, your team is on the "same page".

**SMARTS:** We look for smart hockey players who understand the importance of doing the little things that win games. We quantify these little things and make them part of our system. Fundamentally sound hockey players make a good system even more effective. If your players are fundamentally unsound, no tactical system in the world can make a difference.

**COMPETITIVENESS:** Championship teams are comprised of competitive athletes. They punish their opponents and they accept whatever punishment necessary to win. They outwork their opponent at every opportunity, never taking a night off. They persevere through adversity, and they play through injury and pain. We value competitiveness in all its forms, among them: physical and mental toughness, aggressiveness, hustle, and consistency.

**CONDITIONING:** Vince Lombardi said it best: " Fatigue makes cowards of us all." When you are tired, you have no stamina, no heart, and no pride. Conditioning is the foundation of all success. Teams that are out of shape can't win late in the game. Outside of your talent level, this is the single greatest factor that determines success.

**TALENT:** A core of talented players is the first step in building a championship caliber team. Teams with little talent can stay close in some games, maybe even win a few, but seldom do they go very far. Talent can always be improved. We work hard every day to elevate the skill level of the players we have.



# Competitiveness

*“A coward dies a thousand deaths, but a brave man dies just once.” – Oscar Wilde*

## Playing the Game Tough

**We put all players into one of the three following categories. In which one do you belong?**

**Type 1: Will play physically at every opportunity and take all punishment necessary to make a play. We will take as many of these players as we can get.**

**Type 2: Will take punishment if necessary but won't dish it out. Players of this type must have a significant talent.**

**Type 3: Will neither take nor dish out punishment. Players of this type are usually extremely skilled and very productive offensively.**

# **Competitiveness**

## **When the Game Gets Ugly**

**Where do you fit on this scale?**

- 5) Stand alone tough guy. Needs no backup, fears no one, plays tough every night in any rink against any team.**
- 4) Plays tough against all but the most dangerous opponents.**
- 3) Plays tough against opponents he knows he can hold his own against.**
- 2) Avoids confrontation, might defend himself if necessary, but only himself.**
- 1) Totally intimidated. Runs from trouble at all times and will not defend himself or anyone else.**

# Competitiveness

## The Areas of the Ice a Successful Team Dominates

These are the areas of the ice you must take pride in as a team. We must win the battles in these areas. This is no compromise. To win consistently, you must dominate these areas.

### RED – The Corners

This is where their offense stops and ours starts.

### BLUE – Inside the Blue Line

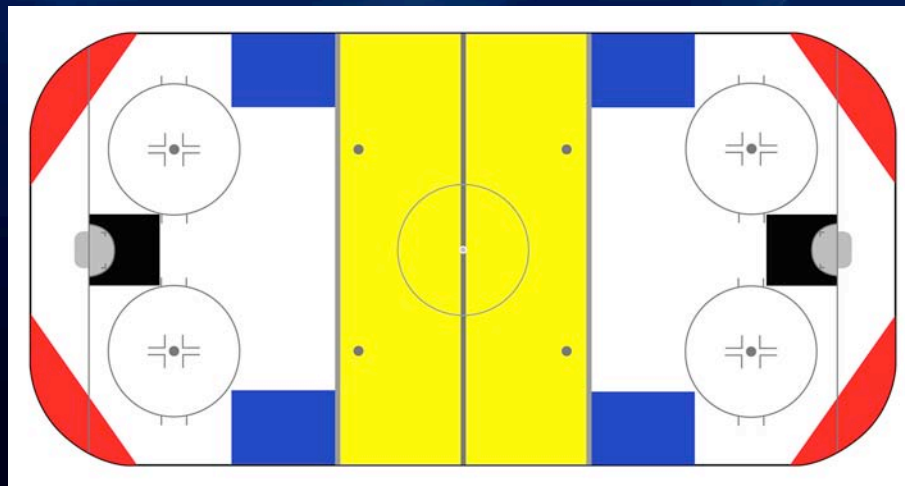
When the puck comes around the boards, we take these battles personally.

### BLACK – In Front of Both Nets

We punish people in front of our net, and we take liberties in front of theirs.

### YELLOW – The Neutral Zone

We look to make as many hits as we can, because this is where they least expect it.



# Competitiveness

## Our Rules of Team Toughness

### Rule 1:

**No one ever takes a beating, no matter what.** If one of us is in trouble, someone must intervene. Protect your teammates at all times.

### Rule 2:

**We battle who we want.** Smart teams don't let their better players be taken off the ice by the opponent's lesser players. Conversely, the right players on our team should bother their opponent's top players as much as possible.

# Competitiveness

## Our Rules of Team Toughness

### Rule 3:

**We battle when we want.** There are times that a big hit is what we need, for example, when we want to change momentum in a game that is not going well for us. In these cases, we do just that. However, we want to avoid situations that probably can't help us, for example, when we have the lead and our opponent wants to provoke us to wake up their crowd. There are times that you cannot avoid confrontations, even when you would prefer to. When this occurs, refer to rule 4.

# Competitiveness

## Our Rules of Team Toughness

**Rule 4: When we battle, we make sure we are 100% ready.** You can battle to survive, or you can battle to win. If you battle to survive, you'll probably lose. If you battle to win, you'll seldom lose, always survive, and usually win. When battles are inevitable, we look to get the jump and make sure no half measures are ever used.

**Rule 5: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.** If opponents take liberties with us with impunity, they will take greater liberties next time. When necessary, we retaliate quickly against players they depend on.

# Competitiveness

## Work ethic

**This is a vague term, but to us it means the following:**

- 1) To out-compete your opponent, in all areas of toughness and hustle.
- 2) To work as hard in practice as you do in games.
- 3) To train off the ice as if your career depended upon it (it does!).
- 4) To step up your efforts when they are really needed. Frequently all it takes to win a game or a playoff series is to work a little harder for just a little longer than your opponent is willing to.
- 5) To do these things on a *consistent* basis.

# Individual System Fundamentals

**No system can be better than the players who are trying to execute it.** Our system begins at the level of the individual player. The concepts that we will discuss describe the traits of a smart and experienced player. Become a better and smarter player and you will be better able to help us implement our team systems and strategy.

**The concepts can be broken up into three categories:**

- 1. General**
- 2. Offensive**
- 3. Defensive**

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Be decisive:** Hesitation leads to doubt. Doubt leads to failure. When you decide to do something, *do it!* The first option that appears to you is usually the correct one. That is why you saw it first. Decisiveness is a trait of the confident player. Make your decision quickly and follow through on it with no regret. If you know your assignments, the wrong options will not appear to you.
- **Handle the puck with authority:** Whether you are shooting the puck, passing the puck, or clearing the puck, do it like you mean it. Goaltenders love shooters who let up at the last second to gauge their accuracy. Defensemen love soft passes they can intercept. Forecheckers love weak clearing attempts with which they can scoop up and create scoring chances. Don't make your opponent's job easy because you are soft with the puck.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Stop and start:** If you are playing a regular shift, the decision to stop and start rather than float around or make the big swing will present itself a minimum of fifty times a game. When you go into that momentary floating mode, you render yourself utterly ineffective. If you are ineffective for a matter of seconds fifty times a game, how useful can you be? The tenacious player starts and stops, stops and starts all over the ice. He is never out of a play or easy to beat. You can't play this way if your conditioning won't allow it.
- **Keep your feet moving:** When you stop moving your feet, you become much easier to defend. Your options diminish and your passing lanes disappear. If you are the defender, you must then resort to holding or hooking, thereby increasing the chance of taking a penalty. An astute player recognizes a checker whose feet stop moving and promptly takes a dive. The referee's decision seldom goes against the player who keeps his feet moving.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Communicate on the ice:** An effective team is constantly helping each other with loud vocal communication. Nobody can see everything at once. When trust develops between teammates, players make smarter decisions under pressure when they get timely information from a teammate. This includes the five skaters on the ice, the goaltender, and especially the bench. You don't even have to be on the ice to help your team.
- **Work hard to get into position, work even harder to stay in position:** Frequently a player will work hard to get to where he needs to be, and then leave that area simply because he is in motion already, or an opponent doesn't want him there. If play dictates that you are where you need to be, stay there any way you can, whether by simply stopping, slowing down, or battling for your territory.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Maintain positional balance:** No team needs three or more players in the same general vicinity. If you create an imbalance by pursuing the puck into an overloaded area, get in and get out quickly. The most frequent violation of this rule is three forwards burying themselves deep in the offensive zone giving up the odd man rush.
- **Run smart interference:** Holding up a forechecker for even a second can give a defenseman the extra time he needs to make an intelligent play. Setting a pick can spring an attacker for a shot. Screening a goaltender can result in a goal. Sometimes, you don't have to even touch the puck to set up a goal.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Be quick to the puck:** This applies to anyone who is trying to recover a loose puck, but especially defensemen going back into their own zone. The sooner you possess the puck, the more time you have to make an intelligent decision. Even if you have all of the time in the world, get to the puck as soon as possible to exploit the offensive opportunity that creates.
- **Close the gap both ways:** Defensemen should come up the ice quickly behind a rush, looking for opportunities to make themselves useful offensively, and being properly positioned to defend in the event of a turnover. Forwards should backcheck hard through the middle of the ice, positioning themselves to pick off attackers in the neutral zone and take advantage of a turnover. The idea is to outnumber your opponent up and down the ice. The team that can get up and down the ice as a five-man unit is seldom beaten cleanly.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Strive to win the battle convincingly:** When you attempt to merely avoid being beaten in a battle in the corner or around the net, you run the risk of being crushed by someone who wants to win convincingly. Try to humble and disgrace your opponent in every confrontation, and you will seldom be beaten.
- **Make yourself useful at all times:** There has never been nor will there ever be even one moment in a hockey game where you cannot contribute to the situation by checking someone, driving to the net, positioning yourself better, etc. Be a participant rather than a spectator. Be a controlling factor every second you are on the ice.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Bear down:** What is the point of putting together a series of nice passes only to have the shooter miss the net by five feet? Professional players are expected to have a certain degree of mental toughness under pressure. The closer you get to scoring a goal or clearing the puck from our zone the more intense you need to be. Bear down at the last instant, not let up.
- **Take the pressure option:** When you must decide between an aggressive or passive course of action, the aggressive course usually will yield more dividends. Pressure causes mistakes. Take the course that requires your opponent to make the quicker decision.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## General

- **Trust the system:** When you deviate from it, you are pitting your instantaneous decision against a system of common hockey sense developed over a century. A player who follows the system consistently is often a hero and seldom the goat. Let the system do your thinking for you and you will quickly earn the trust of your coaches and all the playing time that you want.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Offensive

- **Get the puck to the net:** The good goal scorer has usually decided to shoot before the puck even reaches his stick. Not only that, he has his body positioned for a quick release. How often do you see a fifty-goal scorer pass the puck when he is twenty feet away from the net? On a team level, consider this: on average, for every ten shots you take, you will generate another five shots in rebound chances; for every ten passes you make while in scoring position, five of them will never result in a shot. What's better, fifteen or five?
- **Drive hard to the net with and without the puck:** The closer you get to your opponent's net, the more likely you are to cause a bad decision by a defender. Driving the opponent's net with speed and determination takes pressure off the puck-carrier and might make the difference in him getting away a quality shot. Players that drive hard to the net are hard to defend and dangerous. Players that pull up hoping for the perfect feed are susceptible to backcheckers and generally regarded as perimeter players. When you drive hard to the net you turn a Grade B chance into a Grade A chance.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Offensive

- **Drive wide with the puck:** At competitive levels of hockey, even slow-footed defensemen are almost never beaten to the inside. Inside moves usually result in a turnover. If you drive wide with the puck, you gain territory, you spread their defense out, you risk no turnover, and a slower defenseman is very vulnerable. This action combined with another forward driving straight to the net will always produce a scoring chance.
- **Head man the puck:** When a teammate is ahead of you and open, give him the puck! When you advance the puck quickly, your opponents must shift their attention to the new puck-carrier. You or a teammate is then free to jump to a new hole created by that shift. Every time your opponents shift coverage, they have a chance to make a bad decision. If a teammate that is ahead of you and open has to slow down to avoid an offside, you have effectively ended the rush by your indecisiveness.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Offensive

- **Use the backhand when appropriate:** Don't telegraph your intentions by using a forehand pass when the backhand is called for. It usually takes a series of well timed passes to spring a man for a scoring opportunity but one good backhand pass might be all it takes, since opponents tend to cheat to the forehand side, and the backhand pass is usually not expected.
- **Come back hard to join the attack:** Thirty to forty times in a game your team will have the chance to regroup with possession of the puck and start an attack. The effective regroup includes all five men, coming back hard to receive a short pass, filling all three lanes with speed. The five man regroup goes a long way to foiling trapping schemes that depend on your puck-carrier having too few options and a few of your forwards being uninvolved.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Offensive

- **Don't force what isn't there:** You can't be too eager to make something happen that isn't there. Putting the puck through sticks and skates, or forcing a teammate to pass to you before you go offside even though the lane is not open are two examples of this. Be patient when you need to be.
- **Find open ice immediately:** When you skate the puck into open ice, you draw someone from the space they just occupied. This creates a hole for a teammate to jump into. Repeat this process a few times successfully, and you are threatening to score.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Offensive

- **Support the puck-carrier:** Take every opportunity to give your teammate an extra option with the puck. If you can give a teammate the option to make a short pass to someone with speed, he doesn't have to clear it thereby giving up possession. Teams that support the man with the puck keep possession of the puck. Teams that do not support the man with the puck are constantly turning it over.
- **Don't overextend time and space:** When you have time and space to handle the puck or make a play then make the best play you can. But when you don't have time or space, you must move the puck to safety rather than commit a dangerous turnover. If you are over the red line, this usually means a dump-in. If you are not over the red line, this usually means off the boards.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Play the man, or play the puck, but don't try to do both:** In every battle over a puck, there is a right decision and a wrong one. Most of the time, the right decision is to play the man with no regard to the puck. Sometimes, the right decision is to play the puck with no regard to the man. Seldom if ever does a combination of playing the man and the puck prove to be effective. When you elect to play the man, take him out decisively with the intention of punishing him. When you elect to play the puck, bear down and give it a ride.
- **Keep the puck out of the middle of the ice unless you're sure:** When you throw the puck up for grabs in the middle of the ice it is at best a fifty-fifty proposition, and your team is usually unprepared to defend against a quick interception. You must be sure that your teammate can receive the puck cleanly with room to move with it. If you do not have a clean lane, use the boards.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Remain with your defensive commitment:** Nothing confuses your teammates more than when you are checking one man, and then you decide to check someone else. Every time this happens, someone must make a perfect read and immediately pick up the man you just abandoned. Of course, someone else must make a perfect read and pick up his man, and so on. Every time you pick up a man and stick with him, you make your teammates decision that much easier, and you eliminate the threat of the chain reaction breakdown.
- **Play the defensive side of the puck:** When you approach a confrontation from the defensive side, you assure yourself that your opponent does not have an open lane to your net. When you gamble and try to fish the puck out of a pile from the offensive side, you are taking a low percentage chance that usually results in trouble.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Get it out and get it in:** Effective teams do not give the puck up easily. You make your opponent's job easy when you feed their transition game by turning the puck over at the blue line. You make their job very easy when you set them up for scoring chances by handling the puck carelessly inside your own zone. You make their job hard when the only place they ever gain possession is deep in their own zone, 200 feet from your net. When you move the puck, know where it is going and who is likely to get it. Never move the puck backward unless you are very confident of a clean play.
- **Take smart angles:** The smart player takes away an opponent's options by angling him into an area of his choosing, applying pressure while cutting off passing lanes. Smart teammates can then anticipate his next move with far more accuracy and adjust accordingly. Most neutral zone and forechecking schemes depend upon the first forechecker to take a smart angle.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Swivel your head, don't stare at the puck:** Know what is going on around you at all times. When you stare at the puck, you can't know anything else about what is happening, especially behind you. Your peripheral vision is seldom as good as you think. Keep your head and eyes moving.
- **Protect your blue line:** When your opponent can skate the puck over your blue line, his options increase dramatically. He can move from side to side without putting someone else offside, he can hit any number of late attackers, and he can draw one or more of your teammates to him creating a breakdown. Avoid this situation by playing him before or at the blue line. His best and only option is to give up possession and dump it in, where they may or may not regain possession. If you are not minimizing the gap, this is hard to do.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Don't run at defensive trouble, let it come to you:** Why chase after someone who can't hurt you from the space he occupies? If you have defensive side positioning, you occupy the territory he wants. Be patient, let your defense firm up around you, and play him when he gets to you.
- **Do your job and trust your teammates to do theirs:** You can't do everything. When you take on more than one job you do none of them effectively. If you concentrate on your own assignment, everyone else can concentrate on theirs.
- **Be careful when you penetrate:** Puck pursuit is good, but one pass should never beat two men. If you are a defenseman, a bad pinch can cost you an odd man rush. When you step up, do it decisively and make sure you don't get burned. Get back before your return route disappears.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Focus on the immediate task at hand:** When you are doing a job that requires your undivided attention, give it just that. You can't do a good job checking an attacker on his way to your net if you are anticipating a turnover that may or may not occur. Commit 100% of your attention to the immediate task at hand, and you will perform that task well. Any less than that and you run the risk of being burned.
- **Take away time and space:** The less time and space an opponent has in which to make a play the less likely he is to make a good one. Get to your opponent quickly and play the body. Concede the time and space he has until you get there but when you do, he must be eliminated.

# Individual System Fundamentals

## Defensive

- **Take the extra step:** When approaching a situation, take the extra step necessary to arrive in a position of strength. By doing this, you concede your opponent an extra fraction of a second in which to make a play. What you gain is the opportunity to make a strong play instead of a weak one when you do get there.
- **Get off the ice before you are tired:** Even the best conditioned players have a tough time backchecking when they have been on the ice for over a minute. Instead of trying that extra rush when you are tired, get the puck over the red line and get to the bench. Come hard to the bench, so your replacement can get on the ice a fraction of a second sooner.

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