

## In Gretzky's Office

For those of you who weren't rabid hockey fans during the 80s and 90s, "Gretzky's office" refers to the area behind the net where Wayne used to set-up a lot of his goals and assists.

The area behind the net is a critical offensive tool that isn't used nearly enough in girls' hockey.

Let's look at the breakout first - after all, you've got to take care of the defensive end before you can worry about creating offense. Defensemen must learn to use the area behind the net as a safe haven. For example, if you are being chased by a forechecker, and you carry the puck behind the net while staying as close to the net as possible, the odds are that forechecker is going to get stuck behind you with no where to fit in between you and the net or, even better, they are going to get caught reaching with their stick to try to stop you, and will get called for a stick penalty (holding, slashing etc). Moving the puck behind the net on the breakout with a D to D pass or with a reverse allows players to move the puck away from pressure instead of banging the puck back into traffic - which is always frustrating for coaches to watch. In some ways, the net can act as a 3rd defenseman in the defensive zone and players must be taught how to use it effectively to relieve pressure.

In the offensive zone, using the back of the net to your advantage is critical when it comes to setting up scoring chances. If you decide to set up behind the net with the puck (one of Gretzky's favorite maneuvers), it forces the defensive team to chase you out with pressure which may open up seams to make a pass in front or to walk out in front of the net for a scoring chance. If they let you stand there, they must continue to watch you, which means that your teammates have the opportunity to find holes and seams in front of the net while the opposition is focused on the puck, instead of on them.

I like to use the area behind the net to change the point of attack with my teams. For example, if you have a player carrying the puck into the attacking zone but her teammates still have to catch up to the play, having her carry the puck behind the net allows for her teammates to jump in to support the puck. Again, this causes the other team to have to face their own net and become "puck focused" which should open up opportunities for the players on the weak side or for the defenseman to jump in behind the opposition for a scoring chance. Even just having a player drop below the goal-line off the far post when her teammates are cycling in the opposite corner gives them a good passing outlet and allows her to sneak in behind the play, which forces the defensive team to adjust if she gets the puck. There are many ways to use the back of the net to help create offense off face-offs, powerplays and in 5-on-5 situations, but it is something that must be taught and practiced. Since many young players today never had the chance to watch Gretzky set-up behind the net in his "office", coaches must teach them how to use the net to be creative and generate scoring chances.

Work Hard. Dream BIG. Be Creative.

Your friend and coach,

Kim