

Rink Map and Glossary

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see UK and England Rules.

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Overview

This is the map and the dictionary for everything else here. Every other document assumes you know where the half-wall is, what "weak-side" means, and why F1 is a job rather than a person — and every other document links here rather than re-explaining it.

Read it once end to end. After that, use it as a lookup. If a term appears anywhere in these documents and you are not certain what it means, it is defined here.

Two things are worth saying up front. First, **hockey's vocabulary is spatial** — almost every instruction you will ever be given is a location plus a reason. Learn the locations and the instructions start to make sense on their own. Second, **most location words are relative, not absolute**. "High", "low", "strong-side" and "defensive zone" all change meaning depending on which team you are on and where the puck is right now. That relativity is the single biggest source of beginner confusion, and it is dealt with explicitly below.

1. Rink dimensions, and why they matter

NHL / North American

Every NHL rink is the same size, and it is the size most North American rinks are built to.

Feature	NHL measurement	Metric
Overall	200 ft × 85 ft	60.96 m × 25.91 m
Corner radius	28 ft	8.53 m
Goal line to end boards	11 ft	3.35 m
Blue line to goal line	64 ft	19.51 m
Blue line to blue line (neutral zone)	50 ft	15.24 m
Boards height	40–48 in (ideal 42 in)	1.02–1.22 m
Glass above boards	8 ft at the ends, ≥6 ft along the sides	2.44 m / 1.83 m
Goal opening	6 ft wide × 4 ft high (Rule 2.1), 40 in deep (rink diagram, not Rule 2.1)	1.83 m × 1.22 m

(NHL Official Rules 2025-2026, Rules 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 2.1 and the official rink diagram.)

IIHF / international ("Olympic ice") — and the British base

If you play anywhere in Britain, this is your specification, not the NHL one above. Every level of the game here — the Elite League, the NIHL, English and Scottish recreational and junior hockey, university hockey and the GB national teams — runs on the IIHF Rule Book, amended locally. See UK and England Rules — and read the England Ice Hockey amendment in the next subsection before you take any figure in the table below as describing your rink.

The IIHF rulebook does not specify one size. It specifies a range. Rule 1.2 reads in full: *"The official size of the rink shall be 60m long and 26m to 30m wide. The corners shall be rounded in the arc of a circle with a radius of 7.0m to 8.50m. Any deviations from these dimensions for any IIHF competition require IIHF approval."*

Note what that last sentence does: under the IIHF book a deviation is not simply a smaller rink, it is something that needs **approval**. Note too that the **length is fixed at 60 m** — only the width is a range.

Feature	IIHF	In feet	Rule
Overall	60 m × 26–30 m	~196.9 ft × 85.3–98.4 ft	1.2
Corner radius	7.0–8.50 m	23.0–27.9 ft	1.2
Goal line to end boards	4.0 m	13.1 ft	1.5
Blue line to goal line	18.5 m	60.7 ft	Appendix VI (2250 cm from the end boards)
Neutral zone ($\frac{1}{4}$ of rink length)	15.0 m	49.2 ft	Appendix VI ($\frac{1}{4}$ L = 1500 cm)
Blue line width	30 cm	~12 in	1.5
Boards height	ideal 1.07 m	~42 in	1.3
Glass above boards	2.4 m behind each goal (extending at least 4.0 m from the goal line), 1.8 m along the sides	7.9 ft / 5.9 ft	1.3
Players' bench	10 m long × 1.50 m wide	~32.8 ft × 4.9 ft	3.1

(IIHF Official Rule Book 2025/26, Rules 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 3.1 and the Appendix VI "Rink Lines" infographic, whose measurements are all in centimetres.)

The classic "big ice" is the 30 m (98.4 ft) version — **13.4 ft wider than an NHL rink**. That is the sheet most European domestic leagues and most older Olympic tournaments used.

Don't assume "international" means "wide" any more. The 2026 Milano Cortina Olympic tournament was played on 60 m × 26 m ice — about three feet shorter and about four inches wider than an NHL rink. The 2010 Vancouver and 2022 Beijing Games also used NHL-sized sheets. The IIHF's position was that the difference is insignificant for safety and quality of play. So the wide sheet is now the exception at the top level, not the rule.

The consequence for anyone playing outside North America — Britain included — is that "IIHF-size" is not a size. Rule 1.2 sanctions everything from 26 m to 30 m wide, so two rinks that are both entirely legal can differ by more than thirteen feet across. Whatever your league's rulebook says, the sheet is a property of the building, not of the book. Measure it or ask, and read the next section.

The England Ice Hockey amendment — British rinks are outside the IIHF range

This is the single most important thing on this page for a British reader, and it is the reason you cannot take either table above as a description of your rink.

England Ice Hockey and the SIHA amend IIHF Rule 1 directly. Under the heading "*Rink size and eligibility*", the In-House Rules state: "*Rinks with a non-standard playing surface (below 56 m × 26 m) are authorised by the NGB for all levels of hockey*" — with three named rinks permitted only up to U16: **Sutton** in England, and **Coatbridge** and **Limekilns Road** in Scotland. The rule applies to all EIH and SIHA fixtures.

Read the numbers carefully, because they are not a relaxation of Rule 1.2 — they sit **outside** it:

- IIHF Rule 1.2 fixes the **length at 60 m**. It offers no shorter option at all. A sheet under **56 m** is at least four metres — over thirteen feet — shorter than the only length the IIHF book recognises, and shorter than an NHL rink too (200 ft is 60.96 m).
- **26 m is the IIHF minimum width**. "Below 56 m × 26 m" is therefore below the narrowest legal international sheet. Note that 26 m is 85.30 ft, so even the IIHF's *minimum* width is fractionally **wider** than a full NHL rink at 85 ft — a legal international sheet is never narrower than an NHL one. Where the IIHF sheet gives way is length: 60 m against the NHL's 200 ft (60.96 m). A British rink authorised below 56 m × 26 m is therefore short of the **IIHF** book on both dimensions, and short of the **NHL** on length — but not necessarily on width, because 85 ft is 25.91 m, so a sheet just under the British 26 m threshold can still be wider than an NHL rink. Note also that 56 m is a British threshold, not an IIHF one.

So the practical position for a British player is blunt: **your working assumption should be that your rink is smaller than both the NHL standard and the IIHF standard, and that the geometry stated elsewhere in this corpus does not describe the building you are standing in**. Everything downstream of rink size — how long a rim takes to come round, how far the half-wall is from the slot, how much room there is behind the net, whether a stretch pass is even available — shifts with it.

Two things about how far that goes:

- **The two British sources word the authorisation differently, and it matters**. The In-House Rules read as blanket and standing — non-standard surfaces "*are authorised*" by the NGB "*for all levels of hockey*", with three venues named as the **exception to** that authorisation rather than as examples of it. But England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 22.2 says such rinks "*may be approved by EIH to be used for all levels of hockey*", which is the language of approval on application, and names only Sutton. **The corpus does not**

resolve which governs. The inference that sub-standard sheets are the ordinary case rather than the awkward one follows from the In-House wording and from a governing body not writing a rule in that shape for a handful of buildings — but it is an inference, and no published count of British rink dimensions exists to test it.

- **There is still no published census of British rink dimensions**, so nothing here tells you the distribution — how many rinks, or how far below. The rule tells you what to expect; it does not tell you what yours measures. That remains something to go and look at.

The In-House Rules amend the benches in the same section: the home club or venue operator must provide players' benches and penalty boxes that, "*within the fixed constraints of the rink, conform as closely as reasonably practicable to IIHF dimensions and layout*", and any unavoidable deviation must be "*communicated to both teams and the officials prior to warm-up*" (In-House Rules, Rule 3). The phrase "*the fixed constraints of the rink*" is the same admission from the other direction.

UK and England Rules owns the full list of England Ice Hockey amendments; this document owns the geometry.

What the extra width actually changes

If you move from an 85 ft sheet to a 98 ft sheet, five things change in ways you will feel within one shift:

- **The corners get bigger and further from the net.** A puck rimmed into the corner is a longer retrieval, a longer forecheck sprint, and a longer pass back to the middle. Dump-and-chase is less rewarding.
- **The half-wall is further from the slot.** A pass from the wall to the middle takes longer to arrive, which gives defenders time to close. Offensive-zone play tends to be more perimeter-based and more patient.
- **Angling an attacker to the boards stops being a kill shot.** On narrow ice, the wall is your second defender. On wide ice, an attacker forced outside still has room to keep skating, so gap control and stick position matter more than steering.
- **Backchecking distance goes up.** Cross-ice recovery is longer, so weak-side coverage is harder and late attackers arrive more freely.
- **The neutral zone stays almost the same length.** NHL 50 ft versus IIHF 15.0 m (49.2 ft) — effectively identical. What changes is width, not length, so neutral-zone traps that rely on squeezing the width of the ice get much harder to run.

The reverse also holds: coming from wide ice to narrow ice, you have far less time on the wall, and simple quick plays beat clever slow ones.

One genuine asymmetry worth knowing: the IIHF goal line is 4.0 m from the end boards, the NHL goal line is 11 ft (3.35 m). There is about **two feet more room behind the net** on international ice, which makes wrap-arounds, behind-the-net possession and D-to-D behind the net slightly easier there.

Rec rinks are not standard, and it matters

Most recreational, beer-league, youth and older community rinks are **not** built to either specification. Common variations, and what they do to you:

- **Short sheets** (170–190 ft). The neutral zone is compressed; there is barely any time between the blue lines. Stretch passes and regroupings mostly stop working; quick chips and immediate forechecking work better.
- **Narrow sheets** (65–80 ft). Everything happens faster and closer. Cross-ice passes are far more available, but so are the sticks trying to intercept them.
- **Missing markings.** Many rec rinks have no trapezoid at all, no neutral-zone dots, or faceoff circles painted to a different radius. If the trapezoid isn't painted, that is a strong hint your league isn't enforcing it — a hint, not a ruling, since the rule turns on the position of the puck rather than the markings — which changes your goaltender's job completely (see Goaltender and Breakouts).
- **Boards and glass in poor repair.** Dead spots in the boards eat rims. Learn your home rink's dead spots; they are a real tactical asset.

Practical instruction: on the first shift at an unfamiliar rink, deliberately check three things — how far it is from the goal line to the end boards, whether the trapezoid is painted, and how the puck comes off the corner boards on a rim. Those three answers change your breakout.

If you play in Britain, assume nothing from the diagrams here until you have looked — and note that in Britain this is not a rec-rink caveat, it is the governing body's own position. British hockey runs the IIHF rulebook at every level (see UK and England Rules), Rule 1.2 sanctions any sheet from 26 m to 30 m wide, and England Ice Hockey then authorises rinks *below* 56 m × 26 m for all levels on top of that. So "we play IIHF rules" tells you which penalties get called and tells you nothing at all about the ice — and unlike a North American beer-league rink, a British sub-standard sheet is running the full IIHF rule book on it — with one exception whose status is genuinely unsettled, the trapezoid (see below). The England Ice Hockey amendment above has the wording and the three named rinks; the three checks above take one shift and are worth more than any published figure.

2. The full-rank map

Both diagrams in this document are **schematic, not to scale**. They are there to fix the relationships between markings in your head, not to be measured.



Note how much of the rink is *behind* the goal line. That strip — 11 ft in the NHL, **4.0 m (13.1 ft)** **under IIHF Rule 1.5** — is live playing surface, and a large fraction of offensive-zone possession happens there.

3. The lines and markings, and what each one does

The goal line

A **2-inch red line drawn all the way across the ice**, 11 ft from the end boards, with the goal frame standing on it (NHL Rule 1.5). **Under IIHF Rule 1.5 — the British book — it is a 5 cm red line drawn 4.0 m from each end and continued vertically up the boards.** It is one of the most consequential lines on the rink because so many rules key off it:

- A goal is scored when the puck **completely crosses** the goal line between the posts and under the crossbar.
- **Icing** is judged by the puck crossing the goal line (the whole line, boards to boards — not just the goalmouth).
- The **trapezoid** restricts your goaltender only *behind* the goal line.
- Coaches use "**below the goal line**" as shorthand for the area behind the net, which is a distinct tactical space with its own rules of thumb.

The blue lines

Two **12-inch-wide blue lines**, drawn 64 ft out from each goal line, dividing the ice into three zones (NHL Rule 1.5). **Under IIHF Rule 1.5 they are 30 cm wide — the same foot — and sit 18.5 m out from each goal line** (Appendix VI puts them 22.50 m from the end boards). They are the widest lines on the ice, and the width is not decorative — it exists because offside is judged against the *whole* line.

What the blue lines do:

- **They define offside.** You are offside only when **both skates** have completely crossed the line into the attacking zone before the puck has completely crossed it. One skate on the line or behind it keeps you onside. A skate in the air over the neutral zone counts as onside **under NHL and IIHF rules — but not under USA Hockey, whose Rule 630(a) requires skate contact with the neutral zone or the blue line.** And the **puck** must completely cross too — until it has, the line is still live. See Rules Primer and Zone Entries.

- **They are where defencemen live in the offensive zone** — see "the point" below.
- **They are the reference for the "tag up" reset** on a delayed offside.

Because the line is 12 inches wide and the rule requires *complete* crossing, attackers deliberately drag a trail skate on the line while their body and stick get ahead of it. That is not a trick; it is the rule working as designed. Dragging the blade **in contact** works under all three rule sets; lifting it works under the NHL and IIHF but is offside under USA Hockey (Rule 630(a)).

The centre red line

A **12-inch red line** across the middle of the ice, marked with a distinctive pattern so it can never be mistaken for a blue line (NHL Rule 1.5). Its remaining jobs:

- **Icing** is measured from it: a puck shot from your own half, crossing the opponent's goal line untouched, is icing.
- To nullify a potential icing, a teammate must "**gain the line**" — the puck must contact the centre red line **on a stick**, not a skate.
- It is the conventional reference for gap control ("close to about a stick-and-a-half by the red line").

The centre red line is **no longer a passing restriction** in the NHL. The two-line pass rule was abolished by a playing-rule change for the 2005-06 season, adopted alongside the new Collective Bargaining Agreement rather than by it (a CBA is a labour agreement and does not set playing rules), so the centre line is no longer used to determine an offside pass — which is why the **stretch pass** exists as a weapon at all.

The goal crease ("the blue paint")

In the NHL the crease is built as follows (Rule 1.7): a 2-inch red line runs **1 ft outside each goal post**, extending **4 ft 6 in** straight out at right angles to the goal line, and the two straight sides are joined by a **6 ft radius arc** struck from the centre of the goal line. So it is **8 ft wide at the goal line and 6 ft deep at its deepest point**. The enclosed area is painted light blue and — importantly — the crease is a **volume**, not a patch of ice: it extends **4 ft vertically**, to the height of the top of the goal frame.

There are also two small **5-inch marks** on the inside of the crease lines, 4 ft out from the goal line. Those are the goaltender's reference marks, not player restraining lines.

IIHF (Rules 1.5 and 1.7 — the British book): the crease is essentially the same shape at metric sizes — 2.45 m wide at the goal line, marked in 5 cm red line, and "*the marked line*"

belongs to the Goal Crease." One real difference: Rule 1.7 says the Goal Crease Area *"includes all of the space outlined by the crease lines and extends vertically until the top of the crossbar"* — the top of the frame, rather than the NHL's fixed 4 ft.

Why it matters to you: the crease is the boundary of goaltender interference. Inside it, you must not impair the goalie's ability to make a save. Outside it, *incidental* contact is legal if you made a reasonable effort to avoid it. And **screening — standing outside the crease in the goalie's sightline without contact — is normally legal**. The limit is Rule 69.1: a goal is disallowed where an attacker *"either by his positioning or by contact, impairs the goalkeeper's ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal"* — positioning alone can be enough. Live at the edge of the paint, not in it. See Winger and Offensive Zone Play.

The referee's crease

A **10 ft radius red semicircle** on the ice in front of the Penalty Timekeeper's seat (NHL Rule 1.7). Players may not enter or remain in it while the referee is reporting to the off-ice officials — doing so is a misconduct under Rule 39.4. It is the one marking on the rink with no tactical purpose whatsoever; it exists so officials can do paperwork without being surrounded.

IIHF calls it the **On-Ice Officials' Crease** and marks it with a 3.0 m radius (Rule 1.7).

The faceoff spots and circles — all nine

There are **nine faceoff locations** on the ice. Every stoppage results in a draw at one of them.

#	Name	Location (NHL)	Circle?
1	Centre ice dot	Exact centre of the rink; 12-inch blue spot	Yes — 15 ft radius blue circle
2-3	Neutral-zone dots, defensive-zone end	5 ft outside your own blue line, 44 ft apart	No
4-5	Neutral-zone dots, offensive-zone end	5 ft outside the attacking blue line, 44 ft apart	No
6-7	End-zone dots, one end	20 ft out from the goal line, 22 ft either side of the centre of the goal	Yes — 15 ft radius red circle
8-9	End-zone dots, other end	Same	Yes

(NHL Rule 1.9. The end-zone spot location is fixed as "along a line twenty feet from each goal line and parallel to it, mark two points twenty-two feet on both sides of the straight line joining the centre of the two goals.")

The **four neutral-zone dots have no circles** — just 2 ft red spots. That is deliberate: neutral-zone draws are meant to restart play quickly with everyone spread out, so there is no restraining circle.

How players name them in conversation:

- **"Centre ice"** or **"the middle dot"** — the opening draw of each period and every draw after a goal.
- **"Our end"** / **"their end"**, then a side: *"D-zone draw, bench side"* or *"O-zone draw, far side."* "Bench side" means the half of the ice your players' bench is on; "far side" is the other. This is the most common way to specify an end-zone draw, because your bench side determines who can change.
- **"Outside the blue"** or **"neutral-zone dot"** for the four dots flanking the blue lines.
- **"Strong-side dot"** / **"weak-side dot"** when the puck is already in play near one of them.

IIHF equivalents (Rule 1.9 and Appendix VI) — the operative set in Britain: centre spot 30 cm across with a 4.50 m radius blue circle; neutral-zone spots 60 cm across, 1.50 m from each blue line and 14.0 m apart; end-zone spots 6.0 m from the goal line and 7.0 m either side of centre, with 4.50 m radius red circles. Functionally identical geometry, metricated — the count is the same nine, and the four neutral-zone spots have no circles there either.

Hash marks

The **hash marks** are the short lines outside each end-zone faceoff circle. In the NHL they are two red lines, 2 inches wide and **2 ft long, placed 5 ft 7 in apart**, at the outer edge of each side of the circle, running parallel to the goal line (Rule 1.9). Four per circle — one pair on the boards side, one pair on the middle-of-the-ice side, both roughly level with the dot.

They exist to keep players apart on a draw. **Encroachment into the area between the hash marks before the puck is dropped is a faceoff violation** — Rule 76.7(ii) lists it verbatim: *"Encroachment by any player into the area between the hash marks on the outer edges of the face-off circle prior to the puck being dropped."* And — this is the part that catches people out — a winger who creeps over the hash marks gets **the centre** thrown out of the dot, not themselves.

They are also the single most useful landmark in the defensive zone, because coaches use them constantly as a depth reference: "**below the hash marks**" means the low half of the zone; "**above the hash marks**" means the high half.

There is a second, smaller set of markings you may not have noticed: an L-shaped pair of lines 1 ft outside each faceoff spot, 4 ft long and 18 in apart, with a 2 ft 10 in foot at the end. Those are the **restraining lines** for the two centres' skates on a draw, and standing wrong on them is itself a faceoff violation.

IIHF (Rule 1.9): hash marks are 5 cm wide, 60 cm long and 1.70 m apart, at the outer edge of both sides of each circle and parallel to the goal line. The centres' restraining lines start 30 cm out from the spot and are 1.20 m long, 45 cm apart, with a 90 cm foot.

The trapezoid (goalkeeper's restricted area)

The trapezoid is the marked area behind each net inside which the goaltender is allowed to play the puck.

Current NHL markings (Rule 1.8 and the official rink diagram): the lines begin **7 ft outside each side of the goal crease — 8 ft from each goal post** — and run diagonally back to points **11 ft from each goal post** at the end boards. In plain numbers: **22 ft wide along the goal line, widening to 28 ft at the end boards**, and 11 ft deep.

Two rules, two different numbers — flagged because you will see both quoted. Neither is self-contradictory; 27.8 simply describes the older, narrower trapezoid. Rule 1.8 and the official rink diagram give 8 ft from each post (22 ft at the goal line). Rule **27.8**, the penalty rule, still reads "lines that begin six feet (6') from either goal post" — the pre-2014 dimension. The trapezoid was **widened by two feet on each side for the 2014-15 season** at the NHLPA's request, to give defencemen more retrieval help; Rule 27.8 appears not to have been updated to match. Treat **8 ft / 22 ft** as the painted reality and the diagram as authoritative.

The rule itself: the goaltender may only play the puck behind the goal line inside this area. Playing it outside is a **two-minute minor for delay of game**. The position of the puck is the determining factor. **The sole exception is a goaltender playing the puck while maintaining skate contact with the goal crease** — there is no teammate-based exception. This document owns the geometry; the **penalty** (Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii)) belongs to Rules Primer, and what it means for the goalie who has to live inside it is in Goaltender.

Where it applies: the NHL (since 2005-06), the KHL, and IIHF play (since the unified 2021-22 rulebook). **Most North American rec, beer-league and youth associations do not use it.** Find out which you are under, because it changes your defencemen's retrieval game completely.

Britain is not covered by that "most rec leagues don't" line, and this is the trap. EIH, SIHA and BUIHA competition — recreational and junior hockey included — runs the IIHF Rule Book, and the In-House Rules amend Rule 1 only on rink size and benches. They do not touch Rule 1.8 or Rule 27.7. **So on the In-House Rules alone the goalkeeper's restricted area would be live at every level of British hockey**, including the levels where a North American reader would reasonably assume it isn't — but England Ice Hockey's own *Rules & Regulations* suspend it, and that is the next paragraph. See UK and England Rules.

IIHF — the operative geometry for a British player. Rule 1.8: "*Behind each goal, a trapezoidal area is marked on the ice surface, called the 'Goalkeeper Designated Area'. The two 5cm-wide red lines mark the restricted area between the goal line and the boards behind the goal. The outside dimension of the marking along the goal line is 6.80m and along the boards is 8.60m.*" Against the NHL's 22 ft (6.71 m) and 28 ft (8.53 m) that is four inches and three inches — trivially different. The area is *deeper*, though, simply because the IIHF goal line is 4.0 m from the boards rather than 11 ft. **Note the one place the IIHF book is tidier than the NHL's:** IIHF Rule 27.7, which sets the penalty, restates the *current* 6.80 m / 8.60 m dimensions, so unlike NHL Rule 27.8 it does not leave a superseded figure sitting in the penalty rule. It also carries the same sole exception in terms — "*The minor penalty will not be assessed when a goalkeeper plays the puck while maintaining skate contact with their goal crease.*" For a player under IIHF rules, the shape is the shape you already know.

One thing this document cannot tell you. The In-House Rules authorise British rinks below 56 m × 26 m without saying how the markings are laid out on a sheet that short — and the trapezoid's depth is set by the 4.0 m goal line, which a shortened rink may not have room for. **Nothing in the IIHF book or the In-House Rules establishes what a sub-standard British rink's trapezoid actually measures**, so this is one more thing to look at rather than assume. **And in England and Wales it may not be a live rule at all — though nothing in the In-House Rules suspends it for SIHA or BUIHA hockey.** England Ice Hockey's own *Rules & Regulations* (2024-2025), Rule 22.3, reads: "*Goalkeepers' Restricted Area is not currently enforced to allow ice rinks the necessary time to make the changes to implement this rule.*" That is the governing body suspending the IIHF rule domestically, and it explains the missing paint — a rink that has never marked a trapezoid is not in breach.

Treat the status as unsettled rather than resolved either way. The non-enforcement is stated in the 2024-2025 edition of the *Rules & Regulations*; the 2025-26 In-House Rules, which are the current playing-rule amendments, do not mention the restricted area at all. So it is not clear from the published documents whether the suspension still stands. Ask your league before assuming either that your goaltender is free behind the net or that they are not. UK and England Rules records the same uncertainty.

Tactically, the trapezoid is why dump-and-chase works. A puck rimmed into the corner cannot be calmly collected by the goaltender; a defenceman has to go and get it with a forechecker arriving.

Aim your dump-ins away from the trapezoid.

The boards, the glass, and the benches

- **The boards** (also "**the wall**") are 40–48 inches high, ideally 42. They are in play: the puck off the boards is live, and a skilled player uses the wall as a passing partner.
- **The glass** is 8 ft above the boards at the ends and at least 6 ft along the sides. "Off the glass and out" is a legal, always-available clearing option.
- **The players' benches** are both on the **same side of the ice**, opposite the penalty benches, each about 24 ft long, seating at least 14. The **penalty benches sit in the neutral zone**, on opposite sides of the timekeeper. **IIHF Rule 3.1 says each bench "should be 10m in length and 1.50m in width"** — a longer bench than the NHL's, and "should" rather than "shall". In Britain the In-House Rules soften it further, to "*as closely as reasonably practicable*" within the rink's fixed constraints (see the England Ice Hockey amendment in §1).
- **The change zone:** a player leaving the ice must be **within 5 ft of their own bench and out of the play** before their replacement steps on, or it is a bench minor for too many men (Rule 74.1). IIHF marks a defined 1.5 m "changing zone" on the ice for the same purpose.

Because both benches are on one side, one half of the ice is the "**bench side**" and the other is the "**far side**". This is a real tactical fact, not trivia: changing is safe on the bench side and dangerous on the far side, and coaches call faceoff plays differently depending on which side the draw is.

4. The three zones — and the thing that confuses every beginner

The two blue lines divide the ice into three zones. The NHL rulebook names them from the perspective of one team (Rule 1.6 and the Glossary of Terms):

- **Defending zone** — the zone containing the goal your team is defending. It runs from your own blue line to the end boards behind your own net.
- **Neutral zone** — the centre ice area between the two blue lines. Neither defending nor attacking.
- **Attacking zone** — the zone containing the goal you are attacking, from the opponent's blue line to the end boards behind their net.

Here is the part that confuses everyone: the zones are named relative to your team, not to the building. The same physical piece of ice is *your* defensive zone and *their* offensive zone, simultaneously. Nothing about the ice changes; the label depends on who is speaking.

Two consequences you must internalise:

1. **"Offensive zone" and "defensive zone" swap ends every period.** Teams change ends after each period, so the end you defended in the first is the end you attack in the second. The label follows the team, not the paint.
2. **When a teammate or coach says "get it deep," you have to know whose zone they mean.** In practice, hockey speakers almost always mean *their own team's* perspective. If in doubt, use the unambiguous terms: **"our end"** / **"their end"**, or **"end zone"** for either.

Some documents and commentators use **"offensive zone"** where the rulebook says "attacking zone", and **"D-zone"** as shorthand for defending zone. All three are common; they mean the same thing.

The zone includes its blue line. For offside purposes the puck is not in the attacking zone until it has *completely* crossed the line, and a player standing on the line is not yet in the zone. That is why the line is painted a foot wide.

"End zone" is the neutral term for either zone that contains a net — useful precisely because it carries no ownership.

5. Named areas of the ice

This diagram is a close-up of **one end zone**, with the blue line at the top and the end boards at the bottom. Schematic, not to scale.

Why it matters: more goals are scored from here than from everywhere else combined. It is the shortest route to the net and the widest angle on it. Everything in defensive-zone coverage is ultimately about who is standing in the slot, and everything in offensive-zone play is ultimately about getting a puck and a body there at the same time.

The slot is layered, and the layers have different jobs:

The high slot

Where: the upper part of the slot — from the level of the **faceoff dots** up to the **top of the circles**.

Why it matters: this is the shooting layer. A player unmarked here gets a clean look with time to pick a corner, and a puck arriving here from the half-wall is a one-timer. In a low zone collapse (zone) defensive system — the house default across these documents — the high slot belongs to the centre, or to the weak-side winger collapsing down when the centre goes to help in the corner.

The low slot

Where: the lower part of the slot — from the dots down toward the goalmouth, outside the crease.

Why it matters: tips, rebounds, and screen position. Shots from here go in at a far higher rate than shots from anywhere else, and defenders cannot let anyone stand unmarked in it. This is the ice a net-front player fights for.

The goalmouth

Where: the immediate front of the net, at the edge of the crease — a much smaller area than the low slot.

Why it matters: it is where tap-ins and jam plays happen. In the house default coverage, the **weak-side defenceman** owns it and does not leave it. Getting "goalmouth" and "slot" mixed up is one of the most common causes of a blown assignment: they are two different jobs, one layer apart.

The "home plate" / high-danger area

Where: not an official marking — a shape used by analysts and increasingly by coaches. It runs along the goal line between the two faceoff dots, straight up the dot lines to about the top of the circles, then angles in to the net. Drawn out, it looks like a baseball home plate pointing at the blue line.

Why it matters: it is the working definition of a "high-danger chance." The exact boundaries vary a little between analytics providers (Natural Stat Trick, Evolving Hockey, MoneyPuck all draw it slightly differently), so treat it as a concept rather than a measurement. The concept is simple and worth having: **shots from inside home plate are worth several times a shot from outside it.** Take shots from inside; work the puck inside rather than shooting from outside.

The crease / "the paint"

Where: the light-blue area in front of the net, 8 ft wide and 6 ft deep, extending 4 ft upward.

Why it matters: it is the goaltender's space. "**Stay out of the paint**" is the instruction; "**live at the edge of the paint**" is the skill. See the crease section above for what is actually legal.

The corners

Where: the rounded ends of the rink beside and behind the net, outside the faceoff circles.

Why it matters: most loose-puck battles happen here. Corner possession is the start of nearly every offensive-zone cycle and nearly every defensive-zone breakout. On NHL-sized ice the corners are tight and a two-man forecheck can seal them; on wide ice they are much harder to seal.

The half-wall

Where: the boards **roughly level with the faceoff dot**, between the corner and the point. There is one on each side of each end zone.

Why it matters: it is the most important non-scoring area in the offensive zone. It is the natural distribution point — from here a player can see the point, the slot, the corner and the net-front, and every one of those passes is available. Wingers live here in offensive-zone possession; half-wall players are the two "wings" of a 1-3-1 power play.

"Half-wall" is not "the point." The point is at the blue line; the half-wall is level with the dot, roughly 20 ft from the goal line. Conflating them is a common error and it produces a real mistake — a defenceman drifting down to the half-wall has abandoned the blue line.

The boards / the wall

Where: the perimeter of the rink.

Why it matters: the wall is both a weapon and a trap. As a weapon, it is a passing partner (bank passes, chips, rims, glass-and-out clears). As a trap, a player pinned against it has no escape on

one side and can be sealed by a single forechecker. "**Get off the wall**" means stop battling and move the puck to open ice.

The point

Where: the area just inside the blue line, toward each set of boards, where the defencemen set up in the offensive zone. Two of them: the **strong-side point** (puck side) and the **weak-side point**.

Why it matters: it is the top of the offensive-zone structure. From the point you can shoot for tips and rebounds, walk laterally to open a lane, or feed either half-wall. Defensively, "**covering the point**" means denying the opposing defenceman time and space up there — normally a winger's job in a zone system.

Note the precision: "the point" is an *area*, not the blue line itself, and it is not the same as "high". A forward who rotates high is not "at the point" unless they are actually occupying that spot.

The top of the circle

Where: the edge of the faceoff circle closest to the blue line.

Why it matters: it is the standard depth marker for a defenceman supporting a cycle. Picture three depths in the offensive zone — just inside the blue line (default), top of the circle (the activated position, still recoverable), and **below the circles** (a commitment: you are a fourth forward, you cannot recover, and a forward must have taken the blue line for you *before* you went). "Step down to the top of the circle" is a specific, bounded instruction, which is why coaches use it. Offensive Zone Play owns these depths.

The dots

Where: the four end-zone faceoff spots. Used loosely to mean the depth-line they define across the zone.

Why it matters: "**above the dots**" and "**below the dots**" is how coaches split the zone in half. In a hybrid defensive system, for example, coverage is man-on-man **below the dots** and zone **above** them.

Behind the net

Where: the strip of ice between the goal line and the end boards.

Why it matters: it is the safest place in your own zone to compose yourself, because a turnover there produces no direct shot. It is also a pivot point in the offensive zone: a puck carrier who goes behind the net can emerge on either side, and the defence has to commit. In your own end, **carry behind the net rather than through the slot** — always.

"The office"

Where: behind and beside the opponent's net, in the offensive zone.

Why it matters: the name comes from Wayne Gretzky, who set up there because the defence cannot easily pressure a player behind the net without opening the slot. It is a phrase you will hear in commentary and it means "attacking possession behind the goal line" — not the same as the neutral space "behind the net" in your own end.

The neutral-zone dots

Where: the four dots 5 ft outside each blue line, 44 ft apart.

Why it matters: they mark the standard lateral lanes for a neutral-zone setup. Defencemen defending the rush position roughly between them; forwards in a 1-2-2 neutral-zone forecheck align on them. Faceoffs land here after offside, after most neutral-zone stoppages, and after a whistle in the attacking zone.

The bench area

Where: both players' benches on the same side of the neutral zone; penalty benches opposite.

Why it matters: the bench side is where you change safely. The far side is where lines get caught. If you are stranded on the far side and tired, stay in position and finish the shift — a bad change is worse than a long shift.

The trapezoid

Where: behind the net, between the goal line and the end boards. See above for dimensions.

Why it matters: it defines which corners your goaltender can help you in — under NHL and IIHF rules, none of them. Aim your dump-ins outside it.

6. Directional and relational vocabulary

These words are used in every other document here. They are all **relative**, which is exactly what makes them hard at first and useful once they click.

High and low

- **High** = closer to the blue line you are facing, away from the net.
- **Low** = closer to the goal line, toward the net.

This holds in **all three zones**, and it is always relative to the net that matters in that moment. "Swing low in your own zone" means come down toward your own goal line. "Rotate high" means climb toward the blue line.

Related: "**third forward high**" means the third forward stays in the upper part of the zone as a safety valve. "**Low-to-high**" describes a pass from the corner or half-wall out to the point — the setup for most point shots.

Strong-side and weak-side

- **Strong-side** = the side of the ice the puck is currently on.
- **Weak-side** (also "**off-side**", "**back side**") = the opposite side.

These flip the instant the puck crosses the middle of the ice, which is why defencemen have to talk constantly: one is always the strong-side defender (on the puck) and the other the weak-side defender (at the goalmouth), and they trade those jobs several times a shift.

The **backdoor** is the weak-side net-front area — the most dangerous unmarked space in hockey, because a player arriving there is behind the goaltender's field of view.

Inside and outside

- **Inside** = toward the middle of the ice; also, "on the inside of" an opponent means between them and your net.
- **Outside** = toward the boards.

"**Get to the inside**" is a defensive instruction: put your body between your check and the net. "**Force them outside**" is the same idea applied to the puck carrier: take away the middle so the only route is to the wall.

The middle of the ice is where goals come from, so the whole defensive game reduces to: **be inside, force them outside**.

North-south and east-west

- **North-south** = up and down the ice, goal to goal. Direct, fast, low-risk.
- **East-west** = across the ice, boards to boards. Slower, higher-risk, but it moves the defence.

"A north-south player" plays direct and straight. "Too much east-west" is a criticism — passing sideways lets the defence reset. But east-west movement is also what beats a set defence, so the useful version is: **north-south to gain ice, east-west to break structure once you're there.**

Defensive side of the puck, and above/below the puck

- **On the defensive side of the puck** = between the puck (or your check) and your own net. If an opponent is between you and your net, you are on the wrong side and cannot defend anything.
- **Above the puck** = between the puck and the blue line you are defending — i.e. in a position to stop a counter-attack.
- **Below the puck** = closer to the net than the puck is; committed, and unable to help against a rush the other way.

The universal rule of thumb: **at least one player is always above the puck.** In the offensive zone that is usually a defenceman at the point plus the high forward; in the defensive zone it is whoever has not committed to the battle. "Everyone below the puck" is the single most reliable way to concede an odd-man rush.

Wide and middle

- **Wide** = out near the boards, in the outside lane. "Beaten wide" means an attacker got around you on the outside.
- **Middle** = the central lane. "Middle drive" means a forward attacking the central lane on a rush; "take away the middle" means close that lane and force the play wide.

Note the asymmetry: **wide is safe for you and bad for them.** A shot from wide is a low-percentage shot; a pass to the middle from wide is a high-percentage play. That is why defenders force wide but keep a stick in the middle passing lane.

7. Positions and shorthand

The six positions

Code	Position	Notes
C	Centre	Takes faceoffs, covers the middle in all three zones, the most demanding two-way role
LW	Left wing	Left-side forward
RW	Right wing	Right-side forward
LD	Left defence	Left-side defenceman
RD	Right defence	Right-side defenceman
G	Goaltender / goalie	The only player allowed to freeze the puck

Five skaters and a goaltender per side at even strength. An NHL team dresses **20 players — 18 skaters and 2 goaltenders** (Rule 5.1), normally organised as four forward lines and three defence pairs.

Note that "**defender**", "**defenceman**", "**defenseman**" and "**D**" all mean the same position and all appear throughout, as do "**centre**" and "**center**".

F1 / F2 / F3 — roles, not people

F1, F2 and F3 are jobs defined by order of arrival, not by position. This is the most important piece of shorthand in hockey and the most commonly misunderstood.

- **F1** = the first forward to the puck. Pressures it.
- **F2** = the second forward in. Supports, seals the escape route F1 has taken away.
- **F3** = the third forward. Stays higher as the safety valve and covers the counter.

If the centre is usually F1 on a forecheck but a winger gets there first, **the winger is F1 and the centre takes the support role**. Nobody swaps positions; they swap jobs. Teams that treat F1 as "the centre's job" end up with two players chasing and nobody high.

The "third forward high" is the same idea named from the other direction: whoever is F3 stays above the puck. Which body it is changes shift to shift.

D-partner and defence pairs

Your **D-partner** is the other defenceman on your shift. Pairs are usually kept together because the pair's whole job is a two-role rotation: one on the puck, one at the net front, trading continuously.

D-to-D means a pass between partners — and the rule about it is: never through the slot. Go behind your own net.

Forward lines

A **line** is a set of three forwards (LW, C, RW) who play together. Lines are numbered by role: the first line takes the most offensive minutes, the fourth is typically an energy and defensive-matchup line. "**Changing as a unit**" means the whole line goes off together, which is what keeps the structure intact.

Left-shot, right-shot, and why a defenceman's handedness picks their side

A **left-shot** player holds the stick with the left hand low, so the puck sits on their left; a **right-shot** is the mirror. This is about which side of your body the puck lives on — it has nothing to do with whether you write with your left or right hand.

For defencemen, handedness normally determines the side:

- **A left-shot defenceman plays left defence; a right-shot plays right defence.** On your natural side, the puck is on the **inside** of your body — between you and the middle of the ice — when you face the play along your boards.
- **Retrieving pucks behind your own net comes to your forehand**, which means you can pass out of the corner immediately rather than turning your back to the play.
- **D-to-D passes and shots from the point are on your forehand**, so you can move the puck across the line quickly and take a one-timer.
- **You can defend the wall with your body between the attacker and the middle**, with your stick in the passing lane.

Playing your **off-side** (a left-shot on right defence) is common and not a disaster — plenty of NHL defencemen do it, and it gives you a better angle for cutting to the middle and for defending pucks along the wall on your forehand. But your retrievals and D-to-D passes come to your backhand, which costs a beat. Analysis of NHL pairings has generally found that pairs with each defenceman on their natural side perform better than pairs with someone on their off-side, and that is why coaches build pairs left-shot/right-shot when they can.

For **forwards** the convention is looser. Many wingers deliberately play the **off wing** (a left-shot on right wing), because it puts the puck on the inside for cutting to the net and opens up the one-timer from the circle. On the power play, the off-wing half-wall is standard.

8. Glossary

One or two sentences each. Terms in **bold** inside a definition are defined elsewhere in this list.

Activation — a defenceman joining the attack as an extra forward. Only legal tactically if a forward back-fills so someone stays **above the puck**.

Backcheck — racing back toward your own end to defend after your team loses the puck. *Not the same as forecheck*, which is pressure applied in the opponent's end.

Backdoor — the **weak-side** net-front area. A backdoor pass goes cross-ice to a player arriving there unmarked, behind the goaltender's line of sight.

Board battle — a contest for a loose puck against the boards. Won with body position and leverage far more often than with strength.

Boards (also **the wall**) — the perimeter wall around the rink, 40–48 inches high. Always in play.

Breakout — your team's structured exit from your own zone with possession. Common options: up the wall, **wheel**, D-to-D, **reverse**, **rim**, or off the glass. See Breakouts.

Bumper — the player in the **middle** of a **1-3-1** power play, sitting in the slot between the point and the net-front player. *Not the same as the net-front* player, who is at the goalmouth. A true **umbrella** has no bumper.

Chip — a short, deliberate flip of the puck past a defender into space, usually off the boards or the glass, for a teammate to skate onto.

Cycle — offensive-zone possession maintained by rotating players through the corner, half-wall and net-front, passing low-to-low or low-to-high rather than shooting. Wears out defenders and pulls coverage out of shape.

Dangle — a stickhandling move to beat a defender one-on-one. Broadly interchangeable with **deke**; "dangle" usually implies a longer sequence of moves.

Deke — a single fake with the puck, body or head to make a defender or goaltender commit the wrong way.

Drop-in — pay-at-the-door pick-up hockey. You turn up alone, are given a jersey colour and play; usually full equipment, usually no referees, and no commitment beyond the session. *Not the same as stick-and-puck.* Getting Started explains the practical differences and what to ask at the desk.

Dump-and-chase — deliberately putting the puck deep into the offensive zone without possession and forechecking to recover it. Chosen when a controlled **zone entry** isn't available. Effective largely because the **trapezoid** stops the goalie retrieving it.

D-to-D — a pass between defence partners. Resets the forecheck and changes the angle of attack. Never through the slot; go behind your own net.

Empty net — the net with the goaltender pulled for an extra attacker, usually late when trailing. A shot from your own end at an empty net still counts as a goal, so **icing** does not apply to it.

F1 / F2 / F3 — the first, second and third forwards to arrive in a situation. **Roles defined by order of arrival, not people.**

Faceoff — the restart, with one player from each team facing off at one of the nine dots. Stick-placement order is the reverse of what most players assume: at **eight of the nine spots** — both end zones *and* all four neutral-zone dots — the **defending** player places their stick first, followed immediately by the attacking player. Only at the **centre ice** dot does the **visiting** player place first (Rule 76.4). **Under USA Hockey Rule 613(a) that is reversed** — the *attacking* player places first at all eight, with centre ice again going to the visitor. See Faceoffs.

Forecheck — pressure applied to the opposing team in *their* defensive zone, to force a turnover before they can break out. *Not the same as backcheck.* Named by shape: 2-1-2, 1-2-2, 1-3-1, 1-4.

Gap control — the distance a defender keeps between themselves and an oncoming puck carrier. Aim for roughly a stick-and-a-half at the red line, closing to about a stick length at your blue line. Too big and they build speed; too small and one move beats you.

Give-and-go — pass to a teammate and immediately skate into open space to receive it straight back. The simplest and most reliable way to beat a defender without stickhandling.

Goalmouth — the immediate front-of-net area at the edge of the crease. *Not the same as the slot,* which extends much further out.

Half-wall — the boards level with the **faceoff dot**, between the corner and the **point**. The main distribution spot in the offensive zone. *Not the same as the point.*

Hash marks — the short lines outside each end-zone faceoff circle, 2 ft long and 5 ft 7 in apart in the NHL. **Four per circle** (Rule 1.9) — a pair on the boards side and a pair on the middle-of-the-ice side, both roughly level with the dot. They restrain players on a draw, and serve as the standard high/low depth reference in the zone.

Home plate — the analysts' high-danger scoring area: roughly from the goal line out to the faceoff dots and up to the top of the circles, angling in toward the net. Not an official marking.

House league — the recreational, non-travelling tier of a local association: you play within your own club rather than against other towns, and there is normally no tryout. *Not the same as* travel/rep hockey. Tier names vary by association and by year; Getting Started explains how to work out where you belong.

Icing — shooting the puck from your own half across the opponent's goal line untouched. Most leagues use **hybrid icing** (adopted by the NHL in 2013-14 and the IIHF in 2014): the race is to **the puck**, and the end-zone faceoff dot is the **decision deadline**, not the finish line. Rule 81.1 says so in terms — *"the determining factor is which player would first touch the puck, not which player would first reach the end zone face-off dots"* — and the linesperson must make that judgment by the instant the first player's skate reaches the dot. **If it is too close to call at that moment, icing is called.** Waved off if the opposing goalie plays it or, under Rule 81.3, *"feigns playing the puck, attempts to play the puck, or skates in the direction of the puck... at any time"* — no departure from the crease is required (NHL — USA Hockey does *not* wave off for goalie movement), if it goes in the net, if it comes directly off a faceoff, if the team is **shorthanded** (conditionally — see **Shorthanded**, below), or if a linesman judges an opposing skater could have played it. After your own icing: defensive-zone draw, **no line change, no timeout.**

Odd-man rush — an attack where the attackers outnumber the defenders back, e.g. 2-on-1 or 3-on-2. On a 2-on-1, the defender takes away the pass and leaves the shot to the goalie.

Offside — an attacker entering the attacking zone before the puck. **Both skates** must have completely crossed the blue line before the puck completely crosses it; one skate on or behind the line keeps you onside, and a skate in the air over the neutral zone counts as onside **under NHL and IIHF rules only — USA Hockey Rule 630(a) requires skate contact.**

One-timer — a shot taken directly off an incoming pass without stopping the puck. Devastating when timed, because the goaltender cannot reset between the pass and the shot.

Outlet — the first pass of a **breakout**, from the puck retriever to a teammate heading up ice.

Overload — an offensive or power-play structure that loads four players onto one side of the ice, overwhelming that side and creating a weak-side option. Distinct from the **1-3-1** and the

umbrella.

The paint — the light-blue **crease**. "Stay out of the paint."

Penalty kill (PK) — playing shorthanded while serving a penalty. Standard shapes: **box** (two forwards high, two defencemen low — *no single top*), **diamond** (a single apex, used against a **1-3-1** because a box leaves the **bumper** unmarked), and **wedge+1** (three in a tight triangle plus one puck-chaser).

Pinch — a defenceman stepping *down* from the **offensive** blue line into the zone to keep a puck in. *Not the same as step up*. Relatively safe, because your forwards are behind you to recover.

Under most systems only one defenceman pinches at a time, the other holding the middle as the safety — but that is a near-universal coaching default, not part of the definition and not a rule: some teams give both defencemen a standing green light, and every team sends both on a delayed penalty, a full-ice press or 6-on-5. See Forechecking Systems and Offensive Zone Play.

Point — the area just inside the blue line where defencemen set up in the offensive zone. *Not the same as the half-wall*. "Covering the point" means denying that space to the opposing defenceman.

Power play (PP) — playing with a man advantage while the opponent serves a penalty. Common structures: **1-3-1** (exactly **one** player at the point, two half-walls, a **bumper** between them, one net front — most first units use four forwards and one defenceman), **umbrella** (three high), and **overload** (four to one side).

Quarterback — the player who runs a power play from the top, usually the single point defenceman in a **1-3-1**. Their job is distribution and walking the line, not just shooting.

Regroup — abandoning a failed attack, retreating with the puck back into the neutral zone or your own end, and re-attacking with better structure. Almost always better than forcing a bad entry.

Reverse — sending the puck **back against the flow**, into the space a forechecker has just vacated, usually to a defence partner arriving behind you. *Not the same as a rim*. A reverse beats a forechecker who has over-committed.

Rim — a hard pass along the boards that follows the curve of the rink **onward** in the direction you are facing, typically corner-to-corner behind the net. *Not the same as a reverse*. A rim beats a forechecker who is sealing you against the wall.

Saucer pass — a pass flipped so the puck flies flat, off the ice, and lands flat. Used to clear a defender's stick or a body in the passing lane.

Screen — standing in the goaltender's line of sight so they cannot see the shot. **Normally legal** as long as you stay outside the crease and neither your contact nor your positioning impairs the goalie's ability to move freely or defend the goal (Rule 69.1).

Seam — a gap between two defenders' coverage areas, and the passing lane that runs through it. "Finding the seam" means threading a pass through that gap into the slot.

Shinny — informal pick-up hockey, indoor or outdoor; in much of Canada it is the standard municipal-rink word for **drop-in**. House rules vary enormously — contact, lifting the puck and whether there is a goalie are all local. See Getting Started.

Shorthanded — playing with fewer skaters because of a penalty. A shorthanded team **may ice the puck freely** (Rule 81.6), which is the single most useful fact on the penalty kill — **but it is not unconditional**. USA Hockey grants the exemption only at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult (Rule 624(b)(1)), and the NHL withdraws it from a team shorthanded by a *major* that has left nobody on the penalty bench. Special Teams owns this rule; Rules Primer has the wording.

Slot — the area directly in front of the net between the two faceoff circles, from the top of the circles down to the goalmouth. Subdivided into **high slot** (dots to the top of the circles) and **low slot** (dots down to the goalmouth). *Not the same as the goalmouth.*

Step up — moving *forward* to challenge an attacker early, in the neutral zone or at your own blue line. *Not the same as a pinch.* Riskier, because there is nothing behind you if you miss.

Stick-and-puck — open ice booked for individual practice rather than a game: many pucks, no teams, no referees, often no goalie, and frequently a lighter gear requirement than **drop-in**. See Getting Started.

Stretch pass — a long pass from your own end through the neutral zone to a forward who has left early, aiming to create a breakaway or odd-man rush. Legal since the two-line pass was removed in 2005-06. High reward, high turnover risk.

Tag up — on a delayed offside, the attacking team clearing the zone, after which they may immediately re-enter and attack with no whistle. **It is a five-man act, not something you do alone.** Rule 83.3(i) requires that "***all players of the offending team clear the zone at the same instant (skate contact with the blue line)***" — the linesperson's arm stays up, and nobody is legally re-entered, until the *last* attacker in the zone has tagged. What is generous is the standard for each individual: **skate contact with the line** is enough, not both skates fully back over it, so you can drag a foot onto the line and go again without leaving the zone properly. What

is not generous is the "all players" part — tagging alone and re-entering while a teammate is still inside gets the play whistled dead. See Zone Entries.

Tip-in — redirecting a shot — usually a point shot — with your stick blade as it passes, changing its direction late so the goaltender cannot adjust.

The trap — a neutral-zone defensive system (usually 1-2-2 or 1-3-1) that concedes the opponent's own end and clogs the middle of the neutral zone to force turnovers there. Frustrating to play against, and beaten by patient regroupings and quick puck movement rather than by skating into it.

Trailer — a player arriving late into the offensive zone behind the puck carrier, into open space the defence has already collapsed away from. Often the most dangerous attacker on a rush.

Umbrella — a power-play structure with **three players high** across the top and two low, shaped like an umbrella canopy. There is **no bumper** in a true umbrella.

Walk the line — a point player skating laterally along the blue line to change the shooting angle and pull the penalty kill or defensive box out of shape.

Wheel — a defenceman skating the puck themselves from behind their own net around and up the ice to start the breakout, rather than passing. Good against a slow or one-man forecheck.

Wrap-around — carrying the puck from behind the net around the post and attempting to stuff it in at the far side before the goaltender can seal.

Zone entry — the act of getting the puck into the offensive zone. **Controlled** entries (carrying or passing it in with possession) produce far more shots and goals than **dump-ins**, which is why teams work so hard to enter with speed and width. See Zone Entries.

Common Mistakes

- **Assuming "defensive zone" is a fixed end of the building.** It follows your team, and it swaps every period. Say "our end" and "their end" if there is any doubt.
- **Confusing the slot with the goalmouth.** They are two layers of coverage with two different owners. A defender who leaves the goalmouth to cover the slot has just left a tap-in unmarked.
- **Confusing the point with the half-wall.** One is at the blue line, one is level with the dot, 40 ft apart. A defenceman drifting to the half-wall has abandoned the line.

- **Confusing a rim with a reverse.** They beat opposite kinds of pressure. Using the wrong one hands the puck straight to the forechecker.
- **Confusing a pinch with a step-up.** A pinch has your forwards behind you. A neutral-zone step-up has nothing behind you.
- **Treating F1 as "the centre".** F1 is whoever arrives first. If two players both think they're F2, nobody pressures the puck.
- **Thinking of the trapezoid as the goalie's problem.** It is the defencemen's problem: it means nobody is coming to help you in the corner.
- **Learning "high" and "low" as absolute directions.** They are relative to the net that matters right now, and they invert when the puck changes ends.
- **Assuming your rink is standard.** Check the distance behind the net and whether the trapezoid is painted before your first shift at a new rink.
- **Quoting the wrong trapezoid width.** The current painted dimension is 22 ft at the goal line; the "18 ft / 6 ft from the post" number is pre-2014.

Key Takeaways

1. **Zone names are relative to your team, not the building** — and they swap ends every period. "Our end / their end" is never ambiguous.
2. **High means toward the blue line you're facing; low means toward the goal line.** True in all three zones, and it inverts when the puck changes ends.
3. **Strong-side is wherever the puck is.** It flips several times a shift, which is why defence pairs have to talk constantly.
4. **The slot has layers.** High slot (dots to top of the circles), low slot (dots to the goalmouth), goalmouth (at the crease). Different jobs, different owners.
5. **The point is at the blue line; the half-wall is level with the dot.** Never use them interchangeably.
6. **F1 / F2 / F3 are roles defined by order of arrival, not people.** Whoever gets there first is F1.
7. **The trapezoid is 22 ft along the goal line widening to 28 ft at the boards** (IIHF: 6.80 m to 8.60 m), applies in the NHL, KHL and IIHF, and does not exist in most *North American* rec leagues. **In England and Wales it is the IIHF rule but England Ice Hockey's Rule 22.3 says it is "not currently enforced"** — and the current In-House Rules are silent, so check locally rather than assuming — and until you know, keep your own goalie inside it and

plan as though theirs may come out. Its one exception is a goalie keeping skate contact with the crease.

8. **The neutral zone is the same length on any full-size rink** (NHL 50 ft; IIHF 15.0 m, defined as $\frac{1}{4}$ of the rink's length). What changes between NHL and big international ice is the width, which is why wide ice punishes forechecks and rewards skating. On a short sheet — which British rinks are authorised to be, though nobody has published a count — the neutral zone shrinks with the building.
9. **At least one player is always above the puck.** Which body it is changes; that there is one does not.
10. **Be inside, force them outside.** The whole defensive game compresses into that.

VERIFICATION NOTES

*Unverified / flagged in the text: the exact boundaries of the "home plate" high-danger area are an analytics convention rather than a rule, and differ between providers. Two NHL rules give different trapezoid widths (Rule 1.8 and the rink diagram give 8 ft from each post; Rule 27.8 still reads 6 ft, describing the pre-2014 shape) — this document follows Rule 1.8 and the diagram. Rec-rink dimension ranges are general observation, not a sourced standard. **There is no published census of British rink dimensions**, so this document states what the In-House Rules authorise and does not claim a distribution; and **neither the IIHF book nor the In-House Rules establish how the markings are laid out on a British rink below 56 m × 26 m**, which is why the instruction there is to look.*

Rules Primer

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see [UK and England Rules](#), and read **"If you play in Britain"** in the Overview before you take any NHL statement below as describing your game.

RELATED[UK and England Rules](#)[Rink Map and Glossary](#)[Faceoffs](#)[Special Teams](#)[Game Management](#)[How to Watch Hockey](#)

Overview

This is the canonical rules document here: where two documents disagree about a rule, this one wins, and most other documents link here rather than restating a rule at length.

A handful of topics are deliberately owned elsewhere, because the document that teaches them can say more about them than a rules primer should. Each fact has exactly one owner, and the other documents link to it rather than duplicating it:

- **Faceoffs** owns the faceoff procedure, the violations, the ejection rules and the NHL/IIHF/USA Hockey splits in full. This document keeps the table of where each draw goes, plus short statements of the two things no rules reference should omit — that an encroaching winger gets the *centre* ejected, and that the IIHF issues a team warning instead. Take the detail from Faceoffs.
- **Zone Entries** owns the **trail-skate drag** as a technique. This document owns the offside rule itself, delayed offside, the disallowed goal and the rule-set differences.
- **Rink Map and Glossary** owns every rink dimension, including the goal crease and the **trapezoid geometry**. This document owns the trapezoid *penalty*.
- **Goaltender** owns how **freezing the puck** is actually enforced, because it carries the published Hockey Canada and USA Hockey interpretations.

The aim is not to reproduce the rulebook — it is to tell you what each rule actually changes about your decisions on the ice. A rule you understand only as a definition will get you caught out; a rule

you understand as a *constraint on where you can be and when* becomes a tool. Offside is why you drag a trail skate. Icing is why a tired line dumps the puck from their own blue line instead of their own goal line. The trapezoid is why your goalie stops behind the net instead of in the corner.

Everything below is sourced to the **NHL Official Rules 2025-2026**, the **IIHF Official Rule Book 2025/26**, the **USA Hockey Official Playing Rules 2025-29** or the **IHUK In-House Rules 2025-26** — the actual rulebooks, cited by rule number. Where they disagree, or where a claim is unverified, that is said explicitly in the text rather than smoothed over.

If you play in Britain, the IIHF column is yours

This document is written to NHL rules, and the rule-set flags in it are mostly written for a North American reader. **If you play anywhere in Britain, the flag to follow is the IIHF one.**

Every level of the game here runs on the **IIHF Official Rule Book**: the Elite Ice Hockey League, the NIHL, the English and Scottish recreational and junior game, university hockey, and the GB national teams. The In-House Rules say so in terms — England Ice Hockey, the Scottish Ice Hockey Association and the British Universities Ice Hockey Association "*adopt the IIHF Official Rule Book 2025-2026 (Version 1.1, published July 2025) as the foundation for the rules of the game to be applied in England and Scotland.*"

On top of that base sits one thin layer of local amendment: the **In-House Rules** in England, Scotland and university hockey, or the **EIHL Casebook** in the Elite League. The In-House Rules are not a rulebook and say so — "*This document is to be read alongside the IIHF Rule Book and is not intended to serve as a standalone rule book*" — but they are the "*overriding interpretation of how the IIHF Rule Book is to be applied domestically*", so where they amend the IIHF book, they win.

What that changes about reading this document. Wherever the text below says "*under IIHF rules*", it is describing your game, not a footnote to somebody else's. Wherever it flags a **USA Hockey** or **Hockey Canada** divergence, that flag is not yours. The comparison table in section 10 carries a fifth column, **England Ice Hockey**, for exactly this reason — and where that column reads "*As IIHF*", that is the answer and not an omission: it means England Ice Hockey does not amend the IIHF rule, so the IIHF cell beside it is your rule.

UK and England Rules owns the full list of England Ice Hockey amendments. This document points at it rather than restating it. Read it before your first game — several of the amendments (neck protection, facial protection, rink size, junior age categories) change things this document does not cover.

1. How a Game Is Structured

The teams on the ice

Each team plays **five skaters and one goaltender** at even strength. A skater is any outfield player — the three forwards (a **centre** and two **wingers**) and the two **defencemen**, sometimes called defenders or D. The goaltender, or goalie, is the player permitted to use special equipment and to catch and hold the puck.

An NHL roster for a game is **20 players — 18 skaters and 2 goalkeepers** (NHL Rule 5.1). Rec teams are usually smaller; two lines of forwards, two pairs of defence and a goalie is a common minimum, and it makes for a very long night.

Periods and the clock

A game is **three periods of twenty minutes of actual play** (NHL Rule 77.1; IIHF Rule 77.1; USA Hockey Rule 636(a) gives 20 minutes as the *maximum* period length). The clock is **stop time** — it runs only while the puck is in play, so a 20-minute period takes roughly 35–40 minutes of real time.

Intermissions between periods are **18 minutes** in the NHL (Rule 77.2), **15 minutes** at IIHF (Rule 77.2) and **15 minutes** under USA Hockey (Rule 636(a)).

Teams **change ends after every period** (NHL Rule 86.3). This matters more than it sounds: in the second period your bench is at the far end from your defensive zone, which means the trip to the bench from a defensive-zone shift is the length of the ice. That is "the long change", and it is why second-period defensive-zone shifts are the most dangerous shifts to be caught tired on. See Game Management.

Rec-league variation: many recreational and beer leagues use shorter periods, **running clock** (the clock does not stop for whistles) except perhaps in the final minutes, and a hard curfew that ends the game whatever the clock says. USA Hockey formally accommodates short periods by **pro-rating penalty times** (Rule 402): a minor is 1:00 in periods of 12 minutes or less, 1:30 in periods of more than 12 but under 17 minutes, and 2:00 in periods of 17–20 minutes. Adult classifications always use 2:00. Check your own league's sheet — this is the single most common thing players get wrong when they move between leagues.

Stoppages

Play stops for: a goal, a penalty, offside, icing, the puck leaving the playing surface, the goalie freezing the puck, a hand pass, a puck played above shoulder height, an injury, a displaced net, or

an official's judgment that the puck is unplayable or out of sight. Every stoppage restarts with a **faceoff** at one of nine marked spots (see section 8).

Practically: the whistle is not the end of your shift's responsibility. Two things carry on after it — the scrum around the net, and the faceoff. Both are places where undisciplined players hand over penalties and possession.

Changing on the fly

You may change players **at any time during play** (NHL Rule 74.1). The condition is that the player leaving the ice must be **within five feet of the bench and out of the play** before the substitute steps on.

The exact mechanics matter because they define the penalty:

- A substitute is considered **on the ice once both of his skates are on the ice**.
- If either player — the one coming on or the one going off — **plays the puck, checks an opponent, or makes physical contact with an opponent** while both are on the ice, that is **too many men**.
- If the retiring player is accidentally *struck* by the puck during the change, **no penalty** and no stoppage.
- If a player on the bench plays the puck or interferes with an opponent while still on the bench, that is **interference** (Rule 56), not too many men.
- You must leave via the **bench**, not any other exit. Leaving via the gate to the dressing room and being replaced is a bench minor.

What this means for you: the change is a defensive act, not an administrative one. Change when your team has the puck in the offensive zone or in the neutral zone going forward — never when the puck is coming at you. If the puck turns over while you are halfway to the bench, **finish the trip and get off**; do not turn around and play the puck, because that is the actual infraction. Your teammate stepping on is the one who plays.

Long shifts are a rules problem as well as a fitness problem. A 90-second shift ends with you on the wrong side of the puck, and the temptation to reach with your stick instead of moving your feet is what produces hooking and tripping calls. Most rec-league penalties are conditioning penalties in disguise. See Conditioning and Recovery.

Too many men on the ice

Too many men is a bench minor — two minutes, served by any player the coach designates through the captain (NHL Rules 74.2, 17.1). It can be called by **either the referees or the linespersons**.

Two useful details:

- If the offending team **scores** before the whistle goes for too many men, **the goal is disallowed** and the penalty is still assessed (Rule 74.2).
- A player coming out of the penalty box who is being changed for must **skate to within five feet of his own bench** before the change happens (Rule 74.3). Sending a fresh body over the boards while the penalised player is still crossing the ice is too many men.

Practically: count. The centre or the last defenceman back is usually the one who notices. If you step on and see six blue jerseys, get straight back off — the officials will usually allow the correction if nobody has played the puck.

Line changes at a stoppage

At a whistle, the **visiting team puts its line-up on the ice first** (up to five seconds), then the **home team changes** (up to eight seconds), and the referee lowers his hand to close the window (NHL Rule 82.2 sets out that four-step clock). That is the concrete value of home ice: the home coach gets **last change** and can therefore match his lines against yours.

But last change is not unconditional, and the exception lives in a different rule. Rule 82.1 — not 82.2 — grants the right in the first place, and grants it with a carve-out: "*The home team may then make any desired substitution, **except in cases following an icing, which does not result in the delay of the game.***" Later in the same rule, that exception is spelled out: "*A team that is in violation of Rule 63.8 - Delaying the Game or Rule 81 - Icing shall not be permitted to make any player substitutions prior to the ensuing face-off.*"

Quoted in full, the clause is not ambiguous about whose icing. The two passages are the same bar — the second one names the team it falls on, "*a team that is in violation of... Rule 81 - Icing*" — and it pairs Rule 81 with Rule 63.8 (Delaying the Game), which is what the first paragraph's trailing "delay of the game" wording is pointing at. **Rule 81.4** then repeats the bar in the same words, with the same three exceptions (replacing a goalkeeper who had come off for an extra attacker, replacing an injured player, or a penalty that changes on-ice strength) — exceptions that only make sense for the team that iced it. If the carve-out froze both benches after any icing, the later paragraph and Rule 81.4 would have nothing left to do. So: **ice the puck and you cannot change, home or away; after the visitors ice it, the home team changes**

normally and keeps last change. That is exactly why icing is expensive — you hand the other side fresh legs *and* the matchup. See Faceoffs and Game Management.

After an icing, the offending team may not change at all (Rule 82.1, Rule 81.4). More on that below.

Overtime

NHL regular season (Rule 84.1, 84.4): a **five-minute, sudden-death, 3-on-3 overtime**, then a **shootout** if still tied. The shootout is three shooters a side, then sudden death; no player may shoot twice until everyone eligible has shot. A team that loses in overtime or the shootout still keeps the single point it earned by being tied after 60 minutes.

Three-on-three is a different sport. There is enormous open ice, the value of possession is extreme, and the single worst thing you can do is force a low-percentage play that gives the puck away — a turnover in 3-on-3 is very often a goal against within seconds. Note also that pulling the goalie in regular-season overtime **forfeits the guaranteed point** if you lose while he is off (Rule 84.2), and once he is off he **cannot return on the fly** — he must wait for a stoppage, or it is a bench minor.

NHL playoffs (Rule 84.5): **full 20-minute sudden-death periods at 5-on-5**, with 15-minute intermissions, repeated until somebody scores. No shootout, no 3-on-3.

Overtime with penalties (Rule 84.3) is fiddly but worth knowing the shape of: teams never drop below three skaters, so a power play in 3-on-3 overtime is played **4-on-3**, and a two-man advantage is played **5-on-3** with the penalised team at three. Once strength evens out, the count is corrected to 3-on-3 at the next stoppage.

IIHF (Rule 84.1, 84.4–84.6): preliminary-round games get a **five-minute 3-on-3** overtime then a **five-shooter shootout**. Playoff and bronze-medal games get **ten minutes of 3-on-3** then a shootout. The **gold-medal game** goes to unlimited sudden-death 3-on-3 periods with 15-minute intermissions until somebody scores. *Note: the IIHF rulebook text for the gold-medal game (Rule 84.6) does not state the length of each overtime period, so no figure is given here rather than a guess.*

England Ice Hockey amends the IIHF rule, and the amendment is that there often is no overtime at all. The In-House Rules state against Rule 84 that overtime "*is only played in NIHL fixtures and in SNL fixtures where specifically provided for in competition regulations*" — so a British league game that is level at the buzzer normally stays level, and none of the IIHF formats above applies to it. Where NIHL fixtures do go to overtime the format is **five minutes of 3-on-3** followed by a three-shooter game-winning-shots competition, except in the NIHL playoff final,

which goes to successive **20-minute 5-on-5 sudden-death periods** with no shootout (In-House Rules, Appendix 1). See UK and England Rules.

USA Hockey (Rule 638): overtime is **recommended**, not mandated — a 5-minute rest, then a **10-minute sudden-victory period**, on-ice strength never below three skaters plus a goalie, and a shootout may be used in addition to or instead of overtime. Crucially, the rule ends with a note that **affiliates and local governing bodies may make their own rules** on overtime length, number of periods and shootout format.

Rec and beer leagues: most commonly, **ties simply stand**. Where there is overtime it is usually short (three to five minutes) and often 4-on-4 or 3-on-3, sometimes followed by a three-shooter shootout. This varies league by league, with no general practice to rely on — read your league's rules.

Timeouts

Each NHL team gets **one 30-second timeout per game** (Rule 87.1). **IIHF Rule 87.1 also gives one 30-second timeout**. USA Hockey gives **one 60-second timeout** (Rule 636(f)).

There are specific situations where the NHL will **not** grant a timeout (Rule 87.1):

- Following a **faceoff violation**.
- To the **defensive team following an icing**.
- To the defensive team when the **goalie froze a puck shot in from beyond the centre red line**.
- When a **defending player accidentally dislodged the net**.
- Once instructions have been given for a **penalty shot**, or at any point during a **shootout**.

The pattern is deliberate: all of those are situations where a team has just done something that is supposed to leave them stuck on the ice, tired. The rulebook closes the escape hatch.

IIHF Rule 87.1 lists the same exclusions in the same words, so a player under IIHF rules — which is what British league hockey runs on — gets no relief anywhere on that list. **USA Hockey Rule 636(f) lists none of them**. Its only restrictions are that the timeout be requested during a stoppage before the line-change procedure ends, and that a team wanting one at the same stoppage as its opponent must ask before the first timeout finishes. So the escape hatch the NHL and IIHF close is open under USA Hockey: a team there really can ice the puck and then buy its tired players a minute.

2. Offside

The rule

Players of the attacking team must not precede the puck into the attacking zone (NHL Rule 83.1).

The mechanics, precisely:

- **Skates decide, not sticks.** Your stick can be as far into the zone as you like.
- You are offside when **both skates are completely over the leading edge of the blue line.**
- You are **onside if either skate is in contact with the blue line, or on your own side of it**, at the instant the puck completely crosses the leading edge.
- "Your own side of the line" is defined by a **vertical plane** rising from the leading edge of the blue line. **If your skate has not yet broken that plane, you are onside — even if it is in the air.** An airborne trail skate over the neutral zone is onside. **This is NHL and IIHF only — under USA Hockey Rule 630(a) an airborne skate is offside**, because that book requires actual skate *contact* with the neutral zone or the blue line. See **Rule-set differences** below.
- New for 2025-26: **"a 'skate' is to be considered the blade of the skate only."** Your boot and your ankle are irrelevant; the blade is the reference.
- The puck must **completely cross** the leading edge of the blue line. A puck sitting on the line is not yet in the zone.
- The blue line is **12 inches wide** (Rule 1.5). That is a full foot of legal real estate.
- A player **carrying the puck** may cross the line ahead of it, provided he had **possession and control of the puck with his stick** before both skates crossed (2025-26 wording — this closed the loophole of kicking the puck ahead of yourself).

The technique consequence: drag a trail skate

Because **one skate on or behind the plane keeps you onside**, and because the line is a foot wide, you do not have to slow down at the blue line: you can attack it at full speed with your body and lead skate already in the zone, holding the trail blade on or behind the line until the puck crosses. **Which book you are under changes how you do it** — dragging the blade *in contact* with the line is legal under all three rule sets, but holding the trail skate *in the air* behind the plane is **NHL and IIHF only** and is **offside under USA Hockey Rule 630(a)**, which requires skate

contact. Most North American rec and youth hockey runs on USA Hockey rules; if that is you, keep the blade on the ice.

The technique itself belongs to Zone Entries — the four steps, the timing, and what it does to a defender. The same logic applies on a **regroup**: see Neutral Zone Systems, and Defending the Rush for the defender's side of it, which is that you cannot rely on the blue line to save you.

Delayed offside and tagging up

If attacking players have preceded the puck into the zone but the defending team is **in a position to bring the puck out without delay or contact**, the linesperson raises an arm and signals a **delayed offside** rather than blowing the whistle (NHL Rule 83.3, signal 29.7).

The delayed offside is **nullified — arm drops, play carries on** — if either:

1. **All players of the offending team clear the zone at the same instant** (skate contact with the blue line). This is **tagging up**. Once the arm is down, everybody may re-enter and pursue the puck.
2. The **defending team passes or carries the puck into the neutral zone**.

Clearing the zone requires actual skate contact — the vertical plane does not apply here. This is the one place the NHL's own wording is easy to misread, and the IIHF text spells it out: where the NHL parenthesis reads "*(skate contact with the blue line)*", **IIHF Rule 83.3(I)** reads "*(skate contact with the blue line, '3D' judgement is not used in this situation)*". So the airborne trail skate that keeps you **onside on the entry** does **not** clear you on a delayed offside. Coasting over the line in the air leaves the arm up. Touch the paint.

The delayed offside becomes a **whistle** if any attacking player, while the arm is up:

- **Touches the puck**, or
- **Attempts to gain possession of a loose puck**, or
- **Forces the defending puck carrier further back into his own zone**, or
- **Is about to make physical contact with the defending puck carrier**.

Note the second and third of those. You do not have to touch anything. **Merely chasing the defenceman deeper into his own zone kills the play.** That is the most commonly misunderstood part of the rule and it costs teams offensive-zone possession every game.

A nice piece of trivia with real use: a player in the zone during a delayed offside may **clear it by going to the bench** (both skates off the ice, in the linesperson's judgment) — but if his replacement steps on in the attacking zone, that replacement has to clear too.

What to do as a player on a delayed offside:

- If you are the one in the zone: **get out, and get out cleanly to the line**, do not just drift. Everyone has to be out at the same instant, so the last man decides.
- **Do not touch the puck. Do not chase the D.** Retreat to the line, tag up, then attack again.
- If you are the defending team: **take your time**. You have a free moment to make a clean breakout pass because no attacker can pressure you without ending the play. Use it — this is one of the few genuinely uncontested seconds you will get in your own zone. See Breakouts.

Disallowed goals on a delayed offside

If the puck is **shot into the zone** creating a delayed offside and that same shot goes in the net — directly, or off the goalie, a player, the boards, the glass, equipment or an official — **the goal is disallowed**, even if the attacking team had cleared the zone in the meantime (Rule 83.4). The only way the attacking team scores during a delayed offside is if the **defending team puts it in their own net** with no contact or action by the attacking team.

Where the faceoff goes

This is worth learning, because it is a real territorial consequence (Rule 83.6):

- Offside caused by an attacker **carrying** the puck over the line → faceoff at the **neutral-zone spot nearest that attacking zone**. You lose the zone but keep the neutral-zone draw.
- Offside caused by a **shot or pass** into the zone → faceoff **back at the spot in the zone where that pass or shot originated**. If your defenceman fired it in from his own end, the draw goes all the way back there.

So: a carried offside costs you a little; a pass-created offside can cost you 120 feet. That is a real argument for carrying the puck over the line under pressure rather than firing a hopeful pass into the zone.

Video review

An offside that leads to a goal is reviewable by **Coach's Challenge** (NHL Rule 38.2(a)). An **unsuccessful** challenge costs the challenging team a **minor penalty (2:00)** for delaying the game, and a **double minor (4:00)** for any subsequent unsuccessful challenge in the same game (Rule 38.8). Other than a challenge or the delayed-offside case above, **no goal can be disallowed after the fact for offside** (Rule 83.4).

The IIHF has the same machinery — Rule 83.5 routes an offside challenge to Rule 38, and IIHF Rule 38.7 imposes the same escalating bench minor: "*a bench minor penalty (2 minutes) for Delaying the Game*", then "*a double-bench minor penalty (4 minutes)*" for a further unsuccessful challenge.

⚠ England Ice Hockey removes it entirely, and this is one of the sharpest British departures from everything else in this document. There is no review of any kind. The In-House Rules state against IIHF Rule 37 that "*On-ice video review is not available in EIH or SIHA competition and may not be used by referees, official scorers, timekeepers, or any other game official*", and against Rule 38 that "*As on-ice video review is not available (see Rule 37), a Coach's Challenge is not permitted in EIH or SIHA competition.*" The same bar is repeated against high-sticking double minors (18.4), goaltender interference (69.1), goals (78.5, 78.6) and puck out of bounds (85.7). **In EIH and SIHA competition the referee's call on the ice is the call, on every one of those.** Wherever this document describes a decision being reviewed, challenged or overturned, that is the NHL and international tournament game, not yours. See UK and England Rules.

Rule-set differences

- **IIHF Rule 83** reaches the same place as the NHL rule on everything that matters, including the plane concept, but it is not word-for-word. It carries **neither** of the NHL's 2025-26 clarifications — no "blade of the skate only", and no "with his stick" in the puck-carrier clause. It adds two things the NHL text does not have: the sentence that "*the question of an off-side never arises until the puck has completely crossed the leading edge of the blue line, at which time the decision is to be made*"; and, in the delayed-offside clearing test, the explicit "'3D' judgement is not used in this situation" quoted above.
- **USA Hockey Rule 630(a) requires contact, not a plane — and this reverses the airborne trail skate.** The rule reads: "*The position of the player's stick shall not be considered in all instances deciding offside. A player is considered 'offside' when the player does not have skate contact with any part of the Neutral Zone or the blue line when the puck crosses the determining edge of the blue line.*" The Note adds that "*a player only needs to have skate contact with one skate with the blue line to be considered 'onside.'*" So for a skate **on** the line the outcome matches the NHL — but a skate held **in the air** over the neutral zone is **onside under the NHL and IIHF and offside under USA Hockey**. If you play USA Hockey, drag the blade in contact; do not lift it.
- **USA Hockey delayed offside only exists at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult** (Rule 630(d)). Below those levels **there is no tagging up**

— offside is immediate. If you coach or play youth hockey, this is a genuine difference in how you attack the line.

3. Icing

The rule

If a team **equal or superior in numerical strength** to their opponent shoots, bats or deflects the puck from **their own half of the ice** across the opposition **goal line**, play is stopped (NHL Rule 81.1). The **centre red line divides the ice into halves** for this purpose, and the reference point is the **point of last contact by the team in possession**.

"Gaining the line"

To nullify a potential icing, your team must **"gain the line"**: the puck, **while on a player's stick — not a skate — must make contact with the centre red line** (Rule 81.1).

This is the detail almost nobody knows. If you are carrying the puck through the neutral zone and you fire it down the ice, the question is not where *you* were, it is where *the puck on your stick* was. Carry it that extra half-stride so the puck touches the red line and you can dump it in freely. Kicking it forward over the line with your skate does **not** count.

Hybrid, no-touch and touch icing

There are three systems:

- **Touch icing** (historical): a defending skater must physically touch the puck for icing to be called. Produces high-speed races into the end boards; largely abandoned for injury reasons.
- **No-touch / automatic icing**: play stops the instant the puck completely crosses the goal line, whoever is chasing.
- **Hybrid icing**: the race is to **the puck**, but the linesperson must decide it by the time the first player reaches the **end-zone faceoff dot** — the dot is a deadline, not a finish line.

The NHL and IIHF both use hybrid icing (NHL Rule 81.1; IIHF Rule 81.1 — near-identical wording, but not identical: see the note below). The mechanism is:

1. The linesperson first judges that **the puck will cross the goal line**.
2. He then judges **which player would touch the puck first**.

3. That decision is made **no later than the instant the first player reaches the end-zone faceoff dots**, with the **skate** as the determining factor.
4. If the race is **too close to call** by that point, **icing is called**.

Note the clarification the rulebook makes explicitly: the determining factor is **who would touch the puck first, not who reaches the dot first**. The dot is a deadline for the decision, not the finish line of the race.

One IIHF difference. IIHF Rule 81.1 tracks the NHL wording closely but adds a paragraph the NHL rule does not contain: *"If there is no 'race' for the puck, icing should not be called until a defending skater crosses its defending blue line and the puck crosses the goal line (not between the goal posts)."* In practice this means that under IIHF rules, an uncontested icing is not whistled until a defender has actually come back for it — so a lazily uncontested dump can stay live fractionally longer than it would in the NHL.

The NHL adopted hybrid icing in **2013-14** and the IIHF in **2014**. **USA Hockey uses automatic (no-touch) icing** — Rule 624 states that "icing the puck shall have been completed the instant the puck has completely crossed the goal line", with no hybrid provision in the standing game. (Precisely: the one place "hybrid icing" does appear in the 2025-29 book is the **Disabled Hockey / sled** section, which reads *"Automatic icing will be used at youth levels. Hybrid icing will be used in adult classification games."* That does not apply to standing hockey, but the phrase is in the book.) Some rec and youth leagues use no-touch; a few still use touch icing. **Ask before your first game** — it changes whether you chase a dump-in at all.

The full wave-off list

Icing is **not** called if (NHL Rules 81.1, 81.3, 81.5, 81.6):

1. The team that shot it is **shorthanded**.
2. The puck goes **directly off a faceoff** into the far end.
3. The puck **touches any part of an opposing player** — stick, skate or body — before or after crossing the goal line.
4. The puck **touches the opposing goalkeeper** in any way.
5. The **opposing goalkeeper feigns playing the puck, attempts to play it, or skates in the direction of it** at any time.
6. A **linesperson judges that an opposing skater (not the goalie) could have played the puck but did not**. This explicitly includes a team declining to play it during a line change to avoid a too-many-men call.

7. The puck **rebounds off an opponent** in their own half so as to cross the shooter's own goal line — that is not icing on the shooter.
8. The puck goes **into the net** — that is a goal, not an icing. None of the four NHL clauses cited above says so; it is the practical effect of the icing call requiring a stoppage the goal has already produced. USA Hockey states it expressly, in Rule 624(a): *"if the puck has entered the goal as a result of a legal action by the team shooting the puck, the goal shall be allowed."*
9. The **goalkeeper takes any action to dislodge the puck from the back of the net**.
10. The attacking team **gained the line** as defined above.

The puck **deflecting off an official does not automatically nullify** a potential icing.

Two exceptions worth knowing on the shorthanded clause: when a penalty is **about to expire**, icing is judged **at the instant the penalty expires** — if the puck left the stick before expiry, no icing (Rule 81.6). And a team serving a **major** that fails to put a substitute on the penalty bench in time keeps playing a man down but is **no longer "shorthanded" for icing purposes** — icing will be called against them (Rule 81.6; the underlying substitution requirement is Rule 20.3).

USA Hockey differs on the goalie: Rule 624(b) lists five wave-offs and **does not include the goalkeeper moving toward or feigning at the puck**. Only actual contact by an opposing player, including the goalie, waves it off. USA Hockey also restricts the shorthanded exemption to **Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult** classifications (Rule 624(b)(1)) — below those levels, **a shorthanded team cannot ice the puck**.

The consequences

Under NHL rules, an icing costs the offending team three things:

1. **A defensive-zone faceoff.** And the **attacking team chooses which of the two end-zone dots** the draw is taken at (Rule 81.2).
2. **No line change.** The offending team may not substitute before the faceoff (Rules 81.4, 82.1). The exceptions are narrow: replacing a goalie who had been pulled for an extra attacker, replacing an injured player, or when a penalty has been assessed that changes on-ice strength. Players on the ice are determined **at the moment the puck leaves the offending player's stick**.
3. **No timeout.** The defensive team may not take a timeout after an icing (Rule 87.1). Nor is a commercial timeout permitted.

If a **linesperson erred** in calling icing, the faceoff is at **centre ice** (Rule 81.2) — the same remedy appears in IIHF Rule 81.2 and USA Hockey Rule 624(c).

If the **defending team deliberately abstains** from playing the puck to force the stoppage, the referee moves the draw to the **corner spot nearest their own goal** (Rule 81.2).

IIHF imposes all three consequences, in the NHL's own words. IIHF Rule 81.2 gives the attacking team the choice of dot; IIHF Rule 81.4 bars substitution; and **IIHF Rule 87.1 reads "No 'time-out' shall be granted to the defensive team following an icing, following the goalkeeper causing a stoppage of play from a shoot-in from beyond the center red line, or when a defending Player accidentally dislodges the net causing a stoppage of play"** — the NHL sentence with the punctuation changed, third limb and all. If you play under IIHF rules, which is what British league hockey runs on at every level, treat the NHL treatment above as your own. **England Ice Hockey does not amend any of it** — the In-House Rules contain nothing against Rules 81, 82 or 87.

There is one genuine IIHF/NHL split inside the substitution bar, and it is in your favour. Both books allow a team that has iced the puck to substitute for a pulled goalkeeper, an injured player, or a penalty that changes on-ice strength. **The IIHF adds a fourth:** Rule 81.4 permits a substitution *"to replace a goalkeeper who had been substituted for an extra attacker, to replace an injured Player, a Player with a broken skate, or when a penalty has been assessed which affects the on-ice strength of either team."* NHL Rule 81.4 is the same sentence with those four words absent. So under the IIHF book — and therefore in Britain — **breaking a blade on the icing gets you off the ice; under NHL rules it does not.** It is not a licence: it is one named body, and the linesperson has to accept it.

USA Hockey allows a line change after an icing, and a timeout. Nothing in Rule 624 restricts substitution, Rule 204 permits a change at any stoppage, and Rule 636(f) attaches no icing condition to the one 60-second timeout each team gets. This is a real difference in how tired you are allowed to be.

What this means for how you play

Icing is the tax on a bad clear. Getting the puck out of your zone matters, but getting it out *legally* matters more when you are tired, because the punishment for an illegal clear is a defensive-zone draw with your worst five players stuck on the ice and no way to rest.

- **From your own end under pressure**, the safe clear is **off the glass and out** along the boards or **high off the glass** — the puck leaves the zone, no icing, and it is very hard to intercept. A rim around the boards that carries all the way down the ice is what gets iced.

- **Get the puck to the red line before you dump it.** One extra stride is the whole difference between a legal dump-in and an icing.
 - **On the penalty kill you may ice it freely** (Rule 81.6) — subject to the two exceptions immediately above, the NHL's empty-penalty-bench major and USA Hockey's classification restriction. Where it applies, shorthanded teams should use it ruthlessly: it is the single biggest structural advantage the kill has. See Special Teams.
 - **As the defending team chasing a dump-in under hybrid icing**, the race is to **the puck** — but the linesperson's judgment is locked in by the time the first skate reaches the dot, so the first half of the race is the half that counts. Beating your opponent to the dot does not by itself decide it; being clearly on course to reach the puck first does. If you are clearly beaten, do not run yourself into the end boards for nothing; if you are clearly winning it, commit to retrieving it. And a race still too close to call at the dot is icing.
 - **As the goalie, be careful behind your net on a potential icing.** Under NHL and IIHF rules, merely **skating toward the puck waves the icing off** and gives the other team a live puck in your corner (Rule 81.3). If you want the icing, stay put. The exception is when you are legitimately heading to the bench for an extra attacker and make no attempt on the puck — that does not wave it off.
 - **Do not casually poke a dumped puck as it goes by.** Any touch by the defending team, including the goalie, kills the icing. On the other hand, that is exactly the trick to use when the *other* team is stuck and you would rather keep playing than take the faceoff.
 - **Boarding note:** unnecessary contact with a player playing the puck on an obvious icing or offside play that drives him into the boards is explicitly **boarding** (Rule 41.1), and USA Hockey Rule 624(d) penalises it too. Icing races are not a licence to hit.
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4. Penalties

The types, and what each does to your team

Type	Time	Does your team play short?	Substitute allowed?
Minor	2:00	Yes	No
Bench minor	2:00	Yes — any player serves it	No
Double minor	4:00	Yes	No
Major	5:00	Yes	No
Misconduct	10:00	No	Yes, immediately
Game misconduct	Rest of game	No	Yes
Match penalty	Rest of game + 5:00 served	Yes, for 5:00	Yes, after 5 minutes
Penalty shot	—	No	—

Minor penalty (Rule 16.1) — two minutes, no substitute. Your team plays 5-on-4.

Bench minor (Rule 17.1) — two minutes served by **any player except the goalkeeper**, designated by the coach through the captain. Used for team infractions with no single culprit: too many men, delay of game by the bench, faceoff violations after a warning.

Double minor (Rule 18.1) — four minutes. Used for high-sticking that draws blood (Rule 60.3), butt-ending attempts (58.2), spearing attempts (62.2) and head-butting. It behaves as two separate two-minute penalties: if the other team scores in the first two minutes, only that half is washed out and the player serves the remaining two (Rule 18.2).

Major (Rule 20.1) — five minutes, no substitute, and — this is the key difference from a minor — **the penalty does not end when the other team scores** (Rule 20.2). The full five minutes are served no matter how many goals go in. A **third major in one game is an automatic game misconduct** (Rule 20.4), and a major that injures an opponent's face or head brings a game misconduct with it. Since 2021-22 all majors other than fighting are **reviewed on-ice by the referee**, who may confirm, reduce or rescind them (Rule 20.6).

Misconduct (Rule 22.1) — ten minutes for the player, but a **substitute goes straight on**, so **the team does not play shorthanded** (Rule 22.3). This is the most commonly misunderstood

penalty in hockey: a ten-minute misconduct costs your team nothing on the scoreboard directly, it costs *you* a third of the game. A player whose misconduct expires stays in the box until the next stoppage.

Game misconduct (Rule 23.1) — the player is gone for the balance of the game, a substitute replaces him, and **the team is not shorthanded**. Ten minutes go on his record and the incident is reported for possible supplementary discipline.

Match penalty (Rule 21.1) — the most severe on-ice sanction. Imposed on **any player who deliberately attempts to injure, or deliberately injures, an opponent**. The player is sent to the dressing room immediately, **five minutes are served by a designated teammate**, and the player is automatically suspended until the league has ruled. Like majors, match penalties are reviewed on-ice (Rule 21.5).

Penalty shot (Rule 24) — not a time penalty at all but a restored scoring chance. The puck is placed at centre ice and the designated player skates in alone. Rules that catch people out: **no rebounds** (except off post or crossbar and then off the goalie straight in); the puck must be **kept in motion toward the goal**; the **spin-o-rama is banned**; a lacrosse-style "Michigan" **is** permitted provided the puck is never raised above shoulder height and is not released above the crossbar; the goalie must **stay in his crease until the shooter touches the puck**. If the shot is awarded for what would have been a minor, **no minor is served regardless of the outcome** (Rule 24.6).

Coincidental penalties (Rule 19) — when equal penalties are given to both teams, they cancel for on-ice strength. But there is a subtlety worth knowing: **one minor to each team at the same stoppage, with nothing else on the clock, is played 4-on-4** (Rule 19.1). If a team is already shorthanded, the coincidental minors are served with immediate substitution and the strength stays as it was.

Stick fouls

These are the calls that come from using the stick as a tool against a player instead of against the puck. As a group they are the most-called infractions in adult recreational hockey, for one reason: **they are what a tired or beaten player does instead of skating**.

- **Hooking** (Rule 55) — using the stick to **restrain** an opponent. Stick-to-stick contact alone is **not** hooking. The tell is the tugging motion. Note that using the **shaft above your upper hand** to hold or hook is an automatic minor.
- **Slashing** (Rule 61) — swinging the stick at an opponent, **contact or not**. Non-aggressive contact to the pants or the front of the shin pads is not slashing. Any **forceful chop on the**

body, on the opponent's stick, or on or near the hands that is not an attempt to play the puck is.

- **Tripping** (Rule 57) — placing the **stick, knee, foot, arm, hand or elbow** so as to cause an opponent to trip or fall. **No fall is required for the penalty in any book, and USA Hockey's threshold is explicitly the lower of the two:** Rule 639 Note 1 defines tripping as an act that causes an opponent to "*lose balance or fall*", so a stick in the skates that makes someone stumble is a penalty even if they stay up. If you touch the **puck first** and then take the man down, it is a minor for tripping but **not** a penalty shot.
- **High-sticking** (Rule 60) — contacting an opponent **above the shoulders** with your stick, provided their shoulders are at waist level or higher. A **normal windup or follow-through** on a shot is permitted, and so is accidental contact on a centre bent over at a faceoff; a **wild swing at a bouncing puck is not. Injury (drawing blood or otherwise) makes it a double minor** (Rule 60.3). The 2025-26 rulebook redefined this as *contact* above the shoulders rather than *carrying* the stick high.
- **Cross-checking** (Rule 59.1) — "*the action of using the shaft of the stick between the two hands to forcefully check an opponent.*" That is the complete NHL definition; **there is no blade-on-ice element in it.** You will often hear that a blade touching the ice means it cannot be a cross-check — that phrasing **is** part of the playing rule in USA Hockey, whose Rule 609 (Note) defines cross-checking as "*using the shaft of the stick between the two hands to forcefully check an opponent with no portion of the stick on the ice*" — but it is absent from NHL Rule 59.1 and IIHF Rule 59.1. A major for cross-checking carries an **automatic game misconduct**.
- **Spearing** (Rule 62) — stabbing with the **point of the blade. Double minor if you miss, major plus game misconduct if you connect, match penalty if you injure.**
- **Butt-ending** (Rule 58) — using the **shaft above your upper hand**, or the butt of the stick, to jab or check. Same escalation: **double minor for the attempt, major plus game misconduct for contact, match penalty for injury.**
- **Holding the stick** (Rule 54.2) — a specific minor, announced as such. You may **defend yourself against an opponent's stick**, but you must **release it immediately**.

Practically: the whole stick-foul family collapses into one habit. **Stick on the puck or stick on the ice — never stick on the player.** If your stick is horizontal and touching an opponent, you are one referee's judgment away from a penalty. The defensive alternative is your feet and your body position, which is why gap control and angling are defensive *skills* and reaching is a defensive *failure*. See Body Contact and Battles and Defending the Rush.

Body fouls

- **Boarding** (Rule 41) — checking or pushing a **defenceless** opponent so that he hits the boards violently or dangerously. Severity, and therefore whether it is a minor, major or match, is at the referee's discretion based on the impact. The onus is explicitly on the **checker** to ensure his opponent is not defenceless — though the rulebook does allow the referee to consider whether the opponent put himself in a vulnerable position at the last moment. **Unnecessary contact on an obvious icing or offside play that puts a man into the boards is boarding by definition.**
- **Charging** (Rule 42) — violently checking an opponent **as a result of distance travelled**. It can be into the boards, into the net, or in open ice. The distinguishing feature from a legal check is the run-up.
- **Checking from behind** (Rule 43) — a check on a player who is **unaware and unable to protect himself**, with contact on the back of the body. **Under NHL rules there is no minor penalty for this** — Rule 43.2 says so in terms ("*There is no provision for a minor penalty for checking from behind*"): it is a **major plus an automatic game misconduct**, anywhere on the ice. **USA Hockey does provide a minor option** — Rule 608(a) reads "*a minor plus a misconduct penalty, or a major plus a game misconduct penalty, shall be assessed for checking from behind*" — but 608(b) makes the major-plus-game-misconduct mandatory where the check "*recklessly endangers an opponent, or causes them to go head first into the boards or goal frame*", and 608(c) escalates to a match penalty. Do not read the minor option as leniency; read it as covering the pushes that do not put anyone into the boards. **The onus is always on the checker** — USA Hockey Rule 608 states it in those words ("*the onus is on the player delivering the check to not hit from behind*"), and it is the load-bearing part of the rule: "he turned at the last second" is not a defence. The only carve-out is a *deliberate* turn to draw the contact, which the NHL frames as a player who "intentionally turns his body to create contact with his back."
- **Elbowing** (Rule 45) — use of an **extended elbow**, whether or not injury results. A major must be assessed if it injures the face or head, and that brings a game misconduct.
- **Kneeing** (Rule 50) — **leading with the knee**, sometimes extending the leg out. A major for kneeing carries an automatic game misconduct.
- **Clipping** (Rule 44) — throwing the body **across or below the knees** from any direction, or lowering your own body to hit at or below the knees. Major if it injures.
- **Roughing** (Rule 51) — a **punching or slamming motion**, gloved or not, usually at the head or face; also deliberately removing an opponent's helmet. It is defined as "a minor altercation not worthy of a major penalty".

- **Interference** (Rule 56) — the most conceptually important body foul, and the one you should actually study. The rule turns on **body position**: you have body position when you are **in front of or beside** your opponent, travelling in the same direction. From that position you may **block** his path, and you are **entitled to the ice you are standing on** — you do not have to move for anyone. What you may not do is **move laterally into a player without having established position** (that is a "pick"), or use your **stick or free hand** to lengthen his route, or check a player who is **not in possession and unaware** of the hit. A player who has just lost the puck may be checked, but **only immediately** after losing it. The 2025-26 rulebook softened the language from the referee "shall" impose a penalty to "can", formally acknowledging it as a judgment call.
- **Holding** (Rule 54) — **any action that restrains or impedes** an opponent, with or without the puck. You **may** use your arm in a strength move to block, provided you have body position and are not using your hands to hold.
- **Illegal check to the head** (Rule 48) — a hit where **the head was the main point of contact and that contact was avoidable**. The rule lists what "avoidable" means: whether you tried to hit through the body and picked the head through poor timing or angle or by extending upward; whether the opponent put himself in a vulnerable posture; whether he changed his body or head position at the last instant. **This is a minor penalty in the NHL** — there is explicitly no major or game misconduct provision under Rule 48 — though a **match penalty** is available if the referee judges intent to injure, and supplementary discipline usually follows.
- **Fighting** (Rule 46) — a **five-minute major**. In the NHL, fighting is not an automatic ejection; the **instigator** gets an extra minor plus a misconduct, and the **aggressor** — the one who keeps throwing punches at a defenceless or unwilling opponent — is separately penalised. Deliberately removing your jersey beforehand is an unsportsmanlike minor plus a game misconduct. **The IIHF takes a harder line and says so** — *"'Fighting' is not part of international ice hockey's DNA"* (Rule 46.1) — giving referees *"very wide latitude"*, with a **major plus an automatic game misconduct** for any player who persists after being ordered to stop. **England Ice Hockey then pins a number to it:** in NIHL (all leagues), the SNL and BUIHA Varsity fixtures, *"Fighting shall be penalised with a 5-minute Major Penalty"*, and in NIHL, NIHL1 and NIHL2 any fighting major *"in the last 5 minutes of regulation time (including overtime) will also carry an automatic Game Misconduct"* (In-House Rules, Section 6). See UK and England Rules.

Practically: two things. First, **legal contact is defined by the position of your feet before the hit, not by the force of the hit**. Establish position, then finish; do not chase across the ice and arrive. Second, **the onus rule on defenceless players is real**. If a man is facing the

boards, or reaching for a puck, or has just released it, the rulebook puts the responsibility for the outcome on you. Let him go.

Other infractions

- **Delay of game — puck over the glass** (Rule 63.2(iii)) — a minor on any player who shoots or bats the puck **directly, non-deflected, out of the playing surface from his defending zone**. The determining factor is **where the puck was when you hit it**. Over the glass behind the bench counts; **into the bench does not; directly off a faceoff does not**; and it does not apply where there is no glass. This penalty is **challengeable** if the puck deflected on the way out (Rule 38.2(d)), and a failed challenge adds a further minor.
- **Delay of game — other forms** (Rule 63.2) — freezing the puck unnecessarily, deliberately displacing the net, a skater falling on or gathering the puck into his body, adjusting equipment.
- **Delay of game — goalie outside the trapezoid** (Rules 27.8, 63.2(viii)) — see section 7.
- **Too many men** (Rule 74) — covered above.
- **Unsportsmanlike conduct** (Rule 75) — obscene or abusive language or gestures **directed at any person**, hair-pulling, biting, grabbing a face mask, throwing objects onto the ice, or **sitting on the boards with skates exposed during play** (one warning, then minors). Escalates: minor, then misconduct, then game misconduct if you persist.
- **Diving / embellishment** (Rule 64) — a minor on any player who **blatantly dives, embellishes a fall or reaction, or feigns injury**. A goalie who deliberately initiates contact with an attacker, or acts to make incidental contact look like more, can be penalised under this rule too.
- **Closing your hand on the puck** (Rule 67.2) — you **may catch the puck out of the air**, but you must **immediately place or knock it down to the ice**. It is a minor if you catch it and **skate with it**, if you **cover it on the ice to conceal it**, or if you **pick it up off the ice** during play. **If a skater falls on or gathers the puck inside his own goal crease, it is a penalty shot** (Rule 67.4); outside the crease it is a minor. **Note: this is a penalty, not a faceoff violation** — the fact that it often happens at a draw does not change what it is.
- **Hand pass** (Rule 79) — you may bat or push the puck with an open hand, but play is stopped if you **direct it to a teammate** and your team then gains possession. **No hand pass is called in your own defending zone** — that is a free tool for a defenceman under pressure. The centres at a faceoff may not bat the puck with a hand until a third player has touched it, and doing so is a **minor for delay of game — faceoff violation** (Rule 67.2).

- **High-sticking the puck** (Rule 80) — playing the puck with your stick **above shoulder height**. The whistle is conditional, not automatic: under Rule 80.1 play stops "*when a puck is struck with a high stick and subsequently comes into the possession and control of a player from the offending team*" (including the player who struck it), directly or by deflection. Otherwise play continues — and it expressly continues if you batted it to an opponent or a defender batted it into his own net. A goal cannot be scored by contacting the puck **above the height of the crossbar** — note that the reference height for the goal is the **crossbar**, not the shoulders.

Broken sticks

This is a penalty, it catches beginners constantly, and almost nobody is taught it.

A broken stick is one which, in the opinion of the referee, is "unfit for normal play" (Rule 10.3). That is a judgment, not a definition — a shaft snapped in half is obvious, but so is a blade hanging off, and a stick you think is still usable may not be.

The player rule (Rule 10.3):

- **You may keep playing without a stick.** Rule 10.3 says so in terms: "*A player without a stick may participate in the game.*" There is nothing wrong with backchecking, blocking a lane or finishing a check empty-handed.
- **What you may not do is keep hold of the broken one.** "*A player whose stick is broken may participate in the game provided he drops the broken stick. A minor penalty shall be imposed for an infraction of this rule.*" So the instant it goes, **let go of it** — do not carry it to the bench while the play is still live, and above all do not play the puck with the stub. This is the version that costs beer-leaguers two minutes: they break a stick in the corner, hang on to it out of instinct, and poke at the puck with what is left.
- **Getting a replacement.** You may take one **handed to you from your own bench, handed to you by a teammate on the ice**, or you may **pick up your own unbroken stick, or a teammate's, off the ice**. What is penalised is that you "**throw or shoot a stick to a teammate on the ice**" — the IIHF's version of the same rule spells the same prohibition out as "*throw, toss, slide or shoot*" — or **pick up and play with an opponent's stick**. A skater also **may not play using a goalkeeper's stick**. Each of those is a minor.
- **If a stick is thrown to you from the bench, you are not the one penalised** — you may use it; the person who threw it earns a **bench minor**.

The goalkeeper rule is different, and it is the difference that matters (Rule 10.4):

- **A goalie may carry on playing with a broken stick** until a stoppage, or until a teammate legally hands them a new one. A goalie is not required to drop it — the opposite of the skater rule.
- **The replacement must be passed hand to hand.** A teammate may not throw or shoot it to them; doing so is a minor to **that teammate** for throwing the stick, not to the goalie for receiving it.
- **A goalie may not go to the bench for a replacement.** They must get it from a teammate on the ice. And **a goalie may play with a skater's stick** in the meantime, until a proper goalkeeper's stick reaches them.

Practically: as a skater, train the reflex — *stick breaks, hand opens*. Get to the bench for a new one if you can do it without leaving a hole, and play the shift stickless if you cannot. As a defenceman losing a stick in your own zone, drop it, get your body into the lane and let a forward hand you theirs. As a forward whose defenceman has lost a stick in front of the net, **hand yours over** — that is what the rule contemplates, and you can go to the bench far more cheaply than they can.

Rule-set differences:

- **IIHF Rules 10.3 and 10.4** are the same rules in the same words, with one addition: an *intact* stick a goalie has accidentally dropped may be **pushed or slid** to them along the ice by a nearby teammate, provided it does not interfere with play.
- **USA Hockey Rule 605** is stricter in two ways worth knowing. First, the replacement sources are narrower: 605(b) allows a replacement "*only ... from the player's bench or from a teammate on the ice*" — it does **not** carry the NHL's express permission to pick a loose stick up off the ice. Second, **not knowing your stick is broken is not a defence**. The rule text allows "*reasonable time to be aware that the stick is broken*", but the casebook is blunt about the limit: a player "*is accountable for their actions, so the minor penalty shall be assessed if they participate in the play in any manner ... there is no provision of the rule that allows them to legally participate in play.*" "Participate" is defined there as playing or attempting to play the puck, body-checking or attempting to, or "*continuing any action that directly affects the play.*" You **may** carry the broken stick to the bench, but only if you are close to it, out of the play, and go immediately.
- **USA Hockey's goalkeeper clause (605(c)) covers only where the stick comes from** — the goalie may not go to the bench for one during a stoppage and must receive it from a teammate, on pain of a minor for delay of game. It contains **no equivalent of the NHL's Rule 10.4 permission to keep playing with a broken stick**, and 605(a) is written to

cover "a player or goalkeeper". Do not assume the NHL allowance travels to USA Hockey play; if you are a goalie under USA Hockey rules, ask your league.

What actually gets called at rec level

In my reading of the rulebooks against how adult recreational hockey is officiated, the calls you should expect to see, in rough order of frequency:

1. **Hooking, slashing and tripping.** Overwhelmingly the most common, and overwhelmingly the product of being beaten and reaching.
2. **Holding and interference.** Both are usually late-arriving players grabbing rather than skating.
3. **High-sticking.** In leagues where most players are not used to controlling a stick in traffic, this is common, and the **double minor for blood** is a real risk in beer-league play where visors are not universal.
4. **Too many men.** Bench discipline is worse in rec hockey than anywhere else.
5. **Body checking**, in the very large number of rec leagues that are **non-check**. Officials in those leagues call contact tightly and inconsistently by NHL standards, because the standard they are applying is not the NHL's.
6. **Roughing and unsportsmanlike conduct** after the whistle.

Conversely, the calls you will rarely see in rec hockey: **delay of game for puck over the glass** (many rinks do not have full glass, and the rule does not apply where there is none), **goalie trapezoid violations** (most rec leagues do not have the trapezoid at all), and **diving**.

The practical conclusion: in rec hockey, the entire penalty-avoidance problem reduces to *stop reaching with your stick, and stop being late*. Both are fixed by conditioning and gap control, not by trying harder to be careful.

5. Delayed Penalties

Two different things share this name

The rulebook's **Rule 26 "Delayed Penalties"** is about a **third penalty** to a team that already has two players in the box: the third player's clock does not start until one of the first two expires,

and a substitute keeps the team at three skaters (Rule 26.1). A team never plays below **three skaters plus a goalie**.

What players and commentators mean by "delayed penalty" is different: it is the **delayed call** under **Rule 15.1**. That is what this section covers.

How the delayed call works

If a player of the team **in control of the puck** commits an infraction, the referee **blows the whistle immediately**.

If a player of the team **not in control** commits an infraction, the referee **raises his arm** and lets play continue (signal 29.8). Play is stopped, and the penalty imposed, **when the team to be penalised gains control of the puck**.

Read that condition carefully: **control**, not touch. A puck deflecting off a penalised-team player's skate does not end the play. Play continues until they actually have it.

Pulling the goalie

Because play cannot be stopped until the offending team gains control, the non-offending team is **guaranteed possession or a stoppage**. There is no risk of a goal against from open play. So the goalie skates to the bench and the team plays with a **sixth attacker**.

This is a tactic, not a rule — nothing in the rulebook requires it. But it is universal at every level where the goalie can be trusted to make the trip, and you should treat it as automatic.

Two rules that constrain it:

- The goalie leaving the crease legitimately to be replaced by an extra attacker is **not** penalised for leaving the crease if an altercation then breaks out (Rule 27.6), and does **not** wave off a potential icing (Rule 81.3).
- **In regular-season overtime**, pulling the goalie **forfeits the guaranteed standings point** if you lose while he is off — **except** when he was pulled for a delayed penalty (Rule 84.2).

What happens if you score

- **Minor penalty:** if the **non-offending team scores** during the delay, **the minor is not imposed at all** (Rule 15.2). It is washed out entirely — you get the goal instead of the power play. If two or more minors were coming, the **captain chooses** which one is washed out.

- **Double minor:** one half is washed out; the player serves the remaining **two minutes** (Rule 18.2).
- **Major and match penalties are imposed regardless** of whether a goal is scored (Rule 15.2).

If the non-offending team, with their net empty, **puts the puck into their own goal**, that is a goal for the offending team and the delayed penalty is still assessed. In regular-season overtime this ends the game immediately in the offending team's favour (Rule 84.2).

What to do as a player during a delayed penalty

- **Look for your bench immediately.** The moment you see the referee's arm go up and you are not directly involved in the play, the extra attacker is coming and someone has to come off. If you are the closest player to the bench and not part of the immediate play, you are the one.
- **Keep the puck.** The single rule of a delayed penalty is: **do not give the offending team control.** That means no risky cross-ice passes through the middle, no blind dumps that they will simply pick up.
- **Do not force a shot from a bad angle** just to "use" the extra man. A shot that misses and rims around is exactly how the offending team gains control and ends your six-on-five for a two-minute five-on-four instead. A missed shot that they collect has cost you the better of the two options.
- **Regroup if the zone is not open.** Take it back to your own end if you have to. You have the puck and they cannot force a whistle without taking it from you.
- **Six attackers changes the shape, not the principles.** Most teams simply add a fourth high forward and play a 2-1-2 or an umbrella. See Special Teams and Offensive Zone Play.
- **If you are the team about to be penalised:** touch the puck as fast as possible to end it. Diving on it, deflecting it out, batting it — anything that gets you control. A hand pass in your defending zone is legal (Rule 79.2) and it counts.

USA Hockey note: if a team **ices the puck during a delayed penalty against their opponents**, the ensuing faceoff is at a **neutral-zone spot nearest the icing team's defending zone**, not in their end (Rule 624(a) note). The NHL rulebook contains no equivalent provision, largely because in the NHL play would already be whistled the moment the offending team gained control.

6. Power Play and Penalty Kill Basics

This section covers only what the **rules** determine. The tactics — formations, entries, seam passes, what to do when the puck goes to the corner — live in Special Teams.

The strengths you will actually see

- **5-on-4** — one minor. The standard power play.
- **5-on-3** — two overlapping minors. Lasts only as long as both are on the clock.
- **4-on-4** — one minor to each team at the same stoppage, with nothing else on the clock (Rule 19.1). Not a power play at all; both teams have a man off. Enormous open ice.
- **4-on-3** — a minor to each team while one team is already down one, or a penalty during 3-on-3 overtime (Rule 84.3).
- **3-on-3** — regular-season overtime, or the residue of overlapping penalties in overtime.

Teams **never go below three skaters** (Rules 26.1, 84.3). A third penalty to an already two-men-down team is queued behind the others.

When a penalty ends early

A **minor or bench minor penalty terminates immediately** when the opposing team scores — but only if **both** conditions hold (Rule 16.2):

1. The team scored against is **shorthanded**, and
2. The team scored against is **serving a minor on the clock**.

The penalty that ends is the one with the **least time remaining**. Two important exceptions:

- **Majors do not end on a goal** (Rule 20.2). Five minutes is five minutes.
- **No penalty expires when a goal is scored on a penalty shot** (Rules 16.2, 24.6).

Coincidental minors do not make either team shorthanded, so they do not expire on a goal either.

Shorthanded teams may ice the puck — with two exceptions

A team below the numerical strength of its opponent may shoot the puck the length of the ice with no icing called (Rule 81.6). This is the structural core of penalty killing. Every kill is built on the fact that clearing the puck costs you nothing but the time it takes them to bring it back.

It is not unconditional, and it is often stated bare when it should not be. There are two exceptions, and this document owns the wording of both.

Exception 1 — the NHL's empty penalty bench (Rule 81.6). Quoted in full: *"When a team is 'short-handed' by reason of a major penalty, and they have neglected to ensure there is a player on the penalty bench to exit upon the expiry of the penalty, they will continue to play short-handed but are not permitted to ice the puck. Icing will be called. They may substitute for this penalized player at the next stoppage of play."* (The underlying substitution requirement is Rule 20.3.) This is a bench administration failure rather than a playing decision, but on a five-minute major it is real: somebody must be sitting in the box ready to come out. Note also the timing test in the same rule — when a penalty is **about to expire**, icing is judged at the instant it expires, and a puck released before expiry is not icing.

Exception 2 — USA Hockey restricts the exemption by classification, and for most readers of this document this is the one that matters. The shorthanded nullification in **Rule 624(b)(1)** is prefixed with a classification limit: *"(For all Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult classifications only) The offending team is short-handed (below the on-ice numerical strength of their opponent) when the puck is shot."* Below those levels the nullification simply is not available, so **a shorthanded team cannot ice the puck at all** — an attempted length-of-the-ice clear on the kill comes straight back for a defensive-zone draw. If you play or coach youth hockey under USA Hockey rules, the single biggest structural advantage the NHL penalty kill has does not exist for you, and a kill built on clearing the length of the ice will simply feed the power play repeated defensive-zone faceoffs. (USA Hockey does, however, allow a line change after an icing — see above — so the cost is not identical.)

IIHF gives the same exemption, with the same "instant the penalty expires" test (Rule 81.6) — but the IIHF text has only those two paragraphs and **does not carry the NHL's major-penalty carve-out**, so internationally the exemption reads as unconditional.

Practical consequences

- **On the kill, the clear is the whole game.** You are not trying to make a play; you are trying to make them skate 200 feet again. Get it out, get it down, change.
- **On the power play, the clock is your opponent as much as the killers are.** Two minutes is roughly two possessions if you have to re-enter the zone each time. A failed entry is far more costly than a failed shot.
- **When your penalty is about to expire and you are killing**, the player in the box is a **breakaway waiting to happen**. Somebody has to call it out. See On-Ice Communication.

- **4-on-4 is not a power play and should not be played like one.** Both teams have space; both teams are equally exposed to a turnover.

7. Goaltender-Specific Rules

For the position itself, see Goaltender. This section is the rules layer.

The crease

The **goal crease** is the light-blue area in front of the net — **8 feet wide at the goal line, 6 feet deep** at its deepest point — and it is a **volume, not an area**: it extends **vertically four feet**, to the height of the top of the goal frame (NHL Rule 1.7). Those figures come from Rink Map and Glossary, which owns the rink's geometry and gives the full Rule 1.7 construction, the goaltender's reference marks and the IIHF equivalents.

Goaltender interference

The governing principle (Rule 69.1) is stated explicitly and is not what most players think it is:

An attacking player's **position, whether inside or outside the crease, should not by itself determine** whether a goal is allowed.

Goals are disallowed only if **(1)** an attacking player, **by his positioning or by contact**, impairs the goalie's ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal; or **(2)** an attacking player initiates **intentional or deliberate contact** with the goalie, inside or outside the crease.

Inside the crease (Rule 69.3): if an attacking player initiates contact with the goalie — **incidental or otherwise** — and a goal is scored, **the goal is disallowed**. This is the strict zone. Also: if the goalie, establishing his position, initiates contact with an attacker who is in the crease and the attacker **does not immediately give ground**, and a goal is scored, it is disallowed and the attacker gets a minor. A player "establishes a significant position within the crease" when his body, or a substantial part of it, is in the crease for **more than an instantaneous period**.

Outside the crease (Rule 69.4): **incidental contact is permitted, and goals stand, provided the attacking player made a reasonable effort to avoid the contact**. But "a goalkeeper is not fair game just because he is outside the goal crease" — any *unnecessary* contact is penalised.

Rebounds and loose pucks (Rule 69.7): where a goalie and attacker are simultaneously going for a loose puck, **inside or outside the crease**, incidental contact is permitted and the goal counts.

Being pushed into the goalie (Rule 69.1): if a **defender** pushes you into the goalie, that is **not** contact initiated by you, provided you made a reasonable effort to avoid it. If **you** push a defender into his own goalie, that **is** treated as contact initiated by you.

Screening is legal outside the crease

Standing in the goaltender's line of sight, without contact and without being in the crease, is normally legal. Rule 69.3 disallows a goal where an attacker "establishes a significant position **within the goal crease** so as to obstruct the goalkeeper's vision" — the crease is what makes that illegal, not the screening.

But "no rule against it" overstates the case. Rule 69.1 clause (1) disallows a goal where an attacking player "*either by his positioning or by contact, impairs the goalkeeper's ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal.*" **Positioning alone is enough** — no contact and no crease entry required, if the referee judges that where you stood stopped the goalie moving or defending. So the honest statement is: a clean screen from outside the paint is legal and referees allow it constantly, but it is a judgement call under 69.1, not an absolute right.

This is the single most valuable rules fact for a forward. **Get in the goalie's eyes; keep your skates out of the blue paint.** See Offensive Zone Play and Winger.

The trapezoid (goalkeeper's restricted area)

This section is the **penalty**. The geometry — the NHL figures, the depth, the IIHF metric equivalents and where the lines actually run — belongs to Rink Map and Glossary, which owns the rink's dimensions. Take them from there rather than from here.

The goalie may not play the puck behind the goal line outside the marked trapezoid behind his net. Violation is a **two-minute minor for delay of game** (Rules 27.8, 63.2(viii)). The determining factor is the **position of the puck**, not the position of the goalie.

There is exactly one exception, and it is not the one people think: the minor is **not** assessed when the goalie plays the puck **while maintaining skate contact with his goal crease**. There is no teammate-based exception and no "he was only touching it" exception.

Related, and often forgotten: a goalie who **participates in the play beyond the centre red line** — intentionally plays the puck or checks an opponent — takes a minor (Rule 27.7). Again, **the**

position of the puck decides.

⚠ **Cite 27.8 for the penalty and never for the dimensions.** Rule 27.8 still describes the area as beginning "*six feet (6') from either goal post*" — the pre-2014 wording, from before the trapezoid was widened by two feet a side for 2014-15. It is **stale, not self-contradictory**: six feet outside each post gives 18 feet at the goal line, diverging perfectly coherently to the 28 feet at the boards that both rules quote. It is the old shape, accurately described. **Rule 1.8 is the geometry**, and every figure here follows it.

Who has the trapezoid: the **NHL** (since 2005-06), the **KHL**, and **IIHF play** (IIHF Rule 27.7). **USA Hockey has no trapezoid** — nothing in the 2025-29 playing rules restricts *where a goalkeeper may play the puck*. **Most rec, beer-league and youth associations do not use it either.**

⚠ **But USA Hockey is not restriction-free behind the net — it restricts where the goalie may freeze the puck, and the penalty is the same two minutes.** Rule 614(c) assesses a minor for delay of game to a goalkeeper who falls on or gathers the puck and causes a stoppage when "*the puck is behind the goal line and their body is entirely outside of the goal crease*", or when "*the puck is outside the boundaries of the 'goalkeeper's privileged' area*." The rule's own Note defines that area as "*an area outlined by connecting the end zone face-off spots with an imaginary line and imaginary lines from each face-off spot running perpendicular to the end boards*" — a rectangle from the faceoff-dot line back to the end boards. It is far more generous than a trapezoid and it does include the ice directly behind the net, but **it excludes the corners**. The same area also protects the goalie: Rule 607(c) penalises checking or charging a goalkeeper "*while the goalkeeper is within the goal crease or privileged area*."

Practical consequence: if you play without the trapezoid, your goalie is a third defenceman on every dump-in and your breakouts can be built around him retrieving pucks in the corners — **but under USA Hockey he must play those corner pucks, not smother them**. If you play with it, your defencemen must retrieve everything wide, and the goalie's job is to stop the puck behind the net and leave it. Confirm which before your first game — it changes your breakout. See Breakouts.

Freezing the puck

The goalie is allowed to cause a stoppage, but only in defined circumstances. Holding the puck with the hands for longer than three seconds unless actually being checked, throwing it forward toward the opponents' net, dropping it into his pads or onto the goal net, racing out of the crease to beat an attacker to a loose puck and then jumping on it, and piling snow or obstacles near the net are each a **minor** (Rules 63.2, 67.3) — and the last becomes an **awarded goal** if the net is

empty (Rule 67.5). Coming out to cut down the angle, making the save and *then* covering the puck is legal.

⚠ **One of these reads far stricter than it is enforced — take it from the owner.** Rule 63.2(vii) penalises a goalkeeper who, inside his own crease, deliberately falls on or gathers the puck into his body "*unless he is actually being checked by an opponent.*" Read literally, that would make the routine freezes you see in every game illegal, and it is not how any game is officiated. **Goaltender owns this one** and sets out how the written rule and the "unnecessary stoppage" standard of Rule 67.3(ii) interact in practice, together with the published **Hockey Canada** (Interpretation 3 to Rule 10.1(a)) and **USA Hockey** (Rule 610(b)) interpretations, both of which apply a pressure test the NHL does not publish. Do not act on the bare literal reading — and if your league's referees are strict about it, find out early.

There is one further consequence that is not a penalty at all but hurts more: if the **attacking team shoots the puck in from beyond the centre red line and the goalie freezes it**, the faceoff is in the **goalie's own end**, the **defending team may not change lines**, and they may **not take a timeout** (Rules 63.8, 87.1). The attacking team also **chooses which dot**. In other words, a soft freeze on a routine dump-in is punished exactly like an icing.

The goalie playing the puck

Beyond the trapezoid and the red line, the goalie is a skater with the puck. He can pass, he can rim, he can set up a breakout. The rules that constrain him are:

- **Hand passes** by the goalie in the defending zone are legal, like anyone else's (Rule 79.2).
 - The goalie **cannot participate in a faceoff** (Rule 76.1).
 - A **minor penalty to a goalie is served by a teammate** who was on the ice at the stoppage, designated by the coach through the captain, and **that substitute may not be changed** (Rule 27.1). A **penalised player may not serve a goalie's penalty**.
 - A goalie may **not go to his bench during a stoppage** for a stick, equipment or instructions **without the referee's permission** — otherwise he must be replaced immediately or his team takes a bench minor (Rule 27.6).
 - A **minor for leaving the immediate vicinity of the crease during an altercation** (Rule 27.6). This is why goalies stay in their net during scrums.
-

8. Faceoffs

Faceoffs owns this material and carries it in full — the procedure, the stick-down order, the restraining lines and the fifteen-foot rule, every violation, the ejection rules, the post-icing free violation, and the technique. What this section keeps is the **location table**, which is a rules reference you will want in one place, and the two things you must not leave this document without.

The nine spots

Every faceoff in the game must be taken at one of nine marked spots — one at centre ice, four in the neutral zone, four in the end zones — and **no faceoff may be taken within 15 feet of the goal or the side boards**, or anywhere other than a spot (Rule 76.2). What is painted at each of them is Rule 1.9, and belongs to Rink Map and Glossary.

Why the draw is where it is

Faceoff location is a **penalty and reward system**, and reading it tells you who just did what:

Situation	Where the draw goes
Start of a period, or after a goal	Centre ice
Penalty assessed	One of the two end-zone spots in the offending team's zone — and the team awarded the power play chooses which dot (Rule 76.2)
Penalty after a goal, or at the end/start of a period	Centre ice
Icing	End zone of the offending team; the attacking team chooses the dot (Rule 81.2)
Offside — carried in	Neutral-zone spot nearest that attacking zone
Offside — passed or shot in	The spot in the zone where the pass or shot originated
Intentional offside	End-zone spot in the offending team's defending zone
Goalie freezes a shoot-in from beyond the red line	Goalie's own end zone; attacking team chooses the dot
Defender accidentally dislodges the net	Defender's own end zone; attacking team chooses the dot
Puck out of bounds	Nearest spot in the zone from where it was shot or deflected out
Hand pass in the attacking zone	Neutral zone, outside the defending team's blue line
High-sticking the puck	The spot giving the offending team least territorial advantage
Goal disallowed for goalie interference	Nearest neutral-zone spot outside the offending team's attacking zone
Officials erred on an icing or offside	Centre ice (icing) or nearest neutral-zone spot (offside, USA Hockey)
Two violations at once	The spot giving the offending team least territorial advantage

There is one more that changes behaviour after the whistle: **if a point man or a player off the bench from the attacking team enters the zone past the outer edge of the end-zone faceoff circle during a scrum, the draw is moved out to the neutral zone** (Rule 76.2). If your team has just earned a defensive-zone draw in the other end, **do not go join the scrum** — you will give the zone back.

The two things you must not leave without

1. A winger encroaching gets the *centre* ejected from the draw. Two rules do the work together, which is why both get cited: **Rule 76.6** supplies the consequence — a player other than the one taking the draw moving into the faceoff circle before the drop means "*the offending team's player taking the face-off shall be ejected from the face-off circle*" — and **Rule 76.7** enumerates the violations and adds the escalation: a **second violation by the same team on the same draw is a bench minor**. Both skates stay outside the circle and outside the hash marks until the puck is down; **skate contact with the line is permitted, crossing it is not**, and your stick may be inside provided it touches neither an opponent nor his stick. Your best faceoff man being removed because a winger leaned in early is the most consequential rules mistake a winger makes, and it is entirely avoidable.

2. ⚠ Under IIHF rules none of that ejection language applies, and this changes how you play. A faceoff violation in the **IIHF Official Rulebook 2025/26** results in a **warning to the offending team, not the ejection of its centre** — where the NHL text says "shall be ejected from the face-off circle", IIHF Rules 76.4, 76.6 and 76.7 say the team "*shall receive a warning for a 'face-off' violation.*" A second violation by the same team is still a bench minor. The IIHF also lists a violation the NHL does not have: **"one of the centers wins the face-off by using the skates"** (IIHF Rule 76.3(VI)). Kicking the puck back with your feet is **legal in the NHL and a violation internationally**. So in an IIHF-derived book your winger's encroachment costs you your one warning rather than your best draw-taker, and a technique that is standard in North America burns that warning by itself. Faceoffs sets both out in full, along with the USA Hockey differences.

Two category distinctions that matter more than they look, both fully treated in Faceoffs: **closing your hand on the puck is a minor penalty, not a faceoff violation** (Rule 67.2), as is batting the puck with the hand to win a draw; and **no timeout may be granted following a faceoff violation** (Rule 87.1), so there is no way to buy yourself out of one. (On high sticks at the dot, see the high-sticking bullet in section 4: accidental contact on a centre bent over at a faceoff is explicitly not a penalty under Rule 60.1, though a wild swing at a bouncing puck still is.)

9. Officials and Signals

Who is on the ice

The NHL uses the **four-official system: two referees** (orange armbands) and **two linespersons**.

Referees (Rule 31) have general supervision of the game and full control of all officials and players; their decision is final. They **impose penalties**, give the final on-ice decision on **disputed goals**, and one of them **drops the puck to start each period**. They may consult the linespersons before deciding.

Critically: **referees do not call offside or icing**. Rule 31.4 says so explicitly — those are the linespersons' duties, unless a linesperson is somehow unable to act.

Linespersons (Rule 32) are responsible for **offside** and **icing**, and they **conduct every faceoff except the one that starts each period** (Rule 32.2). They also:

- May **stop play and report** too many men, thrown objects, interference with an official, an illegally received stick, or bench interference.
- **Must stop play** for premature goalie substitution, a serious injury the referees missed, **faceoff encroachment**, an illegal **hand pass**, **high-sticking the puck**, **icing**, **offside**, the puck out of bounds or unplayable, a goal the referees did not see, and spectator interference.
- **Must report to the referees** the circumstances of majors, match penalties, misconducts, game misconducts, and abuse of officials. If a linesperson sees such an infraction by an attacking player before a goal that the referees missed, **the goal is disallowed and the penalty assessed**.
- **May call too many men** (Rule 74.2).

In rec hockey you will most often see two officials, not four, each doing both jobs. That is a genuine difference in what they can see, and it is worth adjusting your expectations accordingly.

The signals you should recognise

From Rule 29. These are the ones with immediate consequences for what you do next:

Signal	What it looks like	What it means for you
Delayed offside	Non-whistle arm fully extended straight above the head (29.7)	Get out of the zone and tag up. Do not touch the puck or chase the D.
Delayed penalty	Non-whistle arm fully extended above the head (29.8) — same as delayed offside	Look at who is doing it. Linesperson at the blue line = offside. Referee = penalty. Head to the bench for the extra attacker.
Icing (pending)	Back linesperson raises either arm fully overhead , holds it until the whistle or the wave-off (29.19)	Puck is going down; if you are chasing, the race is to the puck , and it will be judged by the time someone reaches the dot.
Icing (completed)	The back linesperson points to the faceoff spot , skates there, turns backwards near the blue line and crosses his arms on his chest (29.19)	Icing confirmed. No change for the offending team.
Wash out	Sweeping sideways motion of both arms across the body at shoulder level, palms down (29.35)	No goal (referee), or no icing / no offside (linesperson), or hand pass / high-stick washed out. Play on.
Time-out / unsportsmanlike conduct	Both hands forming a "T" in front of the chest (29.31, 29.34)	Identical signals — context decides.
Misconduct	Both hands on hips (29.25)	Ten minutes, but the team is not shorthanded.
Penalty shot	Arms extended, pointing to the centre-ice faceoff spot (29.26)	—

Common infraction signals worth knowing on sight: **hooking** (tugging both arms toward the stomach), **slashing** (chopping one hand across the opposite forearm), **tripping** (striking the leg below the knee, both skates on the ice), **holding** (clasping one wrist), **cross-checking** (both fists forward and back from the chest), **interference** (arms crossed in an "X" on the chest), **elbowing** (tapping an elbow), **boarding** (fist into the open palm), **charging** (fists rotating around each other), **high-sticking** (both fists clenched, one above the other, at forehead height), **roughing** (fist clenched, arm extended to the side), **hand pass** (open palm pushing forward), and **checking from behind** (both arms extended forward from the chest at shoulder level, palms out).

Note: three further signals are not described here because there are none to describe. For match penalty (29.24), throwing equipment (29.30) and too many men on the ice (29.32) the rulebook

prints "No signal in the National Hockey League. NO SIGNAL" — the same entry it gives for head-butting and kicking below.

The rulebook also notes there is **no signal in the NHL** for **head-butting** (29.14) or **kicking** (29.22).

Talking to officials

The rules on this are unusually blunt. Under **Rule 39 (Abuse of Officials)** and **Rule 75 (Unsportsmanlike Conduct)**, escalation is: **minor, then misconduct, then game misconduct**. Specifically, **a penalised player who disputes a ruling after he has entered the penalty box and play has resumed gets a misconduct** (Rule 75.4(iv)).

Practically:

- **The standing is much narrower than most players think.** Rule 6.1: *"Only the Captain, when invited to do so by the Referee, shall have the privilege of discussing any point relating to the interpretation of rules."* Two things follow. First, it is the **captain alone** — an alternate inherits the privilege only when the captain is not on the ice (Rule 6.2). Second, and more important, **you do not have standing until you are invited**. Approaching an official to open a discussion is not a right the letter confers.
- **A complaint about a penalty is not a "rule interpretation", and complaining is itself a minor.** Rule 6.1 is explicit: *"Any Captain, Alternate Captain or any player who comes off the bench and makes any protest or intervention with the officials for any purpose shall be assessed a minor penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct under Rule 39."* So the captain may ask about how a rule is being interpreted, when invited — but may not dispute a call, and is penalised for trying.
- **The moment to say something is not the moment you disagree.** It is at the next natural break, and only if the official opens the door.
- **Ask, do not tell — and only when invited.** A calm question about interpretation may get an answer. "That's terrible" gets ten minutes. Note that even the mild-sounding opener is a protest if the official did not invite it.
- **You will never get a call reversed.** What you can occasionally influence is what the officials are watching for. That is worth having a captain who is good at it, and worth everyone else keeping quiet.
- **In rec hockey with two officials**, half the ice is unwatched at any moment. Complaining that something was missed is worse than pointless — everything is missed, in both directions.

See Team Play and Culture and Mental Game.

10. Rule Set Differences That Actually Matter

The differences below are the ones that change **what you should do on the ice**. Everything else is trivia.

Read the England Ice Hockey column against the IIHF one beside it. England Ice Hockey, the SIHA and the BUIHA run the IIHF book and amend it in writing, so **"As IIHF" is a positive statement, not a blank**: it means the In-House Rules carry no amendment to that rule, and the IIHF cell to its left is therefore the rule you play under. Only the cells that say **Amended** are British departures, and each of those quotes the In-House Rules. The Elite League runs the IIHF book with its own casebook, which this corpus has not read — nothing in the England Ice Hockey column should be taken as describing EIHL interpretation.

	NHL	IIHF	England Ice Hockey	USA Hockey	Typical rule
Trapezoid	Yes (Rules 1.8, 27.8) — minor for delay of game; only exception is skate contact with the crease	Yes (Rule 27.7) — same rule; 6.80 m at goal line, 8.60 m at boards	Unsettled in England and Wales. The In-House Rules amend Rule 1 but not Rule 27; England Ice Hockey's <i>Rules & Regulations</i> 22.3 say it is " <i>not currently enforced</i> " — and EIH governs England and Wales only, so in Scotland and BUIHA hockey, whose instrument is the In-House Rules and is silent, 27.7 reads as live. The Elite League runs its own Casebook, unread here. If it is your goalie assume it binds; if it is theirs assume they may come for it	No trapezoid — the goalie may <i>play</i> the puck anywhere. But Rule 614(c) makes it a minor to <i>freeze</i> it outside the "goalkeeper's privileged area" (dot line back to the end boards; corners excluded)	Usually not — check)
Icing type	Hybrid (since 2013-14) — race is to the puck , decided by the time a skate reaches the end-zone dot	Hybrid (since 2014) — wording near-identical to NHL, but adds the no-race paragraph noted above	As IIHF — hybrid, including the no-race paragraph	No-touch / automatic — complete the instant the puck crosses the goal line	Usually not touch, sort of — check)
Icing: line change	Not permitted for the offending team; three exceptions (pulled goalie, injured player,	Not permitted — same bar (Rule 81.4), but the IIHF adds a fourth exception, " <i>a Player with a broken skate</i> "	As IIHF — including the broken-skate exception the NHL does not have	Permitted — no restriction in Rule 624	Varies

	NHL	IIHF	England Ice Hockey	USA Hockey	Typical rule
	strength-changing penalty)				
Icing: shorthanded exemption	Yes at all times	Yes — but without the NHL's major-penalty carve-out (IIHF Rule 81.6 has only two paragraphs)	As IIHF — unconditional	Yes only at Youth 15-Only+, Girls 16U+, HS and Adult	Usually yes
Icing: goalie waves it off	Yes — feigning, attempting or skating toward the puck nullifies it	Yes	As IIHF	No — only actual contact	Varies
Icing: timeout	Not permitted to the defensive team (Rule 87.1)	Not permitted — IIHF 87.1 is the NHL sentence verbatim, third limb included	As IIHF — no relief anywhere on that list	Permitted — Rule 636(f) attaches no icing condition	Varies
Body checking	Legal (men's)	Legal (men's). Women's: hitting only with clear intent to play the puck; no using the boards to eliminate an opponent (Rule 101.1)	As IIHF for the checking rules themselves — but the categories they attach to are British: junior is U19/U16/U14/U12/U10 by birth year and unisex , women's Adult runs from the 14th birthday (In-House Rules, Rules 100.1, 200). Neither book sets a checking age — see Body Contact and Battles	Prohibited at 12U and below, all girls'/women's, all non-check adult classifications (Rule 604)	Usually prohibited non-checking the norm

	NHL	IIHF	England Ice Hockey	USA Hockey	Typical re
Fighting	5-minute major , not an automatic ejection; extra minor + misconduct for the instigator (Rule 46)	Penalised hard; major + automatic game misconduct for persisting. "Fighting is not part of international ice hockey's DNA" (Rule 46.1)	Amended. " <i>Fighting shall be penalised with a 5-minute Major Penalty</i> " in NIHL (all leagues), SNL and BUIHA Varsity; in NIHL, NIHL1 and NIHL2 a fighting major in the last 5 minutes of regulation or overtime " <i>will also carry an automatic Game Misconduct</i> " (In-House Rules, Section 6)	Major + game misconduct ; second fighting major in a season = 3-game suspension (Rule 615)	Ejection + suspension nearly always
Offside review	Coach's Challenge (Rule 38.2(a)); failed challenge = 2:00 minor , further failures 4:00	Coach's Challenge available (Rule 83.5 → Rule 38); same 2:00 / 4:00 escalation (Rule 38.7)	Amended — none at all. Video review is " <i>not available in EIHL or SIHA competition</i> " (Rule 37) and a Coach's Challenge is " <i>not permitted</i> " (Rule 38). The referee's call stands	None — no video review in the playing rules	None
Airborne trail skate at the blue line	Onside — judged on a vertical plane ; a raised skate that has not broken it is onside (Rule 83.1)	Onside — same plane concept (Rule 83.1)	As IIHF — onside; drag or lift, either works	Offside — Rule 630(a) requires skate contact with the Neutral Zone or the blue line; only a skate <i>touching</i> is onside	Follows with the league assume a required otherwise
Faceoff violation	Centre ejected from the draw (Rules 76.6, 76.7); second violation by the same team on the same draw is a bench	Warning to the team, no ejection (Rules 76.4, 76.6, 76.7); second violation still a bench minor; winning the draw with your skates	As IIHF — a warning, not an ejection, and the skate win is a violation. If you learned the draw in North America, that habit costs your team its one warning	Centre ejected if a teammate is out of position (Rule 613(d)); second violation is a minor to the player who committed it , not a bench minor. Note also	Often not simply re — check)

	NHL	IIHF	England Ice Hockey	USA Hockey	Typical rule
	minor ; winning the draw with your skates is legal	is itself a violation (Rule 76.3(VI))		that the attacking player puts his stick down first at every spot except centre ice (Rule 613(a)) — the reverse of the NHL	
Tagging up on a delayed offside	Yes	Yes	As IIHF — at every age and level	Only at Youth 15-Only+, Girls 16U+, HS and Adult (Rule 630(d)) — below that, offside is immediate	Usually yes
Overtime	Regular season: 5 min, 3-on-3 , then 3-round shootout . Playoffs: unlimited 20-min 5-on-5 sudden-death periods	Prelim: 5 min 3-on-3 + 5-shooter shootout. Playoff/bronze: 10 min 3-on-3 + shootout. Gold medal: unlimited 3-on-3 sudden-death periods	Amended, and often absent. Played " <i>only ... in NIHL fixtures and in SNL fixtures where specifically provided for in competition regulations</i> " (Rule 84). NIHL: 5 min 3-on-3 then a 3-shooter GWS; NIHL playoff final: successive 20-min 5-on-5 sudden death, no shootout (Appendix 1)	Recommended 10-min sudden-victory period after a 5-min rest; shootout optional; affiliates may set their own (Rule 638)	Usually no stand. With short 4-on-4 sometime
Period length	3 × 20 min , stop time; 18-min intermissions	3 × 20 min; 15-min intermissions	As IIHF	Max 3 × 20 min; 15-min intermissions; penalty times pro-rated for shorter periods (Rule 402)	Often shorter, often running curfews common

A note on the England Ice Hockey column: unlike the rec column, it *is* a book — two, in fact, and both are published. Read the IIHF Rule Book for the game and the In-House Rules for the amendments; neither works without the other. The column above covers only the amendments that touch the rules in this table, and it is deliberately short, because the In-House Rules are short.

The amendments that will catch you out first are not in this table at all — neck protection, facial protection, helmet fit, rink size and the junior and women's age categories. UK and England Rules owns all of them, and Equipment and Rink Map and Glossary carry the equipment and geometry consequences. One further caution: the In-House Rules are revised in-season and EIHA and SIHA "*may also issue Rule Bulletins from time to time*", so check for a later revision before relying on a detail.

A note on the rec column: unlike the other four, it is not one book. There is no single governing document for rec hockey, and the column describes what is common across leagues that mostly adopt USA Hockey or Hockey Canada rules with local amendments. But "no single book" is not the same as "no book at all", and it is worth knowing that published rec rulebooks do exist and can be read.

CARHA Hockey — the Canadian Adult Recreational Hockey Association — publishes a full standalone *Official Rule Book*, adopted wholesale by a good number of Canadian adult leagues, and it bears out most of the column:

- **No trapezoid.** The words do not appear anywhere in the book; there is no goalkeeper restricted area.
- **Automatic icing** (Rule 65(a)) — play stops when the puck crosses the goal line, and "*any contact with the puck over the centre red line, with the puck continuing down over the goal line nullifies 'icing' the puck.*" Note also that "*some CARHA Hockey Leagues will use the blue lines instead of the red line to divide the ice*" for icing purposes (Rule 65(b)–(c)) — a variation with no professional equivalent.
- **Body contact is itself the penalty** (Rule 49(a)): a minor or major "*to any player who intentionally bodies, pushes, shoves, stands in front of an opponent for the purpose of making contact, and/or does not avert body contact with an opponent.*" You do not need to hit anybody; failing to get out of the way is enough.
- **Fighting means the dressing room.** The instigator or aggressor gets a **match penalty** (Rule 59(a)), and a match penalty means "*ordered to the dressing room immediately for the balance of the game*" plus no further games until the case is dealt with by the Chairman (Rule 34(a)).
- **Two twenty-minute periods, not three** (Rule 84(a)), with a 10-minute intermission — though Section Seven item 21 hands period length back to "*the local committee or teams*"

for league and exhibition games, which is exactly the kind of local variation the column is warning you about. Section Seven item 16 also runs a mercy rule: **running time** at a five-goal spread with 10 minutes left, with penalty lengths stretched to 3 / 7 / 12 minutes to compensate.

- **The slap shot is banned outright** (Rule 79(a)) — a minor, or a major if an opponent is injured. The book defines it as bringing the stick back "*more than fifteen inches either on or off the ice.*" There is nothing like this in any of the other three books.

The **ASHL** (Canlan's Adult Safe Hockey League) also publishes a rulebook, but it works as an overlay rather than a replacement: it states that "*the current rules issued by Hockey Canada (Canadian ASHL locations) and USA Hockey (USA-based ASHL locations) provides the foundation for game rules in the ASHL.*"

So the column is verifiable in outline, and CARHA is a fair representative. What it is still not is authoritative for **your** league: neither of those books governs you unless your league says it does. Treat the column as a prompt to go and read your own league's rules sheet.

Common Mistakes

These are rules misconceptions players genuinely hold, and what each one costs.

- **"I have to be behind the blue line."** No — **one skate** on or behind the plane keeps you onside, and the line is a foot wide. Coasting behind the line to be safe kills your entry. Drag a trail skate and enter at speed.
- **"My skate was in the air, so I was offside."** Under the **NHL and IIHF**, no — if the **blade** has not broken the vertical plane of the leading edge, you are onside (NHL Rule 83.1). Under **USA Hockey, yes** — Rule 630(a) requires **skate contact** with the neutral zone or the blue line, so the airborne skate is offside. Know which book you are in.
- **"During a delayed offside I just can't touch the puck."** Wrong, and this one costs possession every game. **Forcing the defending puck carrier deeper into his own zone** or being **about to make contact** with him also stops play. Retreat to the line; do not chase.
- **"We tagged up, so the goal counts."** Not if the puck was **shot in** and that same shot went in. **Clearing the zone afterwards has no bearing** (Rule 83.4).
- **"Icing is a race to the dot."** It is not — Rule 81.1 says in terms that "*the determining factor is which player would first touch the puck, not which player would first reach the end zone face-off dots.*" The race is to the **puck**; the dot is only where the linesperson's decision

is locked in, and a race too close to call at that point is icing. Under **USA Hockey's automatic icing** there is no race at all.

- **"I got the puck over the red line with my skate, so no icing."** No. **"Gaining the line" requires the puck to be on your stick** when it contacts the centre red line (Rule 81.1).
- **"A ten-minute misconduct puts us on the kill."** It does not. A misconduct is **replaced immediately** and the team plays full strength (Rule 22.3). The player pays; the team does not.
- **"The other team scored, so my major is over."** Majors do not expire on a goal (Rule 20.2). Only minors and bench minors do, and only if the team is genuinely shorthanded and serving one.
- **"I can't screen the goalie."** A clean screen from outside the paint is legal, and referees allow it constantly. What is illegal is impairing him **by contact, establishing a significant position inside the crease** — or, under Rule 69.1, impairing his ability to move freely or defend the goal **by your positioning alone**. Stand in his eyes; keep your feet out of the blue paint and don't crowd him so tightly that he cannot move.
- **"Any contact with the goalie is interference."** Outside the crease, **incidental contact is permitted** if you made a reasonable effort to avoid it, and it is explicitly permitted on **rebounds and loose pucks** either side of the crease line (Rules 69.4, 69.7).
- **"Our goalie can go get it as long as a defenceman is coming."** There is **no teammate-based exception** to the trapezoid. The **only** exception is the goalie **maintaining skate contact with his crease** (Rule 27.8).
- **"Closing my hand on the puck at the draw is a faceoff violation."** It is a **minor penalty** (Rule 67.2). Batting the puck with the hand to win the draw is a **minor for delay of game — faceoff violation**. Neither is a simple "do it again".
- **"Only the centre can cause a faceoff violation."** The opposite is the common case: a **winger encroaching gets the centre ejected from the draw** (Rule 76.7). A **second** violation by the same team on the same draw is a **bench minor — under USA Hockey Rule 613(d) it is instead a minor on the individual who committed it**, not a bench minor. **Under IIHF rules there is no ejection at all** — the team gets a warning (IIHF Rules 76.4/76.6/76.7) — and winning a draw with your skates, legal in the NHL, is itself a violation there (IIHF Rule 76.3(VI)).
- **"Every puck over the glass is a penalty."** The strict-liability version applies only from **your own defending zone**, only if **direct and non-deflected**, and not **into the bench**, not **directly off a faceoff**, and not where there is no glass (Rule 63.2(iii)). But note Rule 63.2(ii): a player who **deliberately** shoots or bats the puck out of the playing area *"from*

anywhere on the ice surface" takes the same minor. Outside your own end you are safe only if it was an accident.

- **"The referee blows the whistle as soon as the offending team touches the puck on a delayed penalty."** The condition is **control**, not touch (Rule 15.1). A deflection off their skate does not end it.
- **"We're on a delayed penalty, so let's shoot."** A missed shot they recover ends your **six-on-five** and downgrades you to a **five-on-four**. Keep the puck. Regroup if you must.
- **"We're killing, we can't ice it."** You can, freely, whenever you are **below** their numerical strength (Rule 81.6) — with the USA Hockey classification restriction noted above. Not using this is the most common penalty-kill error at rec level.
- **"My stick broke, so I'll just play it out."** A minor. **Rule 10.3** lets you keep playing *without* a stick but not *with* a broken one — *"a player whose stick is broken may participate in the game provided he drops the broken stick."* Open your hand the moment it goes. And do not take a teammate's by having it thrown or slid to you on the ice; it must be handed over, or picked up off the ice (NHL and IIHF only — **USA Hockey Rule 605(b)** allows a replacement only from your bench or from a teammate on the ice). **Your goalie is the exception:** under Rule 10.4 they may carry on with a broken stick until a stoppage, and must be handed a replacement on the ice rather than fetching one from the bench.
- **"I'll just tell the ref what I think."** Disputing a call **from the penalty box after play has resumed is an automatic misconduct** (Rule 75.4(iv)). Only the captain and alternates have standing at all.
- **"The rules are the rules."** They are not. Trapezoid, icing type, body checking, tagging up, overtime and penalty length **all vary** between the NHL, IIHF, USA Hockey and your league. Read your league's sheet before your first game.

Key Takeaways

1. **One skate keeps you onside, and the blue line is a foot wide.** Drag a trail skate and enter the zone at full speed instead of coasting behind the line — but keep the blade **in contact** if you play USA Hockey, where a raised skate is offside (Rule 630(a)), unlike the NHL and IIHF. On a *delayed* offside, clear the zone and tag up — every attacker in the zone, at the same instant, with a skate genuinely touching the line — and do not chase the defenceman: touching the puck, going for a loose puck, forcing him deeper, or being about to hit him all end the play. **Tag-up is not universal either.** Under **USA Hockey Rule 630(d)** the delayed offside exists only at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School

and Adult; below those classifications there is no tagging up and the whistle goes immediately.

2. **Under hybrid icing the race is to the puck, not the dot** — the end-zone faceoff dot is only the deadline by which the linesperson must decide who would have touched the puck first, and a race too close to call at that instant is icing. And "gaining the line" means the puck **on your stick** touching the centre red line. Hybrid is the NHL and IIHF standard; some youth and rec leagues still play no-touch or touch icing, so check yours.
3. **Icing costs you three things: a defensive-zone draw, no line change, and no timeout** — all designed to keep tired players on the ice. **That is the NHL and the IIHF alike**, so it is the version a British player should assume; IIHF Rules 81.2, 81.4 and 87.1 impose all three in the NHL's own words. **USA Hockey imposes none of the last two** — Rule 624 restricts no substitution, Rule 204 permits a change at any stoppage, and Rule 636(f) puts no icing condition on time-outs. Clear off the glass and out instead. The one relief: a shorthanded team may ice the puck freely, and that single sentence is the foundation of every penalty kill — **but not in every book**. USA Hockey grants it only at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult (Rule 624(b)(1)), and the NHL withdraws it from a team shorthanded by a major that has left nobody on the penalty bench (Rule 81.6).
4. **Minors end early when the other team scores; majors never do.** And a misconduct does not shorthand your team at all.
5. **Almost every rec-league penalty is a stick foul, and almost every stick foul is a conditioning failure.** Stick on the puck or on the ice — never on the player.
6. **Screening the goalie is legal — but "outside the crease" is not a safe harbour.** Get in their eyes and keep your skates out of the blue paint, but know the actual test: Rule 69.1 disallows the goal if you impair the goalie's ability to move or defend "*either by his positioning or by contact*" — positioning alone is enough, wherever you stand. Outside the crease, incidental contact is permitted if you made a reasonable effort to avoid it.
7. **The only trapezoid exception is skate contact with the crease** — there is no teammate exception. And in most rec leagues outside Britain there is no trapezoid at all, which changes your whole breakout.
8. **A winger encroaching on a faceoff gets the centre thrown out; under NHL rules a second violation by that team is a bench minor.** Both skates outside the line until the puck is down. **Both other books differ, and the one most readers play under is USA Hockey:** it keeps the ejection but makes the second violation "*a minor penalty for delay of game ... assessed to the player committing the second violation*" (Rule 613(d)) — an individual minor, not a bench minor — and it reverses the stick-down order, the attacking player going first at every spot but centre ice (Rule 613(a)). Under **IIHF** rules there is no

ejection at all — a first violation is a warning to the team (Rule 76.6), but a **second by the same team on the same draw is a bench minor** for delay of game (Rule 76.7) — and winning the draw with your skates is itself a violation, so a technique that is legal in the NHL costs you your one warning and puts the bench minor one mistake away.

9. **On a delayed penalty, the whistle comes when the offending team gains control — not when they touch it.** Get off for the extra attacker, and above all do not give the puck away.
10. **Find out which rule set you are playing under before your first shift.** Trapezoid, icing type, checking, tagging up and penalty length all differ, and each one changes a decision you will make in the first two minutes.

VERIFICATION NOTES

Unverified: the "typical rec / beer league" column in section 10 remains a generalisation — CARHA Hockey and the ASHL publish real rulebooks and are cited above, but no document governs rec hockey as a whole, and neither book applies to a league that has not adopted it. The length of each overtime period in an IIHF gold-medal game is not stated in IIHF Rule 84.6: the rule specifies the numerical strength (three skaters and a goalkeeper), the 15-minute intermissions and the changing of ends, but gives no period duration, in contrast to Rule 84.5, which sets the playoff and bronze-medal overtime at "not more than 10 minutes" and has the clock "reset to 10:00 minutes". The figure is simply not in the book, so none is given.

UK and England Rules

Rule set: This document is *about* the rule set. The rest of the corpus is written to NHL rules with IIHF, USA Hockey and Hockey Canada differences flagged inline; this document tells a reader in Britain which of those flags is theirs.

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Overview

If you play in Britain, **your rule book is the IIHF's**. Every level of the game here runs on it: the National Ice Hockey League, the recreational and junior game in England and Scotland, university hockey, and the GB national teams — and the Elite League too, on this corpus's reading, though the League runs its own Casebook that nobody here has read.

That single fact does most of the work. Wherever the rest of this corpus says "*under IIHF rules...*", it is describing your game. Wherever it flags a USA Hockey or Hockey Canada divergence, that flag is not yours — it is there for North American readers.

What Britain adds on top is a short layer of local amendment:

You play in	Your rules are
EIHL (Elite League)	IIHF Rule Book, plus the EIHL Casebook where the League's interpretation differs
NIHL, and the English and Scottish recreational and junior game	IIHF Rule Book, plus the In-House Rules issued by England Ice Hockey and the SIHA
BUIHA (university)	IIHF Rule Book, plus the same In-House Rules
GB national teams	IIHF Rule Book, unamended

The In-House Rules say so in terms: England Ice Hockey, the Scottish Ice Hockey Association and the British Universities Ice Hockey Association "*adopt the IIHF Official Rule Book 2025–2026*"

(Version 1.1, published July 2025) as the foundation for the rules of the game to be applied in England and Scotland."

⚠ **Note the version number, because this corpus could not obtain it.** Every IIHF rule quoted anywhere in these documents is verified against the IIHF Official Rule Book 2025/26 **Version 1.0, May 2025** — the edition the IIHF publishes at the link in the Sources below. Britain adopts **Version 1.1, July 2025**. As of 29 July 2026 no copy of v1.1 could be found: the IIHF's own rulebook listing pages sit behind a bot challenge, and England Ice Hockey's site hosts the 2023 rulebook rather than the current one. **Nothing in this corpus tests whether v1.0 and v1.1 say the same thing.** Where a rule number or wording matters to you, check it against your league's own copy of v1.1. This is the largest known gap in the British coverage here and it is stated rather than hidden.

⚠ **The In-House Rules are not a rule book.** They are amendments, and they say it themselves: "*This document is to be read alongside the IIHF Rule Book and is not intended to serve as a standalone rule book.*" You need both. They are also the **overriding** interpretation — where they differ from the IIHF book, they win domestically.

Who governs what

England Ice Hockey (EIH) governs the game in **England and Wales** — its own *Rules & Regulations* say so at 1.1, 3.1 and 17.1. It was called the English Ice Hockey Association, and you will still see "EIHA" everywhere — on club sites, in league names, in older documents. Same body.

The Scottish Ice Hockey Association (SIHA) governs Scotland, and shares the same In-House Rules document with EIH.

Ice Hockey UK (IHUK) is the national governing body recognised by the IIHF, and runs the GB national teams.

The British Universities Ice Hockey Association (BUIHA) runs university hockey and adopts the same In-House Rules.

The amendments that change what you do

These are the ones worth knowing before you play. Everything not listed here is enforced in line with the IIHF book.

Neck protection is mandatory, for everyone, with no warning

This is the sharpest difference between Britain and North America, and it is the one most likely to catch out a reader who has learned the game from North American material.

Under the In-House Rules, *"a neck laceration protector is mandatory for all players in all IIHF categories and SIHA competitions"*, and it must *"cover as much of the neck as possible."*

Enforcement is unusually hard:

- **No warning is given.** Failing to wear one is an immediate **10-minute misconduct penalty**.
- If it comes off during play, **you must leave the ice** and may not retrieve it.
- A second violation by the same player is another 10-minute misconduct, which **automatically escalates to a game misconduct**.
- **It is not only a game rule.** England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 24.3 makes it *"mandatory that all players at all levels use an approved Ice Hockey Neck Guard/Protector whilst participating in all on ice activities"* — practices and stick-and-puck included.

The **mandate** itself is IIHF Rule 9.12, which requires a neck laceration protector *"for all Players in all categories of IIHF Competition"* — so it travels with you to any IIHF competition, not just British ones. What the In-House Rules change is the **enforcement**: IIHF 9.12 gives a warning and then a minor penalty, where the In-House Rules give no warning and a 10-minute misconduct.

 **The two British documents do not agree on the warning, and this corpus cannot resolve it.** The In-House Rules 9.12 say *"No warning will be given."* But England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 24.6 — three clauses below the equipment rules quoted above — sets out a warning scheme: *"This counts as a warning to the player and bench, for any further violation of rule either 24.3, 24.4 or 24.5 misconduct penalties will be assessed."* The In-House Rules are the current playing-rule amendments and the *Rules & Regulations* on disk are the 2024-25 edition, which is why this corpus follows the In-House Rules throughout. **Wear the neck guard and assume no warning** — that is the conservative reading and it costs nothing. This is the same pattern as the trapezoid: a second British document saying something different, and no published statement of which governs.

Compare North America, where the corpus's other documents describe a narrower requirement: **USA Hockey Rule 304(g)** requires it in all classifications *except* adults, and **Hockey Canada Rule 3.6(c)** covers players registered in minor and female hockey. A British adult reading only those would reasonably conclude the requirement is not theirs. It is.

There is no on-ice video review

"On-ice video review is not available in EIH or SIHA competition." The In-House Rules repeat that exact sentence against **nine** separate provisions — double minor penalties (18.4), the official scorer (33.2), the game timekeeper (34.7), the penalty timekeeper (35.8), Rule 37 itself, high-sticking (60.3), goaltender interference (69.1), goals (78.5) and puck out of bounds (85.7) — and add a tenth at 78.6 in slightly different words (*"Video review is not in use in EIH or SIHA competition"*).

The Coach's Challenge goes with it. In-House Rule 38: *"As on-ice video review is not available (see Rule 37), a Coach's Challenge is not permitted in EIH or SIHA competition."* There is nothing to challenge with, so there is no challenge.

Practically: the referee's call on the ice is the call. Where this corpus describes a decision being reviewed, that is the NHL and international tournament game, not yours.

"On-ice" is doing work in that sentence, though. Video is still used *after* the game. In-House **Rule 28** says a supplementary-discipline case may be opened either through an official match report or through *"the defined video review process"*. And a separate, unnumbered **Supplementary Discipline** section later in the same document — after Appendix 2, not part of Rule 28 — adds that the disciplinary body may investigate any incident after the final whistle *"regardless of whether such offences were penalised by the Referee at the time."* Nothing is reviewed during the game; that is not the same as nothing being reviewed.

Rinks are often smaller than the book says

IIHF Rule 1.2 specifies a sheet *"60m long and 26m to 30m wide"* — note that 30 m is the top of a range, not the standard. In England and Scotland, *"rinks with a non-standard playing surface (below 56 m × 26 m) are authorised by the NGB for all levels of hockey"*, with three named rinks permitted only up to U16 — Sutton in England, and Coatbridge and Limekilns Road in Scotland.

That threshold sits **outside IIHF Rule 1.2 altogether**: the book fixes the length at 60 m and makes 26 m its *minimum* width, so a rink below 56 m × 26 m is short of the book on both counts. Rink Map and Glossary owns the dimensions and the markings.

This matters more than it sounds. Time and Space explains what rink size does to the game: on a smaller sheet the distances shrink, the angles do not, and everything arrives sooner. Check your rink before you assume the geometry in any document applies to it.

Facial protection and helmet fit

- **Women's hockey only:** the In-House Rules place "*Players may wear a half visor only from the start of the season following their 18th birthday*" under **Rule 102 - Women's Hockey Specific Equipment Rules**. Read it as a **relaxation, not a restriction**: IIHF Rule 102.1 requires "*full-face protection (full-visor, or cage facial protection)*" for every player in the women's Senior category, and this permits a half visor instead once the player is past that birthday.
- All players in **SIHA Recreational or SIHA University** hockey must wear at minimum a half visor, "*regardless of their date of birth.*"
- **University hockey in England is covered too, and by a separate clause.** Under *Rules Applying Specifically to BUIHA Games in England and Scotland*: "*all players in BUIHA games are required to wear a half visor as a minimum.*" All recreational players in Scotland are under the same floor. So if you play BUIHA — which is English and Scottish university hockey — the half-visor minimum is yours, whichever of the two clauses you reach first.
- **Face cages are mandatory in all junior hockey.** England Ice Hockey *Rules & Regulations* 24.5: "*Face cages for all junior hockey games are mandatory, and must be worn as per the manufacturers stipulations. Cages must be tight against the player's chin at all times.*"
- The gap between chin and chin strap **must not exceed 2.5 cm** — about one finger. First offence sends you to the bench to adjust; second is a 10-minute misconduct.
- A full cage must have the chin cup fitted and in contact; loose or dangling cages and straps are not permitted.

The trapezoid may not be enforced

The IIHF book has a goalkeeper's restricted area (Rule 1.8 for the geometry, 27.7 for the penalty), so on the face of it British hockey has a trapezoid. England Ice Hockey's own *Rules & Regulations* say otherwise:

22.3. "*Goalkeepers' Restricted Area is not currently enforced to allow ice rinks the necessary time to make the changes to implement this rule.*"

That is the governing body suspending an IIHF rule domestically — **and only in its own jurisdiction**. England Ice Hockey is the NGB "*in England and Wales*" (*Rules & Regulations* 1.1), so

22.3 does not reach **Scotland (SIHA)** or **BUIHA university hockey**. Their instrument is the In-House Rules, which are silent on the restricted area — and whose Introduction says "*unless otherwise stated, all rules will be enforced in line with the IIHF Rule Book.*" So for a Scottish or university player IIHF 27.7 reads as live. **The Elite League is a separate question this corpus cannot answer:** EIHL clubs play in England, and the League runs its own Casebook that nobody here has read. The suspension's stated reason — giving rinks time to repaint — is also why so many British rinks have no trapezoid painted on them; treat an unmarked sheet as a hint rather than a ruling, because 27.7 turns on "*the position of the puck*", not on the markings.

Play as though it binds, wherever you are. For a goaltender that costs nothing and the alternative is two minutes. For an attacking team the safe assumption runs the other way — plan as though *their* goalie may come for a dumped puck.

 **Treat this as unsettled.** The non-enforcement is in the **2024-2025** edition of the *Rules & Regulations*. The **2025-26** In-House Rules — the current playing-rule amendments — do not mention the restricted area at all, so the published documents do not establish whether the suspension still stands. Ask your league. It changes where your goaltender may retrieve a rim, which is a decision they make several times a game.

Fighting

In NIHL (all leagues), SNL and BUIHA Varsity, fighting is a **five-minute major**. In NIHL, NIHL1 and NIHL2, a fighting major in the **last five minutes of regulation or in overtime also carries an automatic game misconduct**.

Overtime is not universal

Overtime "*is only played in NIHL fixtures and in SNL fixtures where specifically provided for in competition regulations.*" Many games simply end level.

Where NIHL National League games do go to overtime: **five minutes of 3-on-3**, then a game-winning-shots competition with **three shooters per team** taking alternate shots.

Age categories are British, and unisex

Junior categories are set by birth year, not by the North American banding this corpus's other documents use:

Category	Birth years (2025-26)
Under 19	2007-2009
Under 16	2010-2011
Under 14	2012-2013
Under 12	2014-2015
Under 10	2016 and younger

The In-House Rules add a note worth quoting: *"Junior age categories are unisex and are not classified as 'Mens' within the UK."*

In women's hockey, **Adult runs from the player's 14th birthday** and Under 16 from the 10th to the 16th. Below adult, any foul carrying a major penalty *"will, in all cases, also receive an additional Game Misconduct Penalty."*

The same appears to be true across all junior hockey, at every age from U19 down to U10 — but read how the rule is written. In-House **Rule 201 - Junior Hockey Specific Playing Rules** consists of a single sentence: *"These rules apply to all junior age groups as defined in Rule 200 of the in-house rules."* It does **not** name IIHF Rule 201.1, where the women's equivalent (Rule 101) spells the cross-reference out in full. IIHF 201.1 reads: *"Any Player who commits a foul that is assessed a major penalty will also receive in any case an additional game misconduct penalty and will be ejected from the game"* — and its own heading scopes it to the men's Under-20 and Under-18 categories. **Reading In-House Rule 201 as extending 201.1 down the whole junior ladder is this corpus's interpretation, not the rule's own words.** It is the natural reading of a rule headed "Junior Hockey Specific Playing Rules" that scopes itself to all junior age groups, and it is the conservative one: play as though a major ends a junior's game, and confirm with your league. British junior categories are unisex, so nothing turns on 201.1's "men's" heading in that respect.

Team sheets and bench staffing

The official team list must reach the referee crew **no later than 20 minutes before the scheduled face-off**, and only listed players are eligible. Late submission is a bench minor for delay of game.

For **EIH-sanctioned games**, benches must carry a **Level 2 or higher non-playing coach aged 18+**, plus one more coach at minimum Level 1. The rule opens by scoping itself — *"For all EIH-*

sanctioned games (except where competition regs state otherwise)" — and there are three documented carve-outs:

- **Adult recreational hockey in England:** *"If all players on both teams are 18 years of age or older on game day, there is no requirement for qualified EIH coaches to be present on the bench."* If any under-18 plays, the standard rules return.
- **BUIHA (university) hockey:** *"There is no requirement for coaches in BUIHA ice hockey, as players under 18 are not permitted to participate."*
- **SIHA-sanctioned games** run a different ladder: Level 2 minimum for junior and senior, **Level 1 minimum for recreational.**

A team manager may sit on the bench but does not count toward the requirement. On medics the In-House Rules say *"While not mandatory, the presence of a qualified medic on the bench is strongly recommended"* — a recommendation worth taking on its own terms rather than reading as an exemption.

What this document does not cover

- **The EIHL Casebook.** The Elite League publishes its own casebook recording where its interpretation differs from the IIHF book. This corpus has not read it, and nothing here should be taken as describing EIHL interpretation.
- **Competition regulations.** Each league sets its own regulations on rosters, imports, fixtures and discipline, separately from the playing rules. The In-House Rules themselves note that EIH and SIHA *"may also issue Rule Bulletins from time to time."*
- **Northern Ireland.** England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* describe it as the governing body for **England and Wales** (Rules 1.1, 3.1, 17.1), so Welsh readers are covered by everything here. This document does not establish what governs the game in Northern Ireland, and does not guess.
- **Whether body checking is legal at your age.** This is the most consequential thing this document cannot tell you, so it is worth being explicit about why. Neither British source sets a checking age: the string "check" does not appear in the In-House Rules in any body-contact sense, and the *Rules & Regulations* contain no body-checking provision at all. The IIHF book restricts checking only in women's hockey, at Rule 101.1. The North American age lines — USA Hockey's 12U, Hockey Canada's — are **not** in force here and do not transfer. The answer sits in your competition's regulations, which are not published in either document

above. Body Contact and Battles §1 treats this properly; **ask your league before you hit anyone.**

Common Mistakes

- **Reading the USA Hockey flags as though they were yours.** They are the commonest rule-set flags in this corpus because it was written to NHL rules for a North American-heavy audience. In Britain, the IIHF flags are the ones that apply to you.
- **Assuming neck protection is optional because you are an adult.** That is the North American position, and it is not the British one. It is a 10-minute misconduct, with no warning — and it applies at practice too, not just in games.
- **Expecting a review, or a Coach's Challenge.** There is no on-ice video review in EIHA or SIHA competition, and no challenge either. Video can still be used for supplementary discipline after the game.
- **Assuming a North American checking age applies to you.** Neither British book sets one. Ask your league; do not infer it from USA Hockey's 12U line.
- **Playing English university hockey and reading past the half-visor minimum.** BUIHA has its own clause, separate from the SIHA one, and it binds every player in a BUIHA game.
- **Thinking a major in junior hockey costs you five minutes.** In women's hockey below Adult it ends your game outright, and In-House Rule 201 reads as extending the same consequence across junior hockey U19 to U10 — plan for the ejection and confirm with your league.
- **Assuming your rink is 60 × 30.** Sheets below 56 × 26 are authorised here for all levels, so measure rather than assume. (No published census of British rink dimensions exists, so this corpus does not claim a distribution — only that the authorisation is broad.)
- **Treating the In-House Rules as the rule book.** They are a diff. Without the IIHF book beside them they do not describe the game.
- **Assuming "EIHA" is defunct because the website says England Ice Hockey.** Same organisation, renamed.

Key Takeaways

1. **If you play in Britain, your rule book is the IIHF's** — at every level, from recreational to the GB national side — and, on this corpus's reading, the Elite League, whose own Casebook is unread here.

2. Wherever this corpus flags an **IIHF** difference, that is your game. Wherever it flags **USA Hockey** or **Hockey Canada**, it is not.
 3. On top of the IIHF book sit the **In-House Rules** (England, Scotland, universities) or the **EIHL Casebook** (Elite League). They override the IIHF book domestically.
 4. **A neck laceration protector is mandatory for all players**, with no warning and an immediate 10-minute misconduct.
 5. **There is no on-ice video review** in EIHL or SIHA competition.
 6. **Your rink is probably smaller than the book's** — below 56 m × 26 m is authorised, which is short of the IIHF's fixed 60 m length and below its 26 m minimum width.
 7. **In women's hockey a half visor is permitted only from the season after your 18th birthday** — a relaxation of the IIHF's full-face requirement, not a rule for everyone. A half visor is the minimum in SIHA recreational and university hockey, in **all BUIHA games in England and Scotland**, and for all recreational players in Scotland. **Face cages are mandatory in all junior hockey.**
 8. **Play junior hockey as though any major penalty is an automatic ejection, at every age from U19 to U10.** In-House Rule 201 scopes the IIHF junior playing rules to all junior age groups without naming Rule 201.1, so the extension is this corpus's reading rather than the rule's own words — but it is the conservative one, and confirming it with your league costs nothing. In **women's** hockey below adult the cross-reference is explicit (Rule 101), so there it is not an inference.
 9. **Junior categories are British and unisex**, set by birth year, and are not classified as "Mens".
 10. **Overtime is not universal** — only NIHL, and SNL where its regulations provide for it, and the shootout is **three** shooters, not the IIHF's five.
 11. **Body checking is the one thing this document cannot answer.** Neither the IIHF book nor the In-House Rules sets a British checking age — it lives in your competition's regulations. See Body Contact and Battles §1, and ask your league.
 12. Where your league's regulations disagree with anything here, **your league's regulations are right.** Check them.
-

On-Ice Communication

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. This document is almost entirely about convention rather than rules — there is no rule anywhere in hockey that governs what you may shout, and the few rules that touch communication are noted where they apply. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see [UK and England Rules](#).

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Overview

Every other document here tells you to communicate. This one tells you what to actually say. It is a list of the words hockey players shout at each other, who says each one, when, and — the part that gets skipped — what you are supposed to *do* when you hear it.

The vocabulary below is the most widely understood version of hockey's shared language. It is not the only version, and the specific words matter far less than your team agreeing on them. A team that says "wheel" and a team that says "go" are equally well organised. A team where three players say "wheel", one says "go", and one says nothing is not.

A note on variation — read this before you learn the list

Convention	There is no official hockey vocabulary — calls vary by team, region, level and coach
Action	Agree your list as a team at the start of the season and drill it in practice
Key	A call only works if the receiver decodes it in under half a second
Risk	A call the receiver has to translate is worse than silence — it costs them a beat
Read	This is the North American vocabulary, and at the top level the shouted words appear to be English whatever the nationality
Never	Assume your calls travel when you move between hockey cultures — ask
Convention	Treat every daggered (†) entry as widely used but undocumented as a spoken call

There is no official hockey vocabulary. Calls vary by team, by region, by level and by coach. Two things follow from that.

First, agree your list as a team. A call only works if the receiver decodes it in under half a second. If they have to translate, the call has failed — they would have been better off with silence, because at least silence doesn't cost them a beat. Coaches who set their calls at the start of the season and drill them in practice get calls that work in March; coaches who leave it to chance get five private languages.

Second, expect regional differences. The vocabulary here is the North American one, which dominates coaching material in English and is what you will meet in the NHL, in most of Canada and the United States, and in English-speaking rec hockey worldwide. European leagues run the same concepts in their own languages, and coaching terminology genuinely differs — Sweden forward Gustav Nyquist, describing switching back to a Swedish national-team staff, said "it's different words you use, kind of ... different terminology, I guess, for the same thing."

But be careful which way that cuts, because the evidence points the other way for on-ice calls. Asked at the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off whether his players would use Swedish on the ice to hide instructions from opponents, Sweden coach Sam Hallam said they would do the opposite: *"They're going to scream and yell to each other in English. 'Over! Over!' 'Here! Here!' 'Open! Open!' 'Stretch!' Whatever. Just because that's what they're doing in games over here."* So at the top level the shouted vocabulary appears to be English regardless of nationality. **There is no published call-by-call comparison of North American and European club hockey vocabulary**, so treat this as an open question rather than a rule: if you move between hockey cultures, do not assume your calls travel. Ask.

Calls marked with a dagger (†) below are ones no published coaching source documents as *spoken calls*, though they are in common use. Some of them — outlet, net front, sag, collapse, odd man — are perfectly well documented as **terms**; it is only their use as something you shout that is unverified. Treat all daggered entries as widely-used-but-unverified, and check them against your own team's vocabulary rather than assuming.

Why verbal communication wins games

Key	The puck carrier is the least informed player on the ice — the forechecker closing from behind is where they cannot look
Action	Say what you can see; the information costs you nothing and is useless sitting in your eyes
Goal	Turn a blind decision into an informed one — a guess in the defensive zone is how goals get scored
Priority	Call before the puck arrives — the same call as it arrives just startles the receiver
Mindset	The loudest team looks like the more skilled team, and most of that "chemistry" is information
Key	It is the cheapest improvement available to a team — no fitness, no skill development, no ice time

The mechanism is simple and it is worth understanding, because it tells you when to talk.

The puck carrier is the least informed player on the ice. Their eyes are down or forward, their body is between them and half the rink, and the most dangerous thing in their world — the forechecker closing from behind — is in the one place they cannot look. Everyone else can see it.

A call converts a blind decision into an informed one. A defenceman retrieving a puck in the corner has to choose between three plays. Without information they guess, and a guess in the defensive zone is how goals get scored. With one word from the goalie — "time" or "man on" — they are not guessing any more. The information cost you nothing. It was already sitting in someone else's eyes, useless.

Half a second is the whole game. A call given before the puck arrives lets the receiver plan; the same call given as the puck arrives just startles them. See Scanning and Anticipation for the habit that lets you make calls early.

The loudest team usually looks like the more skilled team. This is worth sitting with. A talking team makes fewer blind turnovers, arrives at pucks with a decision already made, and rotates in the defensive zone without anyone standing still to work out whose job it is. From the stands that reads as skill, speed and "chemistry". Most of it is information. It is the single cheapest improvement available to a team — it requires no fitness, no skill development and no ice time.

The core call list

Each entry gives the word, who says it, what it means, and what you do when you hear it.

Pressure warnings

Action	Call the pressure the moment you see it — the carrier almost never can
Action	On "man on", stop trying to make a play; protect the puck and get rid of it — rim, chip off the glass, or a short pass
Never	Take that contact with your back to the boards — skates parallel to the wall, forearm and hip, head up, chin off your chest
Read	One forechecker can be beaten with a reverse or a quick turn; two means you are being sealed and the puck has to leave
Key	"Time" is the mirror of "man on" and just as valuable — fear of pressure that is not there throws pucks away
Action	On "feet" or "under", look down, kick it to your stick and reset
Never	Use "heads" to mean anything tactical — it means a puck or stick is in the air, so turn away and cover up
Convention	"Wheel" is the documented call for skating it yourself; keep "turn" only if your team already agrees what it means

These are the highest-value calls in hockey and the ones most often missed. All of them are said by whoever can see the pressure, which is almost never the puck carrier.

- **"Man on"** — *Said by anyone with a view of the puck carrier's blind side.* An opponent is closing and the carrier cannot see them. **If you hear it:** stop trying to make a play. Protect the puck with your body, put the net or your own body between you and the pressure, and get rid of it — a rim, a chip off the glass, or a short pass to the nearest teammate. Do not put your head down.

⚠ **One safety override, and it outranks everything else in this entry.** "Man on" is shouted in exactly the situation where the most serious injuries in hockey happen — a player who cannot see the check coming, near the wall. **Never take that contact with your back to the boards.** Get your **skates parallel to the wall** and take it on your forearm and hip, head up, chin off your chest. Protecting the puck never justifies squaring your back to an oncoming checker. If you cannot turn in time, get your stick and gloves up onto the glass and brace. Full treatment in Body Contact and Battles, which owns this — and note that the checker carries the legal obligation here, not you.

- **"One on" / "Two on"** — *Said by anyone, most often the goalie or a backchecker.* The same warning with a count: one forechecker coming, or two. **If you hear it:** the number changes your play. One forechecker can be beaten with a reverse or a quick turn; two means you are being sealed and the puck needs to leave — rim it or glass it out.
- **"Heads up"** — *Said by anyone.* Generic warning: something is coming that you have not seen. Less precise than "man on" but faster to shout when you have no time to be specific. **If you hear it:** get your head up and your body braced. Assume contact.

A related shout, **"heads"**, is a pure safety call — a puck or stick is flying **through the air** toward someone. Get out of its path: turn away and cover up. Never use "heads" to mean anything tactical. **Note the one place this does not apply**, because it is the opposite of the rule that matters most: **it is never an instruction to duck into contact near the boards.** "Heads Up, Don't Duck" governs everything involving the wall — head up, chin off your chest, skates parallel, forearm and hip. Ducking a flying puck in open ice is sensible; ducking a checker at the wall is how spinal injuries happen. See Body Contact and Battles and Skating.

- **"Behind you"** — *Said by anyone.* Either an opponent or the puck is behind you. Ambiguous, which is its weakness — some teams reserve it for the puck and use "man on" for opponents. **If you hear it:** check over your shoulder immediately. If your team hasn't split the meaning, be prepared for either.
- **"Feet" / "Under"** — *Said by anyone.* The puck is in your skates or directly under you and you have lost sight of it. **If you hear it:** look down, kick it to your stick, and reset. This one is a genuine gift; a puck in your feet is invisible to you and obvious to everyone else.
- **"Time" / "You've got time" / "No one on you"** — *Said by anyone with a view, most often the goalie.* Nobody is close. This is the mirror image of "man on" and it is just as valuable, because a player who fears pressure that isn't there panics and throws the puck away. **If**

you hear it: slow down. Lift your head, take an extra stride, make the good play instead of the safe one.

- **"Wheel"** — *Said by a defence partner, a forward, or the goalie.* Skate the puck yourself, usually around behind your own net and up the far side. It is one of the standard breakout options — see Breakouts. **If you hear it:** take off. The call means the person who said it can see that the route is clear, so commit rather than hesitating. Turn to the open ice, not into the boards.

Some teams use **"turn"** † for the same instruction, or simply use "time" and let the retriever decide. "Wheel" is the documented one and the one to standardise on; keep "turn" only if your team already uses it and everybody agrees what it means.

Puck direction

Action	Only call a direction you can genuinely see, and be prepared to be the target
Never	Send "over" or "D-to-D" through the front of your own net — go behind the goal line, because an interception there is point-blank
Key	A rim goes onward around the boards with the flow, a reverse goes back against it — a rim beats a forechecker sealing you in, a reverse one who has over-run you
Technique	Keep a rim hard and high on the glass — a soft rim is a turnover with extra steps
Rule	Shooting the puck directly out of play from your defending zone is a two-minute delay of game (NHL Rule 63.2(iii)); over the glass behind the bench still counts
Rule	USA Hockey has no equivalent — Rule 610(c) penalises only a deliberate shoot-out, and 631(d) makes an accidental one a last-play faceoff
Rule	After your own icing your line cannot change and your team cannot take a timeout under NHL and IIHF rules (81.4, 87.1) — USA Hockey blocks neither
Read	"Ice it" is normal on the kill and expensive at even strength — the shorthanded exemption is removed by Rule 81.6 and restricted by classification under USA Hockey Rule 624(b)(1)
Rule	A puck dumped wide has to be retrieved by a defenceman, because the goalie may only play it behind the goal line inside the trapezoid under NHL and IIHF rules — though in England and Wales that is unsettled, so plan as though their goalie may come for it
Convention	"Eat it" carries two unverified meanings — say "eat the puck" for the board battle and something else for the clock

These tell the carrier where to put the puck. Because they arrive as instructions, they carry an obligation: only make them when you can genuinely see the option, and be prepared to be the target.

- **"Over"** — *Said by the weak-side defenceman, or the goalie.* Move the puck to the other side, typically behind the net. On a breakout it is the call that switches the play away from the forecheck's pressure. **If you hear it:** send it across behind your own goal line, not through the slot. Never make a D-to-D pass through the front of your own net — an interception there is a point-blank chance.
- **"Up"** — *Said by the strong-side defenceman or the winger on the wall.* Move the puck up the same side it is already on — usually to the winger on the boards. **If you hear it:** hit the wall option and go with it.
- **"Reverse"** — *Said by a teammate arriving behind the carrier, often the defence partner or the goalie.* Send the puck back the way it came, against the flow of the forecheck. **If you hear it:** the forechecker has over-committed and skated past you; the puck goes into the space they just vacated.
- **"Rim"** — *Said by anyone.* Fire the puck hard along the boards so it follows the curve of the rink around to a teammate further along. **If you hear it:** keep it hard and keep it high on the glass so it doesn't die in the corner. A soft rim is a turnover with extra steps.

Rim and reverse are not the same play and the distinction is worth being precise about: a rim goes *onward* around the boards in the direction of the flow; a reverse goes *back against* it. A rim beats a forechecker sealing you in; a reverse beats one who has over-run you.

- **"D-to-D"** — *Said by a defenceman or the goalie.* Pass across to your defence partner. Functionally a more explicit "over". **If you hear it:** go behind the net, below the goal line. Same rule as "over".
- **"Chip"** — *Said by a supporting forward.* Put a short pass past the defender into space for them to skate onto — an area pass rather than a pass to a stick. **If you hear it:** don't try to hit their blade. Put it where they are going.
- **"Off the glass" / "Glass"** — *Said by anyone, usually in the defensive zone under pressure.* Clear the puck high off the boards and out. **If you hear it:** aim high and wide, but **keep it inside the rink**. A glass-out rarely gets called for icing, because it usually dies in the neutral zone rather than crossing the far goal line. What it can cost you is **two minutes:** under **NHL Rule 63.2(iii)** a minor for delay of game is assessed *"on any player who shoots*

or bats (using his hand or his stick) the puck directly (non-deflected) out of the playing surface from his defending zone, except where there is no glass." The test is where the puck was when you hit it, not where it left. There is no "I was under pressure" exception, but there are three carve-outs: the "except where there is no glass" clause above, and the NOTE to the rule, which says "*when the puck is shot into the players' bench, the penalty will not apply*" and "*when the puck goes out of the playing area directly off a face-off, no penalty shall be assessed.*" Over the glass **behind** the bench is still a penalty. So the honest version of this call is: you concede possession, and if you miss the glass you concede a power play.

- **"Ice it"** — *Said by anyone.* The puck has to go all the way out even at the cost of a whistle. **If you hear it:** get it out. But know what you're buying: after your own icing, play stops, the faceoff is in your defensive zone and — **under NHL and IIHF rules — your line cannot change and your team cannot take a timeout. IIHF Rules 81.4 and 87.1 impose both restrictions in the NHL's own words**, which is what matters if you play British league hockey. **USA Hockey blocks neither** (Rule 624 restricts no substitution; Rule 204 permits a change at any stoppage; Rule 636(f) puts no icing condition on time-outs). The exception is when you are shorthanded — a penalty-killing team may ice the puck with no whistle at all, which is why "ice it" is a completely normal call on the kill and an expensive one at even strength. It is not unconditional: under **Rule 81.6**, a team shorthanded "*by reason of a major penalty*" that has "*neglected to ensure there is a player on the penalty bench to exit upon the expiry of the penalty*" keeps playing a man short but "*are not permitted to ice the puck. Icing will be called.*" **And it is not in every book.** USA Hockey grants the shorthanded nullification only "*(For all Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult classifications only)*" (Rule 624(b)(1)) — so below those levels shouting "ice it" on the kill buys your tired killers a defensive-zone draw rather than a rest. Find out which rule set you play under before the call becomes a habit. Special Teams owns the rule.
- **"Deep" / "Dump"** — *Said by a supporting forward.* The entry isn't there; put the puck into the offensive zone, usually to a corner below the goal line, and chase. **If you hear it:** dump and go. Under NHL and IIHF rules the opposing goalie may only play the puck behind their goal line inside the trapezoid (markings, NHL Rule 1.8; the two-minute delay-of-game minor, Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii)), so a puck dumped wide has to be retrieved by a defenceman with your forecheck arriving on them.  In England and Wales, do not assume their goalie is confined to the trapezoid when you dump — the restricted area's status is unsettled there, and live in Scotland and university hockey, whose In-House Rules do not amend Rule 27 (UK and England Rules).

- **"Eat it"** †— *Said by a teammate who can see there is no good option.* Hold the puck, absorb the hit, and keep possession rather than forcing a pass that gets picked off. **Two cautions, and a flag on both.** The action described here is **commonly taught** as **"eating the puck"** — holding it against the boards when there are no options under pressure — so that is the phrase to teach. And the short call **"eat it"** carries a *different* meaning in some rooms: *there are only a few seconds left in the period or the game, so keep the puck where it is.* ⚠️ **Neither of those two glosses traces to a named source.** Neither phrase appears in any of the call-vocabulary sources listed at the foot of this document, with one gap: coachchic.com returns a hard 403, so it cannot be ruled out. Treat both readings as unverified coaching usage — which is exactly why the advice that follows still stands. Same two words, two instructions. Agree which one your bench means, or use "eat the puck" for the board-battle version and something else for the clock version.

Support and availability

Goal	Tell the carrier you exist and where you are — without a voice you are not an option
Action	On "here", look to the voice even if you do not pass; you now know there is an outlet on that side
Read	Judge "middle" by zone — the highest-value place to move the puck going forward, the most dangerous in your own end, where it has to be certain
Risk	A cross-ice pass in your own zone is the highest-risk pass in hockey — weigh "far side", do not take it automatically
Rule	A receiver already across with both skates is offside; one skate on or behind keeps them onside (NHL Rule 83.1)
Rule	A skate in the air over the neutral zone counts as onside under NHL and IIHF rules, but not under USA Hockey, whose Rule 630(a) requires skate contact
Convention	"All alone" means no support *and* outnumbered on the published definition, but some teams use it for the support half only — agree which yours means
Never	Attack the defence alone when you hear it — slow down, protect the puck, or chip it in and wait for help

These tell the carrier that you exist and where you are. The carrier's head is often down; without a voice, you are not an option.

- **"Here"** — *Said by any open teammate.* The simplest call in hockey and the one most under-used. **If you hear it:** look to the voice. Even if you don't pass, you now know there is an outlet on that side.

- **"Middle"** — *Said by a support player in the middle of the ice.* I am open through the centre. **If you hear it:** the middle is the highest-value place to move the puck in the offensive and neutral zones — and the most dangerous in your own end. Judge by zone: in your defensive zone, a middle pass has to be certain.
- **"Back"** — *Said by a trailing support player.* I am behind you and available for a drop pass or as the trailer. **If you hear it:** you can leave the puck rather than carrying it into trouble.
- **"With you"** †— *Said by a teammate skating alongside.* I am on your hip, keep the puck alive. **If you hear it:** you have a two-man attack, not a one-man one. Slow down half a step and use them.
- **"I'm high"** †— *Said by a forward or a defenceman above the puck.* I am the option closer to the blue line. **If you hear it:** this is usually your safe reset when the low options are covered.
- **"Far side"** — *Said by a support player on the opposite side of the rink.* Your help is across the ice, not near you. **If you hear it:** the cross-ice option exists, but weigh it — a cross-ice pass in your own zone is the highest-risk pass in hockey.
- **"Outlet"** †— *Said by the first breakout option, usually a winger on the wall or a centre swinging low.* I am your exit. **If you hear it:** move the puck and start the breakout.
- **"Stretch"** — *Said by a forward who has beaten the opposition up the ice.* I am long, behind their forwards; put it up to me. (Documented as a spoken call: Sweden coach Sam Hallam lists "Stretch!" among the words his players shout on the ice, alongside "Over!", "Here!" and "Open!") **If you hear it:** the stretch pass is available. Check the blue line first — a stretch pass to a teammate who has already crossed with both skates is offside. One skate on or behind the line keeps them onside, and a skate in the air over the neutral zone counts as onside too **under NHL and IIHF rules — not under USA Hockey, where Rule 630(a) requires skate contact.**
- **"Point"** — *Said by anyone who can see the defenceman is open.* The player at the blue line has space for a shot. **If you hear it:** get the puck up to the point, then get to the net front for the tip or rebound.
- **"All alone"** — *Said by a teammate behind the play.* You are entering the offensive zone with **no support.** The published call list this document draws on defines it as letting the carrier "know that they do not have any support **and are out-numbered**" — so on that definition it carries both halves, the absent teammate *and* the numbers. Some teams use it for the support half only. Agree which yours means, because the two produce different decisions: no

support says wait, outnumbered says do not enter at all. **If you hear it:** don't attack the defence alone. Slow it down, protect the puck, or chip it in and wait for help to arrive.

Danger and coverage

Action	On "back door", the nearest player takes the unmarked opponent at the far post immediately
Key	The player who can see the back door is almost never the one who can cover it — that is why the call exists
Action	On "switch", take the nearer opponent, and answer it — a switch called and not acknowledged is worse than no switch at all
Convention	"Sag" and "collapse" are low zone collapse language — meaningless under man-on-man, above the dots only under a hybrid; find out which your team plays
Priority	On "clear", the nearest player gets the loose puck out of the high-danger area — do not stickhandle
Action	On "screen", move out of the sightline yourself, or box the screener out with hips and back and tie up or lift their stick
Rule	A two-handed shove on the shaft to move a screener is cross-checking, a minor under NHL Rule 59.2, and the net-front infraction officials are told to watch for
Rule	Screening from outside the crease without contact is not a penalty — Rule 69.1 can void a goal afterwards, but it is no whistle in the moment

These are defensive-zone calls. They are the ones teams stop making when they get tired, and the ones whose absence shows up directly on the scoresheet.

- **"Back door"** — *Said by anyone, most often the goalie or the weak-side player.* There is an unmarked opponent at the far post. **If you hear it:** the nearest player takes them, immediately. This is the highest-danger unmarked position in hockey and the call exists because the person who can see it is almost never the person who can cover it.
- **"Net front"** † — *Said by anyone.* Nobody is on the player standing in the goalmouth. **If you hear it:** cover them, box them out, get your stick on their stick. Under the house-default low zone collapse this belongs to the weak-side defenceman, but the call exists precisely for when it hasn't happened.
- **"Switch"** — *Said by either of two players who need to trade assignments.* Most commonly used between defence partners and between a defenceman and a backchecking forward when two opponents cross. **If you hear it:** take the *nearer* opponent and let your teammate

take the other. The call has to come from the player who initiates it and it has to be answered — a switch called and not acknowledged is worse than no switch at all.

- **"My man" / "I've got him" / "I've got two"** †— *Said by the player taking an assignment.* I am covering this opponent, you take someone else. **If you hear it:** stop tracking that player and find the unmarked one. Using the opponent's jersey number ("I've got seventeen") removes all ambiguity and is worth the extra syllable.
- **"Sag" / "Collapse"** †— *Said by a defenceman, the centre or the goalie.* Tighten in toward the net; give up the outside and protect the slot. **If you hear it:** the shape shrinks. Note that this is system language — it belongs to a **low zone collapse (zone) coverage**, the default assumed throughout. Under **man-on-man** the call makes no sense, because you go where your man goes; under a **hybrid**, it applies only above the dots. Find out which one your team plays. See Defensive Zone Coverage.
- **"Clear"** — *Said by anyone.* The puck is loose in the high-danger area and the nearest player has to move it out now. **If you hear it:** don't stickhandle. Nearest player, get it out.
- **"Screen"** — *Almost always said by the goalie, because they are the one who knows — but the general principle applies here too, and a defenceman who can see their own goalie has no sightline should say so.* I cannot see the puck. **If you hear it:** either move yourself out of the sightline, or **get body position on the opponent who is in it** — box them out with your hips and back the way you would box out for a rebound, tie up or lift their stick, and walk them out of the lane. **Do not cross-check them out of it.** A shove with both hands on the shaft is a cross-check and a minor under **NHL Rule 59.2** — and it is the net-front infraction officials are told to look for, since USA Hockey's Standard of Play names the net-front cross-check as its leading example. **That is an enforcement emphasis, not a frequency ranking:** in NHL play-by-play data cross-checking is only the *seventh* most-called penalty at the net front, and at about 1.08× its league-wide share it is not meaningfully concentrated there either — the fouls that genuinely cluster at the net front are hooking and slashing. The coaching point stands on the emphasis, not on the frequency: officials are watching for it, so it is a bad way to win the space. Body Contact and Battles owns those figures. See Defensive Zone Coverage for the box-out technique. Move fast, because nobody is coming to help you: screening is normally legal for the opposition — standing outside the crease in the goalie's line of sight without contact is not a penalty. (Rule 69.1 can void a goal where an attacker's positioning impairs the goalie's ability to move or defend, but that is a judgement on the goal afterwards, not a whistle in the moment.)

Rush and transition

Action	On "odd man", the defenders stop thinking about the puck and start thinking about numbers
Convention	Published call lists use the short numeric forms — "Two", "One" — and short wins at speed
Technique	Defending a two-on-one, take away the pass and give up the shot — stick flat in the passing lane, and do not slide until the pass is released
Key	The defenceman commits to the pass and the goalie to the shooter — it only works if both say out loud which half is theirs
Action	On "backcheck", turn and sprint first and look second; puck-watching while drifting backwards opens the middle lane
Action	On "pick him up", get on the defensive side of the attacker — between them and your net, not behind their shoulder
Convention	Who owns which lane on a backcheck is a coaching choice — centre in the middle, first man back in the middle, or man-on-man from the puck outward; find out which your team plays
Key	Under every variant somebody owns the middle and nobody assumes it is somebody else

The rush is where communication most often fails, because everyone is skating flat out and nobody wants to be the one who spoke wrongly.

- **"Odd man"** †— *Said by a backchecker or the goalie.* They have more attackers than we have defenders. **If you hear it:** the defenders stop thinking about the puck and start thinking about numbers. Full detail in Defending the Rush.
- **"Two-on-one" / "Three-on-two"** — *The same call with the count.* Note that published call lists use the **short numeric forms** — just **"Two"** or **"One"** — rather than the full phrase, and short is better at speed: two syllables beat four when everyone is sprinting. **If you hear it as a defenceman on a two-on-one:** take away the pass and give up the shot. Position yourself in the passing lane, stick flat on the ice, and do not slide until the pass has been released.
- **"I've got the pass" / "Take the shooter"** †— *Said between a defenceman and the goalie.* The defenceman is committing to the passing lane and the goalie is committing to the shooter. **If you hear it as the goalie:** square up to the puck carrier and play the shot as if it were a one-on-none. This split of responsibility is the standard way to defend a two-on-one

and it only works if both players know which half is theirs — which is why it is said out loud rather than assumed. **Note on the dagger:** published goalie material documents this split being settled out loud on a two-on-one — but from the *goalie's* side, with the single word "**shot**" (see below). It is only these particular words, said by the defenceman, that are undocumented. If you want the verified call, use the goalie's.

- **"Backcheck"** — *Said by anyone, often the bench.* We have lost the puck; get back. **If you hear it:** turn and sprint first, look second. Puck-watching while drifting backwards is how the middle lane opens up.
- **"Pick him up" / "Take the middle"** †— *Said by a defenceman to an arriving backchecker, or between backcheckers.* There is an unmarked attacker and you are the closest. **If you hear it:** get on the defensive side of them — between them and your net — not behind their shoulder. **Who owns which lane on a backcheck is a coaching choice, not a law.** The most common assignment is that the centre owns the middle lane and the wingers own the two outside lanes; other teams use **first man back takes the middle** regardless of position, and others pick up **man-on-man from the puck outward**. Defending the Rush is the authority here and sets out all three. **Find out which your team plays** — these calls exist precisely to resolve the cases where players arrive in the wrong order, and under every variant the two constants are that somebody owns the middle and nobody assumes it is somebody else.

Bench and line changes

- Action** On "change", go as a group
- Never** Change during a defensive-zone scramble, or when you are the player caught deepest
- Never** Use "last change" or "last man" to mean a completed change — both already mean something else and will get you the wrong reaction
- Rule** The home team's last change (Rule 82.1) is lost after its own icing and kept after the visitors' (Rules 82.1, 81.4)
- Rule** A change is legal while the retiring player is within five feet of the bench and out of the play (Rule 74.1) — the offence is joining the play too early, not sharing a seat (Rule 74.2)
- Rule** After your own icing whoever is on the ice stays — no line change (82.1) and no timeout (87.1) under NHL and IIHF rules; USA Hockey blocks neither
- Rule** Rule 82.1 allows exactly three substitutions there — a pulled goalkeeper, an injured player, or a penalty affecting on-ice strength; "he's gassed" is not on the list
- Action** On "stay", finish the shift — a tired player in position beats a fresh player arriving late

Changing on the fly is one of the most dangerous moments in a hockey game and it is coordinated almost entirely by voice.

- **"Change"** — *Said by a player on the ice, or from the bench.* The line is going off now. **If you hear it on the ice:** go, as a group. Never change during a defensive-zone scramble or when you are the player caught deepest.
- **"I've got first player off"** †— *Said by a player on the bench.* I am taking the seat of the first teammate who comes off, so nobody else jumps for it. **If you hear it:** the first opening is claimed; wait for the second.

Do not use "last change" or "last man" for this. Both already mean something else in hockey, and using them at the bench will get you the wrong reaction at the worst moment. **"Last change"** is the home team's right under **Rule 82.1** to put its line-up on the ice after the visitors — the main mechanical component of home-ice advantage, and the sense used throughout Game Management. **It does not apply at every stoppage.** Rule 82.1 grants it *"except in cases following an icing, which does not result in the delay of the game"*, and the rule's later paragraph identifies who that exception catches — the team in violation of Rule 81, i.e. the team that iced the puck (Rule 81.4 says the same). So the home team loses last change after its *own* icing, and keeps it after the visitors'. (The five-and-eight-second procedure for the change itself is **Rule 82.2**, a separate rule.) See Faceoffs, which is the authority on this. **"Last man"** (or "last man back") means the deepest defender, the one player who must not leave — which is the opposite instruction to "the change is complete, go." If your team wants a call for "the change is finished", pick a word neither of those two owns.

- **"I'm coming" / "I got next"** — *Said by a player leaving the ice, or a player on the bench claiming the next spot.* **If you hear it:** the spot is taken; don't jump. This helps, but be clear about what the penalty actually turns on. **Rule 74.1** allows changes at any time during play *"provided that the player or players leaving the ice shall be within five feet (5') of his players' bench and out of the play before the change is made."* So the test is **distance and involvement, not seats:** a bench minor comes when the replacement steps on before the retiring player is inside that five-foot limit, or when either of them plays the puck or makes contact with an opponent while both are on the ice (**Rule 74.2**). Two players wanting the same spot is a symptom; the offence is a player joining the play too early. And if your team scores before the whistle, Rule 74.2 disallows the goal and assesses the penalty anyway.
- **"Stay"** †— *Said by a teammate or the bench to a player thinking about changing.* Don't change now; the situation is too dangerous. **If you hear it:** finish the shift. A tired player in position beats a fresh player arriving late.

- **"Next shift"** †— *Said on the bench.* You are up after this one. **If you hear it:** get to the door, get your head into the game situation, and know who you are replacing.

A rules point that catches teams out: after your own team ices the puck, you **cannot change lines** (Rule 82.1) and cannot use a timeout (Rule 87.1). Whoever is on the ice stays on. That is precisely when bench communication matters most, because a tired line is about to take a defensive-zone draw.

Rule 82.1 allows exactly **three** exceptions, and they are narrow: you may substitute **to replace a goalkeeper who had been pulled for an extra attacker, to replace an injured player, or when a penalty has been assessed that affects the on-ice strength of either team.** Nothing else. "He's gassed" is not on the list.

Faceoffs

Action	The centre tells the other four skaters the play before lining up — an actual sentence, while the linesman is still skating in
Priority	Keep the menu tiny — two or three plays everyone knows cold beat ten nobody remembers
Action	Name a fallback for a scramble, usually "everyone takes their man", so a lost draw does not become a lost coverage
Rule	A winger creeping inside the circle before the drop gets the *centre* thrown out of the dot, not the winger (NHL Rule 76.2)
Rule	A second violation by the same team on the same draw is a bench minor, so the replacement has to be clean (NHL Rule 76.7)
Action	Agree in advance which winger steps in when the centre is tossed, and that they are looking for a safe tie-up rather than anything clever
Convention	Use hand signals here — you can be seen but not heard, and the opposition can hear you — provided they were agreed in the dressing room

Faceoff communication happens before the puck drops, when nobody is moving and everybody can hear. That makes it the easiest communication in hockey and the most commonly skipped.

- **The centre tells the four other skaters what the play is, before lining up.** Not a code word shouted at the last second — an actual sentence said while the linesman is still skating in. Coaches who run set plays off the draw are unanimous that the plays only work when every player knows their assignment, and the pre-draw window is when that gets established.

- **Keep the menu tiny.** Two or three offensive-zone plays that everyone knows cold beats ten that nobody remembers. Most teams run something like: win it back to the point for a shot with traffic already in place; win it back to the strong-side winger for a quick chance; or, on a defensive-zone draw, win it to the boards-side defenceman for an immediate rim out.
 - **Name a fallback.** Most draws are not won cleanly. Agree what happens on a scramble — usually "everyone takes their man and we sort it out" — so a lost draw doesn't become a lost coverage.
 - **Two things the wingers must be told.** First, if a winger creeps inside the faceoff circle or over their hash marks before the drop, **the centre gets thrown out of the dot**, not the winger. Second, agree in advance which winger steps in when the centre is tossed, and what they are trying to do — normally a safe tie-up rather than anything clever. A second violation by the same team on the same draw is a bench minor, so the replacement has to be clean. See Faceoffs.
 - **Hand signals are common here** because you can be seen but not heard across a circle, and because the opposition can hear you. A tap on the boards, a glove pointed at a spot, or a stick blade angled toward the intended target all work — provided they were agreed in the dressing room and not invented in the moment.
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Who owns which call

Key	The player who can see it makes the call — not the captain, not the defenceman, not the loudest
Action	Let the goaltender lead the defensive zone — they face the play, they are stationary, and nothing is behind them
Action	The defencemen call the breakout — "up", "over", "reverse" and "wheel" are called *to* the retriever, not chosen by them
Action	The centre announces the low-zone rotation, because the centre leaving is the one who knows it is happening
Action	Backcheckers call their own pickups, so the defencemen can commit to the puck instead of hedging
Action	The bench calls changes and warns about what the on-ice players cannot see
Convention	Where two people can see it, both call it — the failure mode you are guarding against is silence, not duplication

The organising principle is one line long: **the player who can see it makes the call**. Not the captain, not the defenceman, not the loudest — whoever has the information. That means an eighteen-year-old rookie shouting at a veteran is correct behaviour, and a team where that feels wrong will concede goals for it.

On top of that principle sit a few standing responsibilities, which exist because certain players reliably have certain information:

- **The goaltender is the loudest voice in the defensive zone.** They face the play, they are stationary, and nothing in the zone is behind them. See the next section.
- **The defencemen call the breakout.** The puck retriever cannot see the forecheck arriving; their partner and the weak-side defenceman can. "Up", "over", "reverse" and "wheel" are almost always called *to* the puck carrier by someone else, not chosen by the carrier. A common coaching drill has the weak-side defenceman read where the second forechecker is and make the call for the teammate under pressure — that is the whole shape of the responsibility in one sentence.
- **The centre organises the low defensive zone.** The centre's job moves with the puck, which means they are the player whose assignment is most often ambiguous, which means they are the player who most needs to announce it. When the centre goes to help in the corner, someone has to cover the high slot — under the house-default collapse that is the

weak-side winger. Anyone with a clear view can call that rotation, but the centre leaving is the one who knows it is happening. See Center.

- **Backcheckers call their own pickups.** The players skating back are the only ones who know who they have got. Calling "I've got the middle" or "I've got seventeen" on the way back lets the defencemen commit to the puck instead of hedging.
- **The bench calls changes and warns about what the on-ice players can't see** — a player coming off the opposition bench, a line matchup, a shift that has gone too long.

Where two people can see it, both should call it. Redundant information costs nothing. The failure mode you are guarding against is silence, not duplication.

The goaltender's calls

Key	The goalie's view is exactly the view your defencemen lack — the whole play, permanently, for free
Action	Give the retriever "time" or "man on" first, and add the count with "one on you" or "two on you"
Options	"Up" sends it up the strong side, "over" switches it behind the net, "leave it" parks it behind the net for a teammate wheeling through
Convention	Prefer "leave it" to "set" — two syllables are easier to tell from "up" and "over" at speed in a noisy rink
Key	A goalie shouting "shot" means they have the shooter and you take the pass — stay in the passing lane, it is not a warning that a shot is coming
Rule	Under NHL and IIHF rules the goalie may play the puck behind the goal line only inside the trapezoid — markings Rule 1.8, two-minute delay of game under Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii)
Read	Most rec, beer-league and youth associations use no trapezoid, and there your goalie becomes a genuine third puck-handler behind the net
Rule	The restricted area is IIHF Rule 27.7, not the NHL's 27.8, and in England and Wales its status is unsettled — England Ice Hockey's Rules & Regulations 22.3 (2024-25) say it is "not currently enforced" and the 2025-26 In-House Rules do not mention it
Read	Until your league says otherwise, call it as though it binds — your goalie may not play a puck behind the goal line outside the trapezoid, so "leave it" is only on where the puck is
Action	Answer your goalie — a call that gets no response gets made quieter next time, and then not at all

Your goalie is the best-positioned communicator on the ice and most teams waste them.

Why the position is special: they are the only player who faces the entire play at all times, the only one who is more or less stationary and therefore not making decisions under skating load, and the only one with nothing happening behind them. Every other player has a blind side. The goalie has the whole picture, permanently, for free.

Teams that ignore their goalie's voice concede more for a mechanical reason: the information the goalie has is *exactly* the information the defencemen lack. A defenceman retrieving a dumped puck is facing their own end boards with the forecheck coming from behind —

the precise view the goalie has and they do not. If that transfer doesn't happen, the defenceman guesses, and defensive-zone guesses become turnovers in the highest-danger area on the ice.

The standard goalie vocabulary:

- **"Time"** — nobody is on you. The retriever can turn, look up, and make a proper play.
- **"Man on"** — someone is on you. Get rid of it. Some goalies use "one on you" or "two on you" to give the count.
- **"Up"** — the puck goes up the strong side, to the winger on the boards. In practice this is usually the *defenceman* telling the goalie where they want it, and the goalie executing.
- **"Over"** — the puck switches sides, usually behind the net. The weak-side defenceman is calling for it. The goalie can leave the net on either side to make this happen.
- **"Leave it"** — the goalie should stop the puck and leave it behind the net for a teammate to pick up, typically a centre wheeling through. Some teams use "set" instead; there is a good argument for "leave it" because two syllables are easier to distinguish from "up" and "over" at speed, in a noisy rink, with someone wheeling at you.
- **"I've got it"** — the goalie is playing the puck themselves. **If you hear it:** stay out of their way and get to your breakout position instead of the puck.
- **"Screen"** — I cannot see. Move, or move the man who is blocking me. This is the goalie's most important call and the one most often ignored.
- **"Shot"** — **a goalie saying "shot" is not warning you that one is coming. They are telling you they have the shooter and you should take the pass** — the same division of labour this document gives under "I've got the pass / Take the shooter". Published goalie material documents it as a spoken call in exactly that sense: *"When the puck is at the point, or when the opposing team has a two-on-one, it can be difficult for your defense to know what you want them to do. If you'd prefer that they take away the pass or guard the open man, call for 'shot!'... If you want the shot, call for it!"* That is the sense to adopt, because a warning that a shot is coming tells a skater nothing they can act on, while "I have the shooter" tells a defenceman exactly where to put their stick. **If you hear it as a defenceman:** stay in the passing lane and do not drift toward the puck. If your team has been using "shot" as a warning, pick a different word for the warning — the two meanings are incompatible and this is a call you have half a second to decode.

A constraint that shapes all of this: the trapezoid. Under NHL rules (since 2005-06), in the KHL, and in IIHF play (since the unified 2021-22 rulebook), the goalie may only play the puck behind the goal line inside the marked trapezoid — the lines are specified in **Rule 1.8**, and playing the puck outside them is a two-minute minor for delay of game under **NHL Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii)** (the IIHF numbers the restricted-area rule **27.7** — its 27.8 is "Infractions - Unique to

Goalkeepers"). The only exception is a goalie maintaining skate contact with the crease. So "I've got it" and "leave it" are only available where the puck actually is. **Most rec, beer-league and youth associations do not use the trapezoid**, and if you play under those rules your goalie becomes a genuine third puck-handler behind the net — which changes their calls and yours completely. Find out which rules you are under. Full detail in Goaltender. 🇬🇧 **In England and Wales, treat this as unsettled.** The IIHF book carries the rule (Rule 27.7, not the NHL's 27.8), but England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 22.3 say the restricted area is "*not currently enforced*" and the 2025-26 In-House Rules are silent. Assume it binds — your goalie may not play a puck behind the goal line outside the trapezoid, so "I've got it" and "leave it" are only available where the puck actually is. Ask your league, and look behind the net to see whether the lines are painted at all — a hint, not a ruling, since IIHF 27.7 turns on the position of the puck rather than the markings.

Two things for the skaters. Answer your goalie — a call that gets no response gets made quieter next time, and then not at all. And tell them what you want before you need it: "leave it" works because the centre said it while still in the neutral zone, not while arriving behind the net.

How to call well

Priority	Early beats accurate — a slightly wrong call before the puck arrives beats a perfect one as it does
Priority	Short beats specific — one or two syllables; if your call needs a comma, it is too long
Priority	Loud beats clever — a perfect call at conversational volume did not happen, and that is the commonest reason a call fails
Action	Use names for teammates and numbers for opponents — "Sam, man on" gets acted on, "man on" gets four heads turning
Action	Call while the puck is travelling; once it is on their blade they are already committed
Never	Say "time" unless you are sure — a false "time" puts a teammate into contact unbraced, and they will stop trusting you
Convention	One word, one meaning, all season, across the whole team
Action	Answer calls — "yep", "got it", a raised glove; an unacknowledged switch is two players hoping

The technique of calling matters as much as the vocabulary.

- **Early beats accurate.** A slightly wrong call made before the puck arrives is more useful than a perfect one made as it does. The receiver's decision is already forming; you are trying to inform it, not correct it afterwards.
 - **Short beats specific.** One or two syllables. "Man on" survives a noisy rink; "there's a guy coming from behind your left shoulder" does not. If your call needs a comma, it is too long.
 - **Loud beats clever.** Rinks are loud, helmets and cages muffle everything, and you are both moving. A perfect call at conversational volume did not happen. This is the single most common reason a call fails.
 - **Use names.** "Sam, man on" gets acted on; "man on" gets four players looking around. Numbers work equally well for opponents: "I've got seventeen" is unambiguous in a way that "I've got him" never is.
 - **Call before the puck arrives, not as it does.** The window that matters is while the puck is travelling. Once it is on their blade they are already committed.
 - **Keep the vocabulary consistent across the team.** One word, one meaning, all season. If half the team says "over" for a cross-ice pass and half says it for "go around the boards", the word is worse than useless.
 - **Say the thing that is true, not the thing that is helpful.** If you are not sure whether they have time, do not say "time". A false "time" call puts a teammate into contact they were not braced for, and after one of those they will stop trusting you.
 - **Answer calls.** "Yep", "got it", a raised glove — anything. An unacknowledged switch is two players hoping.
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Non-verbal communication

Technique	Put your blade flat on the ice in front of your body as a target — a stick held in the air says you are not ready
Risk	All stick taps sound alike, so an opponent can tap and induce a blind pass — use the tap to reinforce a call, never to replace one
Action	Make eye contact before the pass — a tenth of a second confirms they have seen you and are ready
Technique	Look a defender off by staring deliberately at one option and passing to another; defenders read heads and eyes as a shortcut
Action	Point your glove or stick at the space you want a teammate to take, then put the puck there
Convention	Signal faceoff plays and power-play entries rather than speaking them, but only with signals agreed off the ice — never invent one mid-game
Key	Your feet and hips tell a teammate what you are about to do — hips open to the middle says inside, square to the boards says wide

Rinks are loud and sometimes a voice will not carry. Non-verbal cues are the backup, and for some things they are better than words because the opposition can hear you shout.

- **Stick blade on the ice as a target.** The most basic and most reliable one. A blade flat on the ice, out in front of your body, says "pass it here" and gives the passer something to aim at. A stick held in the air says the opposite — that you are not ready. See Passing and Receiving.
- **Tapping the stick on the ice.** The traditional "I'm open" signal, and worth a caution: **all stick taps sound alike.** An opponent can tap their stick and induce a blind pass straight to them, and at least one coaching resource argues against relying on the tap for exactly that reason. Use it to reinforce a call, not to replace one, and never make a blind pass on a tap alone.
- **Eye contact before the pass.** A tenth of a second of eye contact confirms two things at once — that they have seen you and that they are ready. It is the cheapest turnover-prevention available.
- **Looking a defender off.** The inverse. If you stare at your intended target, so does the defender covering them. Look deliberately at one option, then pass to another. This works because defenders read heads and eyes as a shortcut, the same way a defenceman

defending a rush is taught *not* to — to read the attacker's chest and hips instead, precisely because the head, hands and puck are the tools of deception.

- **Pointing before you pass.** Point your glove or your stick at the space where you want a teammate to go, then put the puck there. Common on breakouts and on the power play, where the passer has a fraction of a second of calm and the receiver is looking up.
- **Hand signals for set plays.** Faceoff plays and power-play entries are often signalled rather than spoken, because the opposition is three feet away. Any signal works as long as it was agreed off the ice. Do not invent one mid-game.
- **Body position as a signal.** Where your feet and hips point tells a teammate what you are about to do before you do it. Opening your hips toward the middle says you are cutting inside; squaring to the boards says you are staying wide. Skilled linemates read this constantly, and it is why players who have played together a long time appear to be telepathic. They are not — they are reading hips.

Building the habit

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Mindset | The obstacle is social, not tactical — being too self-conscious to shout is universal, and it goes away in about three sessions |
| Action | Talk in every drill, including the ones where it feels stupid; treat a missing call the way you would treat a missed backcheck |
| Priority | Start with "man on" and "time" and get those automatic before adding anything |
| Action | Make one player responsible for volume each drill, rotating the job so the quiet players cannot hide behind the loud ones |
| Action | Name the calls that worked, out loud, afterwards — "that 'over' saved us a turnover" |
| Action | Agree the vocabulary in the dressing room at the start of the season, not on the ice in game three |
| Key | Write down one word per meaning — one word for two things is the classic failure, as with "behind you" |
| Action | Keep the list to ten or fifteen calls, include the goalie in the conversation, and revisit it about a month in |

Almost nobody talks naturally on the ice at first. The obstacle is not tactical, it is social: **most players are simply too self-conscious to shout.** Newer players in particular are worried about being wrong, about being loud, about being the one person making noise. That is normal, it is universal, and it goes away in about three sessions of deliberate practice.

How to practise it:

- **Talk in every drill, including the ones where it feels stupid.** A three-player passing drill with nobody in the way is exactly where the habit gets built, because you can talk without also thinking. Coaches who accept silence in drills get silence in games. Treat a missing call the same way you would treat a missed backcheck.
- **Start with the two calls that matter most.** Just "man on" and "time". Get those automatic before adding anything.
- **Make one player responsible for volume each drill.** Rotating the job means the quiet players get forced through the awkward stage rather than hiding behind the loud ones.
- **Talk on the bench too.** Players who are engaged verbally on the bench are engaged verbally on the ice. It is the same muscle.
- **Note the calls that worked, out loud, afterwards.** "That 'over' saved us a turnover" does more for a team's willingness to talk than any amount of general encouragement.

How a team agrees a vocabulary:

- **Do it in the dressing room at the start of the season, not on the ice in game three.** Twenty minutes with a whiteboard is enough.
- **Write down one word per meaning.** The commonest source of confusion is two words for one thing, or worse, one word for two things — "behind you" meaning both an opponent and a loose puck is the classic.
- **Keep the list short enough to remember.** Ten to fifteen calls covers almost everything. Anything longer will not survive a real game.
- **Include the goalie in the conversation.** Their calls are the ones the defencemen have to act on instantly, and they are the ones most often left out of the discussion.
- **Revisit it once, about a month in.** You will find two calls nobody uses and one situation nobody has a word for.

See Team Play and Culture for the wider point, and Practice and Development for building habits generally.

Common Mistakes

- **Total silence in the defensive zone.** The failure this document exists to fix. The defensive zone is where the information gap between the puck carrier and everyone else is widest, and it is where a lost puck becomes a goal. (Nobody publishes a ranking of amateur mistakes, so treat "most common" claims here — including the next few — as coaching observation, not measurement.)
- **Two players calling for the same puck,** both arriving, and neither taking it. The fix is a standing rule about who has priority — usually the player facing up-ice, or the player who called first.
- **Calling too late to be useful.** "Man on" shouted as the hit lands is not communication, it is commentary.
- **Nobody calling the switch.** Two opponents cross, two defenders both track the same one, and the other walks in alone.
- **Assuming a teammate saw what you saw.** They did not. You are looking at different halves of the rink; that is the entire reason the call has value.
- **The "I thought you had him" goal.** Both defenders drawn to the puck, the goalmouth empty, a tap-in. It is a communication failure rather than an effort failure — both players were working hard, at the same job — and it is the reason the back-door call exists.
- **A false "time" call.** Sending a teammate into contact they were not braced for. One of these and they will stop listening to you for the rest of the season.
- **Making a call and not being available to back it up.** If you shout "here", be there.
- **Using a private vocabulary.** Words your team has not agreed are noise.
- **Talking to the referee instead of to your teammates.** Whatever you say to the official does not change the call and does take your attention off the play.

Key Takeaways

1. **The puck carrier is the least informed player on the ice.** Everyone else can see their blind side. A call transfers information that already exists and costs nothing.
2. **"Man on" and "time" are the two highest-value words in hockey.** One prevents a turnover; the other prevents a panic. Both are usually available and usually unsaid.
3. **The player who can see it makes the call** — not the captain, not the most senior player. Whoever has the information.

4. **Your goalie is your best communicator.** They face the whole play, they are stationary, and nothing is behind them. Their view is exactly the view your defencemen lack.
 5. **Early beats accurate, short beats specific, loud beats clever.** A perfect call at conversational volume did not happen.
 6. **Use names and numbers.** "Sam, man on" gets acted on. "Man on" gets four heads turning.
 7. **Agree the vocabulary as a team and never change it.** The specific words barely matter; a receiver who has to translate has already lost the half-second the call was worth.
 8. **Answer every call.** An unacknowledged switch is two players hoping, and hoping is how the back door scores.
 9. **Non-verbal cues back up words, they don't replace them.** A stick blade on the ice is a target; a stick tap is anyone's, including your opponent's.
 10. **The loudest team usually looks like the more skilled team.** It is the cheapest improvement available to any team — no fitness, no skill work, no extra ice.
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A note on which calls are documented. Calls marked † above are in common spoken use, but no source listed below documents them as *verbal calls*. They are: *turn, eat it, with you, outlet, net front, sag / collapse, odd man, I'm high, my man / I've got him, pick him up / take the middle, I've got the pass / take the shooter, I've got first player off, stay, and next shift*.

Two qualifications on that list. First, **outlet, net front, sag, collapse and odd man are all well documented as standard hockey terms** — they appear throughout the coaching literature and elsewhere in this guide as names for positions, shapes and situations. What is unverified is only their use as something a player shouts. Second, these entries **are** corroborated in the sources and carry no dagger: *stretch, over* and *here* (Sweden coach Sam Hallam's list of what his players shout, quoted by NHL.com — he also lists "Open!", which this document does not carry as a separate call); *two-on-one / three-on-two* (ReasonY gives the short numeric forms "Two" and "One", noted inline); *wheel, reverse, time, man on* and *middle* (the BVHS goalie manual's "phrases and what they mean" list, which also documents "bank" — **"half wall" is not on that list**; it appears in a separate list of "key communication phrases goaltenders can use" in the same manual's *Playing The Puck* section, alongside "leaving it", "reverse", "wheel" and "bank"); *man on, time, screen, ice it, dump, leave it* (Sportmentary); *up, over* and *leave it* (Kelvin Cech's goalie breakout calls, which is also the source for the two-syllable argument); *rim, clear, back, back door, chip, deep / dump, far side, feet / under, one on / two on, all alone* and *screen* (the Chicks with

Sticks call list); and the goalie's *shot*, which Sportmentary documents word for word, in the same sense this document gives it.

For the rest, the concepts are standard and sourced elsewhere in this guide; it is only the specific wording that is unverified — which is the main point of this document anyway: the words are conventions, and yours may differ.
