

**“Offensive and defensive strategy against 5:2:3-System”
(Part-1)**

By:

PAUL LISSEK

GERMANY

Presentation:

“Offensive and defensive strategy against 5:2:3-System”

Explanation:

The 5:2:3-system is currently used by the top-teams in world-hockey! Whatever name your system has, if it is 1:3:3:3-system or 4:2:4-system, it depends more or less from the interpretation of system in the defence and offence situation of the game!

To divide the number-system in 3 parts means, what kind of priority you put in defence, midfield and attack!

Nowadays there is no more an exclusive work to do for defenders in defence, midfielders in midfield and forwards in attack!

All the players have to master the different skills needed in different game situations!

From the NBA-basketball we know theory like “defence wins the game”! How is it in hockey? Without scoring goals you can’t win a game! How important is the short-corner standard-situation in hockey?

I will research the question where and how I put my priority of work with my team, improving the chances of success against the various top-teams in world hockey!

Characteristics in the 5:2:3-system:

From my point of view the 3 parts in this system give us almost a general impression of role play! The number “5” includes the 2 full-backs, the 2 halves (left and right) and centre half.

The full backs are used in the top teams with slightly different tasks:

Some teams let them play in zones like left and right where they are moving more or less up and down. The full back on ball side moves mostly up expecting a tackle against the forward (mostly centre forward), the other one “falls back” like a “Libero” to control, organize and become active if one of his defenders is beaten!

In other teams you can see one full back playing man to man against centre forward, the second one is playing free man in between his midfield and the “last man”!

He provides cover for the midfield when one of his midfielders is beaten; he moves into midfield when one of the midfielders join the attack.

Right and left half, traditionally exclusive defenders with defending skill, currently changed more and more with attacking roles! Especially the right half can be seen as a player who is taking part on many attacks or changing temporary into midfield!

The centre half you can also count as a midfielder! In many teams he was and still is the link-man between defence and attack!

A similar work has to be done by the **other 2 midfielders (left and right)** and it depends on your game strategy, on your own players' abilities and on the opponents' strength, whether your 2 or 3 link-players are able to concentrate more on the attacking or defending role of play!

The 3 attackers are no more only "dribblers" and "scorers", their ability in defence gives a team conditions to tighten the space and get back ball-possession! Their defensive skills can result in dangerous counter attacks and goal-chances!

1. Defence strategy against a 5:2:3-system

Comment:

The best condition to win a game, as already noticed from NBA-basketball, is a well organized and strong defence!

If the defence is successful and good working the self-confidence of a player and the team will improve. This can create more chances for counter attack!

Each player of the team, even the attackers, have a lot of defence-work to do. The physical fitness must be excellent if long sprints up and down the field is to be performed many times in a short period!

Before the coach instructs his team on how to play in defence, he has to consider the opponent's "line up" to analyse their strengths and weaknesses!

When he has checked his own squad he has to come up with a strategy that will put his players in positions where they have the best chances to play successfully against their opponents and also for their own team!

1.1 Playing role of 2 "full backs" and 2 "halves" against 3 forwards!

In many tactical cases **the left and right half** has to do a clear marking against the opponents right and left winger. The marking role looks simple but has got a new dimension since the wingers are no more playing only near their side-line positions. There are many positional changes during a game and with the improved fitness-level there is a lot of movement among the players.

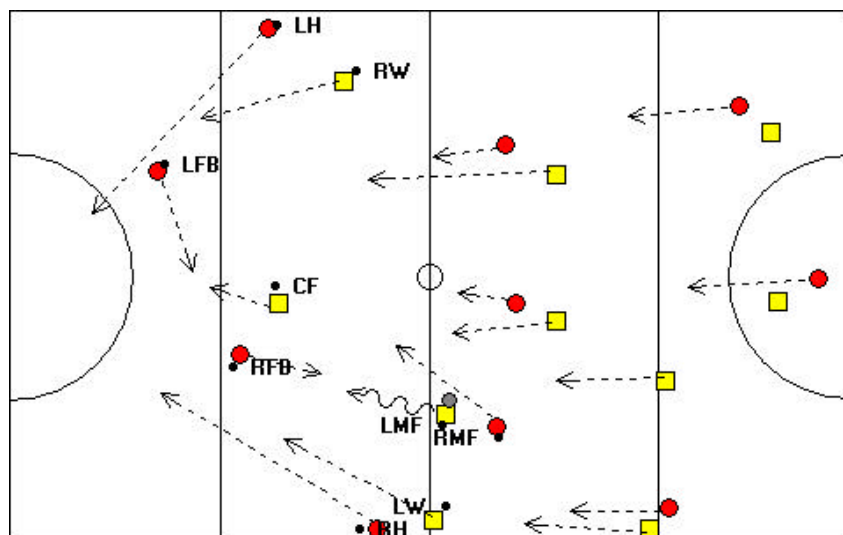
The safest but not always easiest way of marking is just to follow but that is mostly intended by the forwards, to pull the "halves" out of their side position and open the space for other actions like long passes and dribbling.

If the cooperation among the defence and the midfield works, the left or right half is not always following but deviates from the man to man marking shortly leaving the opponent to one full back, covering himself the open space that is left behind by the fullback!

More and more attackers are using the space behind the defence, waiting for long passes or trying to pull back the defence till the goal-line to create space for midfielders to move up or having more room for combinations and dribbling!

The defender has to check whether he can stand in between the opponent and the "ball-leading player" to close passes or to stand closer to his opponent to ensure tighter marking! However, if the ball-leading player gets too close, the defender has to make a decision to tackle or not.

In case a attacker tries to leave his marker by falling back into his own half, the marker can comfortably allow this because he is free to support his team-mates!



Cooperation in defence:

- RFB and LFB in Zones
- RFB is marking CF till he must move up, to tackle the dribbling opp.LM
- LFB moves to ball-side and marks the CF
- RH and LH moving back and closing the space behind the full Backs!
- all players moving behind the ball

1.2 The “full backs” teamwork

You can observe different strategies in the “full back-defence”!

Some teams prefer the full backs working in their zones, one left and one right. When a centre forward enters a zone, the respective full back takes over the man to man marking!! The other full back is playing free man, whether he is moving behind or in front of his partner! The “free full back” moves up and tries to clear dangerous situations, if possible outside the 25-yard area or outside the circle!

When centre forward changes position, entering the other zone, the two full backs reverse the role of “marker” and “free man”.

Other teams interpret this full back-system like a “Libero-system”, where one is always the marker and the other one the “free-man”! Whilst the “marker-full back” is always following his centre forward, the “free-man” is mostly the last man in defence, observing the situation and moving up to support his team-mates in dangerous situations!

Whatever system you prefer to play, your players must be familiar with the style.

It is also depends on what type of players you have! A player, who is used to the marking style only, won't feel comfortable in a free man-role. Consequently he would not like to play the “free man-position” (“Libero-system”).

1.3 The defence-role of the “centre half”

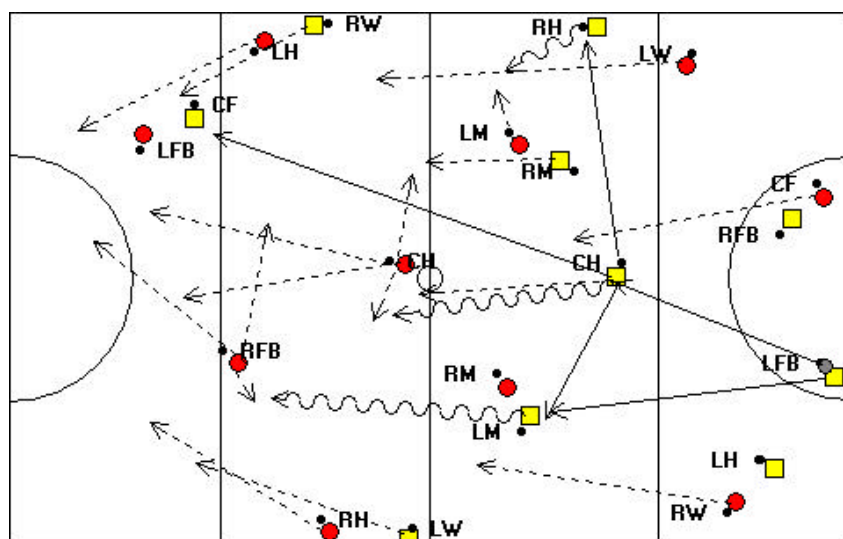
Traditionally **the “centre half”** was in most of the teams a “corner stone” in defence and attack, so it is now!

From his central position he can organize his defence, he can make short decisions to change his marking and supporting if one of his team-mates is beaten!

Regularly he is responsible for the opponent's “centre half” or “centre midfield”, but whenever he leaves his man to move up and tackle, the “free full back” takes over his man! His flexibility in many situations is needed and the verbal and visual communication with his midfielders and full backs decides whether the system works or not!

The centre half can also change his marking role with one of the midfielders, if the situation demands it.

If the team decides to pressure the opponent team, the centre half can leave his man and move up to put pressure on one of the opponent's full backs! In that case his free full back will move up and take over his role of marking the opponent's centre midfielder!



Centre Half in defence:

- opp.CH if dribbles into his half he tackles!
- if his LM leaves opp. RM to tackle opp. RH, he marks the opp. RM
- if opp.LM beats his RM and dribbles towards the goal, RFB tackles and CH is closing the space behind him!
- if attack comes from opp.right wing or CF he moves back closing the space behind LFB
- all defenders are moving towards ball-side

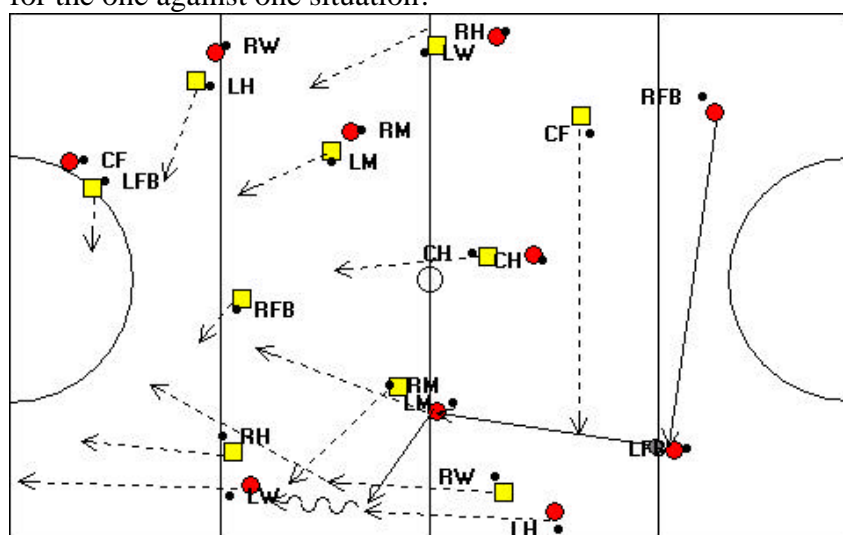
1.4 the midfield-players position in defence!

The right and left midfield-player have to defend against the opponent's midfielder as long as the situation allows it or if there is a tactical change!

For example, tactical changes have to be made in pressure-situations when the midfield-player has to move up to support the forward-line during a 16-yard hit!

Another situation is when the midfielder is beaten by his opponent in one against one. He chases his opponent until another covering defender is tackling him frontal, and then he overtakes and replaces his defender.

That is a simple role change in defence between two players to optimise the tackler's position for the one against one situation!



Midfield-players in defence:

- RM leaves his LM and tackles the dribbler LH frontal.
- the channelling RW leaves his LH when he sees the frontal tackling from RM and turns inside into low defence!
- the attacking opp.LM is taken by the RFB
- the CH,LM,LH and LFB running back to close the space behind RFB and move to "ball-side"

1.5 Forwards as defenders:

Times are changing and especially the role of strikers in the defence!

Nowadays you can see nearly all top teams defending with the full side in their own half! In "off-the-ball situations" you can observe that every player tries to come back immediately to

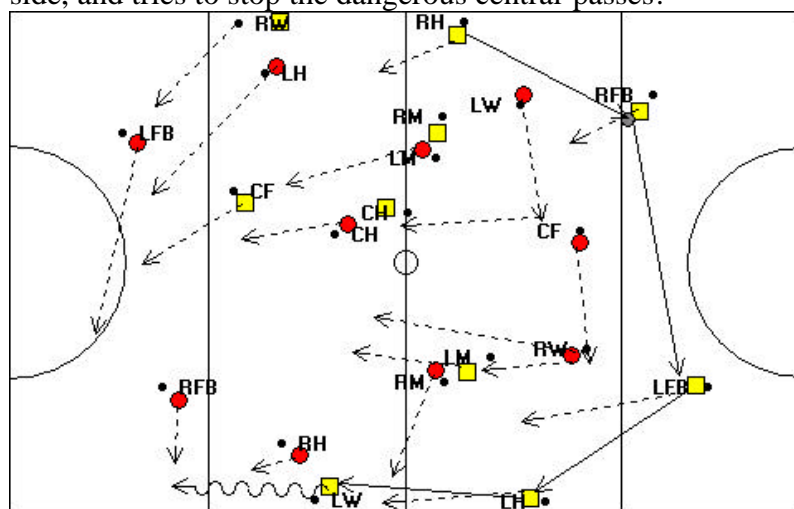
his own half or if needed to his own “25” to defend! We call it “**all behind the ball-tactics**”, to strengthen the defence.

From the opponent’s 16-yard hit, the “left-winger” marks the opponent’s “right-half”, the “right-winger” takes the “left-half” and “centre-forward” takes one of the “full-backs”, normally the one in ball position!

If the two “full-backs” are standing in a far distance and changing ball-position, the “centre-forward” will be unable to follow the ball and blocking dangerous passes!

In those cases the 3 forwards are moving as a “block” with the ball by leaving one of the “halves” free, mostly the “left-half” to channel the opponents to play on their weaker side (left side)!

The forwards “block-defence” allows the other team “side-line-passes”, mostly on their left side, and tries to stop the dangerous central-passes!



Forward-line in ‘block’ defence

- LW,CF in between 2 defenders, and moving to ball-side
- RW closes inside-pass, allows a pass to LH, takes over marking LM
- CF moves back into centre, closing passes to opp. CH
- LW moves back and closing passes to RM and attacking RH
- in case of back passes from opp.LH to LFB to RFB and RH, 3 forwards running in between to block passing to their right side!
- if ball travels into their own half, all moving behind the ball

2.1 Individual-skill in defence

2.1.1 Technical defence-skill:

I want to mention the most important defence-skills used in man to man tackling:

-The “low-stick-tackle” is used regularly as a “passive action” putting the stick in between passing- or dribbling-direction to collect it! It can be used as a “forehand”- or “reverse” low-stick-tackle, it depends on the forward’s or defender’s position!

-The “defence-hit” (“sweep”) is used as a “forehand-“ or “reverse-hit” mostly as a “one-hand-action just to clear it before the ball gets out of his reach and to prevent the attacker from playing the ball!

This skill should only be used, when the ball is out of opponent’s reach and control or to push the ball over the side-line to break the opponent’s attack.

When used against a dribbler or as long as the ball is under opponent’s control, the risk is high, to hit or touch the opponent’s stick. It can cause a stick-foul or the ball can be played easily against the defender’s foot whilst it cannot be covered during that action!

-The “jab” is one of the most important defence-skills, because of the longer reach and the better control of action! However timing is important. It should only be done when the ball is free. In the one against one-tackle it gives you a good opportunity, to put it out of opponent’s reach without the danger of stick-foul and with a chance to regain ball-possession.

-**The “high-reverse-tackle”** is mostly used from the opponent’s left side, when “channelling” the attacker to his right side! The defender who is using the left-handed “high-reverse-tackle” must be careful not to touch opponent’s body or stick during that action but wait for the moment when the ball is free! The tackle should result in getting ball possession or a free hit by putting the ball to the opponent’s feet.

-**The “high-forehand-tackle”** gives the defender the better chance for a clean tackle, to collect it back and prepare a counter-attack because the ball is on his strong forehand-side. The “high tackle” even reverse or forehand must be used in combination with the low tackle! The low tackle is very useful and successful in tight situations but can be tactically very wrong if the opponent has too much space! If a low tackler is beaten he has no chance to follow because of his low body position
So the high tackle is very important in channelling actions and gives a beaten player mostly the chance to move back in defence!

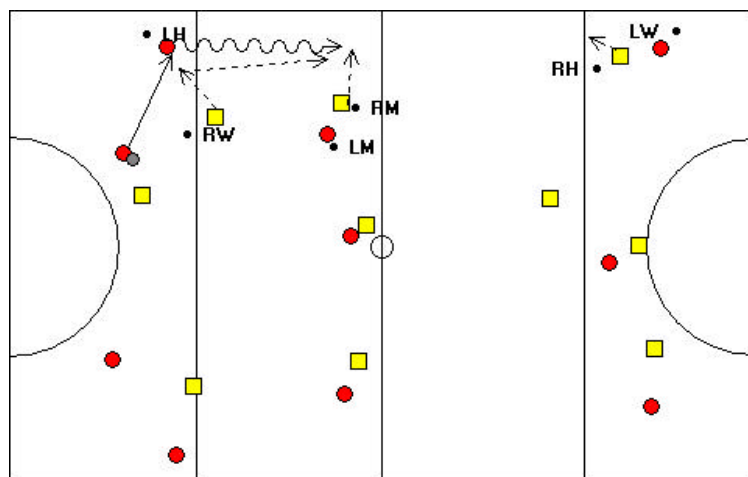
2.1.2 Tactical defence-skill:

-**The “Left-foot-position”** implies that a strong defender, in a “man to man” situation, is mostly tackling the attacker with his forehand stick side whilst covering his left foot and channelling the attacker to the attacker’s left (“weak”) side.

The following aspects must be considered:

-**“Channelling”** means the defender is following the attacker parallel to ball position pressuring him on side trying to prevent him from entering the “D” or “25-yards attacking area”! In this moment the defender must keep “reach-distance” to be able to react on the attacker’s moves!

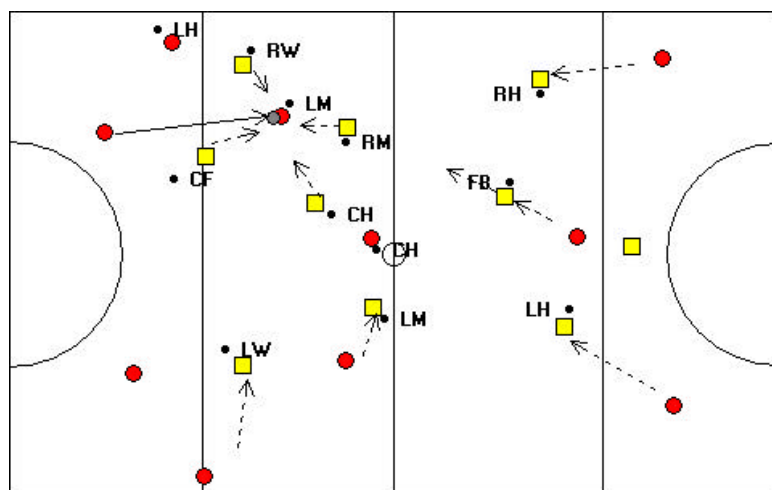
1. The defender always tackles the ball-leading opponent from his right hand side! This moving direction is very important to prevent the ball from being played to his left foot and to the attacker’s right side!
2. In the defending action the defender should not overrun and must stay within reach of the attacker! While moving forward he must reduce his speed, coming to a short stop and turning his frontal body position sideway so that his left shoulder shows into the attacker’s direction! After that he starts channelling!
3. The distance between attacker and defender should never be too close, but reach distance! Too close means the defender cannot react if the attacker is changing directions! Too far means, the attacker can control and has many possibilities to prepare dangerous situations. When attacker is moving into defender’s reach, the defender must vary his distance!
4. When the defender is working in his reach distance, he should use his longest reach! He must use the “jab-skill”, that means “left-hand-stick-tackle”! The longest possible reach can be made by making a long stride using the “jab-skill”!
5. While channelling the defence action is always a change between a “jab” and a “jab-dummy” so that the attacker can never be sure if and when he must change his action!



Left foot/Channelling/Double-team
 -RW runs to LH, protecting his left foot with forehand-stick-side-blocking central passes, allowing "long-line-passes"
 -RW follows LH if he dribbles and channels him along the left side!
 -RM leaves his LM, takes over the LH and tackles the dribbler frontal ("double team")
 -RW stops channelling when RM takes over LH and closes passes to opp.LM
 -RH overtakes his opp.LW, blocking long-line-passes!

-**"Pressuring"** describes an individual or group-tactical action, where the player in "off-ball-position" attacks his opponent! The ball-leading player will be pressured in view of the above mentioned action and he is forced to pass or dribble!

A group-tactical strategy on this subject says that a smaller or bigger group of players is moving around the ball to close the space and to collect it from the opponent!



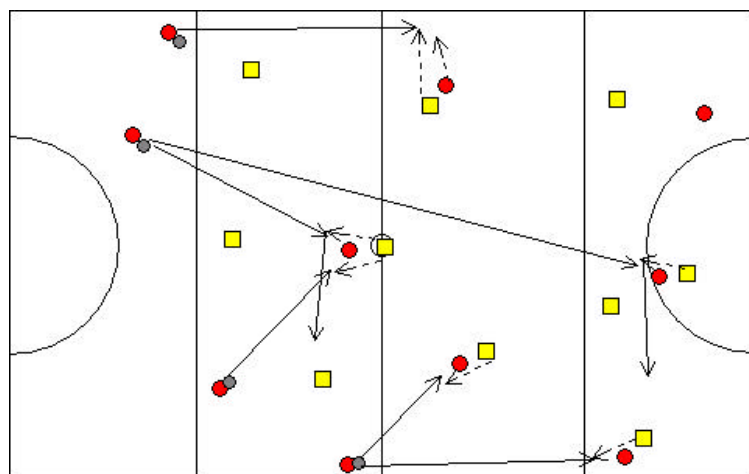
„Pressuring“
 -opp. LM in ball-possession
 -RM comes close,tackles from inside
 -RW comes close, blocking pass to LH
 -CF comes close, blocking central-passes
 -CH comes close, blocking pass to opp.CH
 -all players moving to ball-side to increase pressure and tighten space around the ball

-**"Defence-overtaking"** has replaced the traditional "man to man-marking" attitude where the defender was mostly positioned behind his man, waiting for his opponent's action.

Now you can see the defender becoming more active, making his own decisions to collect the ball from the opponent by "overtaking" his man!

The skill of "overtaking" is used by all top teams. A player must have the physical ability to apply that skill! Speed and the tactical understanding must be used to do it successfully!

1. The defender prepares his action in the "backdoor-position" of his opponent player! He then waits for a good opportunity to start "overtaking"!
2. The defender observes the player in ball-possession and must react when the pass is made to his opponent!
3. The "timing" of the "overtaking action" depends on the player who plays the pass! That means when the player looks at the ball to pass, the "overtaking" must be made at that moment.
4. The defender will always choose the shortest way to overtake! If overtaking on the opponent's right shoulder side, the "overtaker" will receive or touch the ball mostly with his reverse stick side, while overtaking on the opponent's left shoulder side brings him normally in a strong forehand-ball-position!



„Defence-overtaking“

- defender's position mostly "backdoor" (in opp. backposition)
- defender starts to overtake when passer starts passing-action
- defender starts action, when passer looks at the ball to pass!
- defender overtakes his opponent and receives the ball to counter!
- defender overtakes and deflects the ball to prevent opp.ball-possession!

“Overtaking” is used by defenders and attackers!

To get back ball-possession a player will always try to move towards the “ball-side” to be closer to the ball! Opening up the “weak-side” is risky but the collective method of “pressuring” creates good chances to get back ball-possession.

“Double-team” is the smallest group-defence and it is the most important condition for a good cooperation in full team-defence!

A typical example in the game for “double-team-defence” happens in connection with the “channelling-strategy:

Channelling gives the defence the advantage to force a dribbler towards a certain direction, mostly away from direct line to the defender's goal!

An active attack against the ball-leading player by channelling can easily result in a “stick-foul” because of “ball-shielding”! “Double-team-system” allows the second defender, who is coming from behind to tackle the “dribbler” frontal, mostly by “low tackle” without the risk of “stick-foul”!

“Stick-and body-shielding” is a technical-tactical skill to protect the ball from the attacker! In former times that skill was disallowed and was called obstruction-fault! Still we have the obstruction-rule in case when a player is not moving in the shielding position or when he moves several times in different directions only to block the defender! If shielding a player in ball-possession must make a decision where he wants to go!

-“Shielding” under pressure means after a receiving action a player must put his body in between the ball and the opponent. The forehand-side must be put behind the ball! In that particular position the player has to check whether he must pass, dribble or hold the ball! In many cases the movement with the ball has to be done only with the forehand side by turning over the left shoulder! So the ball is always under control and the player can check during the action, when and where he must play!

In case the direction is blocked by a defender the “shielding player has to turn into the opposite direction via “right-shoulder-turn”! If that “exit” is also blocked the player must try to play a lifted ball through the reach of a opponent player! Mostly under pressure a back-pass is possibly the safest option!

Forehand-right, the strongest ball possession!

Every good player must know how to keep the ball possession in his own team. Therefore you have to know what to do, when the opponent team makes pressure and tries to tackle the ball! A player under pressure must use his strongest ball-possession skill, that is the **“forehand-right- possession”**. Without moving but standing the player in ball-possession has the best

position to prepare passes or to find a gap, where to come out. In that strong position the player with ball keeps it with forehand on his right body side! He shields the ball with his body whilst the stick (forehand) is close to the ball! That skill makes it very difficult for the opponents to tackle or reach the ball without foul-play!

This “forehand-right-ball-possession” gives the player a good chance to check the situation without losing ball-control!

“All behind the ball”-strategy

In modern hockey you can see all top teams defending mostly with a “full-team-defence”-strategy! You can call it “all behind the ball” when the team loses ball-possession!

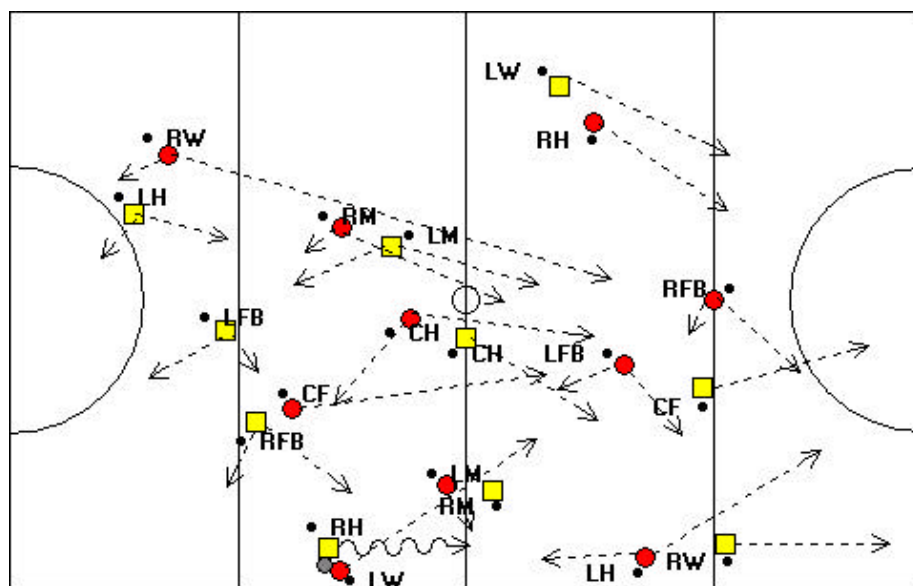
In the past, all players had to move back immediately into their own “25-yards defence-zone” or at least into their own “half”!

“All players” means also those players which are moving on the “weak-side” (opposite to “ball-side”) and not involved in the mistake!

On their way back they have to move between opponent and ball, and not only follow their opponent!

The player who lost the ball and is moving back to chase for the ball must know that a tackle from behind is mostly “foul-play”!

He must leave the player with ball to his team-mate for a frontal tackling, while moving back in the direction of the stroke-point to support the defence!



„team-defence“-„All behind ball“
 -LW dribbles, losing the ball to opp.RH
 -RH dribbles into his attacking half
 -LW chasing back in direction “stroke point”, supporting defence
 -LM leaves his man and tackles the dribbler!
 -LFB moves to “ball-side” in between dribbler and stroke-point
 -RFB is marking opp. CF
 -LH moves back in between opp.RW and stroke point
 -all players moving back “behind the ball” and closer to ball-side!

“Full-team-defence”

In “full-team-defence” the defending team must not give the opponents too much space and allow them to come close to their 25yards-area!

Allowing this will lead automatically to dangerous situations like dribbling near or into the circle, hard hits into the “D” which creates a lot of deflection-goal chances or penalty- corners against!

Consequently, a “full-team-defence” (moving back all the players into their own “half” or “25-yards zone”) will make the opponent team attack with all the field players, including the two “full-backs”!

The attackers will try to open the space as wide as possible through running into “back-door-position”, that means moving behind the defenders and pulling them back into the circle or to the “goal-line”!

In case the full attacking team enters the defender's half, the defenders have to tackle man to man and there is no longer a "free man".

The condition for a successful defence depends on whether each defender is able to stop the dribblings or hard hits into the "D"!

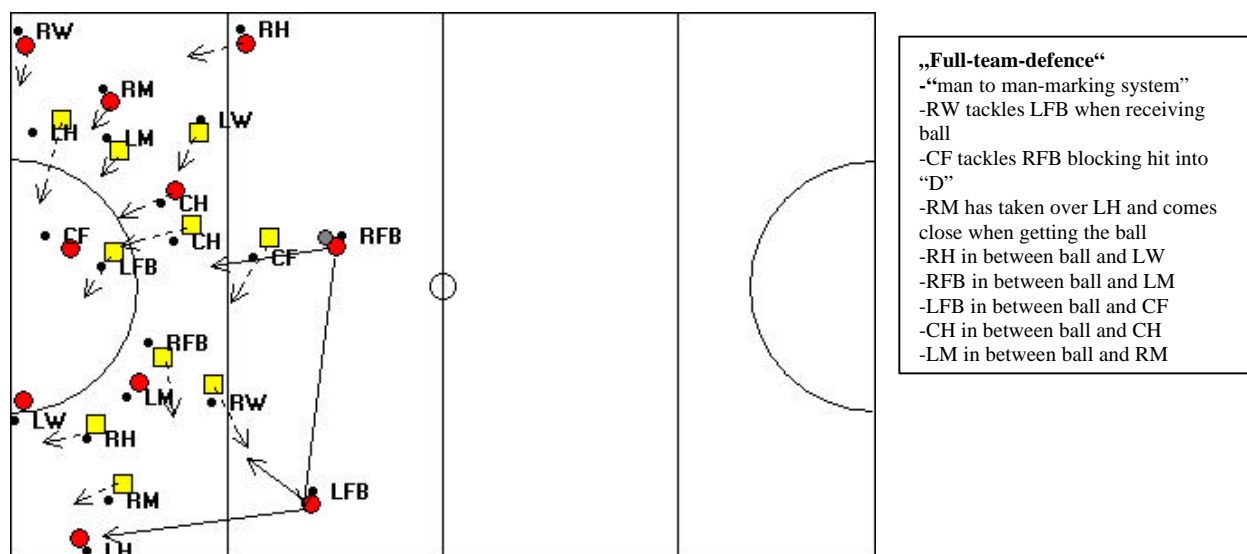
The most important point for the defenders is to pressure the attacking team, especially the man with the ball and to keep them away from the goal!

The defending team must try to tackle as soon as the ball approaches the "25" to prevent any dangerous situations near the "D"!

The distance between defender and attacker varies and depends on the ball position!

The attacker should be pressured or tackled as soon as he receives the ball!

The midfielders in defence and the other defenders must always try to be in position to intercept and to collect passes from the attackers.



Final comment:

The “defence-strategy” against a “5-2-3-system” is very similar to the defence-strategy against other systems!

It almost depends on your target to play it safe with a free man in “full-back-position” (“Liberio-system”), or to play with a free “full-back” between midfield and defence from where you can make more pressure!

Important is the “timing” of decisions and actions! In principle, the players in front must act first before the team-mates behind react!

Flexibility in the marking process will save the players more energy and will make your defence less difficult to read for the opponents!

Cooperation between the defenders is one of the most important conditions to make such a system work!

Communication on the field among the players like orders or instructions will help to clarify the decision!