

Golden Rules for Forwards



The Golden Rules are the keys items players should strive to master as they progress up through the ranks to high school and college. The best players at the highest levels of hockey follow most of the Golden Rules most often.

Players of average skills and speed will do very well if these rules are mastered. While the rules are basic and seem obvious, it may take many years of concentrated effort for most players to automatically perform them properly.

This automatic reaction is what coaches should be teaching and what players should be working toward.

1. Know what your job is — in all three zones — and do it each time. Don't try to do a teammate's job or you will fail at your own. Ask questions in practice if you are unsure about any situations during play of face-offs. Intelligent hockey is what wins games.
2. Backcheck at full speed until you have someone covered when coming back to your zone. Backchecking at full speed is simply the complement of attacking at full speed. Don't be a one-direction hockey player.
3. When backchecking, pick up the most open man without the puck. If the puck is in your area, it may well be appropriate to go after the puck carrier. However, the player without the puck is often the most dangerous. Often it is most effective to let the defenseman take the puck carrier and to take away passes by covering the other open forward. Backcheck on the inside of the opposition player.
4. Put out a full and honest effort on each shift, then get off the ice. Maximum effort and short shifts have proven to be the most desirable at all levels of hockey.
5. Push the puck in the offensive zone or get a whistle when you or anyone on your line is tired. A tired line is most vulnerable — it is seldom productive to play tired. It's always more desirable to take a whistle in the defensive zone than to defend it without legs.
6. Always attack with the puck. Don't make it easy for the other team to catch you from behind. A pressured attack is much harder for a defenseman to cover and results in more 2-on-1 and 3-on-1 situations. Speed over the opposition blue line is critical.
7. Move the puck up ice with passes to linemates ahead that are open, then move quickly to join the rush. Don't force passes to covered linemates ahead. Skating the puck up the ice is the slowest alternative, and lets the opposition catch up and cover.
8. Get into the habit of shooting when in the slot area unless an obvious pass is available. It is seldom productive to stickhandle further once in the slot unless to gain a better angle on the goaltender or let linemates move in for rebounding. Extra passes look good but often take away scoring chances. The key offensive strategy of hockey is to get shots from the slot. When they are available, they should be taken.
9. Always use a wrist or snap shot when shooting from the slot. Slap shots provide neither quickness nor accuracy from the slot.
10. Move away from the net when a teammate has the puck behind the opposition goal line or wide and deep on the boards and move toward the net when your defense or high forward has the puck in a shooting position. It is easier to remember to "move out when the puck is inside and move in when the puck is outside." The tendency is to move up close to the net when a teammate has the puck in the corner or behind the net. However, up close is where most of the congestion and close coverage is. A high slot position will result in more opportunities for clear shots. When a defenseman is in shooting position, on the other hand, moving to the net creates the best screening of the goaltender and also puts players around the net for rebounds. There are some details to be worked out by individual coaches, but the basic concept is important.
11. Take specific care not to go offside when attacking in advantage situations (i.e., 2-on-1, 3-on-2). While it is seldom good to be offside, it is critical to complete a 2-on-1 or 3-on-2 situation as many times as possible each game. It is best to be conservative going over the blueline in these situations.
12. When throwing the puck into the zone, shoot it to the opposite corner or off the end board when it will come out at a difficult angle for both the goaltender and defenseman to handle. Shooting the puck at the goaltender or around the boards gives control to the opposing goaltender who can easily feed a defenseman or wing. Most goaltenders now handle the puck well.
13. Don't tie up with an opposing player when your team is shorthanded. The odds of scoring get better as fewer players are involved in a power-play situation (i.e., 4-on-3 is better than 5-on-4).
14. Don't retaliate from checks or infractions, whether legal or not. Part of the forward's job is to take checks and keep playing. Retaliation often results in a penalty, and referees often miss the initial infraction.
15. Communicate with your linemates and other teammates. It is one of the most important parts of teamwork. Don't ever communicate with opposing players — it seldom is of value and exposes your emotions.
16. Constantly practice your weakest skills. Get away from the habit of just shooting when you have free time in practice. Other skills are more important. If you do shoot, practice while moving, and at game speed. Practice shooting hard — to score.
17. Get as much shinny time as possible to practice stickhandling and other individual skills as well as scoring skills.
18. Learn to be a good all around player — defensively as well as offensively.