

# Oregon Underwater Hockey

Zone Strategies

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## Pool Zones

The pool can be broken up into three different zones, the Defensive Zone, Neutral Zone and Offensive Zone as pictured below. The following pages will depict some strategies specific to each zone:

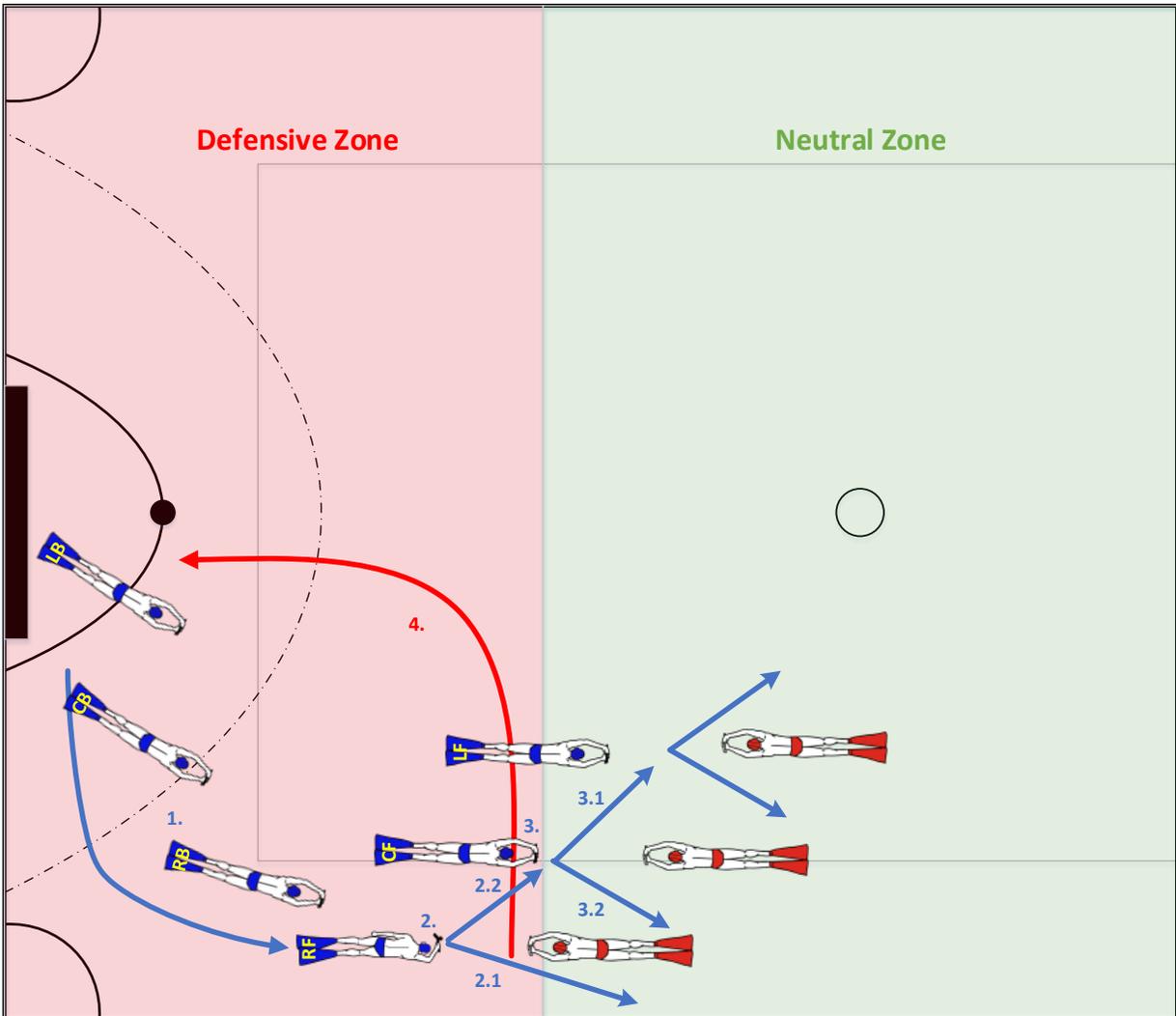


## Transitioning from Defensive Zone to Neutral Zone

Defensive zone strategy dictates that the defenders clear the puck away from the front of the goal and to the walls. But once the puck is on the wall how do we transition into 'attack' mode? There are a few different strategies but let's discuss two below. One aggressive and one safer or more defensive.

### Aggressive Transition

An aggressive transition can work well against a team that plays a more open and spread out game. It also works well to catch an opposing team off guard. Let's take a look at the specific steps.



1. In the beginning of this play the backs clear the puck to the wall
2. As the back clears the puck the strong side forward, in this case the right forward is there to receive the pass once the puck gets to the wall. At this point, the opposing team's forwards are usually there to meet and stop the play. Their object is to grab the puck and get it back out to the middle of the pool. At this point the right forward has two choices.

- 2.1. The first option is the safer option, she can keep the puck along the wall and wait for reinforcements. There is also the option to pass the puck along the wall behind the opposing player which allows the center forward to swoop down along the wall and pick it up. This only works however if there is no one backing up the opposing player.
- 2.2. The second and more aggressive option is to 'Step' the puck off the wall. If the opposing team is stacked up on the wall, making a quick diagonal or lateral pass off the wall to the waiting center forward can open up space. This is slightly more dangerous however, if the center forward is unable to pick up the puck or gets 'picked' by the opposing team then it puts the pressure on to the backs to stop and reset the play. Because of this, the diagonal pass should only be done if the right forward is certain the center forward can procure the puck. If she does not have 100% certainty then keeping it on the wall or passing back to the right back is the preferable option.
3. Once the center forward picks up the puck she again has two options.
  - 3.1. If she is feeling pressured by the opposing team she can take the puck back to the wall which will then reset the play back to step 2.
  - 3.2. If she has space then she can swim with the puck until she runs into resistance, at this point the weak forward should be in position to help. A lateral or diagonal pass to the weak forward can happen. Again, if feeling pressured, the safe option is to return to the wall and reset the play.
4. If at any point the opposing team regains possession of the puck then the forwards or the back attempt to regain possession and reset the play along the wall. It is important to note that this play is best done in a tight formation. Playing to spread out opens up holes for the opposing team to swim through. Also, the center forward must make sure that she doesn't lose possession of the puck in the middle of the pool. If feeling pressured the puck should be taken back to the wall and the play should be reset.



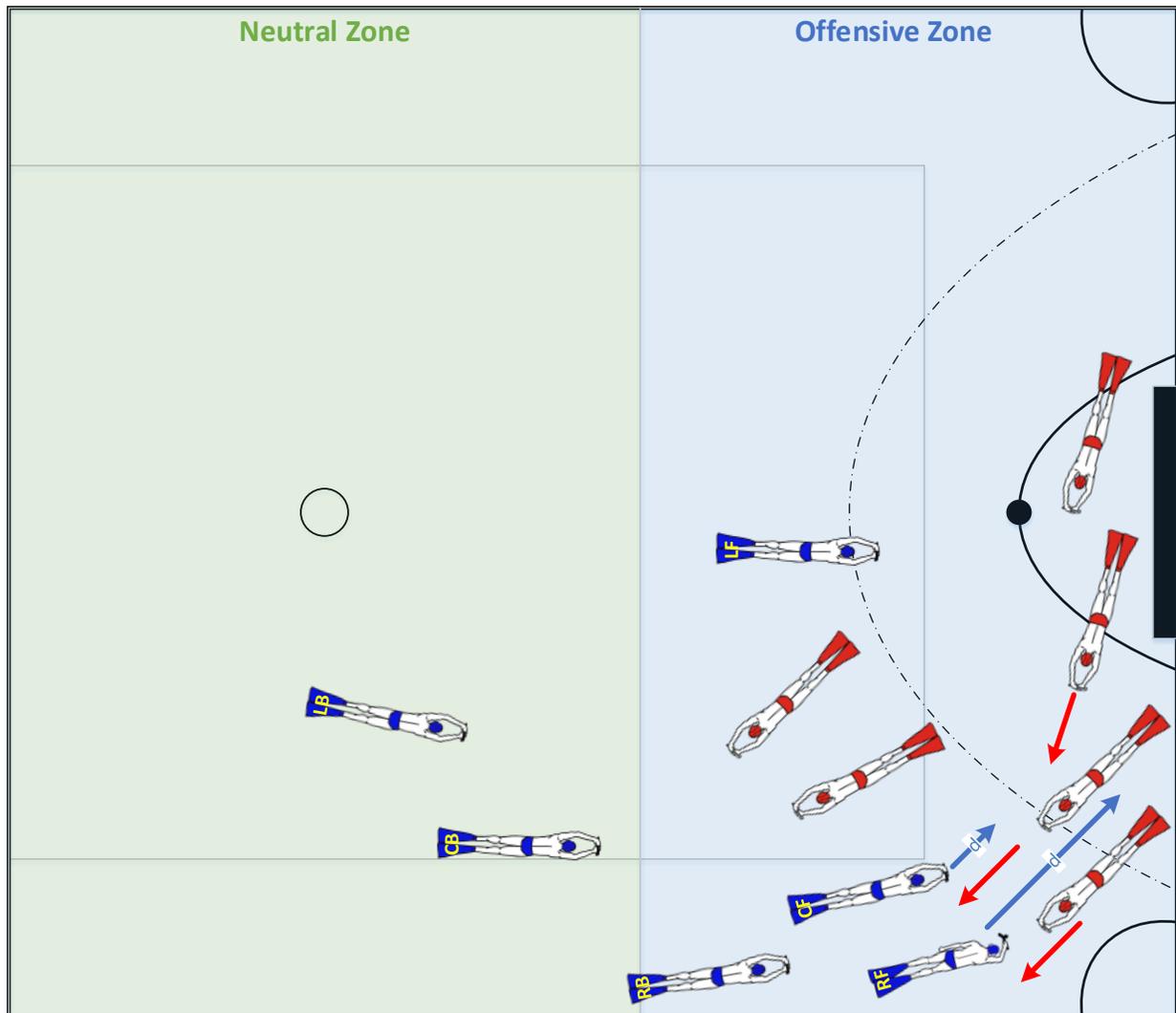
open to counter attack. This choice should only be used if the right back is sure he can get it to the center forward.

- 2.2. The second choice is to take it back to the wall which would then reset the play back to step 1. This is a good option if the opposing team is putting a lot of pressure on with their forwards. It's better to reset and wait for an opening then expose the team to a counter attack.
3. If the right back is able to get it up to the center forward then the center forward should swim until running into resistance, at which point he has two choices:
  - 3.1. If the weak side forward has come up to support the push he can make a diagonal pass to the forward. This should only be done if the weak side forward has time and space to pick up the puck. The pass should also be followed up to ensure completion.
  - 3.2. If the center forward runs into too much resistance or does not have support then he can take it back to the wall where the play resets back to step 1.

## Offensive Zone Strategy

The main idea with offensive zone strategy is to pull it off the wall and cycle the puck back into the center of the pool. Once there you drive straight into the goal with at least forwards. Closer to the goal the idea is to funnel all pucks back towards the center of the goal. Players should position themselves to keep the puck in the middle of the goal.

First let's take a look at what typically happens in a chaotic game:

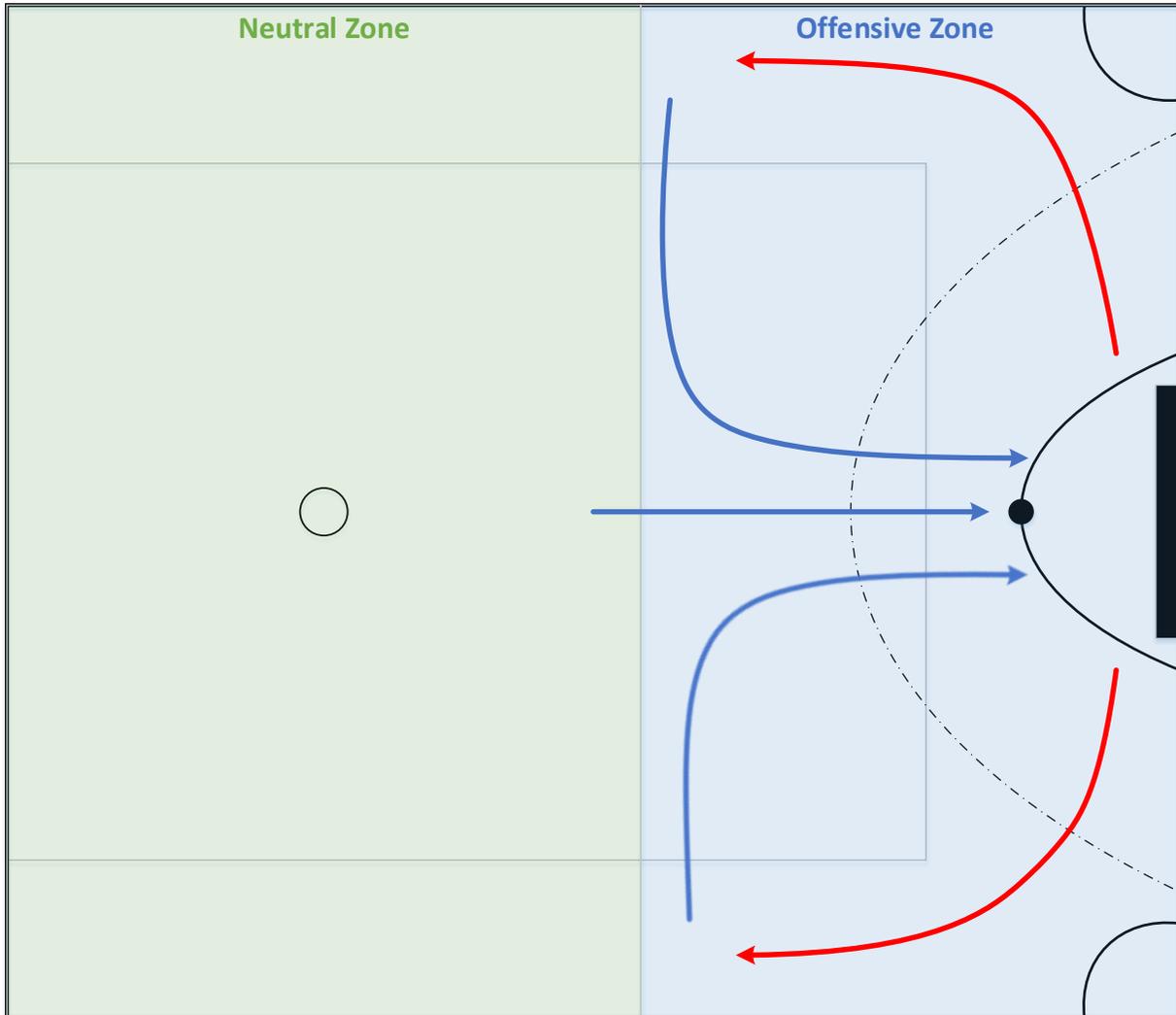


In this play the opposing teams defense is attempting to clear the puck out along the wall and running into our team which is trying to muscle it back down the wall and angle in towards the goal. There are a few problems with this approach:

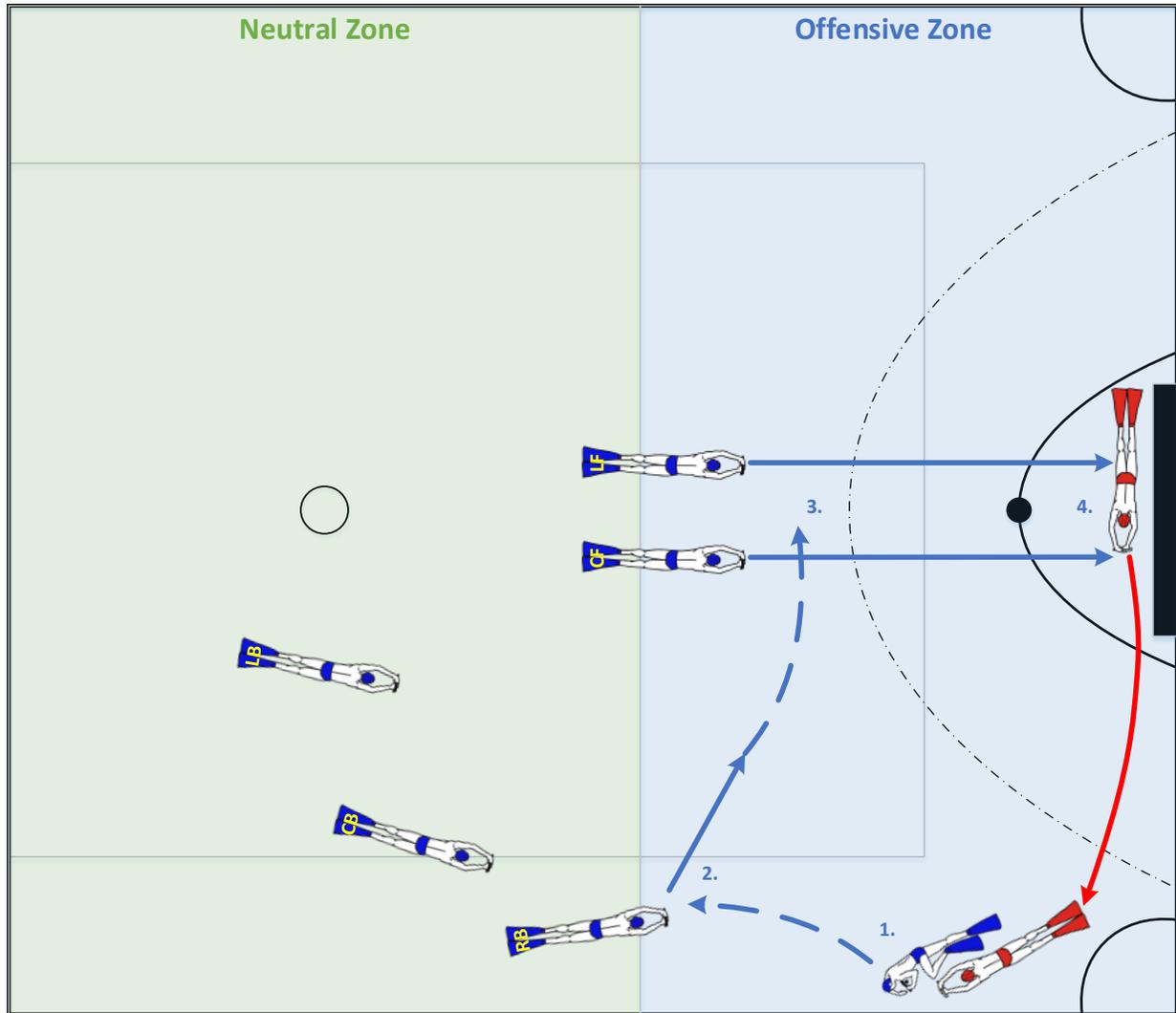
1. It's tiring and only works if you are bigger/stronger/faster than the other team
2. You have to go through 3 to 4 defending players before you even get close to the goal
3. If you do succeed in getting the puck to the wall you then have about 6 inches of side goal to shoot for.

4. It is much easier as a defender to defend this approach because you have to cover less space and you can use the wall.

Now let's take a look at a basic rotation for how offensive strategy should work:



It is essentially exactly the opposite of defensive zone strategy. If the opposing team is able to clear the puck out to the wall then the puck should be pulled off the wall and shot back into the middle. At which point the forwards, who should be sitting about 10-15 feet off the goal can drive it straight down the middle. Let's take a look at an example of this with figures:

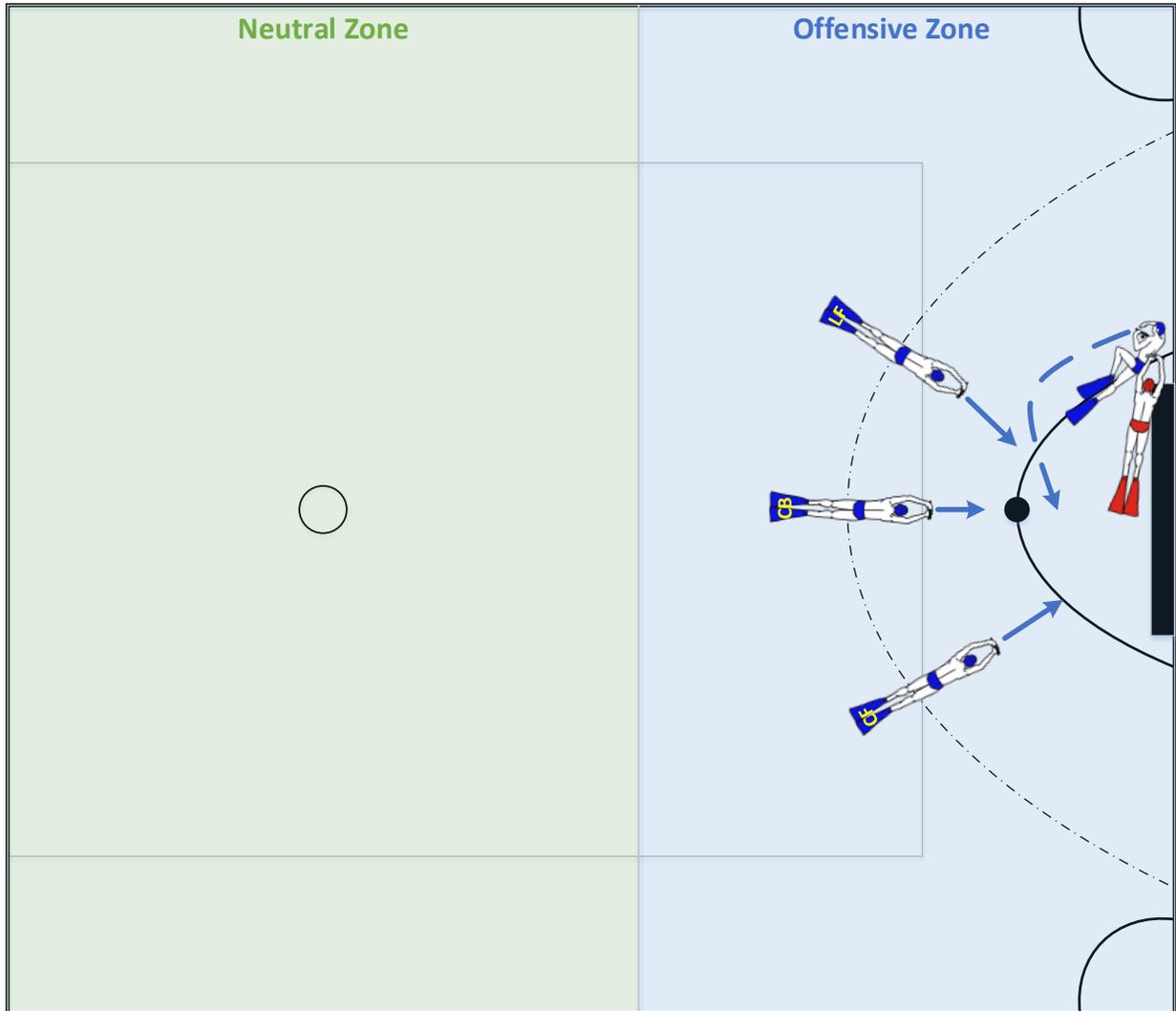


The above image shows the basic idea of what an offensive zone cycle should look like. I kept it deliberately simple so we can just discuss the steps of cycling it off the wall and back to the center.

1. The right forward meets the opposing player on the half wall and performs a 'pinch' using his body, moving in the same direction as the opposing player, to pinch the puck off the wall. From here he uses his body to shield the puck which gives him enough time to throw back to either the right back or sometimes the center forward.
2. The right back at this point should have time to move the puck to the middle of the pool. The forwards should be setup 10-15 feet away from the goal and at this point hauling ass to get to the bottom. Ideally, the right back would time his flick so that it meets the forwards as they come down allowing them to carry their momentum towards the goal.
3. The forwards drive towards the goal together supporting each other. If they get driven off the goal by a defender they should attempt to flick the puck back to the middle. At this point if the drive is looking promising and it gets to within 5 feet of the goal it should be all hands on deck. All three forwards should be funneling the puck towards the goal and ideally at least one back should be pushing up to support in case the puck squirts out.

4. At this point either a goal is scored or a defender is successful in clearing the puck away from the goal and out towards the wall.

Near the goal mouth it's easy to get goal fever, but sometimes it's better to allow the defender to drive you off the goal. If the defender follows you it then opens up space in the goal allowing you to curl and pass the puck back into the middle where hopefully support is cycling in:



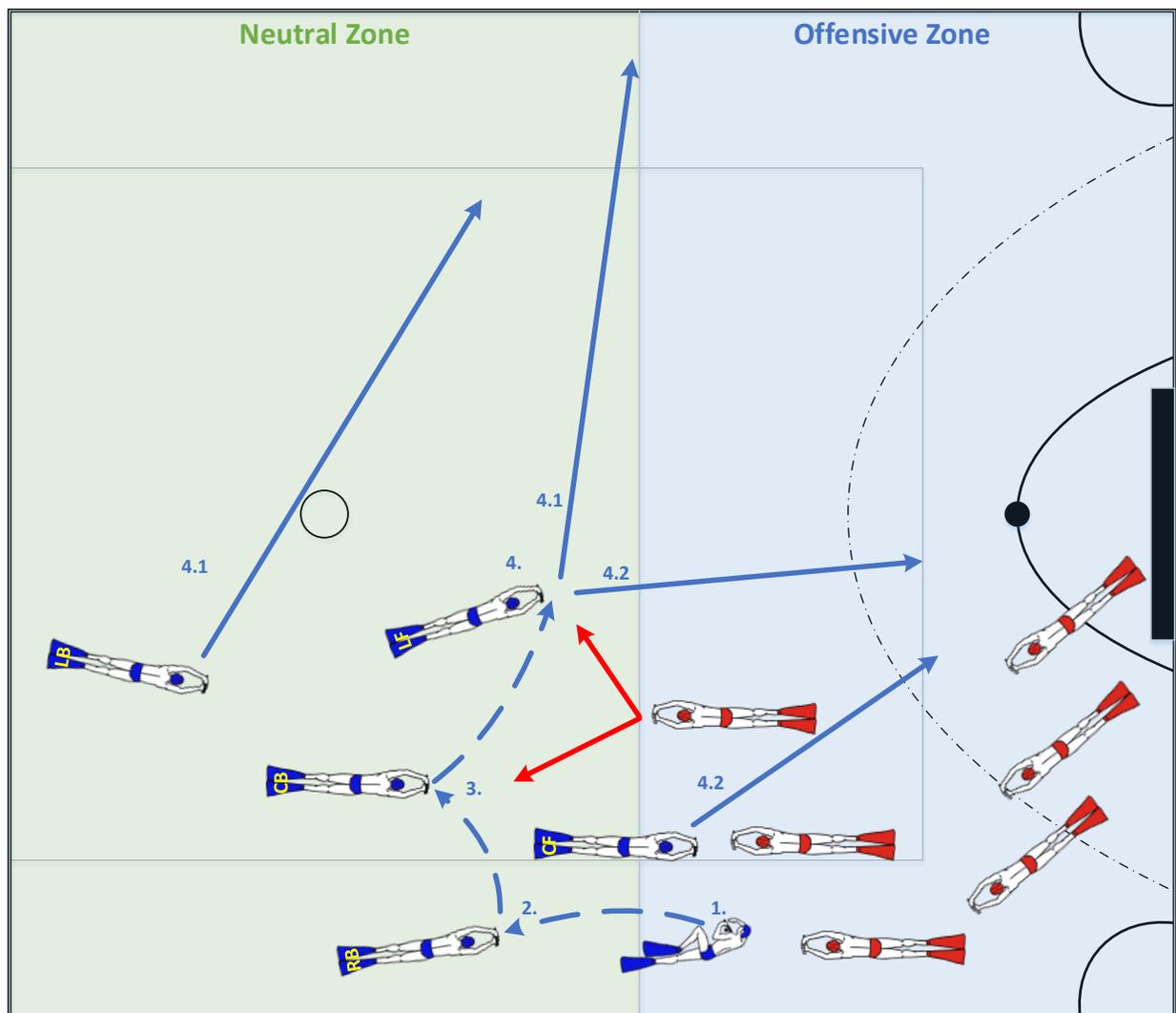
In the above image the attacking player is getting driven off the goal by the defender. Instead of trying to jam it back past the defender, he curls with the puck, using his body to protect it, and passes back into the center of the goal mouth. Supporting players can then come in and finish the goal.

It's important to note that this is basic strategy discussion, the plays are usually never this clean. But the idea here is to always be thinking about pulling the puck off the wall and getting it back into the

center of the pool where it can be most dangerous. This approach can be scaled to any place in the offensive zone, from right at the goal mouth to along the walls, the goal should always be to pull the puck off the wall and get it back to the center. Weak forwards should always be setting up to cycle through the center of the pool looking for that centering pass.

### End Arouds

If forward progress in the neutral or offensive zone is becoming impossible an end around can be attempted to swing the play around the opposing team, opening up space. End arounds are a high risk high rewards maneuver. It can open up space for forward progress but it can also open up large holes in your team. Better teams are well aware of this play and will send their weak side forwards to break it up. If an end around is 'Picked' it opens up the possibility of counter attack by the opposing team. Because of this end arounds need to be based on speed, speed and more speed.



1. The right forward starts the play by curling and passing back to the right back.

2. The right back immediately passes to the center back who is positioned 10-15 feet off the wall. These passes should be one touch immediate passes, this does not allow the opposing team time to set up for the counter attack.
3. The center back at this point should start swimming diagonally towards the opposite wall, passing to the weak side forward when possible.
4. The weak side forward has the biggest responsibility when it comes to the end around. He can either choose to make forward progress down the middle of the pool if he has space, or continue to the opposite wall. The worst possible thing you can do in an end around is stop in the middle of the pool, allowing the opposing team to pick the play.
  - 4.1. If the weak forward is forced to the opposite wall he should be sure to swim it ALL THE WAY to the wall. Do not stop in the middle of the pool. At this point the weak side back should follow up to support the play and the play resets on the wall.
  - 4.2. If forward progress is made then offensive zone strategy starts where we drive to the goal as a unit funneling everything off the walls and back to the middle of the pool in front of the goal