



Line Change Protocol

NFHS and MHSAA Ice Hockey within what is known as the “fast face-off” rule. Without using a literal count-down, it is reasonable to keep face-off pairing decisions to 15 seconds.

The “fast face-off” rule was adopted for a couple of reasons: First, it is a way to complete games in a timely manner. Allowing unfettered time to make changes would unreasonably extend the length of the game. Also, this prevents teams from unfairly resting their players during brief stoppages or disguising an opportunity to stall the game or stifle an opponent’s momentum with a frivolous question for the official(s).

As a guide to manage this face-off rule, and still allow the home team make the last change allowed by rule, a normal change would look like the following:

1. Visiting team initiates its change of players
2. The referee in the neutral zone managing the change raises his/her arm to indicate the visiting team change is complete
3. Home team makes its change
4. Referee points to the linesman that both teams have had an opportunity to make a change and the officials are ready for the face-off to resume play
5. Linesman acknowledges the referee, blows his whistle and conducts the face-off

This, however, is not always as smooth as it appears in writing. Proper mechanics and strong signals are critical to ensuring timely and consistent line changes during stoppages. Good eye contact

from the referee to the affected coach is important. To ensure this, the referee should check the bench prior to the start of the game to find where the coach stands on the bench. He/she also should make sure to clear him/herself from traffic on the ice so that both benches can see him clearly and understand his commands and signals.

Speaking of that, the appearance and signals of an official can do a lot to guarantee proper protocol is followed in a time-appropriate manner. Referees should stand tall and sure-footed, have a strong command of his/her voice and display crisp, clear signals.

Additionally, referees should encourage the visiting team to initiate their line changes with verbal prompts or an occasional hand gesture of “pulling out” the visiting team players. A “stop” signal with an upward extended arm in the direction of the bench should be accompanied by verbal communication such as, “Red team change is done.” This provides the home team the cue that they can make their choice of last change. Remember, if the home team begins their change simultaneous to the visiting team, they are stuck with that change. They cannot make a change, see the visiting teams personnel and then seek a last change. If they want to wait for last change, they need to wait for the referee’s signal.

Good communication and consistency in enforcement will ensure that line changes are fair for both sides. While it is never recommended that a linesman drop a puck without both teams ready with centers in position, the referee may dismiss a center or call a delay of game penalty, if necessary, to ensure compliance.

Something to Consider: Team A pulls its goalkeeper just as Team B gets a breakaway out of their defensive zone. As A1 skates across the blue line into the attacking zone, the goalkeeper throws his stick and knocks the puck away from a clear scoring opportunity. Ruling?

Our Last Consideration: While A1 toes the attacking blue line as the puck-handler approached the offensive zone, B1 intentionally shoves A1 into the offensive zone just before the puck is carried in. Ruling?

Ruling: Interference. 2 minute minor on B1.