

Possession of the Ball Outside Your Offensive “D”

Possession of the ball for a portion of the match is necessary to win in regulation or overtime play (barring a stupid flagrant foul by the opponents that results in a penalty stroke for the team that otherwise never had possession of the ball). You cannot score unless you get possession of the ball for at least one touch inside the offensive “D”. Also, the longer your team has possession of the ball, the less time the other team has to score.

What are the ways your team can maintain possession of the ball (excluding when the ball is in the offensive “D”- for that see the section on “Scoring”)? There are three smart ways: Passing; Dribbling; or Earning a restart (a ball over the side boundary off an opponent’s stick, or by drawing a foul).

1. **Smart pass** – Passing is the **best** and **fastest** way to move the ball. Always try to think ahead for a potential pass so you are ready if you find the ball on your stick. The ball never gets tired, so the more work you let the ball do, the “stronger for longer” your team can be in the match.
2. **Smart dribble** – there is one or more “open” space to dribble into and the ball carrier aggressively exploits one (with speed and vision)- a good dribble creates potential passing opportunities as the defense reacts to the ball carrier first, and then your teammates second- (defenders often look at the ball, then remember they are supposed to be marking a player that has moved away from them...).
3. **Earn a restart** – play the ball off the stick of a defender out of bounds, or draw a foul. The only drawback to a restart is that momentum is lost (the ball “dies”), giving the defense time to organize if the attack had space or superior numbers.

Unfortunately, many players panic with the ball, and make one of these dumb choices:

1. **Dumb pass** - the opponent who intercepts the pass, or tackles your receiving teammate, has to take three or fewer steps to touch the ball. If it is an interception, usually the opponent who steals the ball is open on her first touch and counter attacks while you and many of your teammates are caught on your heels. **A dumb pass can be deadly**. Sometimes playing the ball out of bounds, instead of trying to “force” a dumb pass, is the second best way to lose the ball (what is the best way to lose possession of the ball for your team?).
2. **Dumb dribble** – the ball carrier (assuming no smart pass is available) ignores the open dribbling space and runs into the nearest defender (usually the defender between the ball and the goal...). This would include unnecessary stick work when there is no one in tackling position (that reflexive reverse stick touch on the ball when NO ONE is near you -- the defenders are always very grateful when you slow down your movement into open forward space), or sloppy dodges, such as the 25 foot “Y” dodge (why?), the diagonal forward left into the defender’s front stick dodge (this is possibly the worst dodge...), the reverse pull right when the only nearby opponent is standing to your right ☹, the pull straight back and then close your eyes and run straight forward into the opponent’s front stick dodge (possibly the second worst dodge...), etc., etc.
3. **Playing the ball out of bounds** – A blind pass to no one (the ball carrier is not looking at any teammate) that does not even have a chance to stay on the field (the

ball carrier has no clue how close any boundary is). This can be a good move when your team needs time to recover defensively, but this delaying tactic (a restart for the other team) is definitely NOT a possession skill (although it is the second-best way to lose the ball...).

Each moment you are playing or watching, you must ask yourself “If I had the ball right now, what could I do with it? What potential **passes, dribbles, or restarts** would be available to me?” Each time the ball, or a teammate, moves, you will have to seek variations to some of the options you had a moment ago. Hockey is a **game of change**. Hockey is a game of **decision-making**. Flow with the changes. Improvise. Make a decision and follow through on it. If conditions change, a new decision may be required. **Don’t panic** when the ball comes to you; consider your options. With practice, you will be able to quickly cycle through the three smart options above **before** the ball arrives, and then again while you are in possession of the ball, and you **will** make a very good choice. Think “**Pass, dribble, restart...**” Be cool, make a plan, be flexible (be cool when changing your plan), and you will be successful.

Passing: Fast, Easy, and Fun.....

Remember:

Passing is usually the **best** and always the **fastest** way to move the ball. The ball **never gets tired**. Really, it doesn’t. If your team makes the ball do 75% of the work, and the other team only asks the ball to do 40% of the work, which team is going to have more physical and mental energy to win 50-50 balls, or play smart defense, or execute penalty corners in the closing minutes of the match?

A pass requires two things: a passer and a receiver. If none of your teammates have an opportunity to get to the ball before an opponent does (a clear opportunity), or can even get close to the ball before it leaves the field (a slim opportunity when on attack is OK here: attack involves some element of risk), then it isn’t a pass. The chance of success of any pass will depend on the amount of open space available, the pace (speed) of the ball, the timing of the pass, and recognition of your intention to pass by one or more of your teammates.

NOTE: “Space” can sometimes, for just a few seconds, include a teammate (in which case you should look up and see them, and then pass the ball- it’s easier if you actually look first), but your teammates will draw opposing defenders if they are standing in that space “too long”, especially if they are closer to the offensive end line, or the goal, than the ball.

Remember that your team earns no points for passing. Do not pass to make yourself look good during practice, or because you think it is nice to do. **Pass when it is appropriate**. Make smart passes, not reflexive passes (which usually go out of bounds or directly to an opponent). It is your responsibility to “see” passing opportunities if they are available, and then **choose the best one**. If you turn the ball over to the opponents consistently because you fail to see potential passes, you are passing too late (not releasing the ball soon enough), choosing non-existent passing lanes (not looking up at all), or you are dribbling into trouble, where no pass is possible (if so, the player may need an attitude adjustment).

Something to consider for later (See possession of the ball inside the “D”): what is your **favorite** pass in the whole wide world? What type of pass makes you smile the most? What are some different ways to deliver this magical pass, a pass that all field players dream about? This is a good topic to write about in your journal. How many different types of this pass can you describe (how to, when to, where on the field is best to, etc. etc.)?

One more great thing about passing: If you make a pass, then you can receive a pass. Players who complain they never receive passes are often correct, but not for the reason they think - no one can pass them the ball if no one else on their team ever gets to touch the ball. Passing is like religion: you must have faith that one day you will be rewarded for all your smart passes. When it is **appropriate** to pass the ball, *then do so*. Each appropriate pass your team completes is simultaneously a confidence booster for your whole team, and compounds the frustration of your opponents, who would have preferred to have taken the ball away from the passer in the first place, and now have to run a lot to chase down the receiver. String a few good passes together and you and your teammates will hardly be able to hide the smiles spreading across your faces 😊. And the other team will get really, really tired 😊 😊.

Dribbling: An Adventure into the Unknown.....

Dribbling is a possession skill. When you have the ball but:

you are not in the offensive “D” to attempt a shot on goal...

there is no “safe” **space** to pass the ball into (safe being where no opponent has a chance to intercept the pass **and** counter attack)...

there is no good chance to **dribble into the “D”** for a shot or a pass to a teammate who can shoot...

you cannot continue to stand where you are with the ball because opposing players are actively pressuring, or are approaching you to do so. Sometimes standing still with the ball on your stick is a good choice, until your teammates, or the opponents move to give you a choice you like (if you are winning and the opponents let you stand still with the ball for a long time, or until the clock runs out, do so 😊)...

.....***then*** dribble the ball **to space**.

Although you need to dribble “forward” to approach your offensive goal, you do not need ten yards for a first down (that’s a different game). So **do not always** dribble forward. Remember that the defense will try to position themselves between the ball and their defensive goal, so you should be happy to dribble sideways (usually towards the farther side line) when there is no direct path to goal (this is a great way to find straight through passes between defenders who do not close the gaps...). Blindly dribbling forward to the exclusion of all other directions, regardless of the position of opposing players, is the biggest mistake ball carriers make. It is an even bigger mistake than dribbling when a pass should have been made to **open space**.

Think about this: If you dribble forward with the ball, and there is a defender standing right in front of you waiting to tackle the ball, you have lost a quality possession, when you could have passed in one, two or three directions: back, or left, or right. However, if the

same ball handler chooses to dribble flat into space (towards either sideline) or dribble back into space, instead of making the one or more possible passes to open space, your team still has possession of the ball, and some or all of those passes might still be available. Furthermore, as the ball carrier moves the ball with a dribble to space (not toward an opponent), potentially MORE passes will become available, if she carries the ball into a “good” space. A bad situation can quickly become a good situation if you move the ball. Dribbling to space is one way to move the ball. NOTE: a successful dodge of a defender also moves the ball to space; the space behind the defender...ONLY if there is no second defender. Dodging into trouble (towards a second defender) is not a possession move.

Think of dribbling as an adventure into the unknown (what happens next is “unknown” to your opponents- you sort of know what is going to happen, because you are “making it up” as you go...). When you carry the ball into “open space” you will see new spaces, and opponents and teammates will react to your movement, creating new options for you to choose from to maintain possession of the ball for your team. But dribbling is not guesswork. When you choose dribbling from the three possession options, you are proceeding from certain knowledge of three truths:

1. No smart pass is available (the best pass is actually a pass to the back of the net ☺).
2. There is no immediate opportunity to get a restart that is better than dribbling (in certain cases, earning a penalty corner is better than aimless dribbling in the “D”, especially if time is running out during open play).

...and **MOST** importantly.....

3. You are maintaining 100% possession of the ball for your team!

When it is appropriate to dribble, do so without hesitation. Dribbling can create chaos for your opponents (they **MUST** react to a dribble- otherwise you can carry the ball into the “D” and potentially score a goal...). When the chaos starts, cycle through the three possession options in your mind, choose the best one, and act decisively.

Create a Restart: A Tale of Two Parts

Part 1: If you have no passing opportunities and there is nowhere to dribble, then catch a breather. Although a restart does give the defenders an opportunity to regroup, it does maintain possession of the ball for your team a little longer. The two restarts you are looking for are a defensive foul or a ball over a boundary off an opponent’s stick (not applicable over the offensive end line in Indoor Hockey).

1. **Drawing a foul** – It is important to make any “foul” look accidental in nature. A ball along the ground into an opponent’s foot while moving your feet around the opponent as if to dodge is good- but if you lift the ball into the opponent’s shin, the umpire should penalize you for a “manufactured” foul (even in outdoor Hockey). Also, keep your stick down when trying to pass an opponent. Raising your stick over the defender’s waist, or head, to emphasize obstruction or any other foul is illegal and puts the stick farther from the ball than it should be. Raising the stick over an opponent’s head is dangerous and merits an automatic green card on the first offense.

2. **Boundary restarts** – If a defender’s stick is close to a boundary, and angled towards that boundary (or “open” faced near a side-board in Indoor...the ball would pop-up and over the boards), look to exploit that poor stick positioning to get a restart on the side of the field, or a defensive restart over the end line (or a long hit in outdoor Hockey). In Indoor Hockey, a stick that is both angled open to the boards when viewed from above, and the stick face is slightly open to the sky, is an open invitation to have the ball pop-up off the floor and over the near board. Push the ball as hard as you can into an outstretched stick (to avoid a “drilling” call) in this position if you desire a restart. Always take your restarts in Indoor Hockey at least one meter from the nearest board, so you have the option of bouncing the ball off the near board as well as the far board. Another strategy to earn a restart is bouncing the ball off a stick that is close to and parallel to a boundary (any one in outdoor Hockey, the defensive end line in Indoor Hockey). Simply maneuver the ball and the defender’s stick to a distance of less than a foot from the boundary you want the ball over. As the defender closes in to tackle the ball, quickly push the ball so it bounces off the defender’s stick and rolls out of play, making sure you keep your stick close enough to the ball to make the opponent think you are going to “save” it from going out, but not actually doing so (footwork is key here: back pedal quickly as part of the feint to fool the attacker). This is a lot of fun when you do it successfully, especially to a forward, as they appear so crestfallen when they fall for this one and must now defend a restart even with the top of the “D”.

Special Note regarding the “self-start” rule. It is important to realize how far the ball may travel from the stoppage of play since you can actually restart the ball yourself from the pint of the foul (remember that a short back pass in the attacking area allows a teammate to play the ball directly into the “D”...). Make sure the ball is moved back to a spot **near the original foul** before restarting. Alternately, if you earn a boundary ball with a “hard” ball off an opponent’s stick, you or a teammate may have to chase down the ball and then roll it back to the proper spot to potentially speed up the restart (a player who chases the ball and runs it back themselves kills the possibility of a quicker restart...).

Part 2: Once you have a restart, it is essential that you look for the immediate pass first (if it is a smart pass). If there is no pass available, you can self-start the ball, but **you** must also play the ball into the space the receiver desires, and at the pace she is expecting it (not too hard, not too soft, just right...). This sounds obvious, but watch a match. How many restarts are taken, and the other team gets the “second” touch, frequently under no pressure from the passer’s teammates? Almost as bad is hitting a teammate in the foot when they are not even looking at the ball, or putting the ball on their reverse stick when they absolutely needed it played to their front stick, and they are tackled right away.

A dumb restart is essentially a dumb pass when your team is thinking “attack”, and therefore is unprepared for a counter-attack. So take care to **make a good decision** with the ball once you earn the restart. Your goal on any restart is to get at least three touches for your team. Have a simple plan, make eye contact with your teammates, look where the opponents are and where they can reach with their sticks, and concentrate on the basic skills (body low, push along the ground, or swing smoothly while looking down when the ball “was”, always follow through with your stick) and your restarts will be successful a

majority of the time. **NOTE when facing an All-Star opponent:** If you KYO (know your opponent), be sure not to always play the ball towards their best player or athlete. Talented opponents often get “extra” opportunities to make you and your teammates miserable because your team keeps “giving” like it is Christmas (giving them extra opportunities to touch the ball when there are other places to move it). Sometimes it is best to **play the ball away from** these particular players before advancing the ball up field.

Defensive Possession of the Ball in the “D”

When any defensive player gains possession of the ball while inside their “D”, they must continue to consider the same options to maintain possession: **Pass, Dribble, or “restart”**. Many players panic in the “D” because they know any failure to maintain possession can potentially lead to an immediate goal. That danger is all the more reason to **be the cool girl**. The need to maintain possession is greater while defending in your “D” than when attacking their goal. Therefore the same principles of possession apply. Here again are the three possession options, with the special considerations while defending inside your “D”:

1. **Pass** – Not only must the pass exit the “D”, **it must get to a teammate** who is not close to an opponent, or it must travel far from the scoring area. “Far” is over the opponents’ end line in indoor, or over the 25-yard line or sideline in outdoor. An intercepted pass inside the defensive “D” will result in a shot and possibly a goal. An intercepted pass outside the “D” will soon be back in the “D”, and the attackers will be in a position to make an unchallenged (and possibly a lifted) shot on goal. Know where the opponents are in order to make only “smart” passes inside the defensive “D”. Is a pass best? **ONLY** if it is a **successful** pass. **Make sure** it is successful.
2. **Dribble** – A space exploited by a dribble (even if that space is **across the mouth of the goal** – and **AWAY** from opposing players...) is often the best way to safely get the ball both out of the “D” and into a teammate’s possession. In fact, sometimes you can dribble for a long time once you exit the “D” because the attackers (the first line of defense) are suddenly behind you and the second line of defenders are trying to prevent potential receivers from being open (defenders who dribble out are usually unmarked because they just beat the player who is supposed to mark them). Indoor Hockey defenders should look to dribble “D” to “D” whenever they are completely unmarked **and no smart pass is available**. In outdoor Hockey, these types of attacking runs by defenders are best executed when the ball is already in the attacking half of the pitch. Please take care not to dribble behind a teammate inside your defensive “D” and create “third-party” obstruction, yielding a penalty corner. Often the best place to initially dribble is back **towards the nearest corner**- you will be closer to the side line (outdoor), or a longer pass up the boards (indoor). Plus, attackers that rush towards you create space behind to pass or dodge into. The attack may knock the ball over the end line in an attempt to tackle you. At least any turn over will not result in an immediate high percentage shot (end line shot- or a “stale piece of cake”...). Other benefits of the dribble out of the “D” are:

Once out of the “D”, you can cycle through the three options again 😊

Remember to look **UP** for a potential **long through pass** to a teammate- scoring on the opponent’s penalty corner is fun!

A **short** dribble can create better passing opportunities.

A dribble out of the “D” is less likely to result in a foul, and a penalty corner, than a hurried pass (hitting your teammate's foot with the ball, a lifted ball in indoor, dangerous sticks, or dangerous hit or “lift” in outdoor).

A dribble makes creating a restart easier (more moving feet become available to “accidentally” find with the ball-look for attackers who lift their stick to move, or reach reverse stick for the ball). The attackers often panic and stick obstruct when they see a dribble by a defender (a frequent foul in indoor Hockey).

A smart dribble out of the “D” maintains 100% possession for your team, and denies possession to the opponents. This is true anywhere on the pitch, but is absolutely critical inside your defensive “D” when no obvious pass is available.

3. **Create a restart** – Remember to be the cool girl. If there is no place to pass, and no place to dribble, do not panic. The attacking players will panic first if you give them a chance. Keep your hips low to the ground and the ball constantly in contact with your stick (your front stick whenever possible). If the opponent hits your stick when going for the ball, you may earn a restart. If the attacker lunges in one direction to recover the ball, use their momentum against them by dribbling in the other direction (simply dodge them). When they correct their mistake, they are usually lunging even harder, and are ripe for a “dodge” right into their foot. Any time an attacker lifts their stick to make a tackle, “find” the instep of either foot with a “dodge” attempt. By staying low while looking UP, moving your feet as much as you move the ball, and keeping the ball constantly in contact with the stick, you will be prepared for all of these opportunities, and more. Remember to “play the whistle” in these situations. Sometimes when you have created the “advantage”, the opponent (and if you are lucky, her teammates too) will stand up and walk away, allowing you a second opportunity to consider a quick pass (best option), or a dribble (next best option).

Once the ball is on your stick in the defensive “D”, DO NOT let go of it until:

1. There is a clear chance of a successful pass available.
2. The ball is safely outside the “D” (dribble out to create a potential pass).
3. The attacking team has left the “D”, or has a lopsided attack, and you can easily pass sideways, away from all attackers to a teammate on the other side of the “D”.
4. If tackled, keep the ball on your front stick (nimble footwork may be required), until the other player panics and moves her stick (either up or backwards). **NEVER** reverse pull the ball towards your own goal, as you might lose it and score for the other team. Be nimble on your feet, and let the other player reverse pull the ball away from your defensive goal.

Always be the cool girl. The cool girl wins! ☺

Offensive Possession of the Ball in the “D”

Always keep the ball on your stick near the edge of the “D”, and look to carry the ball into the “D” quickly with a dribble. When near the “D”, only pass the ball in if your teammate is “open”, and you cannot wait until you are in the “D” to make that pass. A pass from outside the “D” cannot become a goal until a teammate touches it ☹. A pass from inside the “D” can be deflected into goal by one or more defenders and count for your team ☺.

Forwards should consider this maxim: In indoor Hockey, if you have a chance to dribble into the “D” once the ball is over mid-court, then **DO SO QUICKLY**. If you are outdoors, then consider a lightning quick dribble into the “D” anytime you are inside the offensive 25-yard line.

One more thing to consider when in possession in the “D”: Open space is now any space where there is no defender’s stick, or any place the GK cannot easily reach. Because the “D” can get crowded, the defenders are much closer to the attackers, the open space available to be “smart” is obviously less. Therefore, the area to the left side of a close marking defender who is reaching front stick is now “open” (whereas outside the “D”, if the defender was 5 or 10 meters away, they would have plenty of time to either step left into proper defensive position, or use the reverse stick to try to intercept a ball to their left).

The options for possession are basically the same inside the “D” as outside the “D”:

1. **Pass** - a shot is simply a pass to the back of the goal. Remember the GK is an obstacle, not a target. If the GK can definitely intercept your pass to the back of the goal, it is a “low percentage shot”- which is the polite term for a “dumb pass”☹. **Do not pass to the opposing GK**; look for a smart pass ☺. Also, although a straight back pass from the end line is not a shot, it is a POSSESSION pass ☺, so use this pass! The defense is rarely in a position to intercept a “straight back” pass. Maintain possession of the ball until that “favorite” pass is available for your team.
2. **Dribble** - to “open space” to discover a pass/shot or foul (usually a penalty corner). A quick “push” shot off the dribble (in the air if necessary) is often the best shot, especially if you are moving parallel to, or diagonally towards the goal line (while the GK is moving laterally to get an angle on a potential shot you can sometimes slip the ball past her). If you find yourself too close to the GK to shoot, then dribble straight away from the goal (as if making a straight back pass), and watch the GK over your shoulder to see when they stop following you. If the GK follows you, then any teammate flat of you has an open goal to lift a shot into (to make it impossible for a defender’s stick to make an accidental save along the ground). If the GK follows you part way, and then stops, keep carrying the ball away from her until the GK is half-way between the ball and the goal line- at which point you lift an aerial shot over her head. Gravity will do the rest ☺. Gravity can be beautiful.
3. **Get a restart** –either a penalty corner- or a penalty stroke. By keeping your stick constantly on the ball, you make it more difficult for the defense to get a “clean” tackle. Sloppy tackles result in either a foul (stick obstruction), or a “lost” defender (swings stick at ball, misses everything completely, and attacker now has more time and space to act while defender tries to get her stick back into proper defensive position). If you can “see” a stick foul coming, and the ball is on your stick, make an attempt to shoot (by shooting with a lifted push or flick, you increase the length of time the ball is on your stick, increasing the opportunity to be fouled in the act of shooting). Technically, a foul in the act of shooting with possession (ball in contact with attacker’s stick) is a **penalty stroke** (you will see this call more often in indoor Hockey and college and international level play than in high school).

Be cool; keep your hips low, and try to have your stick face slightly open in order to bunny-hop the ball over defenders sticks, or lift an unexpected shot on goal. Keep your

left elbow and your head up to see your options. Remember, the defense is under pressure in their “D”. Use that knowledge to your advantage. The defense is tense; you don’t have to be ☺. You are the cool girl. Make the defense react to you. Encourage the defense to go where you want them to with body fakes, glance at a nearby teammate (as if to pass to them), misdirection dribbles, and dodges. Choose from among your options and act.

“**Straight Back**” pass (on the right): Very difficult for defenders to prevent. Eliminates the likelihood of “dumb” end line shots (the stale piece of cake...). Brings more attackers to pressure defenders (RB in indoor, or RH in outdoor is now a scoring threat). The RB can shoot after a short dibble, or can pass to the CM for shot (Option 1). Or the CM can play ball to LW who can slam dunk home the ball (Option 2). Option 3 is for use against defender’s who chase the ball and leave their defensive assignment...

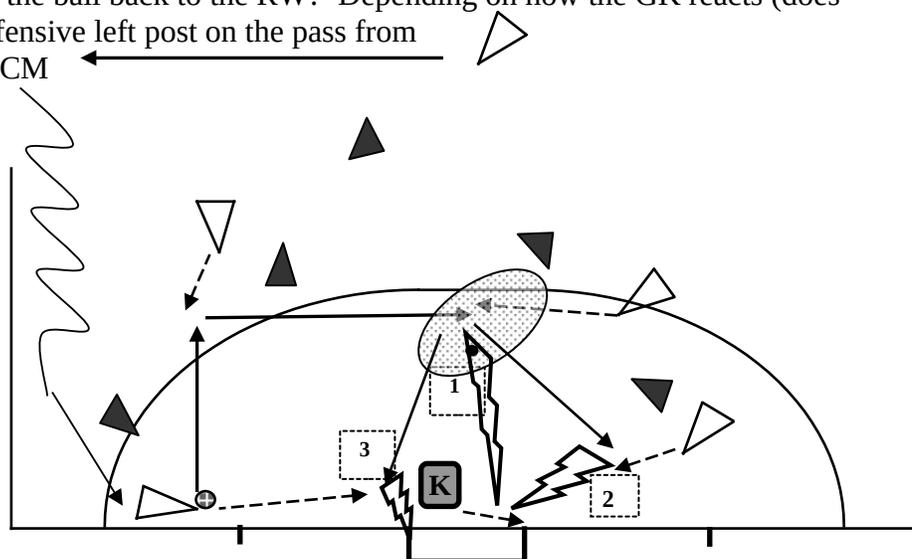
Questions to consider:

1. Do the defenders (their LB and CM) chase the ball, and “forget” the RW?

How could white get the ball back to the RW? Depending on how the GK reacts (does she commit to the offensive left post on the pass from the RB to CM?), the CM could play the ball to the offensive right post where the cutting RW could open face tip the ball in for a wide open back door goal.

2. Do the defenders “forget” the RB after the flat left pass to the CM?

How could the RB easily become a scoring threat? Observe, analyze, adapt...then score ☺.



NOTE: the LW must be patient and not “crash” the post too soon, or the GK can mark her, and even intercept any pass to the LW (the LW must not allow the GK to be between her and the ball...), or eliminate any shooting angle. Sometimes the LW must move away from the end line on the left side of goal so they can “see” the ball as it is carried deep to the end line on the right side of goal. Sometimes you must actually dribble away from the goal cage (end line) to create a scoring opportunity, or a pass to an open teammate who has been ignored by defenders chasing the ball carrier. Attack the open space with the ball- first look for a pass, but if there is no teammate there, then dribble into that space.