



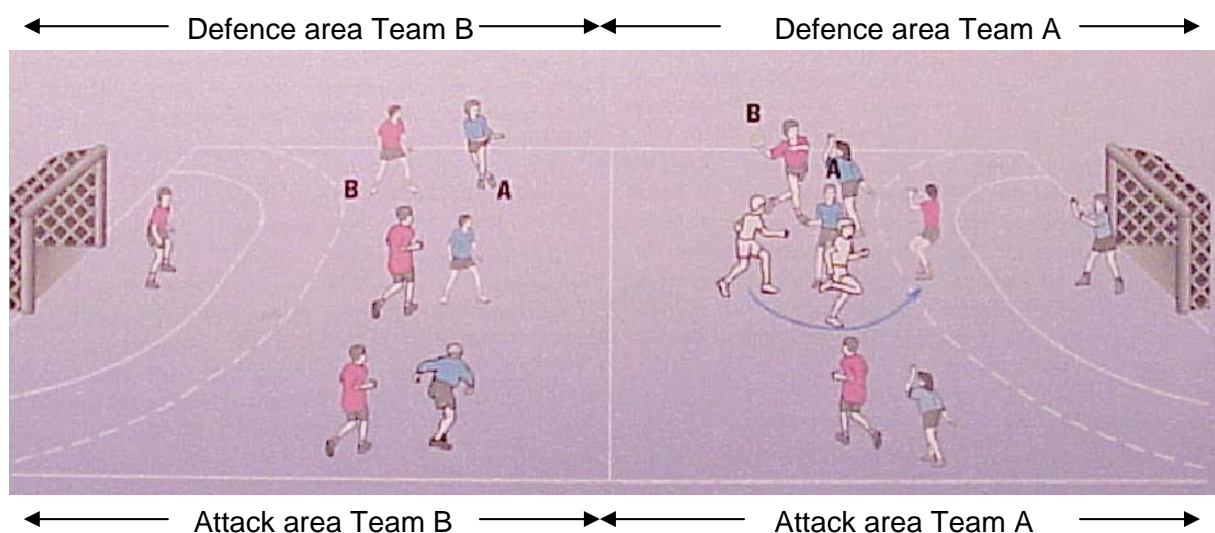
Reflections of the match structure in handball

The Game Idea

“The basic idea behind the game is to throw the ball into the opposing goal as often as possible as the opponent tries to avoid the realisation of these goal attempts” (Döbler, Schnabel, Thiess 1989, P. 93). Therefore handball belongs to the goal-scoring games to which among other things the following similar traits are described: “in principle the renouncement of space separation between the teams involved, undetermined ball possession and the possibility of individual and collective ball securing, only indirectly affected by a time limit in the rules (Bremer, Pfister, Weinberg, 1981, P. 57).

Already the first common trait - the relinquishment between space and the teams leads to central basic problems with goal-scoring games (football, basketball, hockey, and handball): the clearance. The available space kills the game. For this reason, time and again discussions on rule amendments are provoked, that directly or indirectly deal with clearance. Here the approaches are to be used as an example to reduce the number of field players in football and handball (and through this create more room per player). Also the discussions that aim towards the abolition of the offside rule in football are to create more room in the depth on the football field. In basketball by way of the 3-second rule in combination with the engaging man marking in American professional basketball and the 3-point line to open the space under the basket. And in handball the Deutscher Handballbund (DHB) states that the offensive defence measures since 2005 are obligatory for rookies, for this reason the children are not forced to play against a “wall”. Educational orientated game variations such as two-times 3 against 3 (Landgraf, 1997) aim at being beginner friendly, due to clearly laid out game situations with smaller number of players in a large space.

Illustration: 2 x - 3 against 3





How much room (breadth and depth) is available for the attacking players are defined through objectives and the behaviour of the defence: the defence can try to reclaim the ball or prevent the opposing team from scoring. Comparing the great games in handball and football it becomes apparent that due to the dexterity of the player in possession of the ball and the safeguarding of the ball from the attacker in handball is much more assured than it is in football. The consequence is that in handball the struggle for the ball is eclipsed by the struggle for the goal (Cp. Nitsche, 1976, P. 16 et seq).

Open and fixed games

“In front - a wall, behind - a wall and in between a great gratuitous piece of playing court” This is how the former basketball national coach characterised the game of handball (quote. from Hagedorn, Niedlich, Schmidt, 1988, P. 224). He outlines that a „fixed” game; that due to a protective defence in the first line in front of both goals, in particular the free throw area, is played out. The opposite of this is the “open” game, in which the midfield is also intensively used. It is the case in handball, for example, if an offensive man and ball orientated defence is put into action or if during a tempo play the midfield is very quickly bridged, insofar that the retreating defence can be dealt with only after principle man marking.

The concept of an “open and fixed game” shall be used further on, in the sense of work, a definition. But a categorised separation of both situations is not intended; it is much more, that the transitions are often fluent. The meaning of this difference will become clear, if one keeps the changes of modern handball clearly in sight: child and youth teams up to and including c-youth (up to 14yrs) must act in accordance with the FTC of the DHB with offensive defence formations (beginning with man marking in the E-youth). And in the active area in the tempo play a stable trend can be observed; the fast break becomes a main attack medium. This means that the percentage of “open” game situations is independent of age, and capability level have clearly risen.

The open game in football is paraphrased by the term “midfield play”; the closed game is built up in the so called “central game area” in front of the goal. This central space is present within all goal-scoring games; it can be defined as the space in which a goal attempt with an acceptable likelihood of successful realisation is possible. In this context the following factors have to be considered:

- Distance to goal
- Angle to goal
- Level of the team (beginner/intermediate, popular/competitive sports)

The central clearance superimposes in the main goal-scoring games also to a large extent with rule-technical identified spaces: the punishment area in football, the 3-second zone in basketball and the free throw area in handball.

An offensive defence (e.g. half-court man marking) in handball offers according to this on the one hand – great voids (large amounts of space) between the defence players and on the other hand, a large attractive space in the depth at the back of the defence. It is interesting to observe that the use of the depth area at the back of the defence in football through the offside rule is partially limited. The attack is, that is to say, not allowed to occupy this space. In football the position of the most forefront attacker will be determined through the position of the hindmost defence player. In



the moment when the ball is passed, the attacker is then allowed to run behind the hindmost defence player.

Illustration: Offensive defence in children's handball = open play



A defensive cover in handball in contrast offers only little space and little or hardly any depth behind it; thus the offence has the advantage that in comparison to the offensive defence, the defence can determine the distance and with that during the play build-up they are under less pressure.

Illustration: Active defence in children's handball = fixed play





Thereby the adjusted initial situation for the central game situation 1 against 1: the offensive defence pressurizes the attacker and wants to embroil (from the attacker's viewpoint) him in an unwanted man-to-man tussle. Against a tight defence the attacker can build-up the play and define the time and place of the 1 against 1 situation (wanted tussle). On the basis of this reasoning, the phrase "defence makes the difference" takes on a new meaning: the arrangement of the defence (offensive, active, and ball possession orientated vs. defensive, passive and preventing goals being scored) has a direct effect on the attack in the available space as well as the degrees of freedom in the play build-up.

The Goal Orientated Player

A further sign of the central space is that the so called Goal Orientated player will be positioned there: the centre forward in football, the centre in basketball and the line player in handball. The characteristic of the "goal orientated player" is that they, based on their positioning have little or no responsibilities in the building-up of the play and appropriately also a clearly reduced ball contact than the backcourt player (halfback) has. Their intention is to bring the goal orientated player into ball possession or put another way: the "goal orientated player is dependant on the other players; he is ~~only~~ restricted in the ability of developing a game advantage himself.

The responsibility of the "goal orientated player" can be clearly defined; with the ball the "goal orientated player" should

- 1st option: try to score
- 2nd option: try to pass the ball to another player (e.g. a backcourt player, where he will become the targeted player = give & go)
- 3rd option: try to play the ball back before the defence can seize the ball or interrupt the game

Without the ball the key player must try to open the central playing zone so that the backcourt player can infiltrate the central space.

Individual, cooperative and collective play

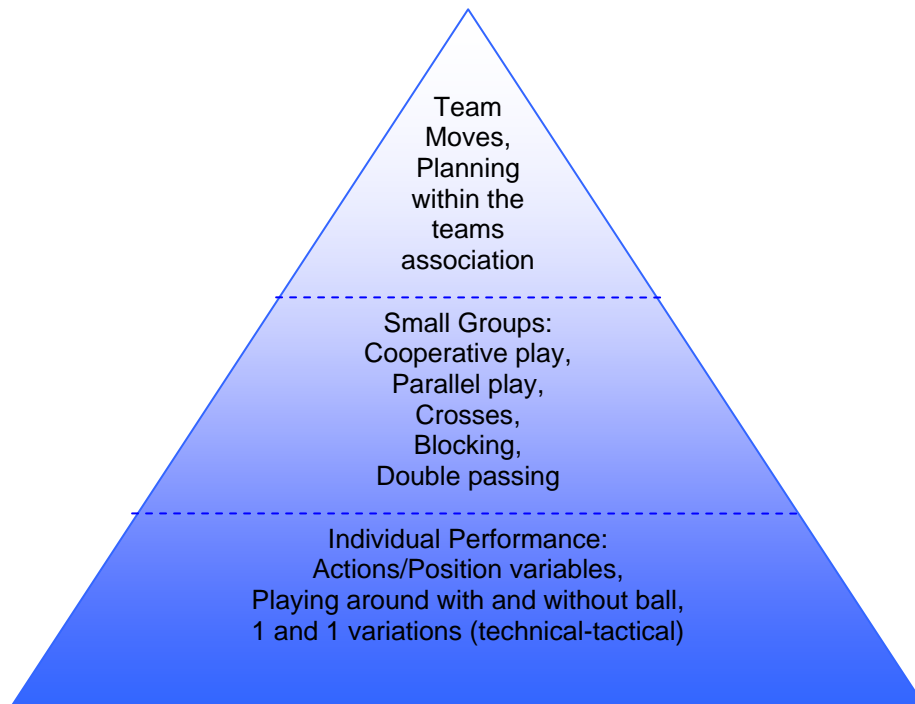
At the beginning of an attack on an even footing – 6 against 6 – both teams find themselves in an attack and defence equilibrium: one defence player defends against the player who has the ball (1 on 1 with ball); five defenders cover the attack players not in possession of the ball (1 on 1 without ball). The aim of the attack is to destroy this equilibrium and with that hold on to the game advantage longer. In a counter manoeuvre the defence tries to keep the balance.

Independent of the the space predetermined by the defence, the objective of the offense remains the scoring of a goal. Therefore, a player must come into a position to score in the main zone, so that he – also based on his acquired skills and abilities – with a high possibility of success; can use the position to his advantage. The shot situations can be without defence obstruction (scorer against keeper) or with defence obstruction (scorer against defenders and keeper). The more intensive the obstruction by the defenders against the scorer the less is the chance of a successful realisation. An unhindered shot means the largest possible game advantage for the attackers; this "scorer against keeper" situation will be identified below as the standardised finish. Offensive tactic in handball will then be defined as the aimed



application of technical and tactical means with the objective; the attackers try to achieve a game advantage to the offence thus making the standard finish possible.

Illustration: Individual, cooperative and collective game mannerisms



The advantage in handball can be generated on three different levels: individual, cooperative and collective. In the illustration, these levels are presented; the foundation establishes the individual game performance on which the teamwork with a small group (cooperation in 2 against 2 / 3 against 3) is based. This group cooperation is building the basis for the collective team-play which consists of complex systems and concepts in the offense.

The development in handball clearly shows that levels 1 and 2 dominate the game, whereas level 3 has lost some meaning: the handball game did, in the earlier development, lose its character as a collective team sport! The reason for this is the high complexity of team tactical offensive means (concept under involvement of nearly all positions). Good defence lines that have been adjusted to the tactics of the opponents are able to anticipate these concepts very quickly and to apply the appropriate countermeasures. Concepts that need up to 5 or more passes before gaining game advantage are too complex and involve too many potential pitfalls. Also, the offensive concept as a rule requires a defined defence action which then can be used by the concept

- Against the direction of the defence
- Against the line of vision of the defence
- Against the defences rhythm of movement

Complex offensive systems consist of a combination of these three approaches.

Game and position advantages

The easiest way to gain advantage is in individual play – an attacker must win the “battle” against the defender. The one in possession of the ball can achieve a direct game advantage (in the situation 1 on 1 with ball); an attacker without the ball (1 on 1



without ball) can merely hope to achieve an advantageous position. Match advantage occurs, if it realised by the one in possession of the ball for example by the utilisation of feints, playing around the defence player, thus coming into a position to throw freely (thrower against keeper). An attacker without the ball has a position advantage if he can position himself in such a way that he stands either closer to the goal than his counterpart and he is still playable (i.e. not in the shadow of the defence) by standing at the same height as his counterpart, but nearer to the one in possession of the ball or while he runs around his defence player – presupposing that there is sufficient space available widthways.

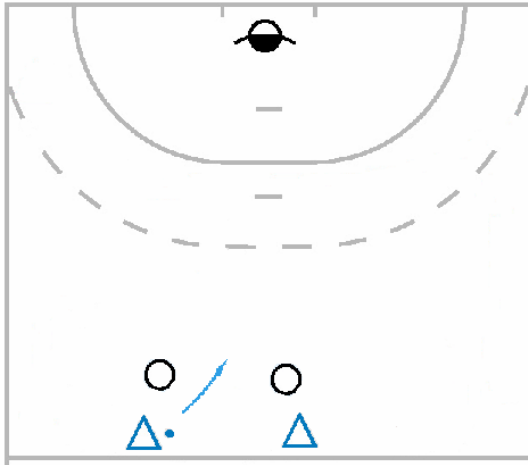


Illustration: the one in possession of the ball has played around his defence player; he can attempt to score a goal himself or pass the ball to a free team mate, if the defence player marking him accommodates this

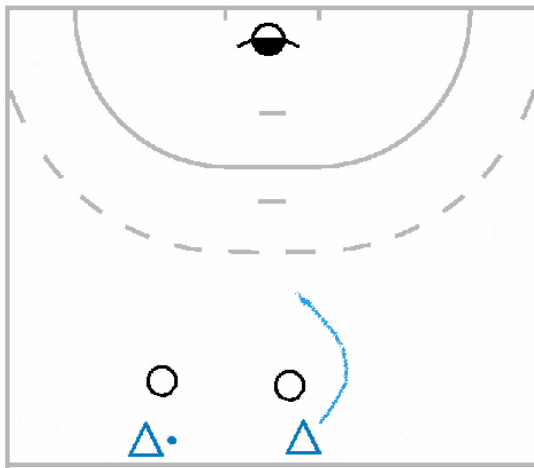


Illustration: Position advantage – 1st arrangement – an attacker runs around his defence counterpart; he is closer to the opposing goal than his counterpart and must be perceived to be playable by the one in possession of the ball

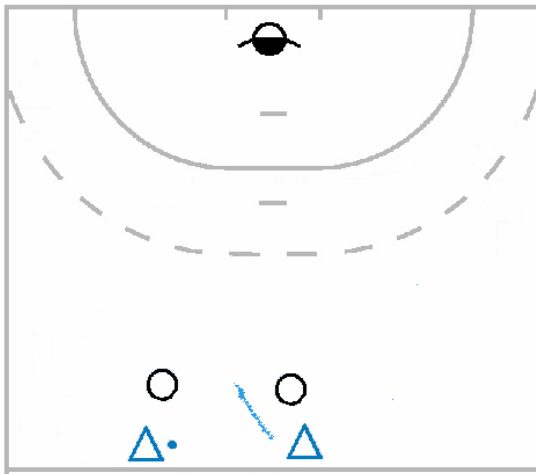


Illustration: Position advantage – 2nd arrangement – an attacker runs around his defence counterpart; and is at the same level as his opponent, but closer to the ball than the defence player; the attacker must be perceived as playable to the one in possession of the ball

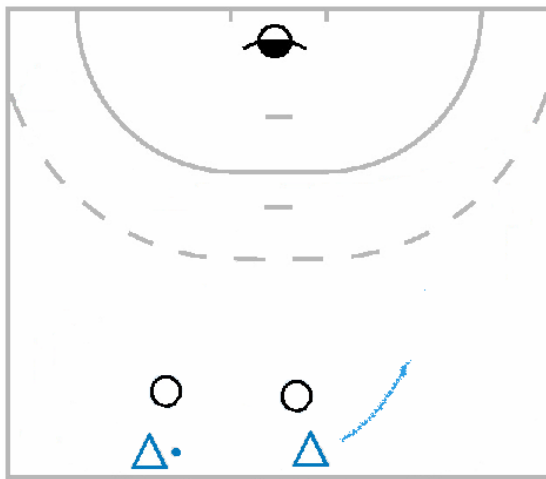


Illustration: Position advantage – 3rd arrangement – an attacker runs around the defence player and is at the same place as his opponent, but further away from the ball than the defender (the attacker is in the shadow of the defence), the attacker must be perceived by the one in possession of the ball to be in a playable position

The higher value of the game advantage over the position advantage is evident – an attacker who has reached a positional advantage has to be seen by the ballpossessor and receive a pass – only then does the position advantage become a game advantage. Furthermore from this position it becomes clear that the position advantage (to win 1 on 1 without ball) is harder to achieve as less room is available in the breadth and depth.

The win in the 1 against 1 situation is vital as long as the game is being played in numerical balance, then the player can win the ball in a one on one situation, not only creates a game advantage for himself, he is also in the position to bind another defence player and therewith creating an advantage for other team mates. In modern handball it can be observed in many cases that the individual play alone is not enough to be able to produce an effective attack. Flexible defence moves (e.g. assist, defend, duplication) make it possible to neutralise strong individuals. In addition, which team relies solely upon the strength of individual players? Only a few teams have many adequate, variable (!) types of players.



Attack actions in small groups are a good compromise between adequate, variable and reduced complexities in comparison with team tactic concepts. The types of cooperation in the second and third groups (parallel, crosses, double passes and blocks) are in handball, also known as “release-moves” because the play advantage should be created by the players. In addition, it is also to be observed that a unique type of cooperation is not enough to create a play advantage. In fact combinations from numerous types of cooperation lean more towards a successful offensive play. Thus for example cross procedures combined with blocks or more cross exercises (with/without ball) can be played out in succession. With this example it is clear that the combination of cooperative play actions can follow both simultaneously and successively. The aim of these combinations is to disrupt the balance of the defence, because the defence is fixated upon defending against one attack action, in particular due to the fact that the defence of an attack action presents a good starting position for the second attack action. At the same time it is an advantage that the combined cooperation based on the varying mistakes that can be made by the defence are available with a set of possible solutions for the attacking team.

The game advantage can be produced on the three levels previously described – it does not always however lead directly to a successful goal. The aim of the defence in handball is to not allow a game advantage to develop and to neutralise it through defence cooperation tactics (marking, switching, assisting and double-team). For the offense it is imperative that they do not allow this neutralisation to happen, instead play the game advantage for as long as possible until a standard resolution can be executed.