

## THE 3:2:1 DEFENCE ?

### Introduction

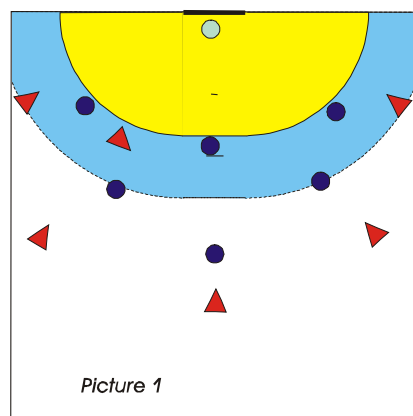
When the Croatian representation marched up to the top of the World Championship in Portugal last year ( 2003 ), a mind about new reanimation of almost written off defence 3:2:1, or even better, the idea that such a defence could not be yet thrown away onto the rubbish-heap of handball history, started to appear among the commentators, coaches and others. Such statements were the result of the fact that Croatians were able to win the title more or less thanks to their defence. But is it really so?

As to my opinion nothing like defence 3:2:1 is presented any more. You can ask yourselves what the real defence 3:2:1 is. It is a pretty complicated and very controversial question, even for those, who once belonged to the joint handball area of ex-Yugoslavia, where the defence 3:2:1 was originally derived from. As I used to be an active handball player in that time Yugoslavia league, I had a chance to get to know different teams and coaches. I had such a chance even before, on the competitions for younger categories in the area of ex-Yugoslavia. As well I had a chance to see different ways among the national coaches of then republic representative bodies or among the selectors of state representations whose member I was or at least I took part at their training. As an example I can say that there was a big difference in understanding of playing the defence 3:2:1 and the use of it to answer the common strategy even among the two players of famous Munich generation from the year 1972, Mišković and Pokrajac, not even to mention Arslanagić, who as a goal-keeper and a coach had his own view of it. I was very lucky to co-operate with the three of them.

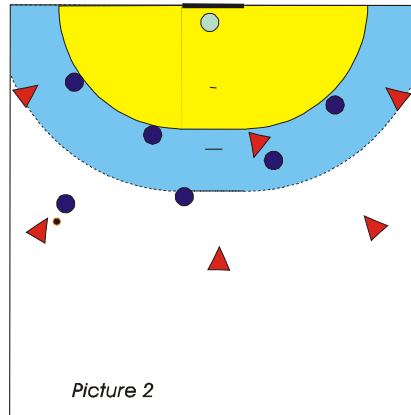
As to my knowledge (from the sources available to me ), the defence 3:2:1 firstly appeared in Zagreb handball school, established by Iris Dolenc. It became internationally most famous by the coach Vlado Štencel who had been training the before mentioned generation and with the awarded golden medal at Olympic Games in 1972. That is why I believe that the right one is that kind of the defence 3:2:1 that originated from this and was a long time or even the whole time being played by Zagreb's team Medveščak in then Yugoslavian league, being the most outstanding exponent. That used to be the way of thinking of some ex-coaches who were before the players in the representation, but did not rise from that school. They transferred it through the representation to their following teams, as well as many other club coaches of that time. But there were many of them who were trying to find their own way. It might have been so also because it was soon found out that such a defence is the most vulnerable one, or some of them just wanted to affront Zagreb's handball school.

The basic characteristics of the “real” defence 3:2:1 should be as followed:

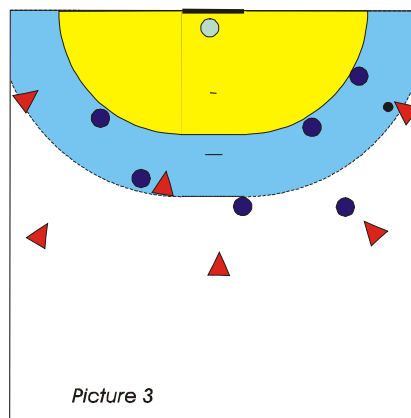
- the expressed deepness of the front line, especially on the player with the ball. (Picture 1)



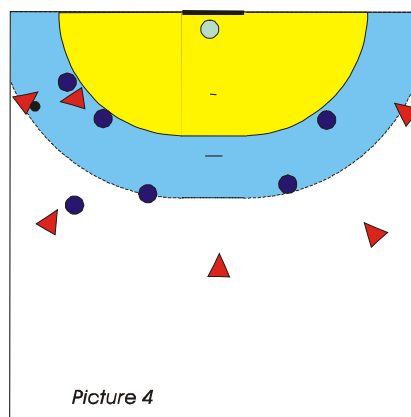
- the expressed density in the middle of the defence, even better at the side of the ball. (Picture 2)



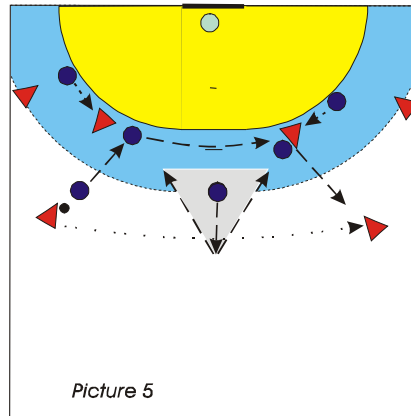
- moving of the back central player following the ball irrespective of the position of pivot. (Picture 3)



- moving of the front central player following the ball. (Picture 4)



- keeping of the formation 3:2:1 even when the opposer plays with two pivots. (Picture 5)



- closing of the room against the ball by all the players.

There were many different deviations from these rules even in the past. For me, as a player and a coach, the most inconvenienced thing was the transformation into other defence positions, as for example into 4:2 or 5:1, and so on. There were many different interpretations and solutions offered also to abolish the faults at front line, when, for example, one of the players on the front line was played over or blockaded.

There were different possibilities to help as well in the situation when the first player in the defence is played over from the file-leader to the centre. Since it was found out that there are many more weak points than advantages in this kind of defence, the development of handball playing led to the state that most world teams or representative selections do not use it any more. It was proved so by the greatest competitions of young European and world's representations in the last years where you can hardly ever see such a defence.

Why do I believe that what the Croatian representation played at the World Championship in Portugal was not the defence 3:2:1?

Mostly because the development of the play led the play in the defence to that extent, that in some playing positions it is hard to set the bounds between different kind of defences as well as it is difficult to exactly determine the defence with the common known definitions (for example 5:1, 3:2:1 and so on). And most of all, if you break the rules of a system, you are not a real representative of it. From my point of view, in the case of two pivots the defence of Croatian representative body was more similar to French defence 5:1 than to the defence 3:2:1. Why do I believe it was so?

Because when they play with two rotating players their defence on position two on the left and on the right is not aggressive any more on the left and on the right outer player. This aggressiveness is ceded to the front central player in both directions. In my opinion, this is a very quality tactical solution, but it does not follow the right rules of the defence 3:2:1 and can therefore not be called so. It is not, as well, a trained improvisation inside a thorough system of playing in defence, where a team, as for example Metaloplastika from Šabac, forced its opponent into a fault. In this way, the passage to two pivots was not an advance for the opponent but its weakness.



EURO 2004 Coaches' Seminar  
during the  
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On the last coach training within the European Championship in Prešovo there were quite many coaches who mentioned to me, that in many countries the coach seminars do not treat the defence 3:2:1 as such at all. I am glad I got a chance to hold a lecture on this theme at this seminar, organised for the coaches all over Europe. The purpose of my lecture is not to state what is needed to be done, but to open the drawers which are, in the world of handball, already forgotten, what could help us to think this way and make our favourite game better, refined. However, it can be so with the use of the right solutions inside a tactical system of playing the defence and what can bring a team an efficient result at every match.

#### Conclusion

Let me state that the “real” defence 3:2:1 does not exist any more and that it has no future, be a challenge to all the participants of this seminar who will be here able to follow different things that are not included into this text. So you can judge about my state with the help of training and matches of your teams by yourselves.