



Decision Making and Action Speed / Drill for Defence Players*

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The current conception of defence is in the initial steps of its affirmation as an active structure and with an initiative capacity inserted also in the spectacular structure of the game.

Remembering O. Krumboltz who said that for many "the attack is the match and the defence is ... work " and we must add **"pure and hard work"**.

And even when compliments were given "a good attack wins matches, the defence wins championships", it ends up seeming as something distant from the rest of the attractive elements of the game.

In spite of being aware of the unquestionable value of the defences of the various winners of collective sports competitions, mainly Handball, where frequently we indicate the objective defensive value of the champion teams, either club teams, or national teams, making use of the indication given by Manuel Laguna "the defence is the soul of the winners". **We are all aware that the winning teams must be balanced and present a strong defence and an efficient attack, but when the attack has problems they always present a solid defence.**

Nowadays, **the defence has assumed a preponderant role in the progress of the spectacular game**, taking initiatives and taking risks that excite the players and attract the public, by the significant number of goals obtained through the successful defence.

The objectives of the defence did not modify and **the main target still is to prevent the opponent from scoring a goal and at the same time recover the possession of the ball**, or in a more actual concept **to recover the ball without suffering a goal!**

According to Laguna (1995) this objective imposes to the defence, some objectives and basic tasks that must be accomplished right after the possession of the ball is lost.

Deeply, the defenders, **either individually or all together, must OPOSE THE MOVEMENTS OF THE ATTACKERS and to the BALL MOVEMENT in the least**, creating difficulties to the ball carriers and not allowing the favourable zones to be reached until the limit of ball recoveries without an owner.

To defend means to prevent the attacker with the ball to gain access to the efficient zones, at least without active opposition and clearly damaging in his options.

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It also means to oppose everywhere to all throws, reinforcing evidently the zones in more clear danger.

In modern Handball some structural elements have arose

In modern Handball some structural elements have arose, either of intellectual character, or structural character (of rules and refereeing interpretation – the passive game in particular) that have altered the concepts of the defence, i.e. the way the defensive tasks are accomplished.

The capacity of the attacks to overcome easily the more “traditional and more static characteristics” defences, have made the teams (and even the players) to try to condition the activities of the attackers, becoming **more profitable the assumption of the active tasks in which that during many years was classified as unreasonable.**

The actual game **forces players to be faster and to introduce a lot more intentionality in the actions of each player,** and one can say that, at least, **the more traditional tasks (even if they are under a different cover) are fulfilled with higher individual initiative and an adapted collective concept, much more versatile.**

Not acting as pre-determined in the traditional concept of the systems

The way as we inculcate in the attacker the sensation of insecurity determined by the variable manner in the which the defender approaches (not acting as pre-determined in the traditional concept of the systems), or sometimes it is even other defender that approaches himself unexpectedly, with confidence in these less common actions, being able to approach the attackers in places well far away from the goal.

We can almost say that we can assist to the use of typical behaviours from other systems, in processes that are not expected and even less anticipated by the opponents.

Defender’s nowadays must has the capacity to understand the game with anticipation

To be a defender nowadays is to possess the capacity to understand the game with anticipation, to read in a transparent way the initiatives of the attack and to feel able to act individually and in collectiveness over the possible actions of the attackers, forwarding them to the zones wanted by the defence and not to the areas wanted and ambitioned by the attack,

All this, without loosing the shocking and physical contact capacities, **counting on the helps in very ample distances.**

The defence forwards with more frequency **to decide between anticipate the actions or to react by the others initiatives.** Both are complementary and must be dominated by the defenders.

The defence often has to decide between anticipate the actions or to react by the initiatives of others. Both are complementary and must be dominated by the defenders.

To conjugate the anticipation and the reaction as basic concepts of the defender of the future

In order to **be able to assume the ANTICIPATION he must be able to ATTACK THE ATTACKER, not let him think**, while pressing the ball, making its pass very difficult (or even its transportation).

The anticipation has to be based in the perceptive capacity of the game – to know how to act based on indications of small movements of the attacker, some of them we can almost say they are on the back of the defender, coordinating the performance of the tasks of all the players, orientating in the consecution of the tactical objectives.

We cannot always act in a similar way

The capacity of acting in an ambiguous way, creating **UNCERTAINTY** in the attack, diminishing their anticipation capacity, i.e. in an individual way, **we cannot always act in a similar way, and we simulate one thing and end up doing another**. A covering action is starting to be transformed in dissuasion, contribution for the collective action.

This means that acting intentionally in terms of collectiveness does not allow that all participate or all must react. To act ambiguously in collective terms presupposes that in a conjugated way, some anticipate the actions and others act in reaction to the events.

Therefore we must conciliate in an active and coordinated way the individual and collective actions.

But can they all perform these tasks, i.e. can any of them anticipate himself or “play ambiguously”?

For that it is necessary to have the adequate conditions, the majority of them are **obtained in the training sessions**. **In practice it means one cannot defend in an ambiguous way if one does not have the adequate training.**

And what characteristic must one acquire in order to defend in an anticipative way and have the capacity to be able to react when necessary or when the task distribution requires it.

We can identify some characteristics related with the personality of each, such as: the commitment, the courage or others, like the perception and the anticipation – Fighter – Dynamic – Anticipative – Creates Doubts and limits the time and the space of action of the attacker – After having resolved the problems in his zone he tries to help his team mates.

The basic tasks **must allow a good conciliation between the opposition to the ball – read the game and the opposition to the movement of the attackers** -

attitude and master of the basic techniques and the inherent physical condition.

The teaching and education training of a competent defender **means to make him able to be efficient in his mental structure**, in the mastering of the technical-tactical actions and good physical capacity.

At the mental level, the anticipation is a main capacity and that means to be able to grasp and treat the information with implications in the training structure, in particular of the **individual tactic** in which the player must be placed facing situations in which he must choose the best option (like open exercises and very near by to the game forms), **in order to always overcome the opponent** by conditioning his immediate actions and the sequence options, adapting to the team mates.

This attitude can only be achieved if the player is stimulated to vary his behaviour, surprising the opponent, adapting to the initiatives of his colleagues and the eventual alterations caused by the change of action of the opponent.

The habit of permanently **observing through the recollection of indications** that the progressive experience will select as significant and insignificant.

The match is a film of intentions and not a collection of photos

It is important to highlight and make the player feel that in the match there can never be only one attitude and even less his own one. On the contrary **the match is a film of intentions** and the player can never think the match is a sequence of photographs. All players have their own intentions and **the most efficient player is not that one that possesses more knowledge but the one that most quick chooses the adequate situation and adapts to the situation changes**, to the succession of events.

It is convenient to remember that preparing handball players in this concept does not mean to induce a very reflexive behaviour, as it is mention by Manuel Laguna, creating "players that think a lot", but to prepare "players that react quick and well".

The bottom line is that the preparation able **to defend in anticipation means that they can unchain a correct response based on indications and before the opponent finishes his initial action** and that the following will not be a care frees one.

Mentally the player must be always available to oppose himself to the ball – intercept, dissuade, block or withstand to the opponent – to mark, help, change of opponent, counter block without that letting to be anticipating and to base his defensive intervention in the "reading of the game" and in the anticipation capacity.

The mastering of the technical-tactical actions

▶ ***defensive base position***

The performance of the defence functions originate from a certain position – **defensive base position** – which is a care free position in which the legs are not parallel to each other and the feet to do not have contact only through

the tips of their toes of their heels. It is a care free position that allows **to keep like this for a long time without creating fatigue** (progressively assuming an intuitive character) and that **leads to the rapid reaction and simple transformation conditions in the several attitudes that are unchained by the reading of the game.**

▶ *defensive displacements*

In association with the position are the designated **defensive displacements**, which **must be performed running, and in base position, alternating permanently**, also in continuous and balanced way in their efficacy capacity.

The movements must be fluid and varied, allowing to pass quickly from a short distance displacement (in which predominate the displacements in the traditional defence steps) for a medium and long distance (in which we conjugate sprints associated to lateral displacements and to come back on the eventuality for any other form of faster and longer displacement).

Again the aspects related with the need of permanent observation and recollection of information must be associated to the physical condition whose absence seriously damages the process of immediate information treatment and the necessary adaptations.

▶ *the marking forms - marking the direct opponent*

The two latter elements are only efficient in the sense that the domination of the **marking forms** – responsibility for a specific opponent or by the one that emerges in the action area of a defender – dependent of the major or minor danger represented by the player (depending on the proximity of the ball and the distance of the individual and collective efficacy zones – **vigilance marking, proximity or interception**).

Marking – marking the direct opponent – is not always made in the same way, depending on the circumstances and above all depending on the more than probable variation of the SITUATION, DISTANCE, ORIENTATION AND THE GEST of the direct opponent.

In any case, **marking is also dependent on the direct relationship with the ball, as to mark the throwing line** (ball carrier in throwing conditions) **is different than marking in the pass line** and even this one in the variation of its relative offensives movements and intentions.

Moreover, those variation factors remain conjugated and definable between the attacker with the ball in an efficacy-throwing zone (**determinant distance and orientation**) and the marking of a player without the ball out of the danger zones.

▶ *the placement of the defender*

The placement of the defender must be in the bisector of that angle – when the angle is reduced to the ball carrier the marking is only dependent on the distance and on the relative motor capacity, in particular of the attackers gesture.

The placement in the bisector of the angle **allows a better visual field, guaranteeing more adequate conditions to the observation and intervention** either in helping or in interception.

In any way the starting point of the interpretation of the marking conditionings **implies a permanent action simultaneously addressed to the ball and to the helps.**

The way of defending that we pretend to implement means that the observation of the defence determines its placement facing the passing lines, to progression lines and throwing lines which danger index is characterised by the distance to the attacker, by the action unchained by him and in consonance with the initiatives and actions developed by his team mates.

► ***Interception the ball***

In the main defensive purposes **we have the capacity of interfering with the ball trajectories, preventing it to reach an opponent –**

The interception of a pass **is determined by the need to be oriented towards the ball,** at least the trunk line, since the displacements can be towards the direction perpendicular to the line of pass. For this to happen, it is necessary to have a good reading of the situation, anticipating the event (the pass) with acting previously (indications that avoid the making of the pass). Such behaviour can only be acquired with training and it is based on the experience and in the process of misleading, simulating a different behaviour (controlling the line of pass without showing it). The action must be made by surprise and must have the capacity of immediate adaptation towards any alteration in the situation.

The interceptions are conditioned by the marking distance, the orientation in the field, the capacity of reading and of anticipation, the motor possibilities.

We can still classify the **interceptions as static,** in which starting from the defence in one's own zone – by the final placement without needing displacement, the ball is intercepted. This is not an option, this is an obligation in any form of defence.

The dynamic interceptions lead to a decision of varying (or transforming) the action of marking in interception (or not) demand always a displacement, starting from an initial need of adaptation to a wider zone and having always as minimal purpose, dissuasion over a certain pass.

► ***..., or block the ball***

The block obliges the defendant to be fitted with the attacker – his superior members between the ball and the goal (normally in a quick action, because if he keeps himself in a very defined position, it is more than certain that the attacker will correct his own throwing action) not allowing that it to displace itself in that direction. The block can be made with both hands – normally when the ball is thrown over the defendants' head.

Even so, **as a way of help, it is more and more necessary to have a hand available to control or dissuade the pass and another available for the block.**

When the ball is lower – shoulder line, the block is made with one hand and the legs position must be adequate to an equilibrium point between the clash and the reaction to any change. In particular, in this type of block the contraction of the arm in the direction of the ball, in association to a good toning of the biceps are fundamental conditions for preventing serious injuries and with a tendency to become chronic.

The capacity of perceptive anticipation and the segmentary speed have great influence in the block, **having as principle that this is a great form of help** (to the team mates and to the goalkeeper) therefore in the execution we cannot place the arms with too much antecedence and the resource to jumping has to be conditioned by the athletic reaction and by the reading of the game, in any case this is a behaviour to avoid as initial action.

To help it is not to take over the responsibility by the colleague's opponent, but to assume that a defender can defend two attackers in certain given circumstances

But the technical-tactical action is **very much dependent of the RESPONSIBILITY OF SHARING**, particularly necessary to the situations that ARE NOT PREDICTABLE – determined by the principle of marking by pairs and the notion of fluctuation, which are subjected to the interpretation and application of the HELPS – to help it is not to take over the responsibility by the colleague's opponent, **but to assume that a defender can defend two attackers in certain given circumstances**.

The helps are tactical procedures that are produced **collectively according to a certain type of mistakes that can be determined as predictable or unpredictable**.

This means that **the helps are prepared to be executed according to the "mistake"** – to assume the **sudden 1 x 2**, or previous to the "mistake" – to assume the **1 x 2 permanently**, which is only possible to obtain efficiency in zone defence.

As a fundamental element in the collective action there are elements of dynamic cooperation that arise in standard situations and in which the players have to anticipate with motor and intellectual capacity and with efficient conjugation.

▶ **opponent changes processes**

The **opponent changes** processes of direct change of the opponents who in the meantime have changed position – either through crossing, or entries – and in which the defenders must use as a meaning of avoiding advantages and may be in a more economical intervention action keeping or recovering the initiative capacity.

Sometimes **it is not advantageous to anticipate these situations** at the execution level although *the communication among colleagues of the same team must always be in previous "wave length"* and execution availability.

THE PHYSICAL CAPACITY

The physical preparation of the players WILL ALLOW that these players will become more agile and strong to correspond to the defensive demands,

particularly the strength has a direct relation with the acquisition and application of a correct technique, avoiding in certain cases that the fear for the power difference and even as a consequence of some painful situations which may inculcate some fearful reactions, either from the game point of view or the integrity of the athlete himself.

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The defence in handball presupposes moments of traction between the two opponents, dialogues **that may be resolved according to the capacity of relative force.**

In the same way, **the resistance will allow the repetition of the actions as many times as necessary,** allows the general and specific development of some muscular structures.

The importance of the displacement speed in the execution of the defensive tasks, as well as the segmentary speed will allow a better space covering, **because the correct action of the legs allows reaching a wider space, whereas the arms have a more efficient intervention over the ball trajectory.**

The interceptions in particular the **dynamic ones,** have a dependent relation at the level of those motor capacities.

The systems will be in much more in consonance with the concepts and models of intervention than the definition of the territorial

The systems will continue to be the fundamental base of the relative distribution of the players and their traditional liaisons will always be very useful, **when there are mistakes or the team loses their initiative** capacity in a certain moment.

The introduction of the systems will be in much more in consonance with the concepts and models of intervention distribution of the different players.

The important if the systems is an ANTICIPATIVE or REACTIVE way, the behaviour more OFFENSIVE or DEFENSIVE and the is MORE INDIVIDUAL or essentially COLLECTIVE.

Deep down, **the important thing is the capacity for the players to respect the concepts of useful occupied space or of active control of certain players,** since that what is defined for the players is to decide if we wish that **the system is interpreted in an ANTICIPATIVE or predominantly REACTIVE way.** On the other hand, **if we wish to assume a behaviour more OFFENSIVE or DEFENSIVE and if the decision still is MORE INDIVIDUAL** (therefore with less changes and other help processes) **or essentially COLLECTIVE** (permanent changes previous to the mistake).

The capacity of changes within the same structural distribution (defensive, reactive and collective 6:0 or a 6:0 more offensive, anticipative on the opposite side of

the ball and individual in the zone of the ball) **assumes a permanent necessity for search of initiative that leads to efficacy and consistent domination of the game, starting from the defence.**

To build a defender thinking of a defensive system seems to be a huge mistake. The key to success **is the articulation of the will power in wanting to defend, the observation and the anticipation of the actions not programmed on the attackers part,** with a good technical execution and great physical condition with the **result wanted by the defence: to recover the ball possession, as quick as possible, without suffering a goal.**

Carlos Cruz, August 2005