



Philosophy of attack in handball



As in other areas (parts) of life the “era of information” has come to handball. Only a few years before, it was possible to have and use characteristics and statistical facts from your own players and team. And this information was not easy to come by. It was necessary to engage persons to collect all the information needed and to develop the methodological treatment process with this information. Later the coach could use this

information to treat his players or further analyse the information to achieve the wanted results. To get the same information about the players of other teams was, almost, impossible. We could use video tapes of the matches and compile statistics, but this process was too slow and complex. Because of this it was very complicated to do complete an expert analysis of our opponents and in turn, prepare your team for the match with these particular opponents. It also meant that it was difficult to follow trends in handball development because collecting, treating and processing the information was very slow.

Today, however, this information is available everywhere. Using the EHF Activities homepage (Activities NEW – Analyses) and the homepage of the IHF (Competitions Archive) we can come by a huge number of facts relating to all handball competitions in the men and women categories and all three selections (junior, youth and senior). For the competitions in the last few years we can find highly significant statistical analyses with two sorts of information:

- **Individual player information:** Here we find basic information as date of birth, height, weight, club, number of appearance for national team, number of goals. Also, we can find statistical facts for every match such as the number of goal attempts, the number of goals scored, number of assists, the amount of ball steals, number of blocked shots, technical faults and many other details.



- **Team information:** For every match in all competitions, the results of each player are recorded in a team table (tabular). Through this way we can control the statistical results of our team and compare these results with the results from other teams making comparisons depending on what we need to find out.

The next resource for information is the numerous CD-ROMs that are produced by handball federations, the EHF and the IHF. The content of these discs is broader than what is to be found on internet sites. Beside the statistical indicators and analyses (what can be found online) these CD-ROMs very often contain lectures and presentations from some seminars as well as expert analyses based on the statistical facts of some competitions.

This information helps us a lot to see and follow the trends within handball development and adapt our work to these circumstances.

The third resource of information is expert periodicals and magazines. Content of these periodicals and magazines have changed a lot during the last years because, now, we can come by the necessary facts for every player or team much easier then before. Therefore the number of articles with individual and team analyses as well as articles with explanations of trend directions in handball development is much bigger then before. More then ever we can find articles with analyses of different handball game systems such as **defence, attack, fast break** etc. These analyses are based on the results of the most successful team's during World Championships, Europe Championships and Olympic Games. However, if we look carefully these articles we can see big difference in access points in the analyses of **defence** and **attack**.

Articles about **defence** basically analyse some system of defence, playing technique of this defence, main principles and characteristics, some variations what the various teams commonly use. Some articles give us methodology of learning and propose the best and the most efficient way to learn a certain system of defence. In any case these articles observe defence in total and give us its **theoretical idea** and **base**.

But articles about **attack** mainly have total different access points. Usually they **don't talk** about **theoretical principles** and **idea** of attack. They talk and analyse various **actions** what some teams used during the game. But, **analysing attack** and **analysing action** is not the same. Action is the last part of attack.



Where is the problem? Certainly, when we analyse the actions of one team, we will get a lot of useful information (about this team). With this information we can prepare for the next match and how to block (suspend) these actions.

Also, from a global point of view, the analysis of actions pinpoint those actions what the best teams in the world commonly use. It will help us in any case as it is unimportant whether we actually play against this team or not, it will help us in study of the handball game.

Nevertheless, regardless of effect that comes with the analysis of the actions in attack of some teams, this **it is not enough when it comes to researching the attack in handball**. Remember, the theory of tactics says that attack has two phases: preparation and final phase.

The **Preparation** phase represents movements of players against a certain system of defence and **final** phase represents actions which can help an attack player to come into position for a shot. In this moment there is a **great disproportion** between the **research** of preparation and final phase in attack. The greatest number of articles and analyses talk about the final phase and a small number of them discuss the preparation phase. But if we look at, discuss and analyze only the final phase of attack, we could be in a situation where we ignore **the most important part of attack** and that is the **preparation** phase. Why is preparation phase the most important part of attack? Because the preparation of attack represents the **attack philosophy** of one team, it provides the main characteristic of this team; it illustrates the tactical level of this team. In the **preparation** of attack all players “participate” no matter what. All of them are involved in this attack whether they receive the ball or not. In any case each of the players must know their own position and role in this attack; their movements against certain system of defence; the forming of cooperation with other players and their reaction according situation at that moment. In the **action** that the team implements, no matter how it will be finished (with or without a goal attempt), usually only 2 – 3 players will participate and not all of them. **It will be unimportant how good an action is, because without good attack preparation, the best result will not be able to be achieved.**



We will give some reasons for that statement:

- A singular action can be very nice and successful. But, can we believe that the same action can be successfully repeated 10-15 times during one match? Particularly if we used this action during previous matches. It is certain that the opposing team is ready for that. Therefore using “the best action” is limited and it can be used only a few times during the game.
- Every action lasts a few seconds (3-5). If the entire attack consisted only of one action, without any preparation, can we believe that we could outplay one good defence every time and prepare our team to play against good defence?
- If we do not use attack preparation and after a few passive play passes, the only actions our players will learn is to play short and to shoot after the (good) action and not when we outplay the defence. From a tactical point of view this is bad.
- If we play only actions, everything that is not action for referees will be called passive play. And they will be in the right because the attack although not too long, is inactive and without inspiration.
- If we play only actions our attack is short, but a short attack does not mean a good attack. Every team knows how to play a short attack. Good teams due to the fact that they are simply better and weak teams because they do not know how to play better, longer and qualitative.

However, when we talk about the **philosophy of attack**, about possibilities and movements that we can use against different systems of defence, we cannot discuss and analyse **only** the final actions. It is not enough but it is exactly what we have most in of articles and analyses in expert periodicals and magazines.

To analyse the actions of one team is useful if we want to analyse this team only and prepare your team for the game. It is also good when we research handball. In this case it is better if we have more ideas and possibilities, if we know the characteristics of the best teams, if we know what trends are present in handball at the moment. However, if we want to prepare our team for a good attack, **to teach them how to play high-quality attacks it is not enough to learn and practise actions only**. We have to teach our team



to **play** attack, to learn as much as possible, various movements that are possible to implement against different systems of defence.

In that regard, learning attack systems has changed a lot in the last years, the reason for this is quite simple. In the past years the focus has been on the development of defence; using many new (deep) defences and their variations. Because of that, the **philosophy of attack** has to change and develop. It is quite reasonable that with the same movements we cannot outplay every defence system.

“Classical” attack in handball consists of three handball steps with ball in direction of goal. This movement is possible to combine (especially back players) with different **changes in their position** as **cross** and **contra-cross**. Using these types of movements the players try to come into the correct position for the shot. This “classical” attack is very useful to use against 6:0 defence.

But to use these types of movements against the 3:2:1 defence tactically is incorrect.

What good at combating the 6:0 defence, is not good for the 3:2:1 defence. Let us give a short explanation. When the player with ball takes three steps he keeps the ball for a longer time and it is enough time for a defence player to go out from 6m to 10 m and stop him from making a foul. This is because the movements taken against the 3:2:1 defence has to be quite different then against the 6:0 defence.

Against a 3:2:1 attack the player does not use three handball steps with the ball in his hand. It is not possible because the defence player expects him at 10m and he does not have enough space for three steps. Also if the defence player is at 10m, the attack player needs to do something before (without) committing a foul. Against the 3:2:1 defence an attack player receives the ball during movement towards the goal and he is ready to receive and passes the ball in one or two steps. It means that he retains the ball for a shorter time than before and it is immediately less time for defence player to come from 6m to 10m and stop him. During these types of moves an attack player is ready for quick and rapid changes in running direction (with or without the ball). This detail is easy to say but players accept that it is quite difficult to implement. This type of movement is different than before and it is necessary to learn some new technical elements (good dribbling with right and left arm, some new feints and a lot of combinations feints and dribbling). Also there are a lot of new combinations between attack players. All this for a



lesser time with ball than before and for this shorter time the attack player has to find the right solution. Simply put this type of attack needs “faster” thinking.

The line player against a 3:2:1 defence also plays tactically much more differently than against a 6:0 defence. He has to play very often out of 6m line to make a blockade and use double passes with his back players. In this way he helps the back players to attack defence not only horizontally. Now they attack the defence in vertical direction, which is a big problem for the 3:2:1 defence. We can say that the line player against a 3:2:1 defence plays as the “fourth back player”.

If we were to analyse and other defence systems it is quite clear that for every defence we can find movements that can produce tactical problems. It means that in our tactical work with the team we need to **prepare tactical movements** against every defence and to **teach** our players to **use tactically correct movements against every defence**, at this moment it is movement against the defences 6:0; 5:1; 3:2:1; 4:2; 4+2; 3:3 and pressing. Using tactically good movements against one defence attack can “bring” defence players into situations where mistakes can be made. In this case the attack will finish with a goal attempt (we already said that the attack plays until the defence makes a mistake). If the defence did not make any mistakes during the **preparation** part of the attack we still would have the possibility to play any **action** against this type of defence. But now, it is not only the action after a few passive passes, it is also the action after tactically good movements against this type of defence with a much better chance of finding a good position for a shot. Then the attack is much more dynamic, without the preparation part of the attack, and in this circumstance passive play is not very possible.

We must not forget one important detail, if, after good **preparation** of attack, we play any **action**, it does not mean that the attack has to finish with a shot. If we did not outplay the defence we will continue our attack. Attack is not only one action. Also, attack is not one preparation and one attack. **Good attack is capable of using more actions connected with tactically good movements.** A good attack will shoot when the defence is “down” and not after one action. It is obvious that this type of attack is longer than a one action attack.

Of course, it does not mean that I am against short (and fast) attack; only that I prefer the long attack. I think that every player has to know to play long but actively which is not



easy. Whoever learns and knows how to play long, will also know very easily how to play short. However, whoever only knows how to play short cannot know how to play long due to a lack of knowledge, concentration and physical preparation. The attack of the player, who only knows how to play **short**, will only consist of **one action**. Our sport is not so disadvantaged.

Everything what I have said and explained in this article gives me hope that during the research of attack in handball in the future it will not be enough to analyse only actions. It is something what we already do and have done in the past years. **Nevertheless, statistical methods and tables are not the only way to becoming an expert in scientific results and conclusions** in handball. Good fortune and tactical ideas allow us the analyses of attack **preparation**. We need to discover them and apply them to “real life” situations. Handball is not only two halves with a ball from wing to wing and one action. Attack in handball is a good idea, good coordination, high level of technique, perfect physical preparation and the instinct to outplay an opponent. These things we cannot explain or research numbers or tables. **We need to write about them expertly and scientifically**. Only this way will we make our contribution to the development of the **philosophy of attack** in handball.

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