



## HANDBALL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 2004-2008 OLYMPIC CYCLE

Juan de Dios Roman Seco / ESP - EHF Lecturer

The analysis from Tunisia 2005, Switzerland 2006 and Germany 2007, top handball national team events, continues the line that began in Athens in 2004. The trends can be confirmed through the events themselves by way of the results: Europe is still far ahead of other continents and within Europe the leading countries have remained constant with the sole exception of the entry of Poland into top handball. In regards to the club competitions, Germany and Spain continue to maintain their overwhelming superiority; having gained strength in their national leagues and they are seemingly more solid than those in the rest of Europe.



Handball is enjoying a period of interest in the game. However, certain slowness has been observed regarding the progress of internal structures of the handball nations as far as the adaptation of the demands of total professionalism is concerned.

The following outline summarises some of the influential circumstances surrounding the game and the overall growth of handball in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. Changes in the "Rules of the Game"
2. The slow adaptation of eastern countries to professional handball
3. The great variety of competitions
4. The universality of information and new technologies
5. A greater acceptance in media and TV

This article will focus on the technical elements and will not go more deeply into the areas that have no direct relation to the development of the game. In addition, this article will have special bearing on the analysis of the influence of point 1 - the changes in the "Rules of the Game" - and how the great innovations of the present game have come about. The key, a trend that is absolutely consolidated in the leading countries, has a name and an expression: Speed - in all facets of the game. The philosophy behind changes in the rules aimed at a faster and more attractive handball that is less rough and violent has enjoyed almost total success. It is still necessary to be more demanding in the subjective interpretation of referees as regards interpretation of the regulations in progressive punishments and in direct disqualifications, but it is obvious that the game is played at cruise speed, **high speed** in expression of Prof. Dietrich Spätte.

What changes have been determinants? In short, the following:



1. **The throw-in from the centre after goal.** The pivotal change created a higher speed in the game, improved the show and contributed to new strategic possibilities. It is true that it still creates some difficulties for the referees but there are options available for correction.
2. A better interpretation in the different nuances that protect the **philosophy of "advantage rule"** and that offer a guarantee for the continuation of the game.
3. The new rules about the **"passive game"** are still not perfect, but have forced a development in offence that has become quicker.
4. To allow **the registration of 14 players.** Fast pace can be sustained in a game where there is more distributed effort between the players, thus contributing to more resources for the trainers.
5. The content and clarifications in the rules of **disciplinary sanctions**, both in the philosophy of progress and in direct sanctions and disqualifications. There is a need for better interpretation from the referees, as said before. This in future will allow handball to move away from violence and from dangerous play.
6. The better interpretations from the referees about **"faults in attack"** that open doors to innovations in individual technique and tactical defence.
7. The most recent rule about the **throw-in of the goalkeeper** when an offence is committed by an attacker who is invading the goalkeeper's area.

Without a doubt, all this has been decisive in the development of the game that we will analyse next.

## **DEVELOPMENT OUTLINE - WHERE IS THE GAME GOING?**

### **1. GLOBAL SPEED INCREASES.**

- 1.1 In making technical gestures.
- 1.2 In tactical decisions.
- 1.3 In the length of the attacks.
- 1.4 In the development of counterattack.

### **2. INCREASE IN TACTICAL ACTIONS BY GROUPS OF PLAYERS.**

- 2.1 Tactical ways, 2x2, 3x3.
- 2.2 Tactical processes of 5 or 6 players are decreased.
- 2.3 The game with pivot(s) is increasing.
- 2.4 More universal players and fewer specialists in attack.
- 2.5 Creativity is increasing.

### **3. TENDENCY TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE AND VARIABLE DEFENCES.**

- 3.1 In numerical equality or inequality.
- 3.2 Anticipation versus reaction.
- 3.3 Decrease the number of exclusions as priority.
- 3.4 Initiate defensive contact.

### **4. INCREASE IN THE PACE OF THE GAME.**



- 4.1 In the defence-attack transition.
- 4.2 In throw-in after goal.
- 4.3 In the length of the attacks.
- 4.4 In tactical decisions.

In modern handball “the decision-making capacity of the player has to be faster in order to reduce the reaction time” (time between the idea of the situation and the decision-making). A fast player is not necessarily the athlete that runs faster on the court, but is faster in thinking. We agree with Lino Cervar, the Croatian national coach, in these reflections about the present game and the qualities that have to be demanded of the high-level players.

The details that the analysis offers about the international competitions since 2004 confirm this completely.

#### **Attack Analysis. Olympic cycle 2004/2008 Number and time of attacks**

	No. of attacks Average game	Time Average game
Athens 04	115	31'1"
Tunisia 05	120	29'9"
Switzerland 06	117	31'2"
Germany 07	117	26'

(Research, Prof. Juan de Dios Román. First 12 teams)

The average figures are higher “than the best team, considering the games in which up to 140 attacks were reached”.

Prof. Spätte in his work “Handball High Speed”, presented in León (Spain), 2006, suggest reflections in this direction with the following events:

	Total attacks	Average
Final WCh 05 Spain/Croatia	130	27'7"
W-WCH 06 (84 games)	129.8	27'7"
Kiel/Magdeburg 2006	160	22'5"

This tendency can be confirmed in men as well as in women; speed in the game is not a requirement for speeding up but an unquestionable reality. The question has to be related on the one hand with the effectiveness and percentage of mistakes, on the other hand with training, charges and



methodology. The game develops a line of psychological pressure based on a permanent speed and this demands new arguments in physical, technical, tactical and especially strategic plans for coaches and for trainers of young players.

In view of this panorama, with the increase of number of attacks and the shortening in their length, the disappearance of the traditional denominated "Organisational phase of attack" is almost a fact and the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of counterattack is joined to the "carrying out phase". This is the reason for the increase in the number of situations of throw-offs from the area of the 6m line, the game of the pivot(s) multiplies, and tactical means between two or three players as maximum in very short actions are defined. Penetration decisions multiply and consequently, the number of goals and the efficiency average increase.

If we analyse the development of the goals average obtained in different areas of the last selections events, this tendency can be confirmed.

**Attack Analysis. Olympic cycle 2004/2008**  
Goals in different areas shown as a percentage:

	9m	6m	Wing	FB	7m	Break
WCh 05	22.7%	24.7%	13.3%	18.6%	11.5%	8.9%
ECh 06	33.8%	17.7%	12.4%	15%	12%	8.9%
WCh 07	30.4%	21.7%	12%	18.4%	11.8%	8.5%

(Research: Prof. Juan de Dios Román. First 12 teams)

A clear tendency of average increase of goals achieved from 6m can be confirmed (especially in World Championships), a slight decrease from the 9m area, in counterattack the high figures remain considering the goals figures and 7m achieved by the continuing contra attack game (3<sup>rd</sup> wave) as well as penetrations.

The question for coaches about how to organise the defence game in view of this "speed" game, the answers demand time based on the experience and new strategies, it seems obvious that new formulas of alternative defences have to be structured and momentary defence organisation in the middle field before the more classical organisation in the area. To avoid the transition of attacks is fundamental and this demands an excellent technical formation and individual tactic in defence.

The increase of speed in attack of the game of handball is a reality that will increase in the next years on a horizon undoubtedly attractive for this sport and it must be the element around which all the support in training of more and better players should revolve and at the same time, it will demand a



higher quality in forms and arts of TV broadcasting to offer the product of handball more successfully. This is one of the future challenges is already upon us.