



Teambuilding in the National Team of Norway (Women)

I started as head coach for the national team of Norway in 1994. Since then we have taken part in 15 championships and have reached 12 semi finals resulting in 10 medals – four gold; four silver and two bronze. I hold this to certify that we have done something right. In this article I want to share with you some of our working processes.

The Congress of the Norwegian Handball Federation (convening every second year) has stated the primary goal for both national senior teams, and it is:

→ **To fight for medals in every championship**

In my experience, it is not that simple to attain a medal based only on political resolution, but when I went from coaching two of the best club teams in Norway (first four years in Byasen, then two years in Larvik) to becoming the head coach of the national team, I was so optimistic about the potential in the team because there were so many good players in “my” team. I was quite sure that we would reach the top really fast. However, it took almost 5 years with much harder work than expected to win the first gold medal (European Championship 1998 in the Netherlands)

After the World Championship in 1995 (4th place), we, the **coach team** and I, revealed during the evaluation with the players after the championship, that they did not believe it was possible to take a medal. Before and during the tournament there was an imbalance between the opinion of players and the opinion of us coaches of what the possibilities relating to the result were. Since it is the players who are on the playing field and create the play there, they are the most important part when producing the result. If they can not imagine obtaining the goal, to win the match, it will be difficult.

After that experience, we involved the players much more in target processes, concerning results in coming championship and developing objectives both individually and in the matter of how to play in the national team.

Through this involvement, we created stronger motivation within the whole group and especially for the players who want to stay in the national team for a longer period (continuity). We created responsibility and commitment for every individual player regarding to important tasks for the result of the team.

Involvement of the players – examples of individual skills

Conceptual, handball is individual skills used together in a team. As coach I am very interested in the skills of each player. And I am really interested in how every player views their own skills and how deep their involvement and consciousness about their own skills is. During the match we want the players to use their best skills. After one season in club/championship with the national team, we invite the players to evaluate themselves and the team. We invite them to focus on their best individual skills/qualities and challenge them how to improve/develop (see questionnaire).

Each player completes this questionnaire to the best of their ability and returns it to us, the team of coaches, by e-mail.

My **coach team** colleagues, Thorir Hergeirsson, Mia Hoegdahl and I, then organise meetings with every player. For the goalkeepers we also have Mats Olsson together with us in this work. We use the time together with each player to discuss, and at times supplement, their suggestions. Furthermore, we discuss what kind of training they have the possibility to do in the club team and what kind of training they need to undertake individually. We request that the players discuss the same areas/subjects with their club coaches.

And we ask the players if they need help to create individual programmes or coaching in the training they undertake themselves. Then we want to hear from the players the plan for the week and the coming period, noting when they will give priority to the different tasks in the training.



National Team Preparation for World Ch 2007 in France, Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing – Euro 2008 in Macedonia

Field Player:

Club Team:

June 2007

What has your last season been like? What are you satisfied with? Describe your best skills?
What do you want to improve/develop?

Fill in headword here, and we will discuss this with you connected to playing in the national team

Focus area/ awareness area	Your best skills/qualities individually and in the play together with other team mates	Development tasks What do you want to improve Individually and in the play together with other team mates
State of my health		
Defence play		
Fast Break		
Attack play		
Play against Fast Break		
Physical resources		
Psychological and social resources		
The use of video in training and before and after matches		
Anything else of importance for your development		

Goalkeeper:

Club Team:

June 2007

What has your last season been like? What are you satisfied with? Describe your best skills?
What do you want to improve/develop?

Fill in headword here, and we will discuss this with you connected to playing in the national team

Focus area/ awareness area	Your best skills/qualities individually and in the play together with other team mates	Development tasks What do you want to improve Individually and in the play together with other team mates
State of my health		
Shoot from distance		
Shoot from pivot 6 m - line		
Shoot brake through		
Shoot from wing		
7-meter		
Shoot in Fast Break		
To start Fast Break		
Sweeper		
Physical resources		
Psychological and social resources		
The use of video in training and before and after matches		
Anything else of importance for your development		

They have unlimited space to write as much as they want (using as many words as they need)



Another example of how involvement and the coaching process are rooted in individual development:

How can you give the players the best possibility to achieve an optimum amount of activity for the overall development of the player and in turn give them the chance to reach the highest possible level in the sport? As coach of the national team I also have the responsibility for advising and coaching the players to develop in the full meaning, wholly, as human being. That means that their lives shall include more than handball. Most of the players qualify for the senior national team when they are aged between 19 – 21 years; they are still young and have just finished college. By involvement and coaching, we give the players opportunities to harmonise their total activity, both to reach personal career goals, aims of the club team and objectives of the national team.

The policy of our federation is that our national team players shall get an education parallel to being top handball player. As a coach I am working together with players and educational institutions (high schools or university) to organise this combination. We have good experiences of organising exams during training camps, as well as during the championships. Sometimes we need help from another university, sometimes from the embassy/consulate and other times the exam is carried out via the internet or telephone.

Because of the comprehensive programme in the club and national teams, most of the players need to complete their education over a longer time period than “normal” students. There are no limitations in the character of studies: medicine, physiotherapy, natural science, law studies, nursing, commercial, economy, teacher training and so on. In this work we have great understanding for the players’ situation and their strong will to adapt the programme and the good cooperation in organising these activities through the institutions.

So far I have been talking about individual conditions, conceptual: handball as individual skills **used together** in the team. How to involve the players and get them to **play together** as a unit? After each championship the players are challenged to tell us, the **coach team**, what they understand to be the main reasons behind our result. We want to hear what they are seeing as the best qualities in different phases of the play (defence and goalkeepers, fast breaks, attack, playing against the fast break and so on) – why did we lose the match? Why do we win matches?

For instance, why did we win the Euro 2006?



At the same time, we want to hear from players their opinions of what they feel will be important and possible to improve/develop – what potential do they see/feel? The work takes place in workshops of small groups. Keywords are written down on a flipchart, and then the results are displayed on the wall for all to see. After that we have



discussions that lead to a consensus of what is to be continued, which areas to increase focus / training and what areas to decrease focus.



Developing of values in our team

The next example of team process I want to share with you is how to involve the players and developing the important values of our total team building. With these values in our team, we are discussing and asking:

- What is important for us in the team to reach common goals?
- What is important for each of you to take part in the National Team?
- What is important on the field?
- What is important off the field?

Once again we divide the players into groups. They are challenged to discuss how they want the situation inside the team to be. Every discussion is deeply rooted in how to reach the primary goal: **Fight for medals in the coming championship**

When we, the **coach team**, involve the players in these questions, we are getting information on basic character of the players. We get information about:

- What are the players preoccupied with
- How do they understand/look at the play
- How do they experience the communication inside the team
- What do they need more time to work with
- What do they want more of
- What do they want less of
- What are they not preoccupied with
- Other important aspects

Together we use this in further development of the team.

The Team inside the National Team

To continue the specific work and the development processes, we are creating small teams inside our national team.

Coach Team

I have mentioned several times the **coach team**. I have during my whole time as head coach of the national team looked for colleagues with competence, qualifications which will give the players what they need, colleagues with skills and experiences that complement my own. I am very grateful to have colleagues like Thorir Hergeirsson (an Icelander living with his Norwegian wife and family in Norway), Mia Hermannsson Hoegdahl (former Swedish national player and top player in Hypo) now working part time in the national team as a coach for National players living and training in Trondheim, part time as club coach at the highest level, she is living together with her family in Trondheim, and Mats Olsson, who spend days together with our team working with our goalkeeper in addition to coaching the Nation Team of Portugal.

To support our **coach team** and our players, we also have persons from our Olympic Committee, "Olympiatoppen", within the area of psychology and mental skills development – we have, for the last 5 years, had psychologist Britt Tajet Foxell and PhD Anne Marte Pensgaard available both for the players and the coaches. These two staff members are very useful in increasing and developing the **coach team** in addition to be working directly with the players individually and in groups.

Analysis Team

During the preparation for the forthcoming championship, we are working a lot with video analysis from matches and training sessions. Mostly we work with our own documentation,



but we also do analyse our competitors. Also during the championship we are tied up with a lot of work here. In the analysis team we have from one to three persons during the activity with the team. We use the current coaches and former coaches from our junior national team.

Now in the preparation for the next three championships, we have Mia Hoegdahl and Henning Kroeger (who will be part of the coach team from August responsible for Youth national team girls born 92/93) and former national player, national coach junior Wenche Halvorsen Stensrud. The analysis team cooperate very closely with the coach team. The analysis team is also close to the players and serves the players with information and ideas and pictures of what they want to see or what they have asked to see. Our goalkeeper team especially is very happy to have so much available information about the opponents or of their own performances. For us in the coach team this work is very valuable for giving feedback to the players, preparing for training session, preparing tactics before matches, and group sessions with the players in developing how to play together and so on.

Health Team

Our health team includes two doctors, two physiotherapists who divide their time so that we always have one physiotherapist when the team is active. One of our doctors is available sixty percent of the time. From "Olympiatoppen" we also have physiologist of nutrition available and masseur when we need/ask for it. We have increased the engagement of our health team. They need to be more available for the players between the activity of the national team and they need to do more coaching on prophylactic behaviour and training. The health team is in very close contact and work in team with the coach team. In my first ten years as national coach, it was only those from the coach team who visited the players in their club team to see the players training with their club team mates and to talk with their club coaches. Now it is even more important that our physiotherapists are visiting the players during their club time and build good relationship and professional contact with the health team in the club. The state of the health of our National players is a vital factor for success in the future. Here I also want to unmask an extraordinary resource in our health team – in situations when the team in championships really needs a break from performance thinking, they shows up like a **Humour team**, making show with a lot of fun and laughter – the whole atmosphere create new energy and we all get a smiling face and relaxing mind.

Team inside the Player Team

The Players Board and the Captain Team

As I already have written: the players on the field create the play and the result of the match. The most exciting recourse for me as a coach is the players. To speed up the development processes, we use the players in almost all processes.

It is difficult to talk with every player all the time, so we have organised a **leader team** among the players. We call this leader team the **Players Board**. The Players Board consists of the Captain Team (two or three players selected by the coach team) and two selected representatives, selected by the players. The Players Board is a discussion partner for the coach team during the most of our team work. They take part in everything of importance concerning the players and the team, aiming to reach the common goals. If there are conflicts in the matter of organisation, for instance economical discussions and the players do not get the necessary contact and understanding from the coach team, they have direct contact to the secretary general – they are taught to use the line of command.

The **Captain Team** has a very important function in leading the players to the attitudes that will produce the behaviour and development that was agreed upon. We have three players in our Captain Team, Gro Hammerseng is the Captain, Else-Marthe Soerlie Lybekk and Goeril Snorroeggen are the Vice Captains. In this team we also want to have one of the youngest players as a leader. She will receive useful knowledge and in the future be prepared for the



tasks of a captain. Additionally, Goeril represents both knowledge and interest of the youngest generation in our team (she was Captain of the junior team who took silver medal both in European Championship and World Championship). In my opinion, both the involvement of the players, my colleagues of leaders and the entire leadership in our national team shall be the kind that will have values for everyone in life, both inside and outside of the sport.

During my 14 years as national coach I am more and more convinced that **Together Everyone Achieves More! A TEAM** is a unique way to create a result.

Marit Breivik
Head coach of the national team of Norway (women)
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