



Beginner Handballers,

Team handball, to a much higher extent than any other American sport, is extremely difficult to practice without a full team's worth of participants. However, there are a few drills you can run through. I hope this paper gives you a couple ideas on how to execute a solo, handball skills workout. A handball fitness workout can be modeled just like basketball workout.

Find a wall at your gym at which you can throw. Preferably, this is a length of wall 10-20 yards long. You'll want a place where you can work at least 20-25 feet away from the wall comfortably. In a pinch, a racquetball court can be used. (Of course, this will only more confuse any discussion of the sport to any would-be spectators.)

Bring some tape to mark a target on a wall. Painters tape works well, just pick a color that contrasts with the wall behind it. Using the tape put a target on the wall about neck high. Use this target for all of your overhand passing/shooting drills.

Start off your warm-up about 20 feet away from the wall, throwing very easy. From the very beginning, focus on hitting the very center of that target with each toss. Remember that throwing a handball is not like throwing a baseball or football. Your elbow should stay well above your shoulder at all times (except for sidearm shots, but that skill is a bit more "varsity.") Additionally, the palm of your hand should stay directly behind the ball as you throw it. If the ball rotates sideways after you release it, you need to adjust your hand / wrist as described above. Often a beginner's elbow will be sore at the end of a workout or the next day. This is often caused by the thrower's elbow staying too low during the workout.

Continue to throw very easy until you feel your arm loosen. As you start off, you can also work on your catching mechanics. Move closer to and farther from the wall so the ball arrives both above the waist and below. If you are catching a ball above your waist, your hands should like this:



If the ball is below your waist, your hands should be catching the ball like this:



Once your arm is loose, and your accuracy is improving, start to work on your velocity and arm strength / endurance. To start off, follow the pattern below:

-Throw 10 @ 50% power

- Throw 10 very easy

-Throw 10 @ 75% power

-Throw 10 very easy

-Throw 10 @ 90% power

-Throw 10 very easy

-Throw 10 @ 100% power

-Throw 10 very easy

-Repeat the last two lines until your arm becomes fatigued. Remember, accuracy is MORE important than power in these drills, so continue to focus on your target.

After you get to fatigue, go back to throwing very easy. As your arm feels better, back up from the wall so to make longer passes. Don't get any further than 15-20 yards or so. Again, accuracy is the key.

After getting through this workout once, adding footwork is the next step. Rarely will you see a passer / shooter flat-footed. For every part of this workout, you should be in motion. After you pass / shoot the ball, immediately back up. Strive to be on your third step backwards as you catch the ball. After catching, immediately move forward. Your goal is to be throwing the ball on your third step forward. After practice, you will find your rhythm of throwing on your third step, backing up three steps, only to take three more steps forward to throw again.

Another skill to add is side passing. This skill is used to move the ball quickly side to side in the offense. Again, this skill is best practiced with a partner, but here is how I practice if I am solo that day. You will always be using this skill to pass to someone who is moving forward – however you can “simulate” this moving target by jogging / running parallel to a wall and passing to yourself as you go. First, as you throw the ball to your side, you should be holding the ball as such:



When you pass, use the thumb as the ball's propulsion. The fingers above are used for aim and stability. The ball starts in front of your chest - as you pass, your arm should get to full extension sideways as your thumb “flicks” the ball at your target. Start off about 10-15 feet from the wall and jog along it, passing the ball in front of yourself as to catch it again after it bounces off the wall and the floor once. Adjust your distance from the wall to make your catch after its first bounce easier. Be sure to practice with both your dominant hand and weak hand. Jog along the wall slowly at first – try to find a good rhythm. As you get better, move faster and faster to make it more of a challenge. If you have a racquetball court, you can jog up and down the middle of the court alternating the side of your pass on

each catch. I always like to finish my workouts with another session of overhand throwing. However, always finish with very easy throwing, just like you started.

Advanced Options: As your strength and accuracy improve, here are some additional ideas on increasing the difficulty of the workout. Instead of just passing on that third step, work in some jumps to practice jump passes. Instead of the one target neck high, put four targets on the wall simulating the four corners of the goal. (Remember that the goal is 3 meters wide by 2 meters tall.) Work in jump shots at the corners instead of 100% power shots at the center target. Work on bringing your arm to a side arm angle – also called a “hip shot.”

A word on dribbling: No matter how much basketball you’ve played, dribbling a handball is NOTHING like dribbling a basketball. First of all, you’ll notice a handball is not perfectly round – it has seams and slight ridges which causes the bounce to be less than “true.” This is by design – in handball, dribbling is used for NOTHING other than gaining additional steps. You will (almost) never see a dribble as part of a move to defeat a defender. In handball, to dribble the hand must remain exactly above the ball at all times. In other words, you can not push the ball side to side while dribbling – no “cross overs” or radical change of directions while dribbling are allowed. I do practice dribbling in my workouts, but only during my sprints to simulate undefended fast breaks.

I hope this helps you in your handball endeavors.

Good luck with your workout!

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