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**Title: Theory of 3:2:1 zone defence**

Zone defence 3:2:1 is considering as an open zone formation, because some of the players already in their basic (initial) position stand apart from the six metres line, moved forward in a playing field. Players stands in their basic position in three lines (some authors describe it as two lines) and formed a kind of triangle. Along six metres line acts outside right (OR), outside left (OL) and centre (C) defenders. A little beat deeper in a playing field (at 7 - 8 metres from the line) stand Mid-right (MR) and Mid-left (ML) defender. At the centre of the playing field stand the player who is furthest from the line of goalkeepers area – Forward (F) at about 9 metres (Figure 1).

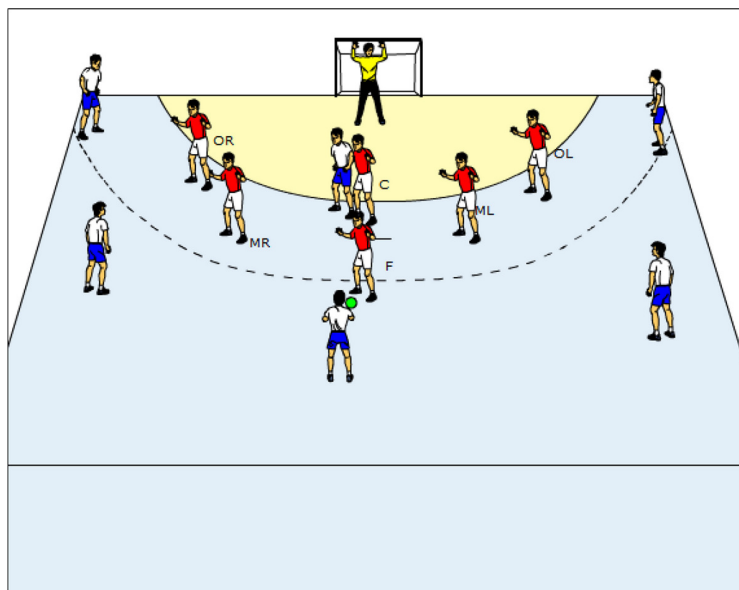


Figure 1: Player's basic positions in 3:2:1 zone defence.

The basic layout varies in accordance with the rotation of the ball around the zone and depends on which attacker has a ball and performs his attack operations (Figures 2 and 3).

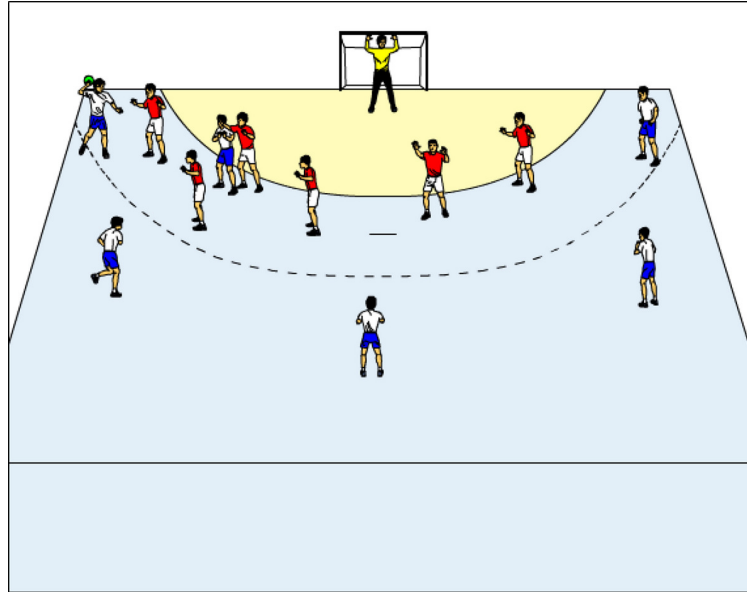


Figure 2: Player's basic position in 3:2:1 zone defence when the ball is on the wing.

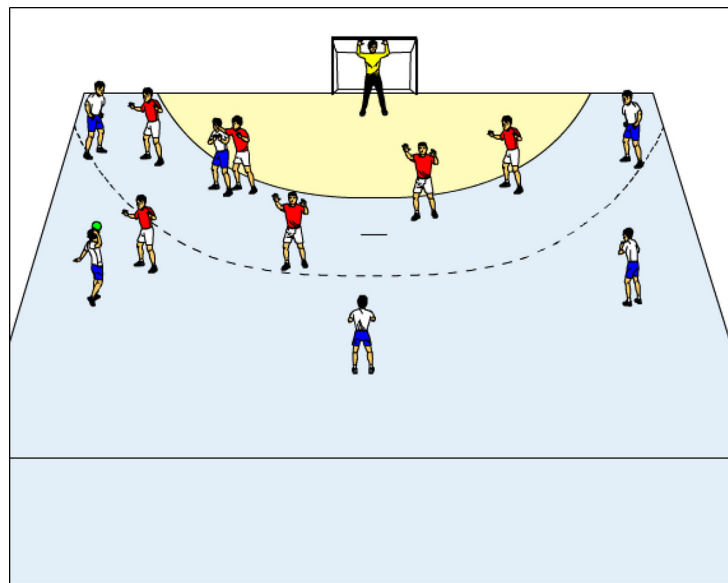


Figure 3: Player's basic position in 3:2:1 zone defence when the ball is in the possession of the back player.

This defence formation demands, a part of an excellent individual performance, very good collaboration among all players (team and group tactic). All the players have to respect certain rules at their actions. Only in this case we can aspect success with this defence. The main task of the OR and OL is to provide a good width of the zone and to prevent shoots from the wing position. With this purpose they use especially side acting along the six metres line. Rarely and only as an exception (when they have to correct the mistake of other players) they act also in depth. So they don't have a task to hinder a pass between back player in attack and wing player. But they have a very important role at guarding the pivot player, especially when he moves in a very width position. So they help the C whose primary task is to guard a pivot player (in collaboration with other players). At the same time C also help other players in

emergency cases - he's some kind of corrector and leader of the defence ("libero"). In principle he's acts are limited to movements beside six metres line. He lives this position only as an exception when pivots try to blockade MR, ML or F defenders. In this case he can move forward with the pivot and try to perform good hand over of pivot and take-over of back attacker. In theory and practice we can find also other solution of the C acting in the case of blockade. C can remain beside the six metres line and control the situation from that position. In this case MR, ML and F defenders are obligated to avoid blockade and act properly against their back court attacker (Figure 4 a, b).

If one can choose one or other solution when the opponents attack with one pivot, it's necessary to provide the second type of C acting in the case when opponents attack with two pivots. Both mid-defenders (MR and ML) are basically responsible to prevent shots from the distance and penetrations of left and right backs. Beside this they have to help by guarding the pivot – they try to keep the density of defence. For this two players are characteristically so called triangle motion in distance and than back to the six metres line when the ball is on the other side of the playing court. Very similar role has also F defender who guard central back player. At the same time he helps MR and ML when they want to stop left and right back attackers. If motion of the players in zone defence 3:2:1 is executed properly and fast enough the form of the defence is always similar to form of triangle. At the same time the players have to keep the right interacting distances among them.

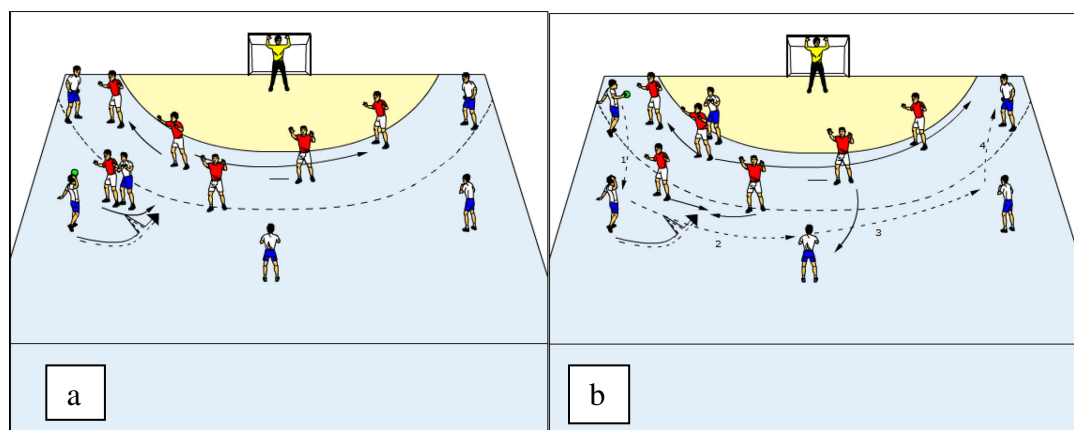


Figure 4 a, b: Player's position when the ball is in the possession of the left back and pivot blockade right half. Centre half move forward with the pivot (a) or remain beside the six metre line (b).

The very special problem of this defence formation is the transformation of attack in a play with two pivots. Even when one of the attackers simply runs in that create great problems. In that case defenders have to change a little beat their motion and tasks if they want to keep the efficiency of defence (Figure 5).

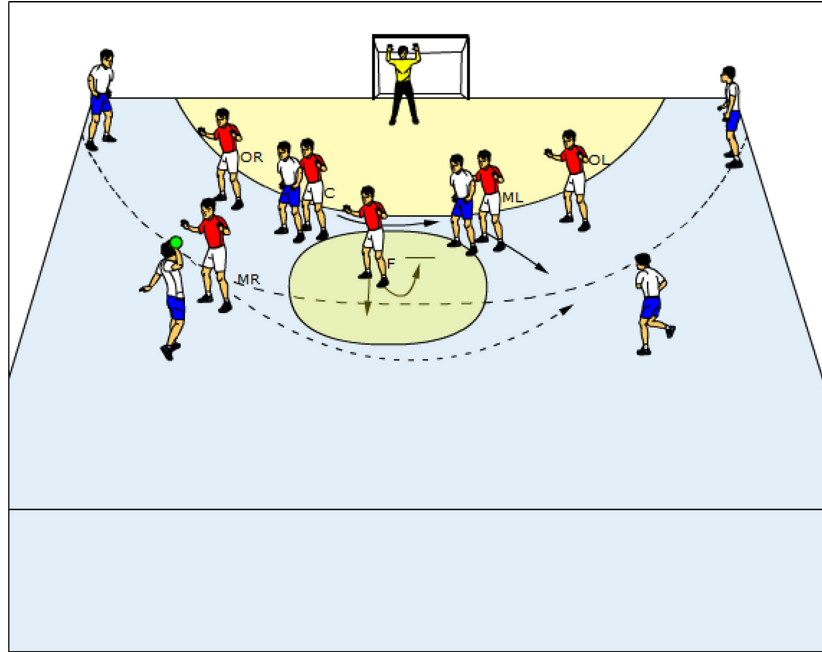


Figure 5: Position of defenders when attackers play with two pivots.

Collaboration among defenders has to be excellent, especially by guarding pivot players. First task of the defenders is to make difficult run in of the attackers. They can perform that action with their bodies in accordance with rules. The main aim of this action is that attackers arrive at a right position with a certain delay. That helps defenders to prepare themselves for the new type of attack. Now all defenders have to act very quickly and aggressive - their aim is to interrupt the attack with a foul as soon as possible. The role of F defender changes the most and became very special. Usually he remains without an opponent against whom he has to act, because in the middle of the playing court is empty place (CB is on a pivot position). But he has many different tasks which he has to fulfil. In the first moment he has to move back towards a six metres line (7-8 m) and help to prevent the pass to a pivot player who is on the diagonal position. But he also has to master the space at the centre of the playing court. So if the back player makes his penetration toward the centre he has to move very quickly against him and try to prevent a shoot from distance (9 metre) (Figure 5 and 6).

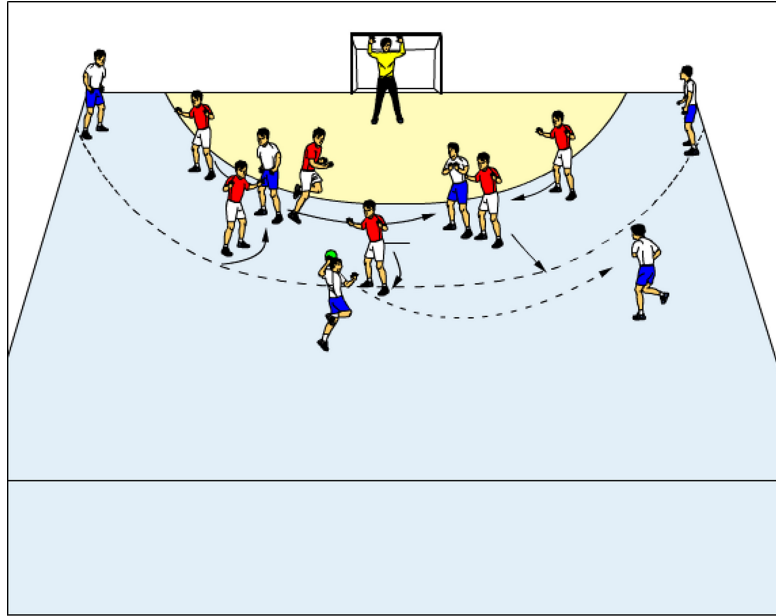


Figure 6: Position of defenders and their correct reaction in the case when attackers play with two pivots and back player penetrate toward centre.

Beside the described way of acting, players in 3:2:1 zone defence may sometimes situational play more open and more aggressive. It's properly especially when the opponents try to attack without transformation in game with two pivots and back players are not mobile enough (Figure 7).

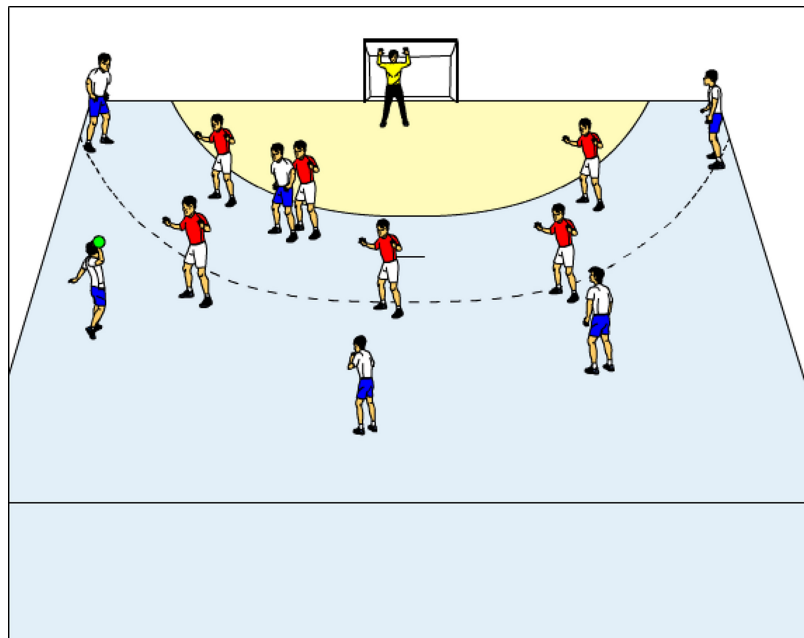


Figure 7: More aggressive and open position of the front line defenders when the ball is in the possession of the back attacker.

As it was mentioned before a good collaboration among all players is essential for the efficiency of 3:2:1 zone defence. So the players have to respect some basic rules how to help

each other when the attackers win an advantage against certain defender. Basically MR and ML help OR and OL players if the wing penetrates to centre; F help MR and ML if the back court attackers penetrate to centre and MR and ML help F defender if central back attacker penetrate between him and F; back players may help MR and ML defenders when they are forced to help F. This is also the only situation when the OR and OL players may live the six metres line. And finally C tries to correct the situation on the line against wing player, if other players didn't succeed to interrupt the attack (Figure 8). There are also different other possibility's how to manage this situations.

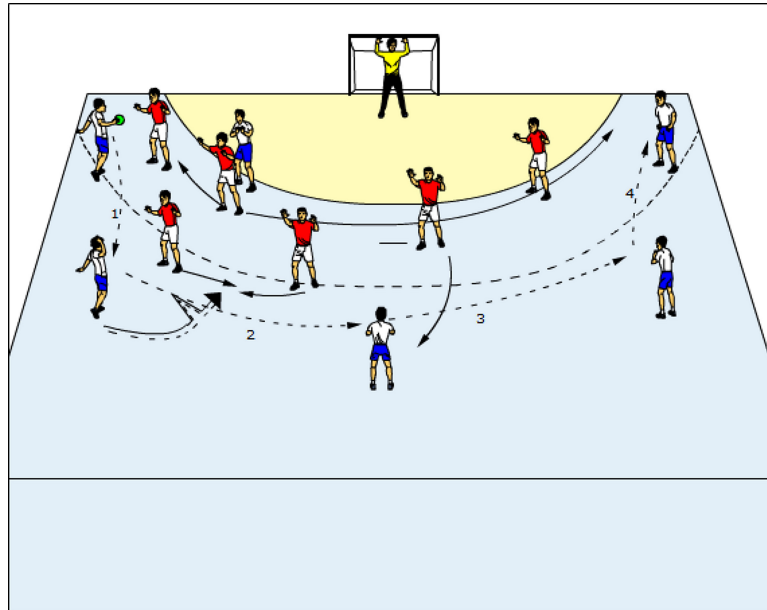


Figure 8: Collaboration among defenders when the attackers win an advantage against certain defender.

### Conclusion

Handball made a great progress in recent years and also 3:2:1 zone defence changed considerably. However basic idea how to play this zone defence remained almost the same and is steel in accordance with the modern approach how to play an open defence. With its basic layout allows defenders aggressive operations against the back court attackers as well as sufficient high density beside the goalkeepers area where the possibility to score the goal is the highest. Zone defence 3:2:1 has certain tactical advantages:

- High aggressiveness toward the back players who can't perform (or are limited) the shots from a distance;
- Favours of certain type of Goalkeepers who's abilities are appropriate for preventing a shots from wing and pivot position or from the penetration through the defence;
- Faster transition from defence to counterattack in the case of winning the ball, thus players score easier and more often goals in fast attack;
- Quick interruption of opponents attack (when they try to have a fluid ball flow) especially against teams which want to score goals with a shoots from a distance.