

Open Master Coach and Licensing Course

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Tempo and speed changing during the game

When trying to get more beautiful, higher quality and more attractive handball, two new rules of the game have been implemented whose application developed rather well and provided positive effects. Those two rules are:

- Warning for passive game and
- Rule that when a player holding a ball, after the received goal, comes to the centre, the referee gives the sign to continue the game regardless where the players of the opponent team are standing.

The effects of ***the first*** rule (sign for passive game) rapidly became obvious. The attack in several seconds from its reference by the referees must try to find the possible shooting position. It means that within a very short period, the attack must be faster and more direct than prior to it and end it with a shot. In that way the application of passive game sign add to the tendency to have a more aggressive attack and it often implies a faster one, with more shots and goals. Of course, the effect of this rule can be also seen in avoidance of its application. In order to prevent the situation when the referees apply this rule, the attack players from the very beginning are trying to play fast, directly and aggressively trying to outplay the defense and get into the position for realization.

The application of ***the second*** rule, that the referee gives the sign for continuation of the game when the player of the team, which received the goal, comes to the centre regardless the position of the opponent team, enhanced the speed-up of the game. New tactics of "fast centre" detail is being used more frequently, when the players of the team which received the goal are trying to conduct counter- attack and be faster that the players of the opponent team who are going back into defense.

However, my opinion is that a significant number of couches, due to using new possibilities of tactics, got to the other side. It started with aggressive forcing the "fast" game on any account and the opinion is being formed that ***modern handball is a fast paced handball, with as many shots and goals as possible.***

My question is: Is it exactly true?

Does the maximum speed always provide the maximum effect as well? Do many shots imply more goals and do more goals imply winning?

I will present my experience. As the coach of the national team of my country, we practiced many various types of feints. Of course, we practiced them, as well as many other things, also during the training matches. We used to play two matches in a row because we wanted that all players have enough time to practice what we agreed on.

We played with the team we could find at the locations where we had our preparation trainings and very often those were not the teams of the highest quality competition range. One of the elements we practiced often was also a successful feint 1:1 and when the attack player “attracts“ other defense player, he should outplay the team player at that side in order to realize the obtained excess of players.

I need to say that the application of this detail was very often so weak that in the end I stopped to use it. What is the problem about? ***It was the too fast pace.*** The national team player used to often be (too) fast during the first part of the feint for qualitatively weaker defense player that one did not even have enough time to react to the first part of the feint. The result of this was that the defense player would not even move from one's position also when the national team player would start the second part of the feint would often “get into“ the defense player and make the fault in attack. ***Non-quality managed to maintain the quality.*** In my practice, it was the first case when I saw that the maximum speed does not need to provide the maximum effect. Therefore, nowadays I ask from my players that the first part of the feint is done at optimum pace, that they appear dangerous in this way but also to provide some time for the defense player to react. Of course, the second part of the feint is performed at maximum pace. For me this was the first case that I had to start taking care of change of tempo and speed. Later on, this change of tempo and speed from one element was transferred also to the complete attack which we shall additionally analyze in more detail.

For the time being, I will point out to the remark that we were often found in the situation to listen to the coach suggesting to his attack players during the match: “Faster ball, faster ball“, requiring faster ball game. But fast or to be more precise, too fast ball play does not very often allow the attack player to be dangerous for the goal, to endanger the defense, to “provoke“ them make a mistake due to one's moving. The player is focused on catching and adding the ball at maximum speed, there is not enough time to analyze the current situation and ask for the best solution, and very often one does not even come to the defense player. And such game, “faster ball, faster ball“, very often ends in fast, i.e. forced shot, and not the shot resulting from the outplayed defense.

It is the similar situation also with “fast centre“. The fast centre should try but not on any account, and especially not that it should end by a shot. And at maximum speed exactly that is the problem: to perform accurately the movements and choose the best solution.

I will try to explain that danger from forcing the speed on any account with the approach that more shots implies more goals and more goals results in winning the match also by the results at several competitions.

Event	Half final	Final
ECh 2010	<i>CRO : POL 24 : 21</i> <i>ISL : FRA 28 : 36</i>	<i>POL : ISL 26 : 29</i> <i>CRO : FRA 21 : 25</i>
WCh 2011	<i>FRA : SWE 29 : 26</i> <i>DEN : ESP 28 : 24</i>	<i>SWE : ESP 23 : 24</i> <i>FRA : DEN 37 : 35 (31 : 31)</i>
Ech 2012	<i>SER : CRO 26 : 22</i> <i>DEN : ESP 25 : 24</i>	<i>CRO : ESP 31 : 27</i> <i>DEN : SER 21 : 19</i>
OG 2012	<i>HUN : SWE 26 : 27</i> <i>FRA : CRO 25 : 22</i>	<i>HUN : CRO 26 : 33</i> <i>SWE : FRA 21 : 22</i>

Out of 16 matches only at 4 matches at least one of the teams reached more than 30 goals and only at one match both teams did this.

Out of 32 teams (of course, not different ones) which took part in those 16 matches, only three teams scored more than 30 goals: France and Croatia twice when they also won and Denmark once which did not win.

If we observe only the results of the final matches, i.e. games for the first position, the situation is even more interesting:

Ech 2010	CRO : FRA 21 : 25
WCh 2011	FRA : DEN 37 : 35 (31 : 31)
Ech 2012	DEN : SER 21 : 19
OG 2012	SWE : FRA 21 : 22

There is one extreme result at the match France: Denmark in the final of the World Championship in 2011. In all other matches, the score was far below 30 goals: once 19; once 22 and three times 21.

I think that after this view it can be said with a lot of facts that in the handball (still) wins the team which receives less goals. Therefore the answer to the question ***if the maximum speed always provides the maximum effect and if the greater number of shots also implies more goals and if more goals implies winning*** is – **NO**.

But it certainly does not mean that I am decreasing the value and importance of speed in handball. I belittle, i.e. question ***forcing the speed on any account and any situation***. Simply, regarding tactics, it is not always convenient, not useful. We also got to analyzing and asking for the best solutions both in tactical and physiological aspects of speed application during the match. It is the time to discuss ***when and why*** we change tempo and speed. When it is the most useful as well as how we develop that quality as the part of training process.

Lets firstly discuss ***tactics aspects*** of the tempo and speed change. Theoretically, one team can play ***slowly, moderately fast, fast and very fast***.

Slowly is played by the team which is not sufficiently qualitative or in subordinate position related to the opponent team and it can be noticed at any phase of the match. The reason can be a low physical preparation when the team does not have any capacity to play faster. The reason can also be a weak technique because the players with worse technique cannot perform some element fast or precisely. Their technique is not automated and during its performance they need to think about that element and its performance and not about the speed of performance and tactical application of that element. The periods of slow game of a team can last for various periods depending on its (non)quality as well as on quality and aggression of the opponent team. In any case, the slow game cannot guarantee quality and efficiency.

Quality team can play ***moderately fast, fast and very fast.***

Moderately fast game can most frequently be seen from transfer from defense into attack if the team does not use counter-attacker after the carried out counter-attack which was not ended by a shot. That period is used for having an active game and as a rest and a chance for preparation of the following phase of the game. This period never last long and it cannot represent the basic form of attack. In case of longer lasting, sign for passive game could not be avoided.

Fast game, especially in the attack, represents “operational“ i.e. basic speed. This speed level is present at the major part of the match. It is actually “optimum“ speed which is used to affect the opponent and cause a his certain reaction. For this game level, the team must be both physically and technically well prepared, because it refers to precise and accurate performance of technical elements at fast pace when the concentration of players is oriented on the tactical application of those elements and not the method of their performance.

Very fast game can be seen with numerous teams. But with the teams of lower quality it is only an inconvenient attempt to “copy“ a quality team, i.e. to follow some direction of the modern handball. The high level of very fast game, which is a characteristic of one top quality team, is characterized primarily with a small number of mistakes i.e. ability of the player that at high i.e. maximum speed perform all movements accurately and precisely and besides aforementioned, even find out the right solution for that moment. But, it is the question if any team can play very fast the whole match or even every match. It is unlikely, maybe even physically impossible and tactically unnecessary. That is the reason why ***very fast game***, although providing the image of a real quality of one team, uses less time than ***the fast game***. It is also a tactical reason, because one should know also to choose the moment when it is necessary to use this speed level but also a physiological one, because the players should be put into the training process up to this level, which is neither simple nor short in time.

Lets consider now the use of these speed levels at certain phases of handball game.

Defense. Fast and very fast defense game is most frequently found. There is no defense in which moderately fast game could be successfully used.

Fast game is usually used by the team “following“ the defense speed and which plays as fast as the attack speed requires. In this situation, the defense players adjust to the movement speed of attack players which is not the most convenient regarding tactics. Of course, defense players are trying not to be late and get to the player holding the ball in time.

The reason why the defense players do not play even faster can also be an inadequate movement technique, i.e. running. It primarily refers to exceeding use of running technique “leg to leg” at the event of side movement in defense. This movement technique **is not natural** and it cannot provide the fastest possible movement. On the other side, the attack players in most cases move forward-backward using the direct, diagonal or semicircular route of movement which in most cases represents a natural running method. It is logical that by **non-natural movement** defense players can hardly get in time and terminate **natural movement** especially because the attack players have the ball and thus the initiative as well.

According to all aforementioned reasons, I am the fan of the fact that in defense one should use **very fast** game, i.e. maximum fast movement whenever it is possible. The running technique must be the fastest possible for the current situation. It implies that also the movement technique “leg to leg” can be used when the attack player passes the ball to short distance thus using this running technique enables occupying the required defense position in time. However, when the attack player makes a long pass, the normal sprint techniques must be used, i.e. maximum fast running which enables the defense player not to be late, to occupy the correct position in time prior to attack player receiving the ball or becomes dangerous due to one's movement. In coach slang, for this situation it is said that the player should get to his position even prior to the ball. Therefore, in defense it is only possible to use **fast and very fast** game but **very fast game must be dominant** because it is more reasonable and successful regarding tactics.

Counter-attack. When we say counter-attack, it is instantly referred to maximum fast running. However, a successful counter- attack implies two running levels: **fast and very fast**. Very fast running is a counter- attack characteristic including not necessarily all players. It is an individual or group counter-attack including from 1-4 players. In such type of counter-attack, there is usually no movement system, every player is moving freely and running as fast as possible trying to be faster than the defense players and get into position which they regard to be the best one at that moment.

If in counter-attack all attack players run, then they cannot move freely. Then a specified, agreed and practiced, counter- attack system is used where every player has one's position and role. The counter- attack system implies both width and depth, the first and second wave, and in such a situation it is not always possible or required to use maximum fast running. Of course, also in this situation, the attack players want to use the maximum possible speed, however it is not often possible because they need to obey certain principles of counter-attack system. But the use of system has its tactical justification because even when all players do not move at maximum speed, the arrangement of players is such that the

counter- attack is dangerous per depth and width, every player occupies tactfully the most convenient position to which one gets at the pace which is possible in a given situation.

Attack. Forcing too rapid speed in attack has already been discussed. This time we shall remind that the attack includes two phases: a **preparatory and a final one**. And when I was speaking about the exaggerated speed in the attack I primarily referred to the first, i.e. preparatory phase. The idea of the attack player is to endanger the goal by their movement and thus force defense players to move as attack requires getting them into situation to make mistake. In case the movement speed in preparatory phase is too fast, the attack player very often is not dangerous for goal because one passes the ball prior to causing the wanted movement, i.e. reaction of defense player. It is even possible to pass the ball and maybe he could have shot by oneself.

That is why in preparatory phase, one should use optimum movement speed, i.e. fast (and not too fast) movement. When the attack changed the game of defense and when the defense players played as attack wanted them to do, we move to final phase of attack and then very fast movement is used in order to “pay out“ the mistake of defense in time. If the preparatory phase of attack was very good, sometimes some attack player would get into shooting position even without the final phase, i.e. very fast movement. Anyway, **during attack it is necessary to use fast and very fast movement regarding the fact that fast movement is dominant and very fast movement is secondary.**

Returning to defense. For the last game phase, returning to defense, i.e. preventing counter- attack is reasonable in only one way: to run back into defense by maximum speed.

Now, when we analyzed which speed level is tactfully used best in certain game phases, we should also see **when and why** we change tempo and game speed and in which situations.

Returning from defense into attack

It is the best and most efficient if from qualitative defense, where players moved very fast, move to counter attack as fast as possible. If you use individual or group counter- attack then running is also maximum fast and if counter- attack system is used, the most possible speed is used which sometimes is not maximum.

However, during the game it is possible to see also using remaining two types of movement: **slow** and **moderately fast**. The change of tempo and speed in this way, when after the defense, the attack is moved to slowly or moderately fast, occurs most frequently if the

defense played long and tiring game, if they need a break, in case they are satisfied with the result and there is a little time until the end of game, etc.

Of course, in these situations this change of tempo and speed can be tactfully useful and justified, but in any case it cannot last for too long in order not to get into situation of passive game.

Beginning of positional attack

Beginning of positional attack depends on the end of counter- attacker way of getting into attack.

If an individual or a group counter-attack was used which did not end in a shot, it is possible that after the arrival of other players, it is continued with attack at optimal speed which is characteristic for preparatory phase of the attack. The same can happen also if the team used the counter- attack system, but did not end it in a shot. This change after defense into counter- attack and instantly into optimum speed of attack preparation is very tiring and it is the question whether it can always be used. That is why it does not happen rarely that after defense and completed counter-attack which did not end in a shot, the attack is continued slowly or moderately fast. This period is short and represents the break from one tiring game period and very soon the game must continue by passing to higher speed level.

However, in case the counter- attack was not used and the attack came to the positional attack slowly or moderately fast, then that period represented the break phase and after getting into positional attack, the movement speed must be increased instantly.

Positional attack

Without any doubt, the passive game sign and use of “fast centre” enhanced the game speed-up. This is the reason why many concluded also that we have greater number of attacks and thus the goals as well which is not confirmed by the results from the big competitions, especially final matches of those competitions.

As the result of this approach, many have considered for years that ***the sign of top quality and modern handball is a short attack***. On this occasion I would acknowledge that ***the short attack does not necessarily mean the good attack***. Why? Due to simple reason that short can be played by both bad and good teams. The only difference is that the bad team would not score a goal and the good one would. The problem is not to play short but ***know how to play long***. If the attack is carried out with several passes, short attack preparation or

one action for outplay the defense and scores the goal – it is great. But it is not always possible. If the defense is good, then not only attack action will be sufficient, the attack will need to include several preparations and actions. It will not be played till the end of one action but till the defense is outplayed. And it should be studied. It should be learned how to play long, to continue from one type of movement to another, to move from one action into another. This game in the attack cannot be played all the time at the same speed regardless what the speed is. This is the reason why one of the most difficult problems is to enable the team for quality positional attack. ***The quality attack is the one where we can see all variations of change of tempo and speed in the game.*** The real quality and maturity of one team can be seen in the positional attack phase and team ability to play long and to change tempo and speed of the game within a single attack. Now it is possible to see the change from optimal to maximum speed although the shot did not occur, to slow or moderately fast game when the players occupy new positions and when the new movement, preparation or action is continued.

It is not easy to build such a team ability. But if the team knows how to play long, it is certain that it is also skillful in tempo and speed change and holds the game under control. And when you know to play long you will know how to play short as well but, the one who knows to play only short the one does not know and cannot play long, especially not to change tempo and speed of attack.

Physiological aspects of tempo and speed change of the game are reflected in the problem of speed development, application of techniques application at maximum speed as well as ability training of long attack game with changes of tempo and speed within one attack.

Speed as a bio-motoric characteristic is very specific. It is mostly given by birth and possibilities of its development are very limited. In activities for suppressing some resistance (ball weight during a shot or body weight during a jump) to the development of shot and jump speed, it is also possible to act upon by strength development. But in activities of sole running, it is not the case. The speed can be developed only by means of speed. There is one well-known proverb: “if you want to run fast, you need to run fast“. However, in handball the entire problem of speed development does not come only to athletic training. It is much more complex. It has been said several times that at maximum speed, it is the problem to perform accurate and precise movements. And this kinds of situations in handball are significantly numerous. It is possibly the basic physiological reason why one team cannot play long time at maximum speed (of course, there is also a tactical reason to use the speed which is the most justified at that moment).

What is actually our basic idea in speed development? What is **THE GOAL**? **Develop as high as possible the level of specific types of speed related to handball and learn how to combine various speed levels by changing their tempo and speed.**

What are the specific speed forms? In **defense** it is **agility** i.e. the speed of movement direction change. In **counter-attack** it is the maximum speed with impeccable catching technique and passing the ball as well as managing the ball by left and right hand. In **attack** with a high level of ball technique (catching, passing, leading, feinting), it is necessary to develop all movements against various types of defense and match them with movement of other team players. These movements and adjustment to team players are directly related to changes of movement tempo and speed.

In order to solve these problems, what means do we have on our disposal?

- Practicing defense

Practicing defense is basic and integral part for development of speed endurance of handball players. They are conducted at maximum speed, thus the speed endurance, agility and therefore related to it, both technique and tactics of defense movement are developed simultaneously. At major number of cases, the group exercises are used, but if we want that the complete defense is played at maximum speed, then any type of defense should be practiced at maximum speed.

- Practicing counter-attack

Individual counter- attack exercises are ideal for speed development and its relation to basic elements of ball technique (catching, leading, passing and shooting).

Group exercises are most frequently practiced in the situation of excess player such as 2:1; 3:2; 4:3, etc. Even at the event of conducting these exercises, the maximum speed is attempted to be acquired which is very often not possible due to solving tactful situations under the conditions of outplaying. That is why player combinations, agility development as well as tempo and speed change are emphasized which depends on the current situation.

Collective exercises. The attack is simulated while the defense is playing certain defense for several seconds. At the sign, the defense is transferred to counter-attack, using the specific system and trying to acquire maximum speed within such movement. During this exercise, the following solutions are possible:

* End counter- attack into a shot,

* Counter- attack not to end in a shot but continue several fast passes in order to find and shot position while the defense is not formed.

* Counter attack does not end in a shot but from maximum movement speed the attack preparation starts, i.e. optimum movement speed.

- ***Practicing attack.***

The most complex form of exercise is changing the tempo and speed of movement. Positional attack is practiced which must be long but active, when attack preparation is combined (optimum speed) with final action (excluding a shot) at maximum speed, re-establishing of various initial positions (optimum or moderate speed) and continuance of the new attack preparation at optimum speed. Stop-watch is used in order to control how long the attack can play with focus. The defense can be asked from to play normally and afterwards to try to make a foul as soon as possible.

Two remarks are also required here:

- This type of attack should be practiced against various defense formations, and

- This type of attack should be combined also with a shot but when the players estimate that the defense is outplayed, and not at the sign of the coach.

Remark and suggestion: Even in case we use the active attack with tempo and speed changes, it does not mean that we will never get into position that the referees show the passive game sign. Tactiful solution for this situation is not a shot on any account, which is most frequently used, but provocation of the foul and an attempt to play the practiced combination of the free shot which has been neglected for a long time.

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