

## Aspects regarding the pivot player tasks in the handball game

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### Abstract

Evolution of the handball game has brought a different approach in terms of the pivot player game. Since the main task of delaying the lateral movement of defenders to create opportunities for the back players or receive the ball and score against defending 6:0, was reached to the much more varied tasks and responsibilities imposed by the much larger spaces offered by the new defense systems. Many of the game actions are based to the pivot player movements, finding an optimal solution to score by the back or wing player being the result of her screening and sliding. To achieve more efficient realisation of this tasks the pivot player must have qualities such as: motor skills, power, speed and a good mental balance.

**Key words:** *pivot player, tasks, handball.*

### Rezumat

Evoluția jocului de handbal a adus cu sine o altă abordare și în ceea ce privește jocul pivotului. De la sarcina principală de a întârzia mișcarea laterală a apărătorilor în vederea creării de oportunități pentru jucătorii de la 9m sau de a primi mingea și a înscrie împotriva apărării 6:0, s-a ajuns la mult mai variatele sarcini și responsabilități impuse de spațiile de joc mult mai mari oferite de noile sisteme de apărare. Multe dintre acțiunile de joc în atac se bazează pe mișcările pivotului, găsirea unor soluții optime de finalizare ale interilor sau extremelor fiind rezultatul paravanului sau alunecărilor acestuia. Pentru realizarea cât mai eficientă a acestor sarcini pivotului îi sunt necesare calități precum: îndemânare, forță explozivă, viteză și un bun echilibru psihic.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *pivot, sarcini, handbal.*

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## Introduction

For many years almost all the defenses were very closed, generally from type 6 : 0 and for many years, we used to see the pivots placed between the 2nd and the 3rd defenders or in the center of the defense between the two numbers 3 of the defense. His main tasks were to delay the laterally moves of the defenders by screening in order to give opportunities for the back players or create spaces for himself and receiving balls for scoring.

Trying to find solution aimed to stop the shots of back players, coaches are forced to search new defense systems in order to put the back players in front of unusual new situations, to push them further away from goal and not to let them have clear shoots. These defense systems (3:2:1, 5:1, 4:2) gave to the pivot more opportunities and also more responsibilities. With more and larger spaces between the defenders and between the lines of the defense, his role became a very important one.

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At the beginning of the attack play we can often see the center back showing to the pivot the place to take. This is necessary because the most playing systems are based on the pivot's actions. Finding a good solution to make a shot, by a back player or a wing, is the fruit of an over number created thanks to a screening or a sliding of the pivot who succeeds to keep two defenders occupied and so, somewhere else, the attacking team can take profit by an over number having a good opportunity to shot and score.

### Main tasks

#### *Break all defensive relations between players*

With his placement related to the laterally moves of the defense, his screening and sliding, he must brake the comunication between different defenders and define the spaces for the attackers. Generally when the pivot is on the ball side, the player with the ball will try to put himself in a relation with this one. To succed it is obvious that the pivot must not run with the ball and must not occupie the center place between two defenders.

#### *Allow the continuity in attack play*

His in and out movements and the fact that he represent a support inside the defense should allowe to the back players to disturb the distributios for the defenders and to take the best profit of this situation.

### *Playing without the ball*

Essentially it is about gaining a good position in the first place and in the second place about his placement related to the opponent and to the player with the ball. When the back player goes towards the goal the pivot must be capable to put himself into a direct relation with him by positioning in the following manner:

- by profil related to a defender and on the side of the back player;
- with spread feets (one on the 6 m) in order to block the defender's passage;
- an upright positon with bent knees allows him to resist;
- the arms must be free and prepared to catch the ball.

### *Playing with the ball*

With the ball pivot player must:

- try to score;
- try to make a pass to another player (a back player for example who goes towards the goal, like give and go relation);
- try to play the ball back to the back player before the attack is interrupted by the defense.(1)

To complete these tasks the pivot player requires different qualities like:

#### *1. Good physical condition*

Most of the time he is in physical contact with the defenders so his physical condition must be at the higher level.

#### *2. Good skills of catching the ball*

The so-called "Specialist defender" does not allow any more to the pivot to catch the ball in confortable situation. Being capable to catch the ball with two hands is not enough anymore, he must catch the ball with one hand or catch the low passes, high passes, difficult bad oriented passes etc.

*3. Good feeling*, when he receives the ball, to know which is the best solution to turn and shoot.

#### *4. Explosive qualities*

With or without the ball he must be capable to get rid of his defender, turn and shoot in a very dynamic way.

#### *5. Very good motor skills*

The characteristics of this position demand good joints and muscle stability and flexibility. Catching and shooting are actions made almost all the time

under the pressure of one or more defenders being pushed, pulled or in an unbalanced position.

#### 6. Speed of movement/reaction/execution

Move fast and open up, turn around and try to beat the goalkeeper, make a decision in a very short time regarding the shot impact, all of this must be done in the shortest time.

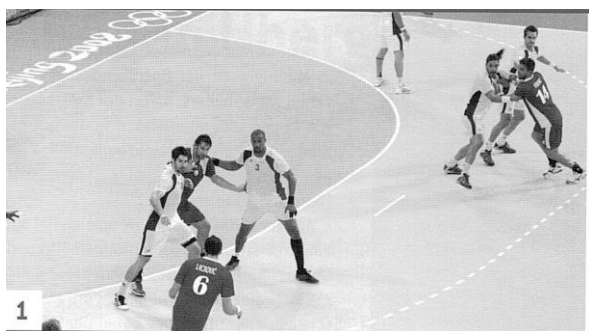
#### 7. Mental qualities

Generally he must play for his teammates. In 80 % of the time he doesn't even touch the ball.

The observation made on the games show that the playing situation of 2 x 2 – which involves the pivot – is one of the most difficult to treat and solves by the defenders. The reason is that in this situation one of the attack player, the pivot, is situated in the most of the cases out of the visual camp of one defender. To solve this situation the defenders must be very strong in communication and collaboration and even in this case the attackers have many chances to score or to obtain a penalty throw. Another reason for the efficiency of the situation is its simplicity, only two players being involved.

Two basic situations has been identified:

1. Playing against a lined up defense system (for example 6 : 0). Two defenders are lined up with the pivot placed between them(2) (fig. 1)(3)



**Figure 1.** Playing against a lined up defense (3)

This playing situation allows to play (for a short moment like few seconds) at 2 x 2, often by using a large space. The attacking team can cause this situation at all levels. That means that the pivot can be placed in the middle of the defense between the two numbers 3, between the numbers 2 and 3 or even between the numbers 1 and 2. The last situation is more and more researched because in this case the pivot has often an advantage related to the weight imbalance (pivot – wing).

2. Playing against a defense system built on 2 or 3 lines (for example 3 : 2 : 1 or 3 : 3)(fig. 2)(3)

This situation allows also playing at 2 x 2 on important spaces. For the advanced defender it is difficult to defend because he doesn't see the pivot coming from behind.



**Figure 2.** Playing against a defense system built on 2 or 3 lines (3)

Based on these two basic situations the coaches have developed different playing systems, adapted to different defenses systems, in order to take a maximum profit from. In this way we are able to identify the movements of different players and the ball circulation (patterns) that conduct the attacking team towards a 2 against 2 situation on a large space. The pivot's behavior is adapted according to different defense systems. The characteristics of the different defenses system were describe in the French magazine "Approches du handball".(4)

#### Defense 6 : 0

##### CHARACTERISTICS

##### Strong points

- good cover of the 6 meters line which allows often to cut the passes throw the wingers;
- its density offers the chance to have a bloc of 2 or 3 players on a back player shots
- little space for the pivot player

##### Weak points

- no pressure on the ball circulation;
- the system become vulnerable when two defenders are placed in the same sector" (Approches du handball, 1994, p.12)
- Mains tasks for the pivot:
  - with his screens he must protect the back players when shot;
  - his screens are made in order to delay the laterally movements of the defenders;

- being capable to place himself between two defenders and create enough space to receive the ball

Defense systems on 2 or 3 lines (3:2:1, 5:1, 3:3)

**CHARACTERISTICS**

*Strong points*

- the first line compose by 1, 2 or 3 players disturbs the ball circulation between the back players;
- the first line can also reduced the solutions for the back players;
- good protection in the center of the defense;
- the position of the players from the first line is ideal in case of fast brake;

*Weak points*

- weak coverage of the 6 meters line;
- the space between the defenders is larger;
- difficult distribution in case of players circulation;
- high energy consumption” (Approches du handball, 1994, p. 14)

Main tasks for the pivot:

- he must use the free space behind the players in order to receive balls;
- search to put himself in a relation (type pick and role) with a back player or a winger;
- he must allow the continuity of the attack play by playing between the defenses lines, demanding the ball, in case of a very aggressive defense
- causing situations of 2 x 2 on large spaces is based on the same principle.

By different movements, with or without the ball, the back players or the wingers try to liberate a big sector where the pivot can have a relation like pick and role with a back player or with a winger.

As we have seen before, one of the weak points of defense systems on 2 or 3 lines is the difficulty on the distribution in case of players circulation.

But still do some judgments related to the somatic characteristics of the top pivot player from the Men-s European Championship 2014 (table 1).

**Table 1.** Somatic characteristics of the top pivot player from the Men-s European Championship 2014

Name	Country	Height (cm)	Weight (kg)	Age
Noddesbo J	Denmark	199	100	34
AGUINAGALDE J	Spain	195	110	32
SORHAINDO C	France	192	100	30
VORI I	Croatia	203	114	34
KARLSSON T	Sweden	196	102	33

As evident from the table we see that players are oversized, with an average height of 197 cm and an average weight of 105.2 kg. We also notice that all players have a great competitive experience, all of them have more that 30 years, with an average age of 32.6 years.

**Table 2.** The percentage of pivot players success, of teams ranked in the top to the latest edition of the European Championships

	Croatia	France	Denmark	Spain
2000	56%	65%	87%	71%
2002	50%	78%	50%	53%
2004	61%	55%	81%	68%
2006	57%	64%	75%	82%
2008	75%	85%	70%	79%
2010	64%	75%	66%	73%
2012	66%	74%	78%	74%
2014	68%	72%	88%	83%

As shown in the second table pivot contribute decisively to achieve great performance in Europe. Table shows the percentage of pivot players success, of teams ranked in the top to the latest edition of the European Championships (table 2).

It is noted that the percentage is between 50 and 88% and generally the pivot players have the best percentage of all positions.

These statistics show the concrete contribution in terms of pivot’s goals. But during the game there are also another aspects, maybe not so visible, but with the same importance that we have to talk about.

One of them are the penalties. Usually the most exposed position where the penalties are obtained is the pivot position. The pivot obtains more than 25% of the penalties of a team.

Another important issue concerns the superiority play. When we are talking about this situation the objective of each team is to score 1 or 2 goals and not to take any. The important thing is that all the strategies, the playing systems turn around the pivot and even if he doesn’t always score, his team will take advantage of his actions: screens, open up etc. Succeed or failed is about how dthe pivot realize his task.

Last but not least we cannot forget the defense. The specific qualities of the pivots make from them the perfect candidates to take place on key position in defense.

### Conclusions

The pivot scores between 10 to 15 percent of the goals and he obtained most of the penalty throws. His scoring percentage is the best among all players. Even if he doesn't have the ball he must accomplish important tasks in all situations: equal number, superiority play, inferiority play.

His actions – screens, open ups – are useful for the back players and the wingers.

He is one of the best defender and he is usually placed in a key position.

Based on these statements we can say that the pivot position is one of the most important.

During practices the coaches must spend enough time to develop the relation between the pivot and

the back players and wingers. Every player must understand the role of the pivot in order to be capable to take profit of his work.

All players must have minimum knowledge about the individual technique of the pivot position.

The position of the pivot has a key role to play.

### References

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