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Modern attack technique model in team handball

Introduction

There is still vast potential to be reaped in the technique of team handball; however, this notion is not given due consideration. This paper proposes a model of technique that has been successfully tested and proven in practice. It leads to a game with more creativity and fewer errors, with less dribbling, less interruptions due to defence fouls, more accurate shots and passes – it leads to a better game. The model also presents a foundation for the school of handball and practice for beginners as it will allow them to learn the game more easily and quickly and to enjoy it even more.

The new, modern model of attacker technique is a milestone in the game of team handball! If it is not introduced by the coaches, the players will spontaneously adopt it as the development of the game will lead them to it. We recommend anyone serious about attacking technique in team handball to study this text carefully as it presents many new details.

The importance of technique in team handball

Technique is the set of moving skills that affect accuracy, speed, and power of execution of particular elements of the game. Regarding sports, technique also includes the ability to carry out tactical aspects of the game as required by the playing situation.

Each elite athlete is striving, in addition to attaining the highest possible physical, psychological, and tactical attributes, to carry out each activity as flawlessly as possible, regardless of whether it is an individual or team sport. All players, young and experienced alike, are working on their technique and trying to eliminate any shortcomings. Top-class tennis players are working to improve the power and accuracy of their serve, swimmers are trying to automate their strokes to push the water, contestants in throwing competitions are looking to make use of the power in their arms, body, and legs as well as possible by performing moves that follow the biomechanical laws. Handball elements, too, may be viewed as athletics disciplines. With the right technique, the ball will be thrown more accurately, more powerfully. Needless to say, throwing the ball takes place during the game and therefore, its effectiveness is affected by several other factors.

Football, basketball, or volleyball are much easier to play in a recreational and non-organized manner than handball. Children learn how to kick the ball faster than how to throw it. Unlike basketball and volleyball, handball includes several elements with demanding technique that can only be learned at team handball clubs. Therefore, coaches of beginning players face a much more difficult task than their colleagues in other team sports. As a result, handball is more rarely played at schools.

Improvement of tactical and technical elements, i.e. reaping the "internal potential" of team handball is too often left to habit, talent, and player creativity. Without proper technique of playing with the ball, there will be no flow in the game and there will be no efficient combinations. Often, a single pass or shot wins or loses a game! Better technique would surely have led to better results. Those who will pay more attention to this problem will beat the competition. To be sure, physical ability, psychological condition, and other factors may be equally important for success; however, technique is where the majority of untapped potential remains. If all fast, strong, and tall players had a better technique, the game would be much more versatile and efficient and there would be more top-class players. Without improvement in technique there will be no better handball!

An expert once said that ball handling in team handball is a matter of each individual, their physical and mental characteristics, and ability. To this we must object. Does it not matter how the ball is caught, held, carried, moved with, and thrown? The style may be individual, but the way run faster, throw farther and more accurately, and jump higher, is known and defined. In tennis, squash, golf, javelin and discus throwing, etc. all elite contestants hit or throw in a similar manner; in all sports, the technique is precisely defined. In team handball,

the most effective way of movement, catching and carrying the ball, shooting, and passing should be defined as well. It certainly matters how the ball is caught and thrown – *particularly because team handball is a game where any activity with the ball is restricted to three steps and three seconds!*

In order to emphasize the importance of technique in team handball, we had to define more accurately the optimum way of playing with the ball and performing the elements of technique in the offence. The new model addresses the issue of how the players should play in order to be more successful at the key goal of attack: "create the best possible opportunity for a shot" and to pursue the two fundamental principles of attack: "to pose a continuous threat" and to "constantly surprise the defenders".

The model should follow the development of the game of team handball. For a number of years, the model was created, developed, and tested with players of all categories and it has been proven time and again. Everyone embraced its novel features and successfully performed them. Despite automated habits, it is possible to learn quite quickly the "new" style of playing. We have noticed that many, particularly top-class players, actually played in certain situations according to the new model: with running strides and carrying the ball above the head.

Characteristics of attacking game in modern team handball

After a few passes around and far from the line of defence, a certain combination is carried out. If the defence is at least somewhat disrupted, or "shattered", before these combinations are carried out, their odds will be improved. Already in the preparatory stage of the offence, an approach run towards the goal with the ball ready for a shot or a long pass would be a good way to warm up and at least partly "shake up" the line of defence without any extra effort. This way, the attackers would come closer to the goal, perhaps even make a sudden dangerous pass, shoot, another player could make a run to open for a pass, etc. With the defence disrupted to become less homogeneous, the combination that normally follows the passing around the defensive line would stand a greater chance of success.

If a combination is not successful, players improvise to create an opportunity for a shot. Such improvisation may include several individual combinations; however, they rarely include anything more than a pass to the adjacent teammate. In such situations, almost all players start their runs too early and as a result, they often receive the ball when their run is already stopped, rather than receiving the ball in full sprint. The ball is then caught to the chest or even lower, and a redundant jump is present during the approach run. When the attackers receive the ball in place or too far from the defence, they have to bounce the ball, which slows down the attack. With the ball in front of the body, or after bouncing the ball, there is not enough time to raise the ball above the head for a long pass and therefore, only short passes to the adjacent teammate from a low arm position can be made. During approach runs or when passing, many attackers turn towards their teammates and thus lose visual control over the game. There are many inaccurate passes, either too high or too low, behind the player or too far to the front. All this allows for more successful defence - more fouls, interceptions, etc. Playing according to the new modern model would notably decrease the occurrence of such errors.

Attackers are successful in their individual moves predominantly because the defenders are in parallel position. Attackers find it much easier to beat, i.e. break past, the defender when their feet are parallel than if the defenders align their feet diagonally, offering a drive towards the sideline. When stepping forward from the defensive line, the defenders would be much quicker if they were standing in a diagonal position. They would take one step less to cover the same distance and this would result in more successful defence. *If the defenders start defending in diagonal stance, the attackers will be forced to attack with the ball above the head in order to avoid the fouls. This is one example of the problem we envisaged when thinking about the best technique to be used in order to present a "continuous threat".*

New attacking technique

As mentioned earlier, the attackers could disrupt the defensive line already in the preparatory stage of the attack. Each attacker should make a run towards the goal with three steps, perhaps somewhat slower, but always running, always ready to shoot. In the active stage of the attack, each attacker should try to create a shot

opportunity. The attacker should make a run towards the goal and attempt to shoot; if this is not possible, a pass should be made to one of the five teammates. Such offensive possession should not be slowed down or interrupted by bouncing the ball, defensive fouls, or inaccurate passes, particularly to players that currently do not pose a threat. If three or four attackers make threatening attacking moves in succession, an opportunity for a shot will certainly open up. However, the attackers must attack in a certain way, with appropriate technique - according to the model.

There are four basic rules of the modern technique model, which apply in the attacking stage and in fast breaks.

1. *Playing in attacking stance/body position, with the ball above the head (shoulder)* – rather than with the ball at the height of the torso.

2. *Moving with running steps* – rather than with short hops. Thus, the attackers will be more dangerous and powerful when breaking past the defence.

3. *Facing the goal* – rather than standing laterally to the goal (facing the sideline); this will give the players better visual control of the game and allow him to attack in both directions.

4. *Passing at shoulder height* – this will allow the teammates to catch the ball more easily and to resume the play as soon as possible.

Condensed into a single sentence, the four rules are as follows: *"Each attacker should run towards the goal with the ball held above the head, in sprint, with three running steps, facing the goal, and attempt to shoot or make the best possible pass to one of the five teammates."*

1. Playing in the offensive stance

Playing in the offensive stance allows the attackers to pose maximum threat in each moment – they can shoot or pass to any of the five teammates. In the offensive stance, the ball is carried with arms flexed (bent) and raised above the head; the angle in the elbow and between the upper arm and the torso should be 90° or more. As the torso is slightly rotated, the arm is turned outwards and the palm with the ball is open upwards as much as possible. When attempting to break past the defence, shooting, making a long pass, or trying to avoid defensive fouls, the ball is carried even higher. Holding the ball in offensive stance, a player is constantly dangerous and the ball is constantly kept in play.

There are thirteen reasons for playing in the offensive stance:

1. With the ball in the offensive stance, the attacker is able to shoot suddenly and in various ways while the defenders find it harder to challenge and block the shot. To add to the swing, the arm is only raised somewhat and the whiplash effect is added by raising the elbow. If the ball is carried in front of the body, a full swing back is required before the attacker can shoot. Shooting from the offensive stance is just as powerful since the swing back is only preparation for a shot.
2. With the ball in the offensive stance, the attacker can pass immediately to any of the five teammates, not only the adjacent one, without having to swing the arm back first. There will be more long passes, including passes to the wingmen; however, long passing technique should also be worked on.
3. With the ball in swing, attackers are more dangerous as they are always ready to shoot. The defenders will have to step out of the defensive line or at least raise their arms. Thus, the defensive line is shattered and gaps appear in the defensive line. With the ball in the offensive stance, the defenders will find it more difficult to "read" our pass. Therefore, their options to assist their adjacent defender will be restricted as they will have to guard their attacker more closely.
4. With the ball in the offensive stance, it is easier to avoid fouls, particularly when the ball is raised immediately after receiving. The attacker can approach the defender and stop just in front of the defensive line, drawing two defenders and still passing safely and accurately. A play that is not interrupted by defensive fouls can make all the difference in the success of an offensive play.
5. Playing in the offensive stance leads to less bouncing of the ball and hence, the ball is constantly kept in play. Three steps allow the attackers to cover enough distance, and three seconds give them enough time

for their attacking activity. If the attackers carry the ball in front of the body, they will be more likely to bounce it than when the ball is carried in the offensive stance. Often, the ball is bounced unnecessarily, although the attacker does not make more than two or three steps altogether. This gives the defence more time for their defensive activity.

6. Accuracy of shots and passes from the offensive stance is better than with other types of swing. From the offensive stance, the ball will only travel forward, following the "chain of throw": shoulder-elbow-wrist. Accuracy is often more important than the power of the shot. The throw will be more accurate if the ball is held in the offensive stance longer.
7. Finishing is more effective from the offensive stance since the accuracy is improved and the goalkeeper will find it more difficult to anticipate the direction of the shot. In the offence, the shots will be more accurate after a run with the ball in the offensive stance. Therefore, the ball should be raised above the head immediately after the last bounce in a fast break as well; the attacker should not wait until the last leap before raising the ball. Shots after an approach run with the ball in the offensive stance should be practised separately.
8. Playing in the offensive stance will lead to less interceptions and "easy" fast breaks, since the attacker does not reveal or indicate the direction of the pass. The defenders will find it harder to read the play than when the ball is held low as in the latter case, only a short pass is possible, forward or to the right. With the ball in an open hand, the direction, height, or length of the pass can be changed at the very last moment. Most interceptions are made after the attackers bounce and shove the ball, looking for a quick pass.
9. Playing in the offensive stance both allows and motivates creativity. Attackers that are ready for immediate, even long passes, various shots and fake moves, will tend to be more creative as they will make use of their visual control of the game, passing technique, and fake moves. Their game will be more witty and spirited, with more unpredictable moves, which is also more attractive for the spectators.
10. In the offensive stance, more fake moves are possible with the arm; fake shots or passes can be made in any direction. A sudden move in the shoulder is enough for a fake move as this is how every throw begins. Thus, the ball is constantly kept in play.
11. Playing in the offensive stance motivates particularly your players, to shoot; they will decide to shoot more often. With the ball in the offensive stance, they will be ready to shoot; all that is required is to swing forward.
12. Catching the ball in the offensive stance is simultaneously a swing for a shot or a pass. Hence, only one swing technique is required. For a short pass, it suffices to open the hand and raise the lower arm somewhat; for a medium-distance pass, a swing to the offensive stance is required; for shots and long passes, the attacker only has to extend the arm upwards and rotate the hips.
13. Beginners find it much easier to play with the ball above their heads as this makes it easier for them to avoid the foul. Initially, they should play with the ball above the head in both, nearly fully extended arms. All that is left is to move one arm away and to shoot with the other. This will allow them to learn the correct throwing technique faster as they will not be tempted to shove the ball with flexed (bent) arm.

The key to successful use of the thirteen advantages of playing in the offensive stance is catching the ball immediately "upwards", or high, into the offensive stance, rather than catching the ball low and then pulling it upwards. Thus, the ball is kept in play all three seconds. The attacker has entire three seconds available to decide whether to shoot or pass; he may also shoot or pass immediately. With the ball constantly in play, throwing the ball does not require an extra swing. If the attacker catches the ball to the chest or makes a circular swing with the ball, this will take one step; during the second step, the player will swing the arm back for a throw; this will leave him only one step for the attacking move. Thus, the player is very likely to bounce the ball to gain new three steps. Therefore: in order to play without dribbling the ball, catching the ball should be "merged" with swinging the arm back. However, the coaches should not require the players to raise the arm after catching the ball low, as this is often too late; rather, they should insist that the players catch the ball high, or "upwards", immediately.

After dribbling, bouncing the ball, the ball should be immediately raised above the head, taking the shortest path possible, in order to move it out of the reach of the defenders' arms and to prepare it for a shot or a pass. Therefore, even when in a fast break, the attacker should complete the dribble early enough to be able to raise the ball high above the head before taking off for a jump shot. This will make the shot more accurate and more difficult for the goalkeeper to read.

It is important to always carry the ball in the offensive stance, in an open hand, even when breaking past the defence; thus will allow the player to shoot or make a long pass at any time, even when being fouled. A long pass only requires additional rotation in the hips. If the arm holding the ball is dropped, it can only be shoved to the adjacent teammate; from the offensive stance, however, the attacker can take a quick shot using the "whiplash effect". Particularly players who pass the ball a lot should always have the arm with the ball ready for a long pass. Even when two attackers are making a switch (crossing paths), the ball should be held in offensive stance, in play, ready for a shot or a pass, including a pass to the wingman. The ball only needs to be dropped over the fingers from an open, upward-facing palm.

Each attacker should make a run with the idea to shoot, with the ball held in the offensive stance, ready for a shot. Only thus will the attacker be convincing enough to draw the defence and shatter the defensive line. During practice, the coach should occasionally shout "shoot!" to the attacker during his first or second step with the ball, requiring that the player shoot the ball instantly. This will reveal whether the player is actually ready for a shot. If the ball is actually received in the offensive stance, this should not be difficult as the swing for a pass or a shot is the same.

The offensive stance is the foundation of a new style of play. However, there are situations when everything is clear and the pass should be made as quickly as possible, without raising the ball. For example, if a teammate is in a good position to shoot, the attacker should pass immediately, even by shoving, from "below the wrist", behind the back, etc. Initially, young players should not be burdened with such details. They should be taught to catch the ball high and to make short passes by opening the hand in the wrist and slightly raising the lower arm, which is the start of a normal throw anyway. If there is no other option, the player receiving the ball in a situation for a shot can use his own style of swing and catching the ball high up is not required.

2. Playing with running steps

Three long strides, in full sprint, but with the ball constantly in the offensive stance, should suffice for the attacker's planned attacking move. Playing with running pace, without dribbling/bouncing the ball, is one of the key aspects of the new model. The play will be faster, with less fouls and more teamwork. If required, the approach run can be extended by a jump pass or with a single bounce of the ball.

Attacking play includes different paths of motion either straight or in a curve towards the goal - approach runs, drives, breaks. These should be performed in full sprint, rather than with hop, sliding steps, half-steps, or switching steps, as these are slower. Watch the players' footwork. With running steps, without stopping when receiving the ball, the player's pace will be maximized. When running, the player is also more convincing in faking the direction of movement. Many players, run, but only when they are shooting (Karabatič, Jicha). With constant running movement, the attackers will disrupt the defence more easily. Defenders will find it much harder to defend against the attackers who are in *sprint*. Attackers in sprint are harder to guard and challenge. Breaks through the defensive line in sprint, with long steps, with the ball above the head, are practised separately (to overcome the fear), against increasingly active defenders.

In order to attack without bouncing the ball, the players should wait for the approach run while trotting in place and receive the ball on the right foot (for right-handed players). Attackers can adjust their footing while the ball is travelling towards them, making a short switch step if necessary. Now, the player can jump-shoot twice between the three steps R / -L-R-L (taking off from the left foot). Thus, the switching step (right-right) which impairs the pace will not be required. All steps of the approach run should be long, including the first one. Three steps should be enough to cover at least 4 metres of distance, e.g. from the 10-metre distance to the 6-metre perimeter line, or from 12 to the 8-metres away from the goal where the defensive line is usually set up.

Playing in sprint, without stopping, requires *the right timing of the approach run!* Most, even top-class players, find it difficult to efficiently *time the approach run*. Observe the players while they are receiving the ball. Often,

e.g. when backcourt players are passing the ball, the first player will receive it in full sprint while the second one may receive it while standing in place, near the 7-metre line. This will happen if the player fails to account for the fact that he or she will take two steps while the ball is travelling from the teammate; hence, the player will have to stop as soon as he or she receives the ball, instead of receiving the ball in full sprint. For a faster start, the attacker should wait for the approach run while trotting in place. The attacker should not start his or her run at the same time as the passer. The approach run of the player without the ball should start after establishing eye-contact with the passer, just before the pass.

With practice, the attackers' runs should become increasingly faster. In order to allow the players to get the feel for how fast the run should be, they should be instructed, as an introduction to this drill, to make a three-step run in full sprint and complete it with a shot or a pass.

For a longer and faster run with running steps towards the goals, and for better visual control of the game, the player should face to the side to look for a pass only after the second step. The attacker should only rotate in the hips in order to maintain the frontal position relative to the goal.

The attack is most commonly initiated by the wingman; however, this start is often not threatening enough. The wingman, too, should make a run in full sprint, "stabbing" between the first and second (fifth and sixth) defender. Holding the ball in offensive stance, the attacker should try to break through the defence or draw the 2nd (5th) defender and pass, perhaps make a jump pass, to a teammate, and not necessarily always the adjacent one. With the ball held low, the attacker will not be able to approach the line of defence, nor pass to a distant teammate.

In a fast break, too, the attacker does not have to bounce the ball – especially the receiver. The attacker should immediately raise the ball above the head. If after making three steps, no player is open for a pass, the attacker can jump and make a jump pass or quickly bounce the ball while in mid air and continue with new three steps L-R-L; this should give the teammates sufficient time so that at least one of them opens for a pass. A player can cover approximately 11 metres with a single bounce of the ball: L-R-L + jump and bounce + L-R-L + pass or shot (4 + 2 + 3 + 2 metres). Such solution can often be seen with the French ace Daniel Narcisse.

3 – Facing the goal

The players should align their feet to face to goal as much as possible, with the take-off foot slightly in front. Unlike when in lateral position, attackers will have *constant visual control* of all players when facing the goal. This will allow passing and driving to *both sides* and to be, with the ball in the offensive stance, ready for different types of shot in any moment. When challenged by the defender, the attacker facing the defender, with feet aligned diagonally, will have *more stability*. Even if the attacker is pushed by the defender, he will be immediately ready for action again. Attackers should move with running steps also to keep facing the goal; with step-and-slide movement, the attackers will be turned sideways (laterally) towards the goal.

When receiving the ball, too, the attacker should be facing the goal. If the attacker is facing the ball, he loses vision of the defender and makes it easier for the defence to handle offensive threats – the defenders will anticipate the possibilities and intents more easily. Instead of turning with feet as well, the attackers should only turn/rotate in the *hips* when receiving the ball and passing while keeping the feet turned towards the goal. This is not hard to do. Rotation in the hips allows a player to even face in the opposite direction from the feet. When receiving the ball from the right side, the attacker should keep it in the offensive stance and never press it against the chest. When receiving the ball from the left side, the ball should be transferred to the offensive stance in front of the player, or – if the defender is standing near the attacker – above the head.

Attention should also be paid to the following aspects:

- Particularly when moving to the left, the attackers should not turn too far to the left as this will make a shot difficult and the attacker will lose visual control of the players (the pivot) on the right-hand side.
- The last step of the run, too, should be directed towards the goal rather than in the direction of the pass. Therefore, passing is executed only with rotation of the torso. A run with the ball in the offensive stance with three long strides and a pass to the side should also be practised separately.

- When dribbling in frontal position, the fake step should be short (!) while the other two steps should be long and as fast as possible.

4 – Receive and pass the ball at shoulder height

The fourth rule of the model is that the players and coaches should be aware of the quality of passing. *Each pass should allow the teammate to catch the ball as easily as possible and to continue the play as soon as possible.* To make catching the ball easier for the teammate, the passer's fingers should slide beneath the ball to give it a *backspin*. For a fast and successful attack, the ball should, as a rule, be passed at shoulder height where the teammate's arms will normally be. From the right side, the passer should pass into the teammate's swing or offensive stance; from the left side, the pass should be directed slightly in front of the defender. In both cases, the pass should be made so that the ball stays well out of reach of the defender's hands. *Ideally, the path of the ball between the attackers would be straight*, at shoulder height, except when making bounce passes or lob passes above the defender. For a bounce pass, the hand should be lowered from the offensive stance below the waist and the ball should be shoved towards the teammate.

Catching the ball upwards, directly into the swing is of key importance for the quality of passing as well. Catching the ball to the chest, and various swings, particularly circular swings, are not only time-consuming; they are the culprits for many inaccurate throws. *The ball should be caught and thrown in the shortest possible path, with only two swings: back and forth.* Such passes will be more accurate than shoving the ball from below the wrist. When the ball is caught, it should be immediately (or simultaneously with the catch) transferred upwards above the shoulder (head). Then, the hand with the ball on open palm should be merely extended and the ball released at shoulder height. In other words, after catching, there is no more backward swinging; the ball only travels forward from then on. To this end, throws should be practised with "paused throw": after swinging the arm back, the player should pause for several moments, trying to "memorize" the position of the arm, and then extend it forward, following the chain of movement shoulder-elbow-wrist. The coach should also check the position of the arm. If required, the player should repeat the swing. The culprits for poor throws are mostly wrong catching technique and, as a result, incorrect holding of the ball. The thumbs should form a letter A, with approx. 45-degree angle between them; the middle fingers should be on the ball's equator.

When passing, some players prefer employing the "whiplash effect," raising the elbow, or swinging the lower arm too far back. The angle in the elbow should never be less than 90 degrees. All such passes take more time. Usually, they are inaccurate and difficult to catch. Children should be taught to throw the ball correctly by playing and throwing with both arms above the head. Later, with both arms above the head, the player only has to move one arm away and to shoot with the other.

For a long pass and shot, the arm should be raised high, almost extended, to allow throwing "from the shoulder", following the chain of throw. To determine the correct height of the arm, it should be bent over the head and then moved away - the elbow will be at the right height, at the level of the top of the head.

When shooting and passing, revealing the intent is a common mistake. The coach should stand next to the goal and observe where the players are looking when shooting and passing. The player should only look in the direction of a shot or a long pass when starting to swing the arm forward. With shorter passes (to the pivot), the "peripheral look" is allowed.

The model introduces many changes and novelties in the game

In the "new handball", the attackers will play more creatively, collectively, dangerously, and beautifully. Every spectator at a game where players are playing according to the new model will notice that each attacker is catching the ball upwards, not to the chest, and that the ball is constantly kept above the head (shoulder), "in play". Thus, all three seconds will be available for a shot or a pass. The spectators will notice that there is no more bouncing of the ball and hopping with it. There will be fewer interruptions due to defensive fouls. There will be no more passing from below the wrist or by shoving. This is (almost) how the players of different categories and both genders played after a few sessions practising the new model, in team or individually. Last year in Sweden, the cadets, demonstrators, had no problems playing with the ball above the head, in sprint, at the end of the seminar.

Efficiency and effect of the model can be envisaged when watching team handball matches. All players catch the ball to the chest, which may not be relevant during the preparatory stage of the attack, when passing around the defence. But imagine a play in which, during active play, the backcourt players would catch the ball upwards, above the head or shoulder. They would be able to shoot or pass immediately to any teammate, wingmen included, they would not have to bounce the ball, and the defenders would not be able to clinch them. Observe the players when they are trotting and hopping and imagine how fast they could be if they moved with running steps, in full sprint. Compare the path of the ball in actual play to the ideal path which is constantly at shoulder height.

Handball is indeed played increasingly according to the model; however, this is an accidental result of inventiveness of individual players. For each element, there is a player playing by a certain rule of the model, confirming the model's validity and justification of its comprehensive introduction and implementation. During the EHF finals in Celje (2008), we observed the Swede Stefan Lövgren (THW Kiel) playing "with the ball above the head". He won the Player of the Tournament honours. He also gave an excellent presentation of playing in the offensive stance on the DVD presenting our model of technique. He praised our DVD himself.

The model is actually a sum of quality activities and playing habits of various top-class players. At the moment, there is not a single player playing entirely according to the model. Top-class players have athletic and technical abilities that conceal many downsides to their respective styles of play; on the other hand, their opponents play in the same way and thus, nobody gains the upper hand. Players observing the new model would certainly have the advantage. As it is, nobody is particularly wary of poor passing – players are used to that and hardly anyone believes that this is a matter of technique!

The requirements of the model are not difficult to master. Every player can learn to catch the ball upwards, to run instead of trot, to play facing the goal and to pass accurately. The latter may be hardest as it includes a reflex of catching and holding the ball – one aspect that is often done automatically and wrong. Any excuses that the new technique can only be introduced with beginners are therefore false. The players, however, must have the desire to master the new model, and the coaches must be persistent in their work. With the new style of play, progress will be guaranteed. More solutions will open up in the game, there will be fewer mistakes.

In general, a lot will depend on the playing situation. The right player will be able to choose the best style of carrying the ball, footwork, and body position in any given moment. In any case, playing according to the four rules of the model is the best solution most of the time.

Playing according to the model will allow an inferior player to make fewer mistakes. Shorter and slower players will be more dangerous, taller and faster players will be able to put their advantages to better use. Especially backcourt attackers and wingmen should play with running steps and with the ball above the head.

The model provides the basis for our school of handball. Handball technique is one of the most difficult techniques and the model provides the answer to the questions of what should we teach the children in order to allow them to carry out the elements of the team handball game as fast, powerfully, and accurately as possible, according to the tactical principles and the rules - requirements of the game.

The model is not a magic wand; there are many other factors that affect the results; however, if less mistakes are committed, if there are fewer turnovers, and if the shooting is better, the effect of these factors will be diminished.

Therefore, technique cannot be a matter of each individual. It is not in any other sport. In handball, too, it should be clearly defined how an activity is best carried out, in accordance with the rules of the game and biomechanics. The least we can assert is that the new model will not impair the current quality of the team and the players.

Responding to some doubts and criticism

The rules of the new style of playing with the ball are based upon theoretical foundation and logical reasoning. Following are some explanations that address some doubts about the new model.

1. *Playing in the offensive stance:* Does it not matter whether the attacker is able to pass to five or merely two teammates? How will the attacker draw the defender – with the ball held low or ready for a throw? When is it easier for a defender to challenge the attacker – when the ball is held in front of the body or above the head?

2. *Playing with running steps, in sprint:* How will the player move faster - when trotting or when running? Which is easier for the defender to guard – a trotting player or a player in full sprint?

3. *Playing in frontal position, i.e. facing the goal:* If the player is turned sideways (laterally) towards the goal, will he be able to see all attackers? Will he be able to dribble in both directions? Will he be able to run or sprint towards the goal?

4. *Passing:* Is it easier to catch the ball when it given a backspin? Does it matter where the pass to a teammate is directed? Does it matter whether the passer is making circular moves with the arm holding the ball, or passing through the shortest path possible?

There are some doubts about playing in the offensive stance. Some players who are not used to shoot from the offensive stance maintain that their shot is weaker and they prefer not to play in the offensive stance. Even if that were true, there are still 13 strong reasons *for* playing in the offensive stance. There is also a reply to the said hesitation: shots from the offensive stance can be just as powerful, particularly when the "whiplash effect" is employed, which includes raising the elbow. Various swings are merely preparation for the shot. The actual shot starts with forward movement of the arm, following the chain of throw shoulder-elbow-wrist. Thus, the power of the shot depends mostly on the correct swing technique. Furthermore, the player can decide while waiting for the pass from the teammate how to shoot and select the right swing. Moreover, most attacking activities include a drive or a run to open up an opportunity for a shot; this should certainly be done with the ball above the head. Such position allows the player to shoot or pass immediately. The defenders will find it harder to challenge or block the attackers' shots. Shots from the offensive stance are also more accurate than with various other swings, and it is much more difficult for the goalkeeper to anticipate the direction of the shot from a "neutral position". A young women's national team player says she could not shoot any other way than carrying the ball above the head during the run or drive. She has made this her habit.

Driving with the ball above the head can certainly be more difficult than with the ball in front of the body, especially, if the players are used to such technique. However, driving is most often intended to create an extra attacker. If the ball is held in the offensive stance, the defenders will find it harder to challenge or foul the attacker who will even be able to pass or shoot while being fouled; hence, the play will not be interrupted. If an attacker sees a one-on-one situation before receiving the pass from the teammate, he can of course choose his own style of breaking past the defender. A former handball player commented that he would have been able to drive very fast in the offensive stance, if only he had been taught to do so.

The statement that "it does not matter how one shoots, as long as one scores" is a wisecrack. Surely even poor technique can be "perfected" to allow efficient shooting. But it certainly matters how and where we make the pass to the teammate.

Introduce the model, improve attacking technique

Let us repeat: *For the new style of play it is important to receive the ball in full sprint, raising it immediately above the head (shoulder), carrying it in a palm that is open upwards and with a backward bent wrist, and to shoot or pass accurately after moving with running steps without bouncing the ball. Needless to say, such style of play requires getting used to.*

Without knowledge, persistence, and effort it cannot be done. If these are invested, however, it will be worth the while. The coaches must learn the details of the technique, present it to the players, and introduce it with appropriate drills and exercises. The players should be carefully watched to reveal any mistakes which should be eliminated in appropriate ways – not merely by giving advice. Each player has a weak spot that may stand in the way of his or her career, perhaps even top-class career. Surely there are countless players who could be even better, top-class, if they refined their technique.

The model will not be particularly meaningful if the elements such as shots, passes, runs, drives, and breaks are not performed technically correct; e.g. if the ball is in the offensive stance but in a closed, down-ward facing palm; if the running steps are short; if the passes from the offensive stance are inaccurate because of redundant moves with the arm, etc. Luckily, the elements are easily performed better if the rules of the model are observed.

Observing and identifying mistakes is a challenging task. It includes comparing the correct (ideal) and the actual performance and identifying the differences. The coach should carefully observe individual segments of the player's activity, particularly the following:

- Position of the arms and direction of catching of the ball – downwards, upwards, is the ball held with arm suspended low, etc.
- Is the ball received in full sprint, on the right foot? Is the run started too early? Is the player running or trotting? Is the player facing the goal?
- Is the payer's elbow at the height of the top of the head? Does the player pass to shoulder height and does he give the ball a backspin? etc.

Mistakes should not be eliminated merely by giving advice, especially not during a match. Mistakes should be memorized, written down, and eliminated in practice. Try to eliminate the mistakes by doing pre-drills and exercises– repetitions of correct execution of a particular element of technique, employing the principle "from the end back to the start", gradually linking the moves to the previous ones. Then, move on to activities after one pass and complete the practice with situational drills with more players and increasing pace.

To consolidate a player's knowledge, the so-called coercion method (force method) can be very effective. In order to perform the elements and to play as required, the players should be "forced" to employ such technique with a particular drill or task. For example, during the drill, any error in technique, e.g. pressing the ball to the chest after catching instead of raising it to offensive stance, results in a turnover. To make the offence play without dribbling or bouncing the ball, the coach should require catching the ball upwards, rather than simply command playing without dribbling. Only catching the ball in the offensive stance will result in a game without bouncing or dribbling. Attention: to check the progress and knowledge of the players, do not warn them of what they should pay attention to before the drill. Thus, the coach can see, what they have already learned and internalized. Do not forget that some mistakes can stubbornly reoccur.

Basic drills for introducing the model include attacking with an extra attacker: 3 on 2, 5 on 4, 6 on 5, with shots from the 6-metre perimeter after as few passes as possible. After three or four passes from one wingman to the other, including a long pass if appropriate (e.g. centre backcourt to wingman) an opportunity for a shot will open up if each player drives towards goal in full sprint, "stabbing" between two defenders while holding the ball above the head and making an accurate pass. *Hence, attacking 6 on 5 does not require any special combination or play. It is a test of knowledge and skills of the new model.*

Playing 3 on 3 or 4 on 4 without shooting with mandatory catching of the ball upwards and without bouncing will successfully get the players used to playing according to the model.

Situational drills will allow the coaches to introduce and implement the model faster. Situational drills resemble, or recreate, a part of the actual game to provide faster transfer of experience from the practice to the game. The combinations (or called plays) that the coach wishes the players to perform during a match should be carried out with full commitment in practice, but with restricted defensive activity. If the player is able to perform an element of the game or a combination in a situational drill, he or she will soon do the same during a match. The goal of each offensive activity is a shot. Therefore, all attacking drills should end with a shot. At least three players should be involved in practising the elements attack: the passer, the shooter for whom the drill is intended, and the defender. Each player should represent a player in a particular playing position and each player should practise a certain element, e.g. the passer should drive and pass, the shooter should go for a break and shoot, the defender should challenge the shooter. Technique can also be advanced by being aware of how each element of technique is performed during tactical drills as well. All players should execute all elements of the game according to the model.

Team combinations should be practised in a similar manner. After two or three drives and attempts to shoot, after certain previously defined activities, e.g. drives to the 6-meter perimeter challenged and held off by the defence, an attacker should take the shot. The shooter for whom the combination is intended should be left by the defender to shoot unchallenged – the defender should be intentionally late. This is approximately the situation as it would occur in a game.

Do not forget about the importance of continuity of threatening drives and runs in the offence; the attackers should not interrupt the sequence of these drives. The coach should loudly spell out the sequence of dangerous activities: "one, two, nothing!"; "one, nothing!" etc.

To be sure, coaches working with the beginners may have the most important task in establishing the technique of a young player; however, there would be many more excellent players of all coaches paid attention to the development of technique. Giving such "added value" to the players is certainly a difficult task. One of the solutions would be to introduce a "technique coach" who would work with all promising players at a club.

More technique training does not require reducing the workload of fitness and tactics practices. Fitness and technique drills can be effectively combined. When specifying the practice plan, it should be taken into account that reserve / bench players, for example, do not need as much stamina as the players in the starting lineup; the coach should deliberate on what is the most important aspect for each player.

In our experience, faster runs, drives, and breaks with running steps and in sprint is the easiest aspect of the new model to introduce. Playing in the offensive stance is somewhat harder as all players are used to catching the ball to the chest and carrying it in front of the body. Therefore, first observe and improve the footwork, while also work to get the players used to catching the ball high. In order to play without bouncing the ball, it is essential that the players to receive the ball open for the pass with the right timing – not too early, only after establishing eye-contact with the passer.

The model of the technique presented here has not yet flourished, but we are convinced that development of team handball will lead to it. The coach of the youth world champions, the Danes, and my colleagues in Sweden already share my views. Slovenian coaches mostly agree with the presented technique. Now, they should master it and start working.

Handball is an increasingly fast game, especially since the introduction of the fast throw-off after a goal is scored. Running is increasingly present in attacking against a fully formed defence line as well. There is still potential in the system of a team fast break after each time the team regains possession, with as few passes as possible and of course with the proper technique which will result in more dangerous attacks and less turnovers. Only a better technique will allow us to play even better.

Most of all, we love handball!