Provocation and Play-acting in Handball

By Sándor Andorka
Basic principle of sport is Fair Play!

- We usually speak about moral attitudes and values, about ideals in life, in sport and in art
- Fairness and success – often at opposite ends of the pole
- 2006 FIFA World Cup – many created actions; play acting and the “crown” in the final awarded for the Zidane/Materazzi action!
Fair play does not mean

- To not change the rules, but
- To accept and respect the rules (The manager of Manchester United once said “The trouble with the referees they know the rules but they don’t interpret the rules!” Read the match!)
- To respect your opponent
- To respect your team-mates
- Avoid violence on the playing court
- To prevent unsportsmanlike behaviour
- To respect the decisions of referees (famous, well known referees and beginners!)
- Referee’s like personality – Collina, Puhl!

Avoid the “win-at-all-cost” attitude
“There is no action without provocation, guilty is always the one who provoked”

Zinedin Zidane

**Typical actions:**
- Intentional verbal disturbing of the best/key player
- Clear open actions or rough actions from “shadow”
- Character of provoked player – how long can his/her patience hold?
- Action and reaction effect! Who was the provocateur?
Some provoked situations in football

• If a player takes a small hit he rolls around for a long time until the referee interrupts the game, he gets a drink and a little deep-freeze spray on his foot and is ready to play
• Or he notices that the ball is out of reach for him and throws himself on the ground in order to get a free kick thus the ball back
• Very limited body contact, both players jumping up and who didn't reach the ball, theatrical falls down, sometimes tears are produced for effect!

Unfortunately these kind of theatrics have also grown more common in handball. Generally the spectators are not consumers for unfair actions. Question: What to do when the players, team officials, use provocation, mislead the referees and how to prevent this kind of behavior?
Main Question

From the point of view of athletes and team officials a very important motivation is to win!

But at the expense of anything?!
To be an athlete – especially an elite – is synonymous profession, existence, money, respect and status!!!
Top (elite) athletes are always under the spotlight!

- Idols for spectators, for children – popularity!
- Sensation - when famous player is involved with a “big” story! (accident, love story, etc.)

To live, behave, compete in a professional manner!

“A real sportsman is correct on and off the court” – Richardson
An important part of my job as a team manager is:

To put pressure on the referees for the success of my team. During the match I do what I have to do

Famous manager of top handball team

- In beginning of game – testing the referees
- Repeat “nice” advice to the referees (passive, 7m, 2”, etc. !)
- Respect or provocation aimed towards the ref’s

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Responsibilities of Referees

- Provide the same conditions for all participants
- Set up clear lines in very beginning, home team – guest team effect, same right for defender and attacker
- To know the current strategic and tactical elements (Training with teams, observing trainings, looking for top referee’s performance)
- To be calm but determined
- Extraordinary situations – good anticipation and plenty of grit (exclusion, disqualification)
- Take care and guarantee the spirit of fairness (“Balance” in refereeing, team A is leading by 5 goals in this case for team B “easy” 7 metres!)
Meaning of provocation according the explanatory dictionary:
Inciting behaviour resulting in harmful, disadvantageous actions, shameless conduct!

What is the goal with provocative behaviour?
- To have advantage at any cost for success
- Mislead the referees for success of own team
- To make opponent lose control of their own behaviour

Kind of provocations:
- Against the tactic: Repeated small fouls, difficulty in flow of the game
- Mislead the referees: Immobilization, offensive foul without body contact
- Action against the opponent: Verbal actions, crying at 7m!
- Team officials: Pressure from outside by various actions
Meaning of acting – Hollywood actions:

Theatrical, affected attitude, illusive behaviour
Incorrect behaviour, far away from fairness, running for unfair advantage
What does “the script” tell us?

• Clarification No. 5
• …unsportsmanlike conduct falls into one of the three categories for which examples are provided below
• 5.2. Punished **progressively already the first time**
  • 5.2.a) harassing an opponent or team-mate through words or gestures of a provoking nature
  • 5.2.c) through fake action (“theatrics”) trying to mislead the referees regarding the actions of an opponent (e.g., pretending that a foul was committed)
“Who was first with the attacking foul?”

- As the game becomes faster more and more one-on-one situations occur all over the court - not only when defence meets attack near the 6-9m
- More encounters end with a “collision”, a big scream from the defender and at the end the defending player lying/sitting on the floor

BUT
Who was first?
Should we whistle for an attacking foul or regard the falling as “theatre”?
COUNTERATTACK SITUATIONS

“Who was first with the attacking foul?”

- To be able to judge whether it is an offensive foul or a theatrical action we must MOVE WITH THE GAME and try to READ IT, all the while keeping an EYE ON IT at every moment.
- If we find the falling/screaming of the defender to be theatre how do we react?
  - Always progressive? In case of repetition, progressive? Depending on where on the court the “play” happened (not so bad if it happens in mid-court?)? Depending on how the play goes on (attackers score - not such a big foul?)?

When attacker is in ball possession they generally run faster, the defender’s reaction is to protect himself by making body contact or by moving backwards in counterattacks.
OFFENSIVE FOULS

The decisive factor always is the timing, who reached the space first!
Flailing movements when falling often accompanied by loud cry, no body contact is made, there is only one correct decision in this instance – progressive punishment in first case – clarification 5:2c!
Immobilizing an opponent’s arm – Which player was the first to commit a foul?

When the attacker immobilizes one of his/her opponent’s arms and partially pulls him along in the same direction.

The aim of these actions are:

- To pull the defender out of his basic position and make more open space for the team mate of attacker or for the attacking player. Free throw for the opponent, in first case verbal warning!

- To fool the referees into thinking that the defender committed a bad foul and thus causing the defender to be punished progressively – defender player goal, to mislead the referees

- Often both players commit an infraction at the same time. Important to know who was first and mostly the attacker behaviour is not correct, but this is not basis for the defender to react unfairly. Both actions should be punished progressively at the same time.

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“Hit” to the face or neck!

• As the players know, we (should) punish actions against the head more severely, providing more temptation to act like there was a blow to the face.

• To be lying on the floor holding ones head may also be a good way to stop a counterattack for the opponents (if the pass didn’t reach is supposed target).
• WHAT SHOULD WE BE AWARE OF?
  – Position ourselves so that we can observe the situation a little bit from the side and not directly from behind/the front
  – If we think there was no hit, observe the situation accordingly to the end
  – Inform the “provocateur” and consequently progressive punishment!

• HOW AND WHEN DO WE REACT IF WE THINK IT IS THEATRE?
  – If the game continues, how does it look if we break the game, let the “coach” come in to give assistance to the “injured” player, and then give the player a progressive punishment?
  – Do not immediately react in order to understand the “tactic”!
CRYING AND FLYING PLAYERS

• The player gets the ball in good position, jumps in and tries to score, but during the score he shouts loudly and maybe even wiggles his body
• Small impact on the body of attacker and he/she is flying very long – not in accordance with the impact of push, clear overreaction!
• How does the referee react?
  Immediately confer with the player, verbal warning in first situation and in next case - progressive punishment!

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VERBAL PROVOCATIONS – “MATERAZZI ACTION”

• Also verbal provocation is unfortunately becoming and increasing problem in all kind of sports with close contacts
• The problem in handball (as well as in football as we all could see in the Word Cup final) is that it can be very hard, if not impossible, to hear what for example a player defending against the pivot whispers in his/her ear
  - what we will see is the reaction of the pivot (hopefully no Zidane head butt…) and then we will probably be quick to punish him/her
VERBAL PROVOCATION

• What can we do to prevent these things happening?
  – BE AWARE that these things can happen and FOLLOW/CONTROL if there are “pairings” building up?
  – REACT IMMEDIATELY with progressive punishment if we hear clear provocation? – YES!
  – Also remember that the provocation must not necessarily happen around the pivot, they CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE on and off the court (BENCH behaviour - cooperation with delegates?)
  – Please take care with “key” players.
Discipline is needed in the substitution area!

• The trainer has, of course, much influence on their team and in which way it plays and acts on the court
• Not only can they themselves behave badly and provocatively on the bench both against the referees as well as against the opponents, they can in some cases even try to get their team to show more of their “acting talents” in order to gain both playing and psychological advantage
• Although the referees have fewer ways of punishing officials progressively, the type of violations are limited to unsportsmanlike conduct, seriously unsportsmanlike conduct and assault. Such behaviour of team officials often leads to “actions” between players.
• Repeated protest against the referee decision – verbal, facial, gestures – progressive punishment
• Insults – verbal, facial, gestures, body contact – directed at players, referees, table officials, spectators - disqualification
Referee Tactics

- Serious preparation for each game
- Know previous history of game – special matches – “derbies”
- Emotions on and outside of playing court – to have good understanding of atmosphere
- Respect toward the referees – courage of referees!
- Encouragement in good moment and suitable punishments!
- Action – reaction effect
- Read the game!

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Task of the Referees

• Immediately react to situations!
• Reduce and eliminate unsportsmanlike behaviour
• Undertaking the decisions, punishment!
• Consequences – more common line!
Task:

To eliminate theatrical actions and provocation, because this is not part of (fair) play on and around the playing court!