Coaching Young Handball Players

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A thorough knowledge of the physical basics and of the technical and tactical elements of handball offers an adequate basis for conscientious and systematic coaching work. However, for the sake of properly building up a training program for young players, it is necessary to investigate the developmental characteristics as well as the physical and psychological capabilities of each age group.

Being in possession of this knowledge then, the technical-tactical repertoire of handball can be divided in such a way that from the beginning (6 – 7 years of age) until the players enter adult handball (17 – 18 years of age), they can acquire the fundamental skills of handball.

Taking into consideration the fact that – in relation to the fast development rate of the young child – 12 years is a significant length of time, for the sake of a clearer view it is practical to divide this long term into shorter 4 year periods. Within these groupings then, in order to facilitate the planning of training, it is further practical to sub-divide mini, youth and junior handball into 2 year periods. (This sub-division in the coach’s personal program would probably further narrow down to a plan for one year, one month, one week, one practice.)

However, this sub-division is not rigid and there are no strict age limits as each group overlaps the next, and girls often surpass the boys in physical development. Rather, it is merely a starting point for planning practices. By highlighting the technical and tactical elements which should be acquired as well as the certain areas of conditioning and skills need to be developed, the requirements for each group can be seen at a glance.
Mini Handball (6 – 10 Years of Age)

The presentation of handball can be commenced at the age of 6 or 7 with the introduction of 4+1 mini handball, adapted to the size and characteristics of the age group. The simplified game, the relatively unrestricted playing manner, the re-occurring feeling of success and the social relationships all contribute to whetting the children’s appetite to acquire the skills of handball and thus to regularly attend practice.

Thus, from the age of 8 or 9 it becomes possible to increase the size of the court and with this the number of players to 7 vs. 7 as well as lay down the fundamental skills for playing handball within the framework of structured practices. The acquisition of basic technical and tactical elements further increases the children’s confidence and feeling of success. Furthermore, basic condition training introduces their bodies to take regular exercise so it becomes possible to further extend the player’s level of knowledge.

6 - 8 Years of Age

Recommended training sessions: 1 - 2 per week

Aim: to make handball enjoyable and appealing to children by:

- Making them understand the basic idea of handball
- Introducing the concept of playing as a team
- Creating the right playing attitude
- Highlighting the importance of fair play
- Emphasising the enjoyment of the game over the result
- Giving boys and girls the opportunity to play together
- Introducing organised practices

8 - 10 Years of Age

Recommended training sessions: 2- 3 per week

Aim: to lay down the fundamental skills of handball by:

- Refining the technique of running
- Developing throwing skills
- Improving eye – ball co-ordination
- Establishing a sense of positioning
- Increasing the awareness of peripheral vision
- Creating a healthy competitive spirit
- Extending the attention span
Technical Training

- Defender’s and Attacker’s basic position
- Start off rapidly
- Change direction on a circular path
- Stop by bracing
- Upper and lower catching techniques
- Holding the ball: with one and both hands
- Chest and lower passes
- Overarm pass
- Preparation of the ball into the throwing position: on a straight path
- Bouncing in basic position
- High dribbling
- Cross step
- Overarm shot

Tactical Training

- Simple fast break
- Direct or indirect long passes
- Mobile attack
- Distant marking
- Man-to-man defence
- Pressing within the score dangerous area
- Open and closed forms of 6:0 zone defence

Condition Training

- Skill training: lay down the basis for movement co-ordination
- Strength, Agility and Endurance training through relays, ball games and chasing as well as gymnastics and athletic exercises in order to develop sporting abilities in a complex manner

Youth Handball (10 – 14 Years of Age)

By continuing the structured training begun in previous years, children of 10 – 12 years of age acquire further knowledge of the technical-tactical foundations of handball. The more confident and economical the technical execution the more possible to consciously apply certain group actions thus increasing the level of tactical knowledge and the effectiveness of team work.
During the ages of 12 – 14 by broadening the fundamental skills of handball, the variety of the attack against disorganised or organised defence as well as the effectiveness of the team’s defence significantly increase. The playful practice gradually becomes an expedient and more intensive training, the development of sporting abilities increases and the direction of training slowly progresses towards the selection of players into different positions.

10 - 12 Years of Age

Recommended training sessions: 2 – 3 per week

Aim: To lay down the fundamental skills of handball by:

- Mastering the throwing motion
- Improving ball handling skills
- Encouraging group work
- Reinforcing a healthy competitive spirit
- Further enhancing the sense of positioning
- Nurturing the sense to readily adapt to game situations

Technical Training

- Piston movement / Side-stepping
- Falling out / Shuffle steps
- Learn to change direction on an angular path
- Catching at different heights while moving, while running
- Underarm and jump passes
- Preparation of the ball into the throwing position on a circular path
- Low dribbling
- Spontaneous, passing and shooting fakes
- Underarm and long jump shots
- Dragging step
- Checking and individual blocking on the ground and in the air

Tactical Training

- Simple fast break - with a self long pass
- Mobile attack by changing positions
- Through-shots from the ground
- Penalty throws
- Delaying the attack in the quick retreat phase
- Close marking as an element of man-to-man defence
- Half court pressing
- 5:1 zone defence
- Falling out – Securing – Rejoining

**Condition Training**

- Skills – with simulated game situations
- Agility – starting exercises from different body positions
- Strength – with the player’s own body
- Endurance – medium distance running with moderate speed

**12 - 14 Years of Age**

*Recommended training sessions: 3 – 4 per week*

**Aim:** To broaden the fundamental skills of handball by:

- Increasing the amount of collective work
- Extending and consolidating co-operation between players
- Developing the ability to combine technical elements
- Encouraging to consciously employ and utilise natural body power
- Developing the sense to find the right alternative in different game situations

**Technical Training**

- Basic movements
- Catching the ball with one hand and while jumping
- Wrist pass
- Jump shot
- Diagonal step
- Starting and Body fakes
- Offensive blocking
- Gaining possession of the ball by
  - snatching away
  - knocking away
  - intercepting a long pass
- Collective blocking such as side-by-side and supplementary blocking
Tactical Training

- Extended fast break – with maintaining moving direction, by changing positions or with combined movements
- Static attack
- Open play
- Parallel thrust
- Changing positions / Crossing
- Passing to the pivot
- Break-through with the ball
- Through-shots from the air
- Moving back quickly
- Full court pressing
- 4:2 zone defence
- Taking over – Guarding – Handing on

Condition Training

- Skills – from general to specified skill training
- Agility – starting exercises with technical correction
- Strength – general strength training with light weights
- Endurance – running longer distances with intensive sprint intervals

Junior Handball (14 – 18 Years of Age)

Based on previous observation and testing, it is practical to select players at the age of 14 – 16 into specific attack and defence positions according to their abilities. With this the direction of training changes in such a way that during technical, tactical and condition training, besides maintaining the level of general knowledge, the specialised practice comes to the fore. After initially allowing players to adapt themselves to their chosen positions, during the ages of 16 – 18 priority is given to deepen the knowledge of the different positions and this should manifest itself in the effectiveness of the team. As the result of a progressive and structured training over the years, players by this stage can reach such a level of technical-tactical knowledge and physical condition that it makes the smooth transition into adult handball possible.

14 – 16 Years of Age

Recommended training sessions: 4 – 5 per week

**Aim:** To broaden the fundamental skills of handball by:
- Increasing the amount of team activity
- Improving the sense of positioning
- Refining the ability to appropriately apply faking techniques
- Encouraging the continuity of team work
- Highlighting the importance of individual responsibility
- Encouraging players to use natural body power
- Improving the collective work of players in neighbouring positions
- Training the players to adapt to changed game situations
- Highlighting the importance of subordinating personal ambition for the sake of team success

**Technical Training**

- Falling techniques such as landing on the arms and rolling over
- Back hand pass
- Hop step
- Sliced shot
- Curved dive shot
- Falling shot
- Arm swinging fake
- Rotation fake
- Guiding into blocking
- Shadow blocking ad blocking/freeing oneself
- Basic position and basic movement of the Goalkeeper
- Specialised Goalkeeper’s training:
  - Saving long range shots
  - One-handed saving, two-handed savings
  - Saving by breaking-out and by sliding-out
  - Saving side shots
  - Saving at the near post
  - Saving by jumping out
  - Making a long pass

**Tactical training**

- Completed fast break in different waves
- Combined attack systems
- Creating a scoring chance with Set play
- Waving with counter - passes
- Blocking/freeing oneself
- Applying different Basic formations of the team
- Breaking-through without the ball
- Set moves to utilise free-throws
• 5+1 and 1+5 combined defence
• 3:3 zone defence
• Settling down temporarily
• Sliding through – Evading – Switching
• Specialisation of players into different attack and defence positions:
  - winger - goalkeeper
  - pivot - outside defender
  - back court player - half defender
  - centre back - forward defender

**Condition Training**

• Skills – more economical and aesthetic execution of technical elements
• Agility – quick 10, 20, 30 m sprints with and without ball
• Strength – specialised strength training for increasing running, jumping and throwing abilities
• Endurance – develop specific fitness for the playing position

**16 – 18 Years of Age**

*Recommended training sessions: 5 – 6 per week*

**Aim:** To consolidate the skills of playing handball by:

- Attaining a high level of collective work
- Improving the effectiveness of the attack and defence
- Achieving a confident individual performance
- Developing a basic familiarity of neighbouring positions
- Facilitating the continuation of personal development
- Compensating for technical-tactical elements that are lacking

**Technical Training**

• Other passing forms
• Tumbling and sliding on the chest
• Curved ad sliced jump shots
• Lob and volley shots
• Dive shot
• Other scoring forms
• Specialised Goalkeeper’s training:
  - Saving close range shots
  - Saving in a clear scoring chance and lob shots
- Penalty-throws
- Other saving forms

Tactical Training

- Attack against different defence systems
- Attacking in different game situations
- Set moves to utilise numerical advantage
- Maintaining effectiveness in numerical disadvantage
- Increasing the variety of attack when in numerical equality
- 3:2:1 zone defence
- 4+2 and 2+4 combined defence
- Effective defence against different attack systems
- Defence in different game situations
- Defence when in numerical advantage and disadvantage
- Effectiveness when there is numerical equality
- Defence in special circumstances
- Defending when there is a throw-in or a free-throw
- Appropriate positions for a penalty-throw
- Specialisation of players into different attack and defence positions:
  - winger
  - pivot
  - back court player
  - centre back
  - goalkeeper
  - outside defender
  - half defender
  - forward defender

Condition Training

- Skills – refining individual technique and developing “playing intelligence”
- Agility – at this age can be developed only slightly (strength + technique)
- Strength – regular training programme with heavier weights and machines
- Endurance – developing special match-fitness and varying the level of intensity

By constantly repeating and systematically extending the knowledge of handball, the linking of each age group and thus the harmonious development of the young player can be achieved. A thoroughly trained player can easily transfer to adult handball where his/her skills and performance can be further polished to indirectly contribute to the promotion and advancement of handball as a sport.

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