Handball for the mentally disabled

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Photo: Claus Hansen

Handball for mentally disabled people in Denmark is turning out to be a great success. Up until 2007 it was not at all possible for mentally disabled people to engage in handball in a sports club. Since then five Danish handball clubs have established teams for adults with mental disabilities and more teams will emerge in the future.

Mentally disabled people in Denmark are associated in municipal institutions either in a day-care facility or in residential accommodations. Unlike Danish handball which is founded in sports club headed by voluntary workers. The challenge in establishing handball for mentally disabled people exists in the recruitment of voluntary workers, as well as getting the municipal institutions to enter into joint partnerships. In the start-up phase consultants from “The Danish Sports Organisation for the disabled” and “The Danish Handball Federation” are involved by offering advice and knowledge.

It is very important to encourage the mentally disabled athletes to play at the handball clubs instead of letting them play in auspice of municipal institutions. Thereby the athletes get a greater opportunity to improve their skills and they generate their identity in the voluntary world of sport.

If handball was to be founded at the institutions, the sport would indeed be a part of working life. Concurrent by founding handball at the sports clubs instead of at the institutions, we improve the possibilities to expand handball for the mentally disabled people in Denmark, as well as making local and national competitions.

"I think it is a very important development for the target group, to get a chance to play handball at the handball clubs; partly because of the chance of qualifying as a player by practicing, and partly because of the possibility to establish tournaments with different teams. Furthermore I think it is positive for the group to get the chance of generating their identity at the voluntary sports clubs.” – Grethe Schøler Pedersen, Sports consultant at “The Danish Sports Organisation for the disabled”.

Currently five handball clubs offers handball for the mentally disabled people. Those clubs are geographically located within a range of 80 kilometres, which makes it possible to arrange local competitions.
In order to reach as large a group as possible, who posses different handball skills, and to ensure equal competition, the athletes are classified into A B and C leagues.
For the very same reason a set of guidelines are composed, entailing how to characterise athletes in the different leagues, as well as guidelines for how the referee rules. The differentiation of the rules ensures a flow in the competition despite lower skills and levels. Those guidelines are placed at the end of this article.

When “The Danish Sports Organisation for the disabled, DHIF” actively are involved in sports for the mentally disabled, the sport and events will reflect the Special Olympics concept (www.specialolympics.org). This is a concept of
competition focused and targeted at the mentally disabled people. One of the many important aspects of this concept is ensuring equal competition by classification of athletes and teams. Handball is classified as a Special Olympics sport, and several international competitions take place. One of the Danish handball teams have already competed in China and Spain. In the long run it is possible that the Danish guidelines must be standardised in order to match the Special Olympics rules.

Handball for the mentally disabled people has not yet clearly been established at “The Danish Sports Organisation for the disabled”. At this point it still remains a local project. Our aim is to disseminate handball in all parts of Denmark and then establish handball in the organisation.

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Appendix

Guideline for categorising athletes:

A league

Defence
- Tackles the competitors – both offensive and defensive
- Masters offensive types of defending

Attack
- No specific characteristics

B League

Defence
- Do not tackle the competitors but begin to learn the defence movements both sideways and forward/backwards
- Are monitoring the competitors in the run-back

Attack
- The attacking players only move sideways not forward/backward towards the defending player
- Is able to run and dribble the ball at the same time

C League
Defence
- Are not monitoring in the run-back. The player runs back to the defence and turns around by the goal area.
- Has no sense of perspective to grab the ball from the competitors

Attack
- Are not able to shoot in a straight line placed in the corners of the goal. They often shoot in arcs
- Passes done by players standing still or walking – not running
- Are not able to run and dribble the ball at the same time

Referee guidelines

A League
The referee awards by valid rules. In the effort of minimizing aggressiveness, the referee must be very consistent in awarding.

B League
As in the A League but more slightly by:
- Too many steps
- Entering goal area
- Incorrect throw from goalkeeper

It must be easier for the players to get a free throw and thereby keep the ball. It is important that every team gets the chance to attack. In case of fast breaks the referee awards by valid rules.

C League
In this league the referee uses very gentle rules since many of the players are beginners and accordingly do not understand handball phrases and rules. The attacking team must be considered when:
- Too many steps
- Dropped balls
- Balls beside the sideline
- Entering goal area
- Incorrect throw from goalkeeper
- Dribble fault

It is important for the attacking team to keep the ball and the chance for setting up the attack. Thus it is easier to get a free throw and keep the ball.

For the defence following items must be considered:
- Gentle awarding proportionate to using the goal area as a defence position
- No defence is allowed outside the 9 meter line
- It is not allowed to block the ball outside the 9 meter line
- No man marking is allowed

The coach is allowed to enter the court in order to guide the players in finding their positions. The coach is allowed to move lengthwise at the entire side line.