THE GAME IN NUMERICAL INFERIORITY SITUATIONS

(ATTACKS IN 5:6 INFERIORITY SITUATIONS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE DECISIVE IN MODERN HANDBALL)

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1. Acknowledgements

For many years, the analysis carried out by experts on the greatest professional handball competitions and events (Olympic Games, World Championships, and European Championships) has highlighted the importance of the game in numerical inferiority situations, both offensive and defensive. Since the first stages in the history of the game some of the situations in handball that related to 2-minute suspensions have been thoroughly studied, especially those related to offensive play in superiority (6:5), and analysed scrupulously by all handball schools. Over these last years the basis for improving the defensive game in inferiority (5:6) had been deeply systemised and rigorously designed leading to noticeable results and new formulas.

No similar path has yet been pursued or studied regarding the defensive 6:5 game and the offensive 5:6 game; the first of which most possibly because of the “safety” perceived given the advantageous situation, in which any strategic design is assumed to be correct, valid and with a high success rate. Regarding the second situation, the offensive 5:6 situation (which is the purpose of this article); there is evidence of the developing of new strategic formulas that enrich the game, ensuring at the same time a better performance in such delicate situations. As explained subsequently, the development of these behaviours start from specific tactical guidelines, both demanding and mandatory for the players.

The current evolution of the game clearly depends on the changes and interpretation of the rules of the game; the author has already stated in different reports the huge effect that the changes in the rules (especially those from 1997) have had in modern handball. The interpretation of progressive sanctioning in order to smooth the progress of a more “fair and favourable for offensive play” game have improved this aspect in handball but it has also set up a situation in which the numerical inferiority situations during the match are relevant and decisive for the final result. That is the reason why “obtaining a good performance” in numerical inferiority situations is becoming mandatory in high performance handball.

The game philosophy is changing and every situation becomes important and decisive for the final result; the maestros Kunst and Nedeff considered back in the 70’s that in 2’ superiority situations, achieving a 1-0 partial score was the ideal objective, accepting that the rival team in inferiority will “use up” the time when in possession of the ball. However, in modern handball, due to the passive game “pressure” and the fast decision making process during match situations, positioning is outdated given the increasing number of possessions in the exclusion 2’ situations. From the opposite point of view, that is for the team attacking in inferiority, “using up” the time is not enough anymore and the team is now forced to assume scoring during that period as a key objective.

The need for the best performance in these situations during the match is becoming more and more important and the chapter “ Attacks in Inferiority” with all the necessary methodological analysis is essential to the structure within the general context of the game. This is the aspect on which this article is focused,
suggesting guidelines for action and at the same time showing different examples observed at high performance level.

Analysing the results of the recent European Championship in Norway 2008, the importance of an effective game and its significance regarding the final result in 5:6 situations is confirmed. The following table shows the data:

### 8th Men’s European Handball Championship – Norway 2008
### Places 1 to 12 - Attacks in Inferiory situations (5:6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Number of Matches</th>
<th>Goals / Possessions</th>
<th>Goals / Possessions per Game</th>
<th>Shot Efficiency (%)</th>
<th>Overall Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>20/44</td>
<td>2.5/5.5</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRO</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>13/33</td>
<td>21.6/4.1</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>15/32</td>
<td>1.9/4.</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>16/40</td>
<td>2/5.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>11/34</td>
<td>1.6/4.9</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>15/35</td>
<td>2.1/5.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>22/49</td>
<td>3.7/8.2</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>14/34</td>
<td>2.3/5.7</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>8/27</td>
<td>1.3/4.5</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLO</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>14/41</td>
<td>2.3/6.8</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISL</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>17/30</td>
<td>2.8/5</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNE</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>11/38</td>
<td>1.8/6.3</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**8th Men’s European Handball Championship – Norway 2008**  
**Position Attack analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Balanced Situation</th>
<th>Superiority</th>
<th>Inferiory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attacks</td>
<td>4,107</td>
<td>3,046 (74.1%)</td>
<td>624 (15.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>1,931</td>
<td>1,366 (70.7%)</td>
<td>389 (20.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The specific results let us conclude that the position attacks average in inferiority situation per game is **6.6 attacks and 2.4 goals**. The success rate of **40%** clearly shows the need that coaches have to specifically prepare these kinds of situations in detail.

**Sources:** Official Statistics from the European Championship and additional analysis by the author. It should be noted that only 5:6 position attacks against organised defence are taken into consideration. No counterattack situations or turnovers are considered.
2. Guidelines to be considered in tactical and strategic structure of 5:6 attacks in inferiority

2.1. Tactical objectives
   2.1.1. Forcing of 1:1 situations on outside spaces (Wings)
   2.1.2. Forcing of 2:2 situations (In any space)
   2.1.3. “Surprising” situations
   2.1.4. Fly play

2.2. Collective organisation
   2.2.1. Attack with no pivot 3:2
   2.2.2. Attack with pivot and two wings 2:3
   2.2.3. Attack with pivot and one wing 3:2
   2.2.4. Choice of options against defensive variables: 6:0, 5:1, 5+1, 4+2

2.3. Recommended strategy
   2.3.1. Ball circulation
   2.3.2. “Fake” movements
   2.3.3. Extreme situations¹
   2.3.4. Continuity

¹ Extreme situations refer to 5:6 situations in which the attacking team is under pressure to shoot because of adverse score and limited time or because of passive play danger.
3. Analysis of tactical objectives and practical examples.

3.1. Forcing of 1:1 and 2:2 situations in outside spaces (Wings)

**Diagram 1**

The outside space is the most appropriate to develop a 1:1 situation and balance the numerical inferiority of the offensive team. An organised team should educate the Wings in being “sensible” in these situations in order to exploit those making individual decisions.

**Diagram 2**

As a follow-up to the objective described in the previous diagram, here a tactical collaboration between the Back and the Wing in a 2:2 action in order to facilitate the Wing penetration is presented. This example is just one option among the many other possible movements in order to find a shoot situation in an outside space.

**Diagram 3**

Other possibilities in a 2:2 situation played in the outside space include modifying the tactical option. On the left side, and at the same time that Wing F develops its action “drawing out” defender 6, Back A penetrates in the outside space and receives the ball from Playmaker B. On the other side, another option of solving the 2:2 situation is shown, thanks to the Wing initiative, a cross between Wing D and Back C takes place, and C takes advantage of the outside space.
Diagram 4

Depending on the defensive variables, the main actors change but the main idea remains unmodified: A Wing is oriented to penetrate on the outside space. In the current example against a 4+2 defence, the opposite Wing F collaborates in solving the situation by circulating and forcing a **2:2 situation** where F and D face defenders 2 and 3.

Diagram 5

A similar approach is taken in the current example. An intermediate situation of Wing D in the pivot’s space. An initial **2:2** try in which A and D face defenders 4 and 5 finally develops in a **2:2** situation where D (alter the cross with A and subsequently receiving the ball) and F face defenders 5 and 6 in order to take advantage of the outside space.

Diagram 6

The objective here is to create a destabilised situation in the defence by using fake movements and then go back to initial positioning and exploit the possible defensive errors. This is the idea shown in the adjacent diagram where Wing F recovers its position at the same time that Back A attacks, the possible defensive error of defender 6 is exploited.
Diagram 7

Fly play by Wing. In this case the offence is organised in a 3:2 structure (no pivot) and the defence chooses a 6:0 deploy. Left Wing F circulates coordinating its action with a fly pass to the opposite Wing D. The tactical idea remains as the outside spaces are being exploited. Many examples are currently based in this philosophy.

Diagram 8

As a practical example of a case in which the Wing does not finishes the attack in an outside space and in order to take advantage of the jump shooting capacity, a singular model is proposed, in which, exceptionally, a shot in an inside space is intended. The attack display is a 3:2 structure (with no Pivot) and the defence is set up in a 6:0 display. A distractive movement is developed, with two crosses and with a possibility of a shot by the right Wing D. The aim is to resolve the 2:2 situation where D and C face 4 and 5.

3.2. Forcing 2:2 situations in the Pivot spaces.

There are two possibilities: with a specialist playing the Pivot position in his space (3:2 with only one Wing or 2:3 with one Backline player less) and also occupying the Pivot position with a no-specialist Pivot, when a Wing or a Backline player takes that space. This last option demands an initial 3:2 offensive organisation with no Pivot.

Diagram 9

The Wing F, from its original positioning moves to the space of the Pivot and the movements of Backcourt players A and B facilitate a 2:2 situation between Right Back C and the “Wing-Pivot” F against the defenders 3 and 4. This model represents one of many that could be coordinated with other movements from backcourt players, looking for the same tactical objective.
This document has stated the importance of “surprising” actions, equally valid for “Wing-Pivot” situations. In this diagram in which the movement of the Wing is done at the very last (“timing”). When facing a 5+1 deep defence structure and starting from a “pass & roll” by Playmaker B and Back C, we have a situation in the central space in which the surprising action of “Wing-Pivot” D increases the attacking options.

A similar example against a 6:0 defence. The objective is clear, forcing a 2:2 situation in the central zone by Left Back A and “Wing-Pivot” F with a previous tactical action (cross between B and A) in order to create confusion amongst defenders and to occupy the valid space by F in the last moment.

In diagram 12, the Left Back (right hand shooter) moves to occupy the Pivot position; The objective is to destabilise the advanced defender and using the cross of A with the “Back-Pivot” C, force favourable situations for C, B and D to shoot or develop a fly shot. This example values clearly the principle of continuity.

In this case, Playmaker B takes the space of the Pivot; it is now a priority to destabilise the advanced defender through a cross between C and A in order to continue the action and develop a 2:2 situation in which A and B (in their new positioning) face defenders 3 and 4.
Organisation of the attack in a 2:3 set up (one Pivot and two Wings) against a 6:0 defensive system. A fast circulation of the ball and a good timing of Pivot E is needed when the ball reaches Back A from the other Back C and the option to play a 2:2 between A and E against the defenders 5 and 6.

It is also used as a strategy in the 5:6 situation when leaving the outside space of a Wing unoccupied and organising the team in a 3:2 set up with a pivot. Whichever the structure, the objectives are still aiming to obtain a 2:2 situation where the Pivot is the finisher.

These practical examples and some others that coaches would use should take into account both the individual and collective technical-tactical resources of their own team. The principle of ball circulation previous to the finalisation of the play (if the action of the defence allows it) should be observed with special attention. It is also critical to design previous fake movements, both individual and collective, that facilitate the planned objective. From individual initiative of a 1:1 situation developed in an outside space until the global collective plan of the game under the described conditions, they all should be an important part of the content of the game and of the global game systems employed by the team. To plan a collective variable in order to act in response to, at least, each basic defensive strategy will be essential in the future development of high performance handball.