

A proposal of psychological intervention in handball

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1. Introduction

This paper describes a strategy of psychological intervention for specific improvements in handball players. Its development comes from the experience gathered in the Women's senior team from St Joan Despi's Catalan Premiership and implemented during the 2011-12 season with information from specific publications on psychological training.

The psychological preparation in handball should assist players to achieve maximum level of readiness for the competition and for a successful training session. In this essay, though employing a hypothetical example, I will try to demonstrate how to influence the game of a player positively through psychological intervention. For this purpose, I chose the establishment of the goal as the psychological strategy to influence the improvement of the player's game within the collective ecosystem.

Psychological demands in handball (Cruz and Girona, 2008) are high and span from the motivation to achieve the goals, to the activation in the implementation of actions, the focus on the game play, the player's confidence in his/her own powers, the cohesion of collective team play and the ability to make the right decision at the right time.

Goal setting can function as a strategy to increase motivation, focus of attention, build confidence and encourage decision making effectively. The approach of the goals, their characteristics and the timing of their achievement will be the limiting factors or facilitators, taking into account the complexity and power of this strategy.

The psychological technique is developed through a theoretical framework, in which the theoretical intervention in handball rises: goal setting; the procedure is described and so its implementation is simulated.

2. Psychological intervention in handball: a cognitive-behavioral approach

In the highly competitive world of handball, players are subjected to a permanent struggle to prove they are among the elite and are able to take part in the most prestigious competitions with excellent results. Winning, improving, overcoming, leading or progressing are some of the objectives with which the best players are confronted throughout their sporting life. Many people try and only a few manage to reach a level of competence that allows them to become professionals. Psychological intervention can contribute to mastering those skills necessary, so that a player is able to demonstrate them with great efficiency in the collective game.

The dynamics of both offensive and defensive game in modern handball is a constant evolution of actions; the time of the ball possession is shorter, the transition systems are faster, and the players' profile is homogenized. The physical preparation conditions, the competitiveness, the variability of offensive and defensive collective proposals have increased. In structuring the game, the systems enable the use of the capabilities of the players, but only the skills used by players show the effectiveness of the game plan. However, it is not enough to run on a given space and time, but also coordinate with one's teammates and the adversaries in opposition, so as to meet the expectations of the environment but most importantly, act on one's conviction, interests and personal wishes (figure 1 .) This flow of premises determines the use of some skills over others. Psychological intervention seeks to channel these expectations and promote the athletic performance of the players.

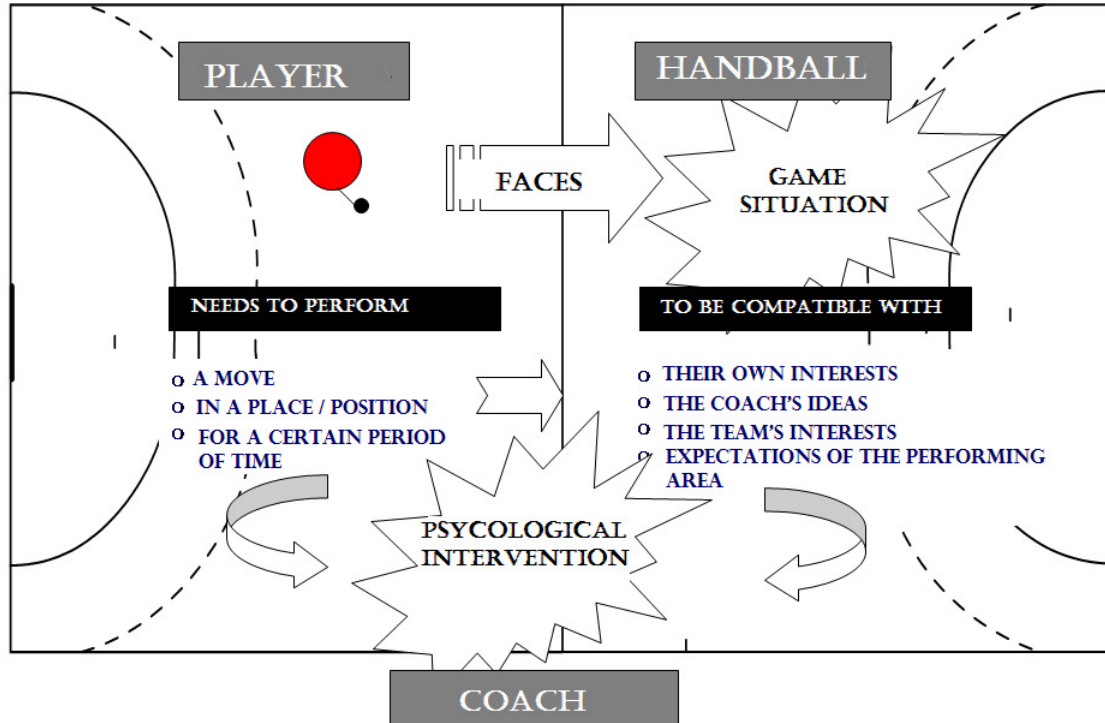


Figure 1: Context of developing the skills of the players.

Players in challenging situation, do so in a precise and intentional space, at a particular time and for a specific amount of time. According to Czerwinski (1984), all players' actions must be coordinated harmoniously with co-players and with adversaries in a discordant opposition. In addition, to meet the requirement of the player's game, not only must the player perform motor actions of the game (with changes of rhythm tracks, locks, catches, passes, ...), but they must also know how to negotiate psychological aspects such as motivation, concentration, stress, leadership, decision making and concentration (Cruz and Gerona, 2008).

Psychological counseling, in which I place the intervention, is conducted through the cognitive-behavioral approach. Since this approach deals with the thoughts ("cognitive") and behavior ("behavioral") of a player, related to a game situation. The intervention focuses on the player with a specific habitat to help them identify the goals of the game, focus their attention and operationalize their participation in the team.

From the cognitive-behavioral perspective, through which the player who possesses some skill is evaluated (inheritance and a certain temperament), players are expected to interact with their environment and also be able to adapt learning skills and behavioral patterns (Riera, 2005). However, the learning process is not unidirectional; it is a complex sequence of interactions, as we are not passive recipients of environmental influence. All learning occurs in an individual who always brings a certain genetic constitution, a personal story and unique thoughts, feelings and emotions of his/her own. This explains why in the same situation each person reacts differently.

3. Description of Procedure: Setting Goals

The psychological intervention strategy of goal setting (Williams, 1991; Weinberg and Gould 1996) is useful because it directs players to continuous improvement. This strategy focuses more on the procedure rather than the outcome, allowing working on building trust (Riera and Cruz, 1991).

The purpose of using the strategy of setting goals in handball is to make it an effective tool for the development of player skills. Being useful for the sake of individual needs within the community enhances involvement in the task and clarifies the role of the player in the collective game and the commitment to the team's game plan.

The development of the interventional procedure is presented as applied to the player, detailing each phase. From a theoretical to a practical level, it shows the expected results after training. The sequence in the construction of the instrument for use in training sessions is as follows:

- a. Identification of game actions
- b. Description of actions
- c. Definition of goal and task
- d. Resources for Implementation
- e. Assessment of the goals

a. Identification of game actions

In order to develop a personal improvement plan, the first thing to address is the needs of the player, his/her strengths and the points we aim to improve. Detection of areas for improvement is made in the context of the dynamics of real game. Play structures are those in which the player develops his/her skills and are typical of competitive activity. The methodology used to obtain the information can be observation, interview or survey. It is recommended that the identification of improvement actions end up providing a detailed graphic of the game structure to synchronize the communication.

Practice:

In this phase I selected two exemplary situations. The first (Figure 2), in which the right side (C) when receiving the ball from the center and cannot pass the ball to the end, is in a dubious situation.

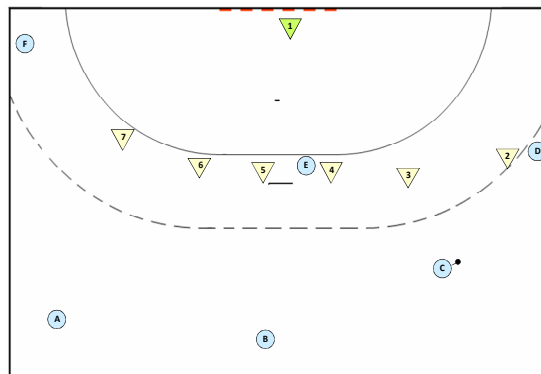


Figure 2: A situation in which the attack is the deterrent of the pass to the right winger.

The second (Figure 3), the defensive side (6) has to defend the lateral (A) in a wide area.

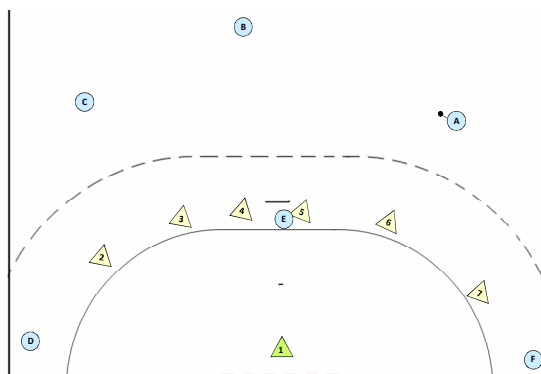


Figure 3: State defense in the second on the right must contain a 1x1 with plenty of space.

b. Description of actions

Whatever the methodology used for the detection of needs, once they have been identified, a description of the real situation is made. In this phase, it can be performed by the player in subsequent agreement with the coach.

From the graph of the situation or situations identified, a conceptual work should be made clearly for the formulation of objectives. The information managed is presented in the following table 1:

SITUATION	DESCRIPTION	INTENTIONALITY
Realization of the graph of the players on the field (identified above)	Explain the game situation personally, with as much detail as possible	In this specific situation the player can promote or achieve the collective goals of the player's game

Table 1: Description of actions to improve.

Practice:

Proposed situations are shown in Table 2:

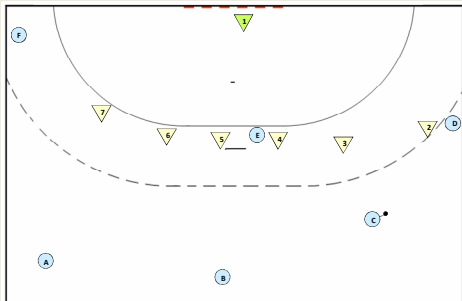
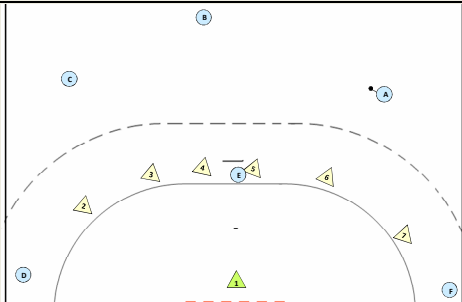
SITUATION	DESCRIPTION	INTENTIONALITY
	The exterior comes to pressing the pass to end when I have the ball	It is a time to create game and provide continuity, it is necessary to mobilize the defensive structure, and offer space and time to the center half.
	The winger is placed almost in the corner and allows more room to the back player have to attack, since the pivot does not allow the center half to help.	Endure and ensure the strong point limiting the possibilities for action, be prepared to move quickly from this point and contact the player with the ball. If the pivot is not there and the second is covering the space behind the space can be reduced.

Table 2: Expected results of the proposed actions by the player.

c. Definition object and task

The description of the situation must be used to analyze the characteristics of the game, the individual requirements and how to fit the game plan. It is now the time of defining the goal based on the characteristics of the player. It is therefore important for the player to achieve that with the accompaniment of the coach. It is interesting to display both the target and the task involved in their application (Table 3). So we consider:

GOAL	TASK
Identify where to guide the player's abilities and what to get out of them	Specify the implementation to be developed in order to achieve the objective

Table 3: Description of how to raise the goal and task.

Practice:

The proposal was concretized in Table 4:

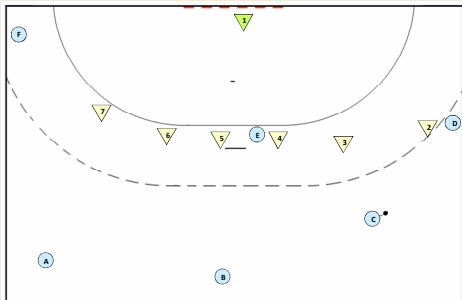
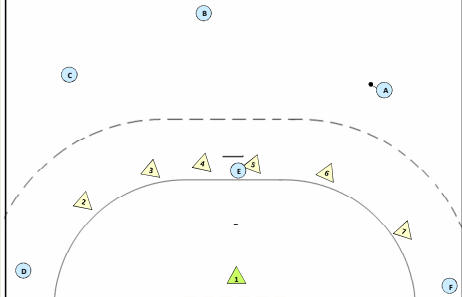
SITUATION	GOAL	TASK
	Extending the game (providing spaces for play 4x4 on the left side of the attack)	Press the space between the back players and center half. At the time the defender comes to cover the space, pass the ball to center half. Thus, it will take time to regain their position and play with the pivot or the back player.
	Controlling the player with ball	Take your left leg forward to prevent breaking through the strong point and force to seek action by the weak. I will go with them moving alongside and will participate with the arms when positioned forward.

Table 4: Expected results in relation to the goals and tasks.

d. Resources for implementation

To achieve the goals, the player should focus on specific aspects of the task; attention can be directed to those observable events that are relevant at the time (Mayor and Pinillos, 1992). The idea is to draw attention to what will promote the effective performance of the task. For this purpose three concepts are managed: the focus of attention, the keyword and the

functional sequence of the player's action (Table 5). The player completes this table with relation to the resources for implementation.

FOCUS	KEYWORD	SEQUENCE
Attention to the specific and significant stimulus for the successful completion of a skill at the time it appears	It is an identifier that has an integrating and activating meaning, predisposing to the action and mood	Logical procedure for the execution chain of actions needed to achieve the objective.

Table 5: Description of the criteria to resource the player.

Practice:

The proposal is defined in Table 6:

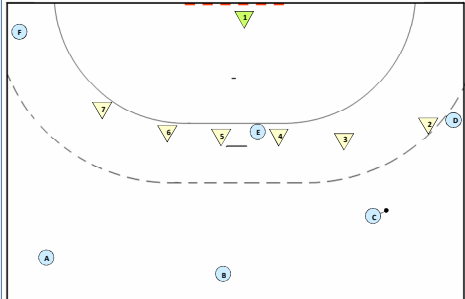
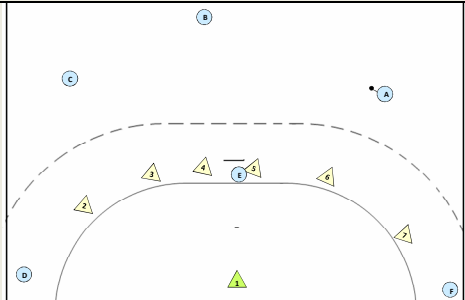



SITUATION	FOCUS	KEYWORD	SEQUENCE
	On the space between the first and second defender	OPEN	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activation 2. Moving into space 3. Reception 4. Penetration 5. Ending
	On the back player when the co-player passes the ball	HARD	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connected to the system 2. Setting the mark 3. Online kick 4. Acting 5. Reconnecting

Table 6: Expected Resources in accordance to the goals and tasks.

e. Assessment of the achievement of the goals

Players appreciate every action sequence in the training sessions and competition. This enables us to identify what degree of success has been achieved by the player. For this, we can do it by means of the "green circle" (Vives, 2012) in which three levels are established on the results obtained:

- Green  : the action is always performed successfully
- Yellow  : have tried and sometimes succeeded in performing the action
- Red  : Error or omission of action

The green colour means that the sequence is obtained and the skills must be fixed. Yellow marks an unconsolidated action and the need to continue its development in training and competition. Red signals an action that involves a performance for education, modification of some pattern or attitudinal channeling.

Practice:

The monitoring worksheet of the goals achievement could be presented in table 7:

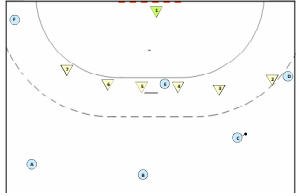





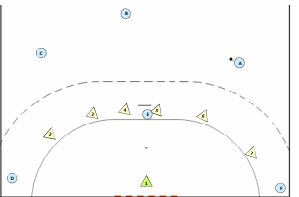





GOAL	SITUATION	FOCUS	KEYWORD	SEQUENCE	ASSESSMENT
Extending the game (providing space for 4x4 play on the left side of the attack)	<p>Press the space between the back player and the winger. At the time the defender comes to close the space, the ball should be given to the center half. Thus, they will have time to regain their position and play with the pivot or the back player.</p> 	On the space between the first and second defender	OPEN	Activation	
				Moving into space	
				Reception	
				Penetration	
				Ending	
Controlling the player with ball	<p>Take your left leg forward to prevent breaking through the strength and force to seek action by the weak. Always escort them by moving and participating with the arms when in a forward position.</p> 	On the back player and the winger when the co-player passes the ball	HARD	Connected to the system	
				Setting the mark	
				Positioned in the throwing line	
				Performing	
				Reconnecting	

Table 5: Final sample with the assessment objectives.

4. Conclusions and limitations

The incorporation of theoretical and applied knowledge is made concrete in specific proposals such as goal establishment and behavior support, in order to reflect significant progress in the intervention on the players, in a sporting context traditionally very experimental. The proposal of psychological intervention in handball is conducted through the cognitive-behavioral approach. This methodological framework is very useful in addressing the weaknesses observed in players during the game and bringing about changes that fit their motivations and capabilities.

Treatment of handball from its functional dynamics means examining the events that occur and the role played by the player. Just in other team sports, according to the elements in space and time, the objectives of individual players may be altered. By setting some goals, complexity and variability are defined, which allows the evaluation of personal and environmental variables.

The design of psychological intervention suitable for each single player, both for its suitability and for the specific characteristics of the task, is crucial in assisting learning acquisition as well as the subsequent consolidation and performance setting. In this proposal, I have considered aspects of the intervention on external stimuli (with corresponding techniques), specifying for what, when and how to apply. The methodology used for the construction of the instrument is important, as it is the player who intends to set and monitor their implementation section that serves as internal stimuli, interest and personal adjustment.

Like every proposal, this approach has its limitations, which I highlight below:

- Weak relation to the time of the season: planning the procedure taking into account the planning team, the whole content raised by the coach.
- Lack of continuity: consider how the intervention can chain for further development and progress of the player.

5. References

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