

# THE GOALKEEPER AS FIRST ATTACKER: PRACTICAL PROPOSALS ABOUT HIS INTERVENTIONS AND LINKING WITH THE OPENING OF THE FASTBREAK

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1. Introduction.
2. Analysis of variables in the initial passes of fast break through phases of the movement: evaluation of its complexity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“There, under the posts of the goal, a man, the goalkeeper, is an important, fundamental piece. It is at least paradoxical to affirm that the goalkeeper is the first defender and... the first attacker, through the responsibility he assumes to cover the angles of his goal, much like the one he contracts when a precise pass leaves from his hands, which inspires or projects the opportunity of the fast break, of the offensive game”.<sup>1</sup>*

This is how journalist, Carlos Piernavieja, described the goalkeeper in the missing magazine Sport 2000, in 1969. Since that time, the importance of the goalkeeper in the opening of the fast break has increased considerably. It is enough to indicate that in big international competitions (World Championships, Olympic Games, etc.) the percentage of obtained goals through fast break by the best teams is located over 20%, and reached its higher level in Sweden '93 when the Russian team achieved 33% of their goals in this way. Taking into consideration these numbers, the participation and contribution of the goalkeeper is of great significance.

In the concrete situation of a game, it is not enough for a goalkeeper to be able to give a precise pass to the wingers, but it is also necessary to choose towards which zone to make the pass, when to do it or to refrain from doing it, what distances do not involve risk based on the variable situation of teammates and adversaries and the resulting free spaces, to decide in each case for a direct shot at the opposite goal if the rival goalkeeper has left the goal area trying to intercept the pass that “still has not left”, to choose in a balanced way between the speed and the security or to combine both, etc. All these aspects demand a great individual tactical instruction of the goalkeeper, who must have numerous experiences, as varied and rich as possible.

One of the keys is to make his interventions against the opponents' shooting in the best and most balanced way possible, in a way that will allow him to observe rapidly the opening possibilities of the fast break and at the same time to look for the best and fastest chain to put the ball into play once he has recovered this one. But also he must be prepared to react accordingly if the previous action has forced him off-balance, for which purpose the improvement of his capacity of agility becomes fundamental.

A good pass quality is the key for initiating an effective fast break, and constitutes one of the three levels of the throw pattern<sup>2</sup>, that has the specific objective of *communicating with the teammate*. The quality of the pass must be conceived with the education process of the player, and implicitly, of the goalkeeper, from a triple perspective:

<sup>1</sup> Piernavieja, C., (1969), The goalkeeper, the first defender and... the first attacker, *Rev. Deporte 2000, año I, nº 4*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> The other two would be the shot on goal in all its range of options, the objective of which is to achieve a goal, and serves to put the ball in game after an interruption.

- **Effectiveness:** The ball must be directed with high accuracy at the teammate the on greater percentage of the occasions. In the opening of the counterattack this percentage must be near to 100%, because an error or mistake can offer an immediate possibility for a goal against.
- **Wealth and variability:** Ample execution range that allows the achievement of a varied and intelligent game both individually and collectively. Even though certain ways of movement are not required by goalkeepers, an important variety of their motor development, which will allow them a better selection and precision of gestures is necessary.
- **Precision and adjustment:** This one identifies the factors of qualitative type in their entirety, forcing the ball to a precise space, and also to a specific teammate. It is the individual tactical aspect, in which the development of the perceptive capacity plays a decisive role.

An optimal conjunction of these three factors will occur in the complex motor act of the pass, in which it is important to analyze the context of specific stimuli in making the right decision. That is to say, the goalkeeper should previously reflect on the different options (which teammate is better located, what type of pass must he choose, etc.), and finally to choose the one that seems a priori more correct. This characteristic, the *intentionality*, is the most important one in the game of evolved handball. The distances vary immensely: from the impulsive passing in short distances to a classic pass of 30 meters made in a long fast break-, and the game situations deriving from recovering the ball - controlled or not from the first moment on, bounced towards the front, turned inside behind the goal, etc.-, as well as the space-time relations between the teammates and opponents, among other reasons, result in many diverse versions of training the opening of the fast break.

There are different factors that can facilitate learning. Each learning process is the result of a long chain of living motor situations during a more or less prolonged time. The ***experience of movement in a multiple form*** is the first factor that affects the acquisition of the pass, and these motor experiences are necessary in conjugating the binomial *amount* (total number of experiences), and *quality* (implicit wealth of each experience). Everybody should keep in mind that having a variety of experiences is not the same as having the same experience many times. Both aspects are equally important in the education-learning process, although the concrete evolutionary period can clarify this relation in one direction or another.

But there are more factors one needs to consider: ***the cognitive capacity to process effectively game-generated stimuli***, in relation to the situation, speed, distance, etc., not only of teammates as but also of the opponent. ***The coordination of fine and segmental movements*** is yet another decisive factor, which can influence the capacity of control of corporal rate, the capacity of detecting changes deriving from different situations, the capacity of skills and manual agility. It will be necessary, therefore, to develop all coordination possibilities extensively. ***The factors deriving from the player himself*** (age, sex, disposition for the learning, etc.), and ***the factors deriving from the used didactics*** (technical of education, strategy methods, etc.), also constitute different factors with an equally determining influence, and that the professor will have to handle with great ability. Actually, any of these factors has a treatment in constant interaction with the others, and must be understood as a flexible form.

The variables that arise from passing learning, and with it the opening of the fast break, demand a methodological treatment, based on the interaction of all of them. The development is based on two sequential phases: in the first, a perceptive substrate must be pursued in order to achieve a good relation of the sensations with the different specific stimuli (ball, distance of teammates, difficulty that opposes the adversaries, etc.) - *learn to observe!* In the second one the goalkeeper works with the execution variables of the different movements - *learn to make*, although it is very difficult to develop one without the other, because the motor activity does not have sealed compartments.

The individual tactics of passing demand constant planning, and from the first moment, selection options, that is to say, diverse alternatives as the solution to opened motor problems. This variability,

without logical performance in the context of the individual and collective game, lacks meaning and it does not have any validity.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF VARIABLES OF INITIAL PASSES OF FASTBREAK THROUGH PHASES OF THE MOVEMENT: VALUATION OF ITS COMPLEXITY.

Although the pass actually represents an inseparable motor unit, from a didactic perspective, it is necessary to analyze the motor action dividing it into different phases. This division of the action is what allows us to learn about the movements in greater depth and to act educative on them with greater rigor. At the same time, it is what allows us to establish the variables that suggest a generic progression from minor to greater difficulty.

The objectives of the intervention are the following:

1. **To communicate with the teammates:** Giving an accurate assist or a goal pass to a teammate (1 against the opposing goalkeeper) or to make progress, advance forward with the ball.
2. **To achieve goal:** Shooting directly at the opposite goal after observing that the opposing goalkeeper has abandoned his goal area.
3. **To put the ball in game:** Derivative of different serves -goal, band, free throw through invading the area of the opponent, in which both previous objectives are united.

From these objectives, we divided the motor conduct in a linking of actions that we can separate in four phases, which united form the totality of the movement, and that from a learning point of view require that the coach and the goalkeeper act on each one of them at different levels of complexity. These phases are as follows:

- a) **Previous phase to the specific movement:** determined by the action or movements to recover the ball and to initiate the pass later.
- b) **Preparatory phase:** corresponds to the segmental or global preparatory movements for the later execution of a pass.
- c) **Phase of execution itself.**
- d) **Phase of later movements:** in a global context of the individual and collective performance in the game, are inseparable from the correct fast break opening.

A theoretical practical evaluation of this structure and its complexity has been made through our own experience and knowledge, and a reflection on the question. This scale goes from minimum to maximum difficulty, taking in account also the media and the great one. We made the valuation of this complexity in an orientate form, because in some cases it is difficult to identify these levels clearly, once the practical situations occur in the form of combinations (perceptive, decisional and executive), which in some cases increases the difficulty and decreases it in others. Each one of the phases is divided in the corresponding sub factors, and these, as well, have manifold possibilities of practical manifestation. For example, in the sub factor of opposition, we see that the actual proximity of the opponent (near, far, or no opposition) can alters the behavior and constitutes the mini level of complexity, where logically we must begin the learning. Another sub factor is the corporal position at the moment of the pass: i.e.: seated, standing up, kneeled, fallen down, on "four legs", on "leg takes", etc. The greater difficulty will be based, actually, in the interaction of the different levels of complexity of the different sub factors that are included in the four phases, a fundamental aspect in learning. In any case, the sample tries to give an idea of the performance of the professor, but the student himself is the one to decide the establishment of a superior or inferior degree of complexity in one sub factor or another, with the greater or smaller capacity of assimilation of a task.

In Table 3 we will observe how some sub factors of the second phase can be repeated in third. In any case, all the phases are correlated, although for methodological treatment purposes, some of these phases should be practiced separately.

Additionally to these three phases in the participation of the goalkeeper another one needs to be added, namely once he has made the pass (table 4), and based on the opponent, the success or failure of his previously executed action, the distance of the ball, etc. The goalkeeper must immediately chain his activity in order to continue the game. It is very important to take this last phase into account and to develop it. A fundamental principle of the game in attack is that it is not possible to perceive the pass as a separated link from the rest of the game or from other tactical and technical elements, which assume a necessity to make constant links to the continuity of the game demands.

#### A. PREVIOUS PHASE.

SUB FACTORS	PRACTICAL MANIFESTATIONS	COMPLEXITY DEGREE
* Level of control of the ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ball controlled with both hands.</li> <li>Semicontrolled ball.</li> <li>Ball noncontrolled.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low.</li> <li>Medium.</li> <li>High.</li> </ul>
* Place of recovery and control of the ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In front of the body.</li> <li>Towards outside the goal area.</li> <li>Towards the sides of the goal area.</li> <li>Within goal.</li> <li>Behind goal (network of behind)</li> <li>On the brink of the goal area (attacking fault outside area)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low.</li> <li>Average.</li> <li>Discharge.</li> <li>Lower middle.</li> <li>Maxima.</li> <li>Discharge.</li> </ul>

Table 1. Analysis of forms of manifestation of the intervention of the goalkeeper and level of complexity in the previous phase.

Development and improvement of a goalkeeper's skills are an on-going activity and a non-stop work, which begin in the young age and will not finish until the conclusion of the sport life of the goalkeeper. It is also necessary to add that this task is not the only one that the goalkeeper needs, and the learning of these activities must occur in interrelation with other contents of his game. This is also the reason why the difficulty of assimilation and consolidation of the learning will consequently increase.

#### B. PREPARATORY PHASE.

SUB FACTORS	PRACTICAL MANIFESTATIONS	COMPLEXITY DEGREE
*Body orientation of the passer with respect to the potential receiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frontal.</li> <li>Diagonal.</li> <li>Lateral.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low.</li> <li>Media.</li> <li>Great.</li> </ul>
* Distance of the possible receiver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minim (between or and 1.5 ms).</li> <li>Short (up to 5 ms).</li> <li>Media (from 5 to 15 ms).</li> <li>High (more than 15 ms).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low.</li> <li>Media.</li> <li>Great.</li> <li>Maximum.</li> </ul>
* Speed required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slow.</li> <li>Fast.</li> <li>Accelerated.</li> <li>Decelerated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low-Media.</li> <li>Great.</li> <li>Maximum.</li> <li>Low-Media.</li> </ul>
* Direction of the pass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Towards ahead.</li> <li>Towards the side dominant arm.</li> <li>Towards the side opposed to the dominant one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low.</li> <li>Media.</li> <li>Great.</li> </ul>
* Positioning of the armed with the ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classic with one hand.</li> <li>With 2 hands from the chest.</li> <li>From the hip with one hand.</li> <li>Another armed forms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great.</li> <li>Low.</li> <li>Maximum (it depends on the side).</li> <li>Maximum</li> </ul>
* Previous dynamism of the body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Static.</li> <li>Dynamic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baja.</li> <li>Media-grande (depende de velocidad)</li> </ul>
* Near and direct opposition against the passer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Next and close opposition.</li> <li>Near opposition.</li> <li>Distant opposition.</li> <li>Without any opposition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Máxima.</li> <li>Grande.</li> <li>Media.</li> <li>Baja.</li> </ul>
* Corporal position when passing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seated.</li> <li>Laying prone or supine.</li> <li>Made kneel.</li> <li>Standing up with two supports.</li> <li>To "leg it takes".</li> <li>In "four legs position"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Of the many forms in which it is executed we expose some, and the difficulty will basically depend on the amplitude of the base of sustentation and the facility to mobilize a greater number of</li> </ul>

Table 2. Analysis of forms of manifestation of the intervention of the goalkeeper and level of complexity in the preparatory phase.

**C. EXECUTION PHASE.**

SUB FACTORS	PRACTICAL MANIFESTATIONS	COMPLEXITY DEGREE
* Initial direction of the pin with respect to the receiver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frontal.</li> <li>• Diagonal.</li> <li>• Lateral.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Great.</li> </ul>
* Faying surface or adaptation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With no dominant hand.</li> <li>• With dominant hand.</li> <li>• With both hands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Low.</li> </ul>
* Number of supports in the ground.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two (both feet).</li> <li>• One (one foot).</li> <li>• None (on the air).</li> <li>• Three or more supports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Great.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> </ul>
* Direction of the pass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perpendicular.</li> <li>• Oblicua.</li> <li>• Curvilínea en el plano sagital.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media-baja.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Grande.</li> </ul>
* Number of possible simultaneous receivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One.</li> <li>• Two.</li> <li>• Several.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> </ul>
* Trajectories of the receivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniforms.</li> <li>• With modifications of direction during the route</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• High.</li> </ul>
* Speed of the pass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow.</li> <li>• Fast.</li> <li>• Explosive.</li> <li>• Accelerated.</li> <li>• Decelerated</li> <li>• Combined.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> <li>• Great.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> </ul>
* Opposition of the defenders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of opponents.</li> <li>• Relation between teammates-adversaries (equality, inferiority, superiority).</li> <li>• Proximity or distance.</li> <li>• Intensity or quality of intervention (passive, active, semi-active, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More number, more complex.</li> <li>• The inferiority implies greater complexity.</li> <li>• The proximity of opponents, greater complexity.</li> <li>• More intensity implies greater complexity.</li> </ul>
* Opposition of the opposing goalkeeper.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always at the goal area.</li> <li>• Leaving the goal area.</li> <li>• Variable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• High</li> </ul>
* Relation with initial armed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not to vary armed in execution.</li> <li>• To vary armed initial simple.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Great.</li> </ul>

Table 3. Analysis of forms of manifestation of the intervention of the goalkeeper and level of complexity in the executive phase

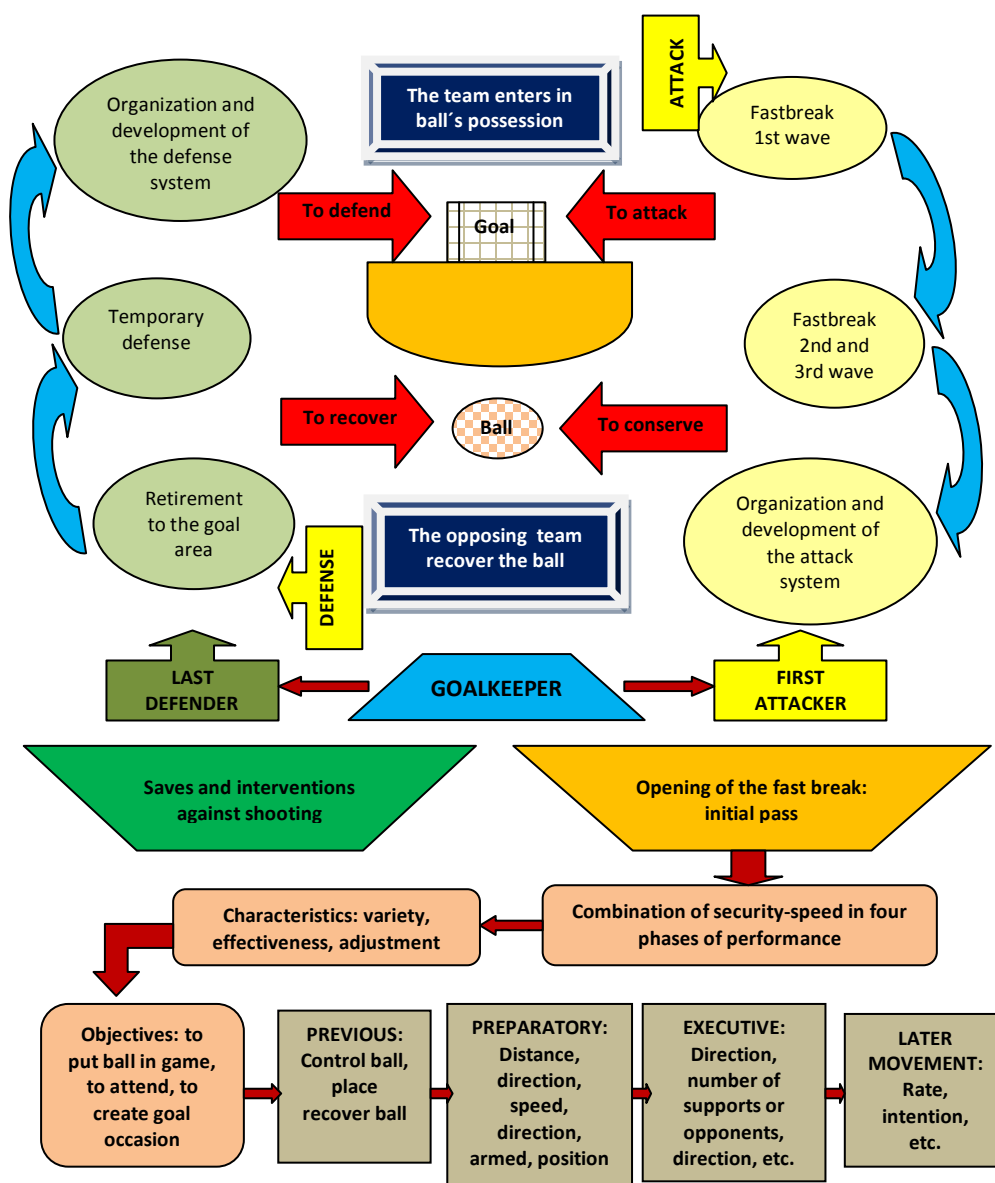
**D. PHASE OF LATER MOVEMENTS.**

SUB FACTORS	PRACTICAL MANIFESTATIONS	COMPLEXITY DEGREE
* Direction of the later movement..	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Without variation.</li> <li>• Simple variation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media-great.</li> </ul>
* Rate of the later movement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniform.</li> <li>• Varied simple or multiple.</li> <li>• Associated to changes of direction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low.</li> <li>• Media-great.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> </ul>
* Intentions and consequences of the later movement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupation of free space leaving the area.</li> <li>• To constitute himself in simple support., being unmarked and distanced the opponents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media depending of the distance.</li> <li>• Media.</li> </ul>
* Give and...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• .....go.</li> <li>• .....go and... return back.</li> <li>• .....stay quite.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media.</li> <li>• Maximum.</li> <li>• Low.</li> </ul>

**Table 4.** Analysis of forms of manifestation of the intervention of the goalkeeper and level of complexity in the phase of later movements.

Through the analysis of the complexity of all the variables exposed in tables 1-2-3-4, any coach with even a minimum experience can immediately understand the variety of exercises that can be extracted in multiple combinations. Evidently, the truly important thing will not be the applied exercises, but the adjustment at the level of evolution of the different goalkeepers in their process of learning.

We finally provide a schematic representation in Figure 1. It attempts to provide a global vision of the union of these different phases and to facilitate the understanding of the treatment of the learning process of the goalkeeper's activity as the first attacker and fundamental protagonist of the opening of the fast break.



**Figure 1.** General schematic vision of the goalkeeper's training process opening the fast break.

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