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RETURN PASSES IN HANDBALL

INTRODUCTION

The term 'return pass' refers to the passing back of the ball to the team-mate from whom the ball was received. Return passes were regarded as an important tactical action in offence against a zone defence already decades ago. The ball can be passed between back players (e.g. LB – CB – LB), between back players and wings (e.g. LW – LB – LW) and between back players and the pivot (e.g. CB – PI – CB). Development of the game of handball has brought about several variants of return passes and different ways of executing them. Hence, in modern elite handball one can see a great diversity of the types and ways of the execution of return passes by offensive players. Through the use of return passes they take defenders by surprise and turn to their advantage flaws in the action of an individual player or in the concerted action of the team. The creative use of return passes renders the offence less predictable and thus more effective, as the defenders' capacity to anticipate the course of the offence is limited. The players frequently change the direction of their movement after passing the ball or prior to receiving a pass.

The movement of both players taking part in a return pass must be co-ordinated and tactically correct. Following a pass, the passer can move closer to the receiver or move further away from them. The same applies to the receiver – they can move in the direction of the passed ball or in the opposite direction. They can also penetrate in depth, towards the goal-area line. The ability to rapidly change the direction of movement (i.e. agility) is very important, along with the tactical adjustment of an offensive player's movement in line with the positioning and movement of defenders. Short sprints with efficient acceleration and deceleration actions represent the basis of correctly executed return passes.

RETURN PASSES BETWEEN BACK PLAYERS

In a handball game return passes are most often made by back players who are also those making the highest number of passes. In the rest of this paper, some of the most frequently used return passes exchanged between these players are presented. The return pass on the left side of the court (between LB and CB) is typically presented; however, the action can also take place on the other side of the court (between RB and CB).

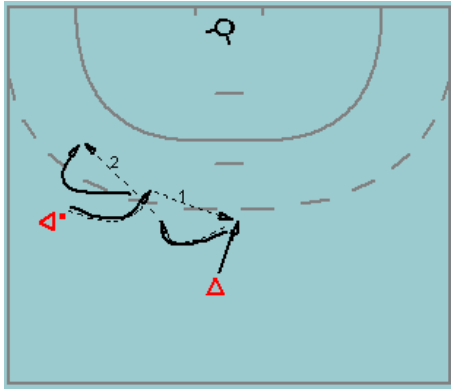


Figure 1: The first figure shows a return pass between LB and CB. LB takes a running start towards the goal and the middle of the court and passes the ball to CB who can first move to the right. Then CB changes direction and takes a running start towards LB. Immediately after the pass, LB changes direction and runs in a curve to a wide position where they receive the ball and continue penetrating.

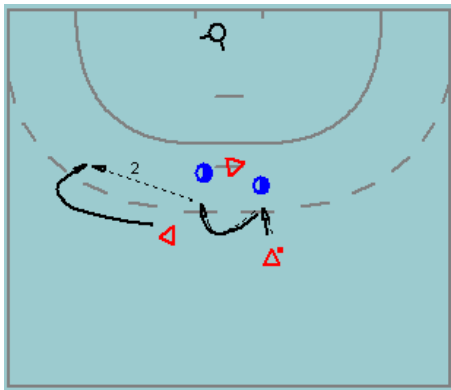
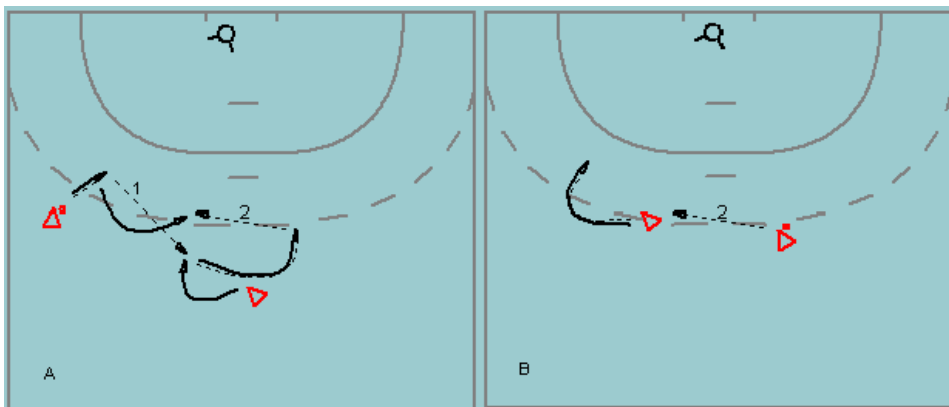
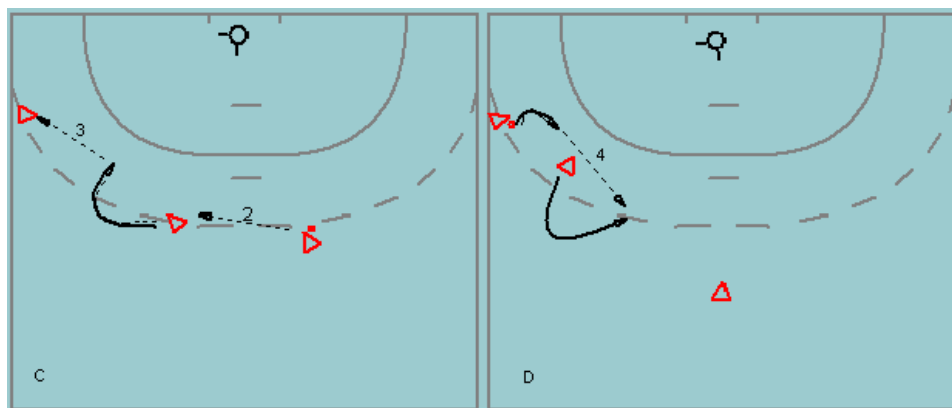


Figure 2: This figure shows a variant of the return pass that was described in the first example. To facilitate understanding, the situation in a game with a 6:0 zone defence is presented. After receiving the ball, CB takes a running start towards the center left defender and either fakes a penetration or a pass to the Pivot. Then immediately change his direction by moving to the left and penetrate via a single bounce of the ball. Then he makes a return pass towards LB who has opened up in a wide position. CB can make a fake pass to Pivot while penetrating towards the left.

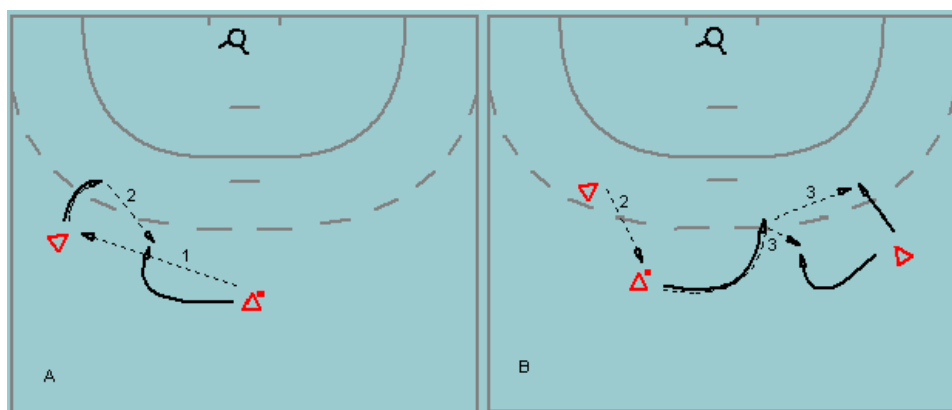


Figures 3 A and B: A return pass between LB and CB is also presented in the two figures above. However, the tactical purpose of this pass is completely different and so is the technical execution. LB, who is in control of the ball, takes a running start straight forward and passes the ball to CB who is approaching (by moving to the left). Following receipt of the ball, CB takes a running start to their right and towards the goal. After passing the ball, LB waits for a moment and then runs in a curve

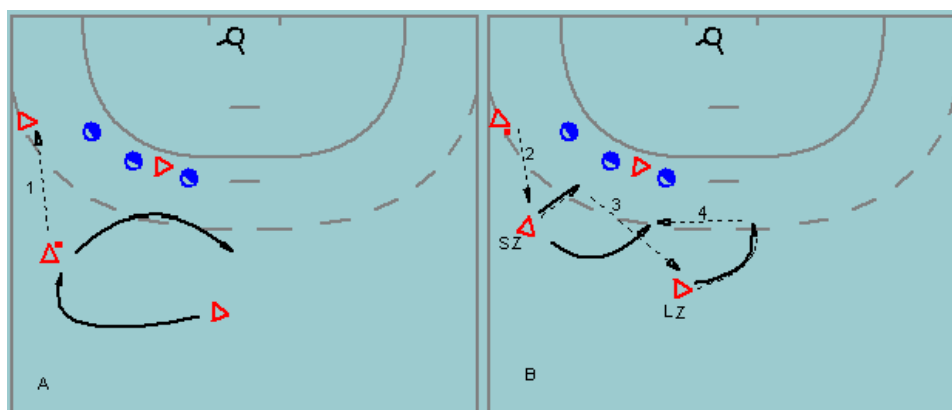
towards the middle of the court. CB makes a return pass to LB, which can either be a jump pass or made with both feet on the ground (Figure 3 A). Figure 3 B shows the optional action of LB who, immediately after receiving the pass, cuts outwards (towards the out) and thus widens their tactical action.



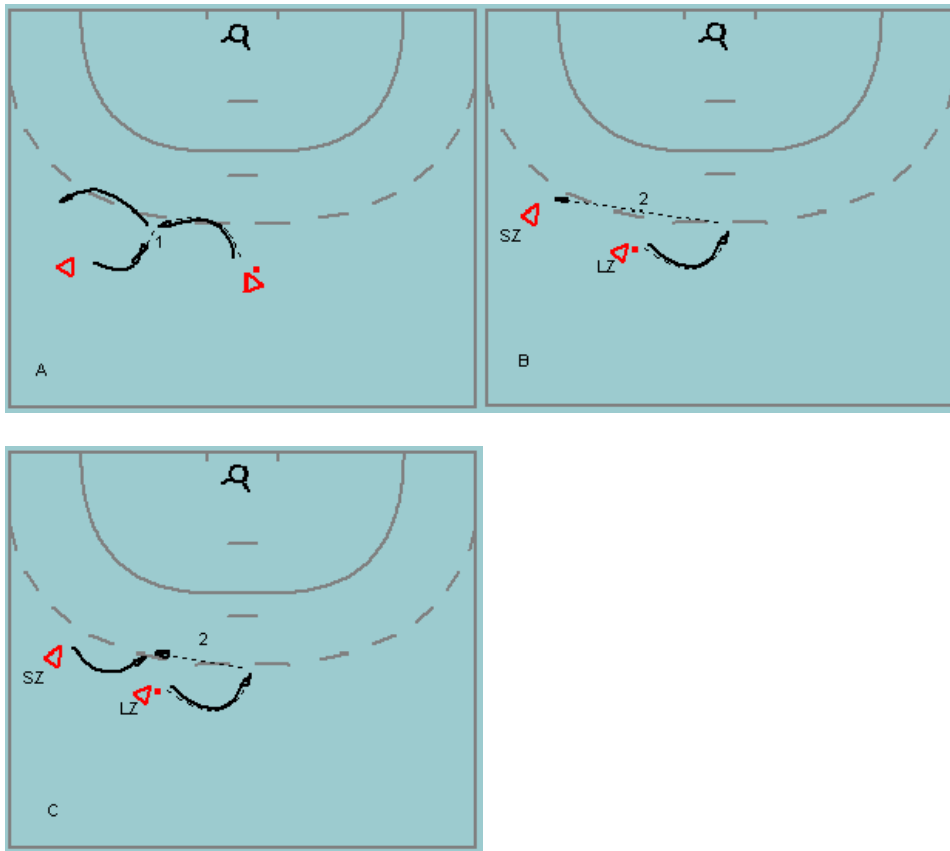
Figures 3 C and D: The above figures show a version of the continuation of the action described earlier. After cutting outwards, LB plays the ball to LW and instantly moves in a curve towards the middle of the court to receive a return pass from LW.



Figures 4 A and B: A return pass between CB and LB. CB passes the ball to LB from a short run and waits for a moment. Immediately after receiving the pass, LB takes a long running start and makes a return pass to CB who is moving in a curve to the left (Figure 4 A). Figure 4 B shows a version of the continuation of CB's action, as CB cuts towards the right to pass to RB to continue crossing or take a wide running start.



Figures 5 A and B: A return pass between LB and CB after they interchange their positions (the filling and emptying of playing positions between LB and CB). LB passes the ball to LW and interchanges their position with CB who, immediately after receiving the ball from LW, takes a short run straight ahead while keeping a wide position. The action continues as shown in Figures 3 A and B.



Figures 6 A, B and C: As shown by the example described above, the players can execute all types of return passes after a variety of combinations which, in such cases, represent the starting position for a return pass. The above figures show a return pass between LB and CB after a crossing. After crossing with LB, CB immediately widens their position (Figure 6 A). LB, who is in possession of the ball, takes a running start towards the goal and makes a return pass to CB (Figure 6 B). The latter can continue in different ways. Figure 6 C shows a variant including a return pass whereby CB runs towards the middle of the court to receive the ball instead of keeping a wide position.

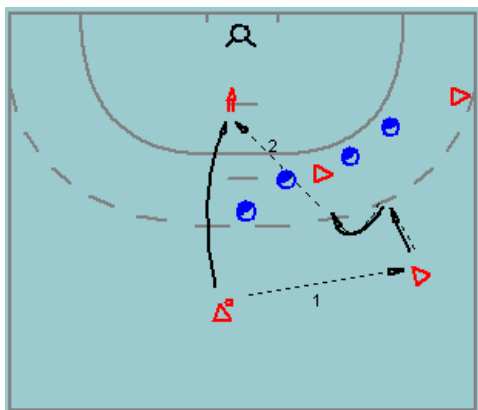


Figure 7: The above examples mainly describe passes made transversally. This example shows a return pass that is made longitudinally. CB plays the ball to RB and waits for a moment. RB takes a running start towards the goal (widening their position at first, but then moving towards the middle)

and passes the ball above the goal area to CB who runs behind the defenders towards the goal-area line, where they take a running leap above the goal area and shoot.

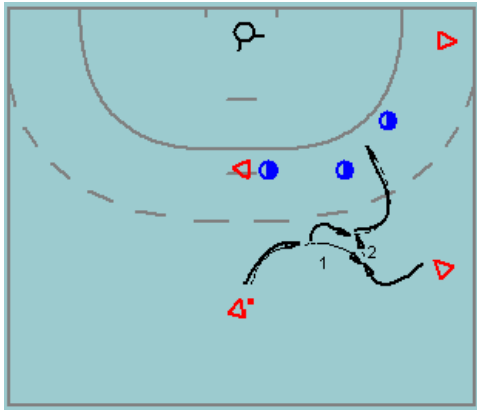


Figure 8: This is an interesting return pass made by CB and RB. CB moves towards RB and plays the ball to them, similarly as in the crossing action. Their intention is to deceive the defenders. RB drives the ball towards CB through a swift and short pass and CB continues by penetrating towards the direction of the out. If the return pass is appropriately co-ordinated and paced, CB can assume a good starting position for a wide penetration and for engaging with the wing ('over counting').

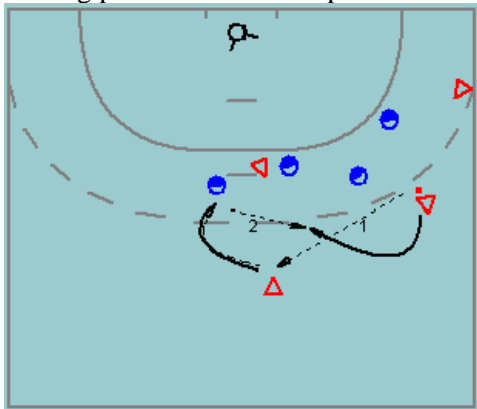


Figure 9: A return pass between CB and RB can differ slightly from that between CB and LB. This is important because of CB's playing arm which is usually the right arm. After the running start towards the center right defender, CB has to adjust the position of his body (usually by making a jump pass) and pass with hindrance. Thus, RB can use his movement to prevent the left half from intercepting the pass. This situation is typical of an offence against a 6:0 zone defence.

RETURN PASSES BETWEEN THE BACK PLAYER AND WING OR PIVOT

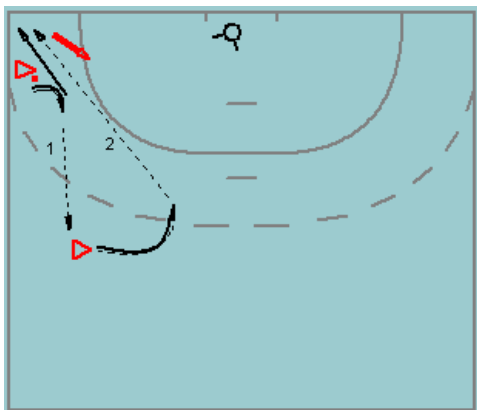


Figure 10: This figure shows an example of a classical return pass from a jump between LB and LW. LW takes a running start and plays the ball to LB who receives it while moving towards the middle of the court. Immediately after passing the ball, LW moves to the corner of the court (assuming an extremely wide position). After receiving the ball, LB continues moving towards the middle and fakes a jump shot at the goal. Instead of shooting, he passes the ball to LW. When doing this, he bends sideways so as to improve his control of the pass. The back players can use this type of pass in situations when PI is positioned between the back defender and half defender on the side of the court where the pass was made and also in situations where PI is positioned on the opposite side of the court.

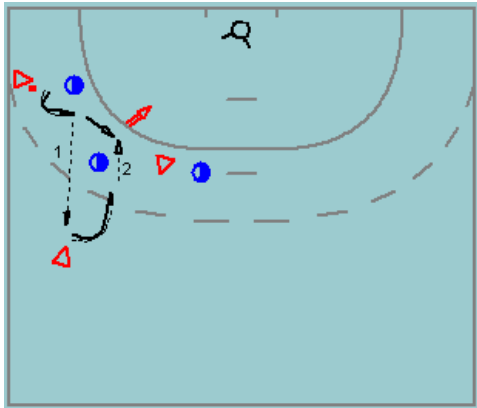


Figure 11: A return pass between the wing and back player can have a completely different tactical purpose than that described above. In the above example, the wing takes a running start and tries to get past the back defender. During this action they play the ball to LB who takes a running start towards the middle of the court, trying to attract the half player. The wing waits for a moment after the pass and then immediately runs behind the half player, in co-ordination with LB. LB tries to make a pass, while the action can be additionally supported by PI who blocks the defenders (in this example they block CH in a 5:1 zone defence).

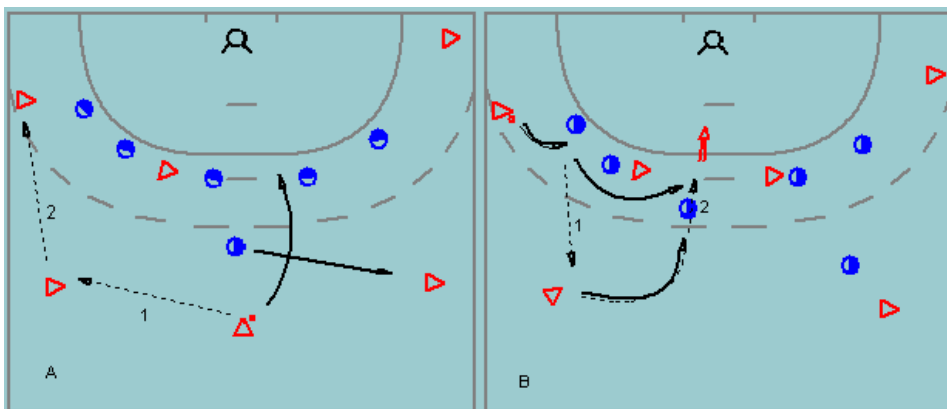


Figure 12: A return pass can be made by a back player and wing in the offence against a 5:1 zone defence – following the transition to the second pivot (PI2). The figure shows one of the variants. In the 5:1 zone defence, CF starts screening RB. CB plays the ball to LB and runs to the goal-area line. LB passes to LW who takes a running start and makes a return pass to LB. LB takes a running start towards the middle, and LW – at the time CH moves from their position to approach LB – runs past the blocked right half behind CH. LB tries to pass the ball to him.

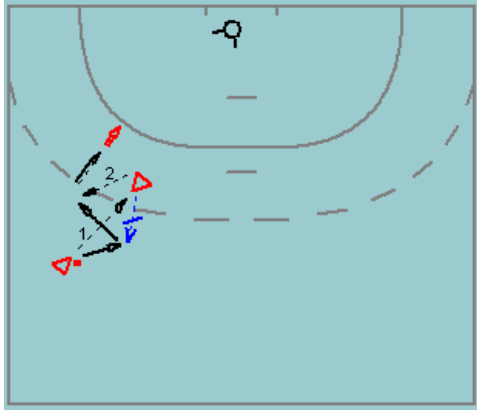


Figure 13: Return passes can also be made by back players and PI. The figure shows an example of a double pass between LB and PI. LB passes the ball to PI who opens up towards the depth of the playing field. Immediately after passing the ball, LB runs towards the middle and turns outwards abruptly. PI first makes a fake pass and only then passes the ball to LB who is in a wide position. LB penetrates and takes a shot.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning, it is recommended that the instruction and practice of the above activities take place in small groups (preferably in pairs), without any defenders or extra activities. Before starting to execute return passes, players can exchange passes at a larger distance from the goal and only then proceed to the preferred type of return pass. As a rule, this action is completed with a shot at the goal. When the players are highly familiar with the different variants of return passes, the execution can be rendered more difficult by adding extra activities – e.g. after the shot the players run to a fast break and make another return pass on the other side of the court so as to prolong the fast break. Later, more players can join in to participate in the continuation of the action following a return pass, and defenders can be introduced. This situational practice puts the player in a position where they must choose the appropriate type of return pass, execute it correctly and pursue with the most suitable action.

Return passes are also an important tactical element of offence in some other sport games. They are very common in football where players use return both transversal and longitudinal passes to break the defence. In our opinion, the use of return passes should also become more frequent in handball. This could be achieved, among other things, by presenting the tactical advantages of return passes to younger age categories. The return pass basics can be taught to the youngest categories of players as soon as they have mastered the technique of moving within the court, passing and receiving the ball as well as shooting at the goal.