

The counter attack structured an advantage for a Small Nation

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Summary

This paper presents the development of counterattack and plays in a small country's game: Luxembourg. In the introduction, I list elements that contribute to the improvement of the fast break. The second section describes the policy and the respective methods used by the federation, the fundamental formation to reach a high level. The third section is dedicated to the actual development of fast break and its illustration. The fourth section reports the results of Luxembourgish Men teams regarding fast break, in a European context. In the last section, I propose a number of practical exercises in order to train fast break.

Keywords

Fast break, scaling, width.

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Glossary

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I. Introduction

In 2000/2001 the Luxembourg suffered from a lack of size in particular on the back base and our biggest opponents defended frequently in 6-0 and it was difficult to play for us. That's why we had to invest heavily in other areas: high recuperative defences (4-2 and 3-3) and the fast break.

Our purpose here is not to treat the fast break which is often a direct pass from the place of recovery of the ball to a player who took the defensive withdrawal speed, but to decry the fast break that can be implemented by the players who decided to play a game on the ground while collective and organized.

This organization is living the ball through the defensive withdrawal (early or late) in continuity. It should give to the team in possession of the ball to play approaching the area and seek solutions to score as long as the defence is not installed.

The factors that have contributed to the needs of the fast break value in the game of the Luxembourg handball are the French training to coaches. The training data since the 70's always gave room to the playing of the fast break. It was a way to play all over the field and not just approach the goal. It was a way of training.

In addition, my coaching club experience. This phase of the game practiced by prepared players has always been used with happiness at different levels of competition.

Then in charge of the national team of Luxembourg, I continued to apply the principles of fast break but I had to adapt to a new population, which should learn quickly.

A document by the French federation on the analysis of women's world championship in Norway (1999) highlighted that the organized fast break was really practiced by only 3 of the 13 nations observed (1st, 2nd and 5th in the final).

According to the document of the French federation, we can see that the teams generally use fast break with low-risk; rapid field players who are skilful receive the ball from the goalkeeper. This is often a defined player who is responsible of starting quickly with sometimes a privileged relay.

For the fast break the point is surprising: Austria (3rd), Romania (4th), Denmark (6th), Macedonia (8th), the Netherlands (10th), Russia (12th), Ukraine (13th), Angola (15th), Côte d'Ivoire (20th) and Cuba (21th) have not offered any organized and structured fast break. Some nations do not play consistently (3 players change, team with old players...) and others favour the support player, but the vast majority of them don't seem to work this area. The only top worldwide women teams of 1999 proposing a rise in organized ball are Norway (1st), France (2nd) and Hungary (5th).

Eric Baradat (French national coach) shows that the 2009 World Women's final ranking is inversely proportional to the shots in 9m. Teams who defend and play the fast break effectively have less need to shoot at 9m conversely those that shoot more at 9 m and have more difficulties to win the match because they are exposed to have a lot of goals in fast break.

This analysis confirms a posteriori, 10 years after, my initial approach to invest in the succession defence/fast break and play on larger fields to create a time, space and organization stress at the opponents.

II. Method

1. Perspectives

Regarding these experiences and previous analyses, we wanted to quickly invest in this area to compete with the European nations located between the 17th and the 30th place in the ranking.

But be willing to play the fast break and to fight is not enough. Technical qualities and understanding of the game in the service of rational organization should allow us to be effective all over the field and approaching the goal.

Luxembourg players regularly show that they have acquired over the past decade a culture in this area. Play the fast break without excessive risks to allow a good attack. Dictate to the opponent, by this pressure, the rhythm of play to become a real skill.

In addition, combinations for amateur players being always problematic, it took streamline work and build around the same idea some identical phases games. That's why early engagement can be a weapon point especially against teams changing players. It will be the same structure as the fast break.

2. The fast break: apart of strategy of Luxembourg handball

2.1 The pyramid of performance

Luxembourg Handball Federation aims to develop handball in a small country, but also to improve its European ranking winning matches. Our federation has decided to participate in all international qualifications competitions knowing that victories are rare and difficult to obtain. Our policy is clear: just win the games against nations that have the same level than us with 1 goal of difference (or more) and not to lose them for 1 goal!

To do this, our approach could be read in the layers of a pyramid and to win we have to work these elements in a wanted time if we want to win.



Figure 1: Performance pyramid

2.2 Policy of the Luxembourg Federation of Handball

To develop this fast break in Luxembourg, he had to:

- Communicate with clubs through the publication of a collection of principles (philosophies 2001)
- Building federal architecture training ahead of ministerial training in order to increase existing supply (2002)
- Increase training (190 trained officers for 3000 licensed people and 17 clubs from 2001 to 2012)
- Require clubs to have qualified coaches (2004)
- Establish rules of the game for young people and create a discussion group on the set of U10 and U12
- Create a training centre for the U14, U20 to play in international youth level.

2.3 Fundamental training

Almost all executives who support the U10, U12, U14 received training either short (20 hours) or long (90 hours) time. During this training we work about the fundamental phase of the game over all the field.

Why play over all the field?

A child under 10 who plays over the entire field keeps an intact motivation. He runs, he throws the ball, he stops, he takes information, he catches the ball, he decides ... he's in activity.

He develops technical skills (running, changing of direction, varied throwing) and dissociation (he is able to take information when he plays).

It develops the qualities of perception of the game to invest spaces (time commitment, overflows) and to replace to be available.

He develops basic and natural qualities. Muscle building is done in the context of running, jumping, starting, stopping ... This physiological difficulty of successive duels, loss and conquest of the ball on the large areas will have an impact over the psychological behaviour of the child. Indeed has to develop his fight spirit.

All these parameters developed throughout the field have an influence on the game in attack and are necessary to reach the highest level.

This initial training (U10, U12) will enable these young people, in the higher categories (U14, U16), to be prepared for their first international trade with our close neighbours (Germany, France)

Then our training will be more demanding. When you are 14 years old you can easily play the fast break even if the reaction of the changing status between attack and defence is still slow. We also observe difficulties for the player who starts in first in having speed, also in the speed control of three plans and transition game in approaching the goal.

In light of these findings, we can emphasize:

- The concept of support and assistance
- The desire to advance the ball forward quickly without dribble.
- The realization of current passes
- The position of the ball (away from defender)
- The possibility of seeing the ball, partner, opponent
- The futility of prolonged dribble that is suitable for the opponents
- The markdowns after transmission
- The availability of non-ball carrier
- The response time of fast break and the timing of departures.

III. Development

1. The fast break

1.1 The fast break must be systematic: why?

- It is a good way to score easily
- It forces opponents to run which is exhausting
- It prevents or interferes with the opponent's defensive changes
- It operates the fragile sectors of the opponent defence
- It imposes a high rhythm for opponents who do not have the culture of running to defence
- It interferes with the organization of the defence that takes a few seconds to reorganize
- It should provide in a secured way, in particular through the defensive imbalance, solutions (using for example 2 line players)
- It always allows to the ball carrier to have supports.

1.2 Collective organization over the field through the fast break when the opposing team is reorganizing its defence after losing the ball.

Use the time where the opposing team is not organized in going on the ball. This organization, whose the risk taking is limited by a tactical balance, can succeed if we respect the following things:

- Knowledge of the roles and tasks (prioritization and timing of departures during the fast break over three plans with permutations)
- Be aware that the ball can be intercepted
- Consider the location where the ball is lost and the future offensive position
- Occupy the field in width and depth to have the central area as large as possible
- Play using quick, systematic and short passes forward in the lateral parts of the field
- Be available to receive the ball within occupied areas to make it go forward
- Search the defensive imbalance at any time by an outside fixation point going on the ball
- Operate the defensive imbalance approaching the opposing area by the quality of offensive replacement and the opponent sub-number to surprise them
- Willingness to succeed

1.3 Main faults observed

- No immediate recognition of its chronological position in the fast break
- Non-respect of the roles and tasks of each defender from the ball recovery (where, how, when?)
- The player's extraction is too slow due to the lack of physical capacities or by a bad perception
- No desire to go on the ball quickly forward without dribbling
- Distance insufficient therefore a lack of awareness information (vision of the game in its entirety)
- Slow assistance without moving
- Bad speed between the different lines, the support player goes too fast
- Prolonged and unnecessary dribble (especially in the first part of the field that facilitates the activities of defenders)
- The player doesn't go toward the ball to catch it
- To get caught by a defender
- Bad analysis of the favourable situation at maximum speed
- The maximum speed is cherished by the change of rhythm
- There is no continuation in actions (the player who gives the ball stops playing after it)
- Lack of support from partners
- Taking risks (advantage/inconvenient, difficult passes, play too fast...)
- Player's choice to stop the fast break due to the defensive pressure
- The tired player who seeks to slow down the fast break

2. ILLUSTRATIONS

2.1 If the fast break is in the same time than the withdrawal play

2.1.1. Occupation of the field

The occupation of the field is in width and depth; situation following a shot from the right wing and in the case of a high defence (5-1, 1-2-3). For convenience, the players have the same number: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, in defence, fast break and attack.

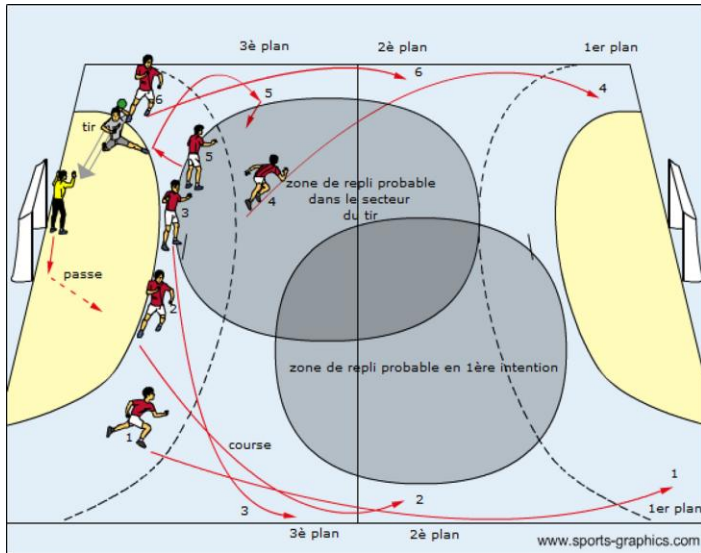


Figure 2: occupation of the field (1)

Particularity: to promote the start of the left back (5) in third left position, a tacit understanding between (5) and (6) may occur ; (6) can start in second position from the right wing shooting and (5) supports a possible recovery of the ball and will start in third position. This timeline allows the shooters to be in third position (left and right handed) but stays is not mandatory. (2) and (5) stay available for a ball recovery in the central area. (3) is on the opposite of (4). (4) runs at the lost ball side.

Figure 3: occupation of the field (2)

Back checking is often mad central zone (see black team). White team fast break has not enough scaling. A white player in the central zone tries to move aside.

2.1.2 Transfer of the ball forward to defeat quickly the withdrawal play

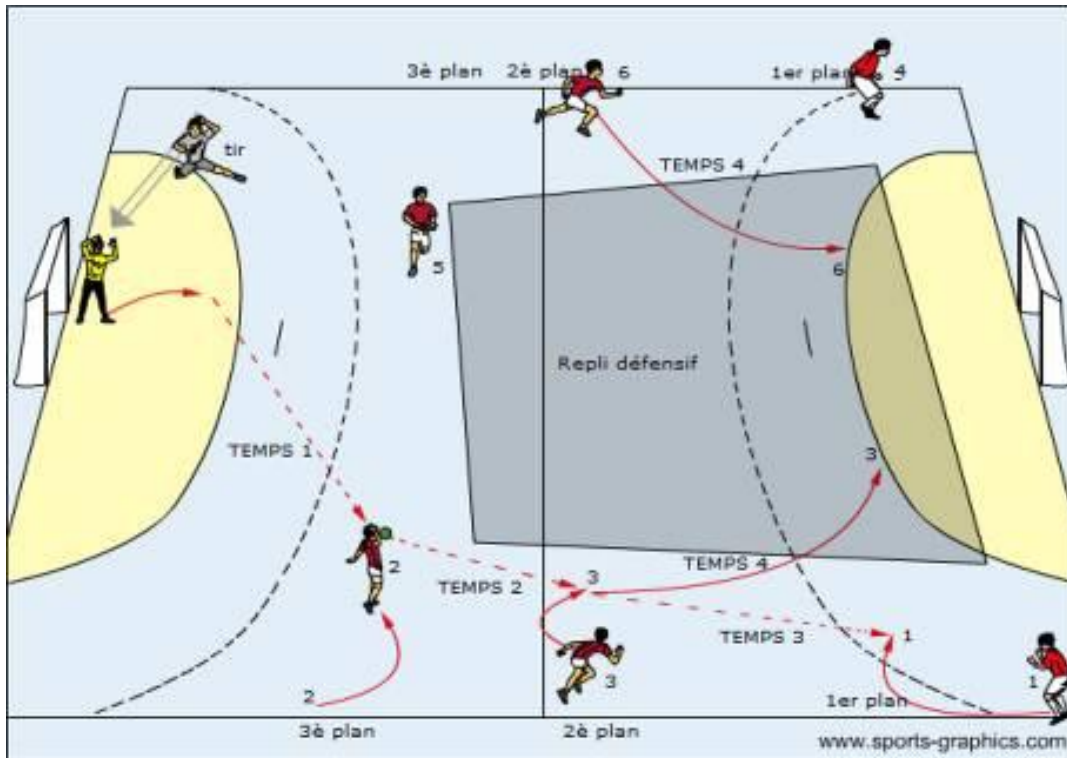


Figure 4: width and depth

The player in third position opposite of the shooting has to be available as soon as possible and give the ball to the player in 2nd position. If the central area is occupied by the withdrawal play, the player in 2nd position throws the ball to the player who is in first position in the wing and is going to play as a line player. On the opposite side the player in 2nd position does the same thing yet slightly later.

1.1.3 Chain in the end of the fast break (transitional play)

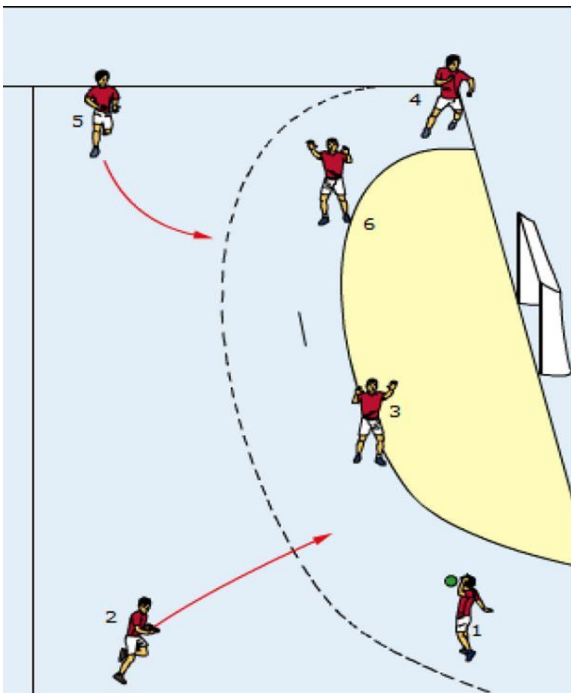


Figure 5: Main positions.

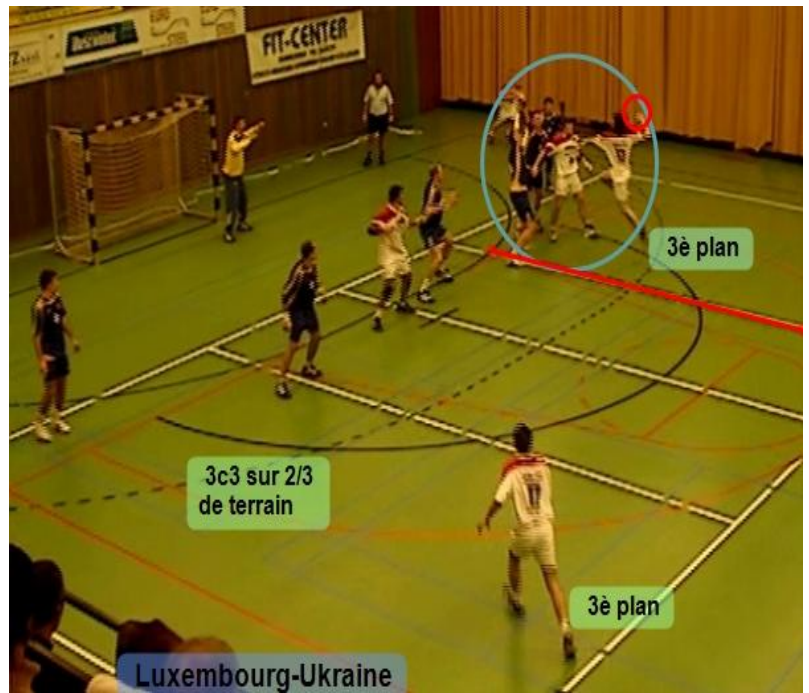


Figure 6: play 3 vs 3 on 2/3 of the field

The two line players (6) and (3) are inside the withdrawal play. The four main roles are occupied (1), (2) (5), (4). The ball on external support (1) is given in to the player in third position (2).

2.1.4 Transfer of the ball forward if the outside lane is not available

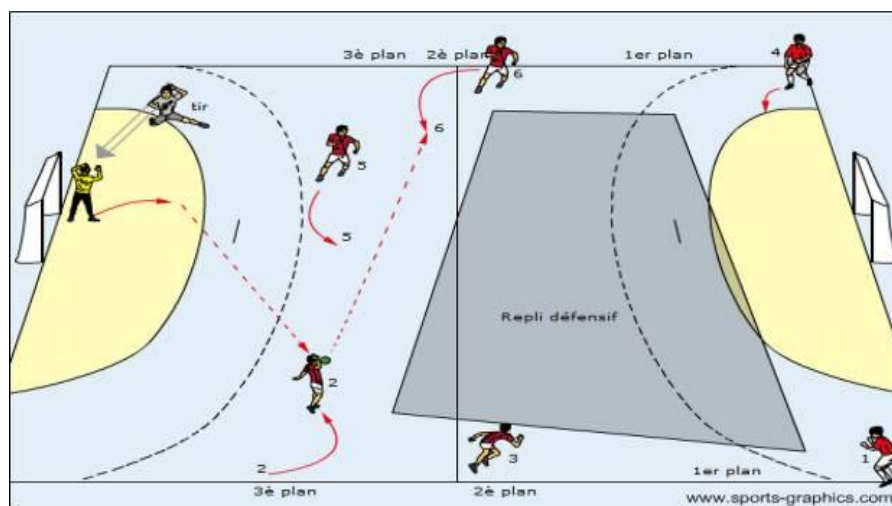


Figure 7: Play with the opposite side

In case where the withdrawal play discomforts transmissions in the outside lane so the ball holder tries to play at the opposite, even after a dribble. All with the idea of losing no time.

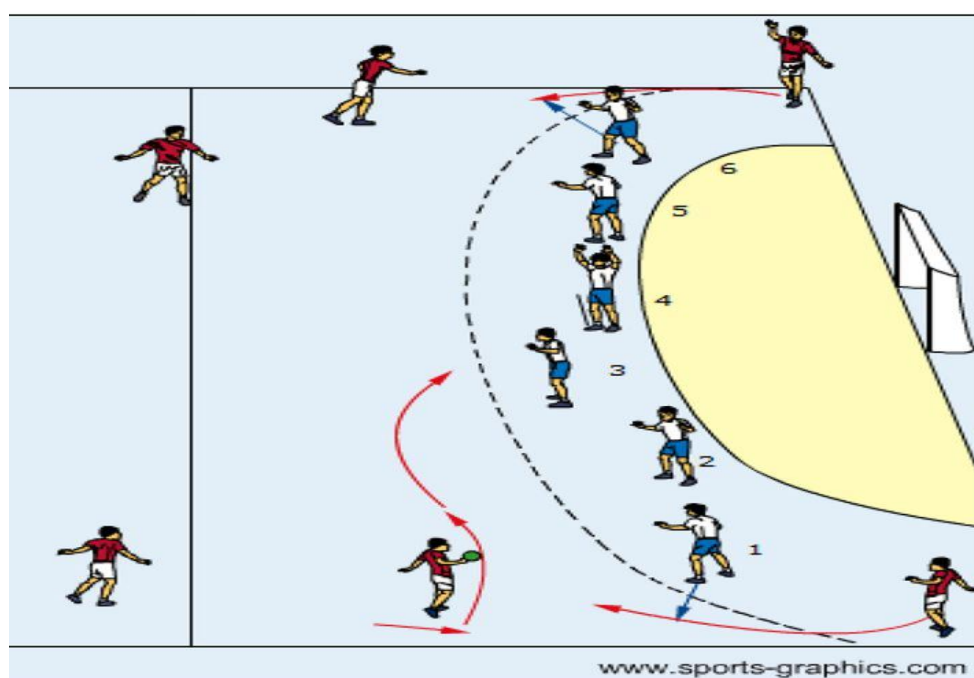


Figure 8: dissuasion on the 1st plans.

How is working

- Defenders (1) and (6) asked to deter on the fore ground to prevent the wingers from being fulcrums and to force the ball porter (2nd plan) to drive through the middle of the field.

2.1.5. Counter attack and plays

2.1.5.1 Defensive imbalance



Figure 9: open space 1

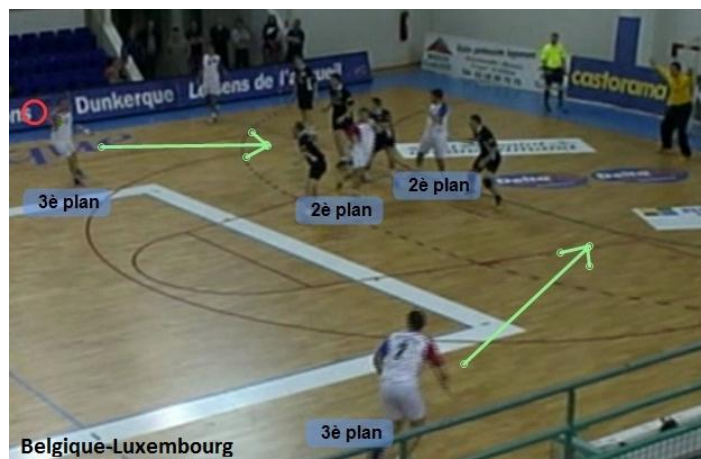


Figure 10: open space 2

2.1.5.2 Relation with the other third plan



Figure 11: the mirror playing



Figure 12: the back pass



Figure 13: Going toward the throw



Figure 14: Open space 3

2.1.5.3 Screen of the 2nd plan for the third plan



Figure 15: screen 1



Figure 16 : screen 2

2.1.5.4 Relations with the players inside



Figure 17: Post position of the pivot 1

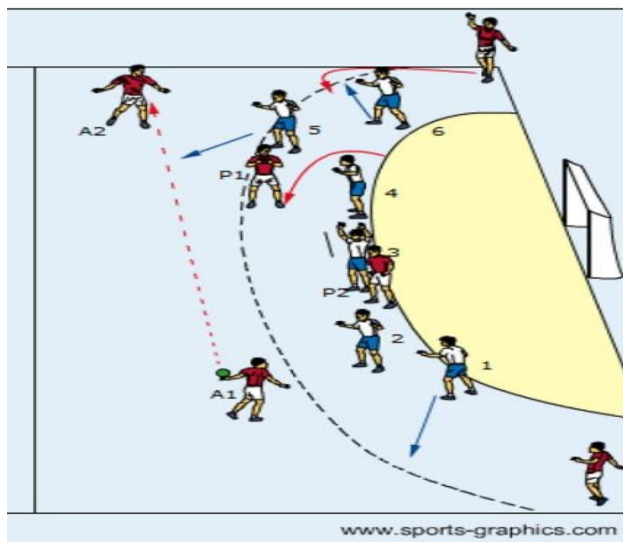


Figure 18: Post position of the pivot 2

The defender (5) perturbs the throw between number A1 and A2 attackers. The pass to the pivot P1 is possible

2.1.5.5 Play with the wing (back pass)

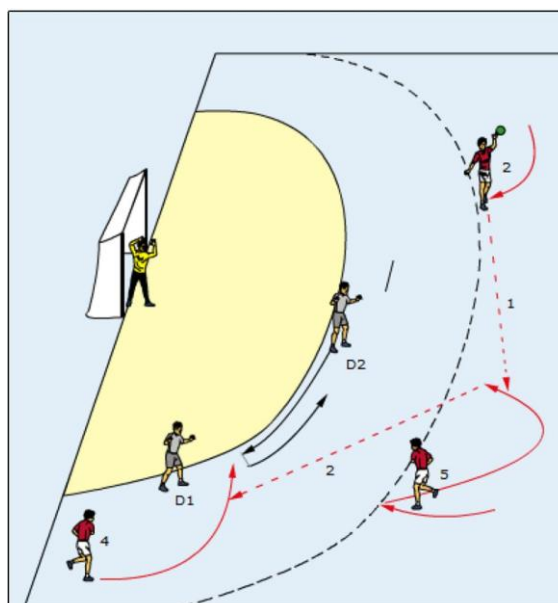
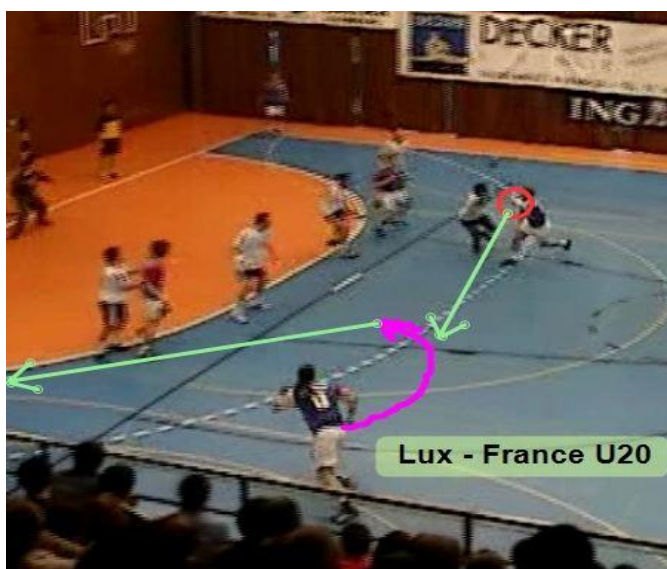


Figure 19: Attack profitable for the wings

Figure 20: Attack profitable for the wings (exercice)

2.2 If the fast break is slower than the withdrawal play

2.2.1 Occupation of the field. The situation is the result of a shot in the central area, which prohibits relationship with the players in 1st position.

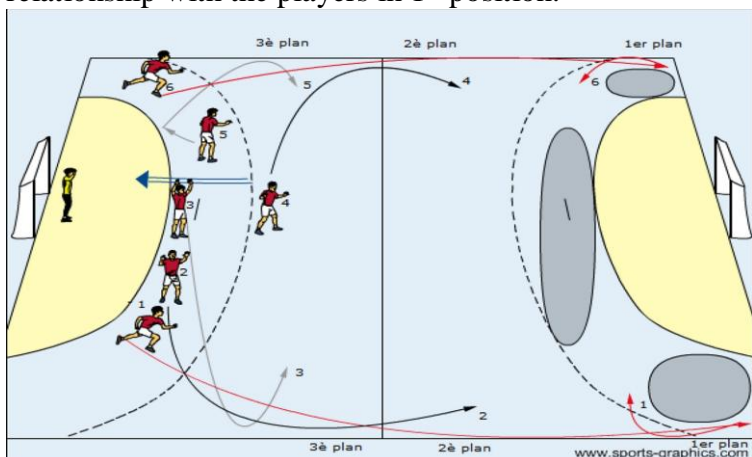


Figure 21: fast break make late

2.2.2 The ball holder uses the central area

The withdrawal play is already on its defensive zone. The first plans (1) and (6) are hampered by the comeback. The ball holder (2) must use the free central area. He can play with support and assistance.

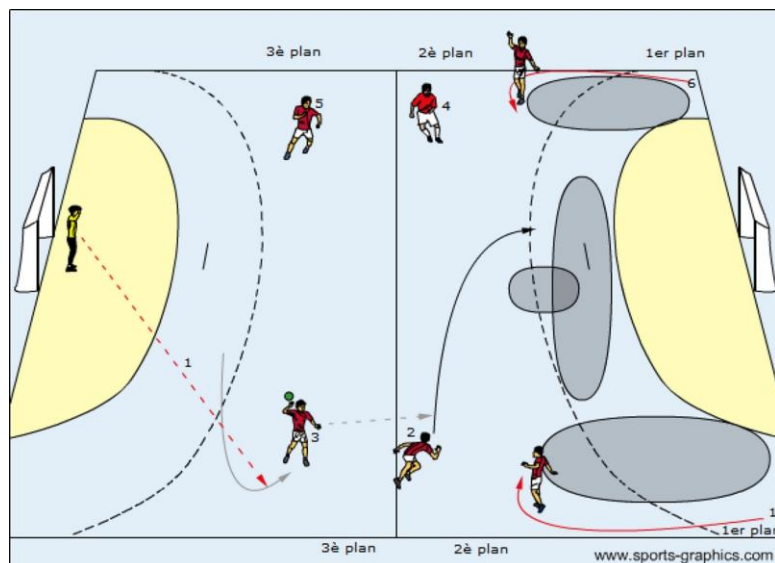


Figure 22: central area used by the 2nd plan (1)



Figure 23: central area used by the 2nd plans (2)

2.2.3 The end of the fast break (crossed play)

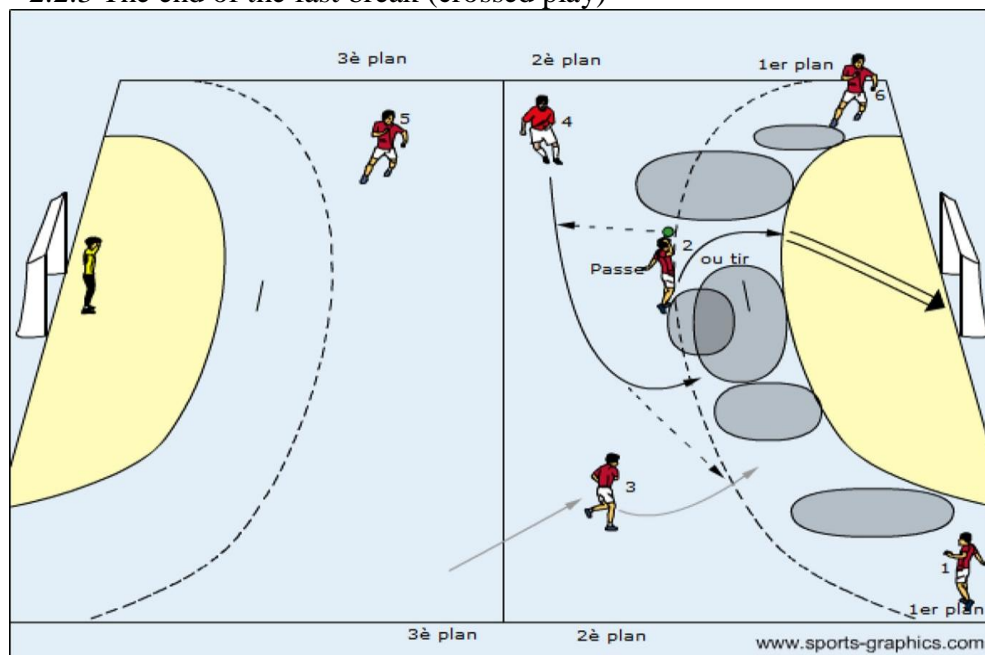


Figure 24: end of the fast break after crossed play

(2) dribbles toward the (4) area, looks for a solution toward the goal if not he gets in contact with his partners on the opposite side and cross with (4) who dribbles toward the goal or gives the ball to (3). (3) is on the 12-14 meters and wait to run in the ball. (2) and (4) play like pivot.

2.3 Types of operation from two different styles of defence

2.3.1 From a high defence (1-2-3 or 5-1).

The physiological state, the velocity, the skills of a position that will be the criteria to promote a particular position for the rise fast break and give specific tasks and roles to each player.

2.3.1.1 The ball is lost in the centre of the field

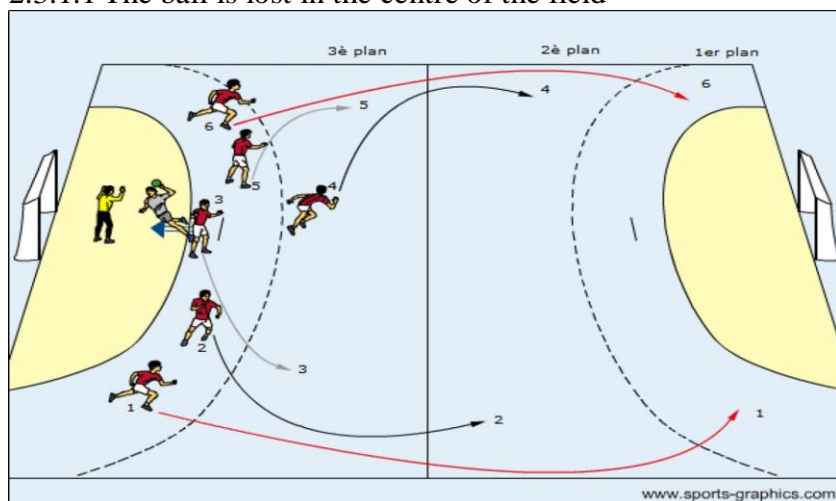


Figure 25 : fast break from high defence

2.3.1.2 The ball is lost in the wing

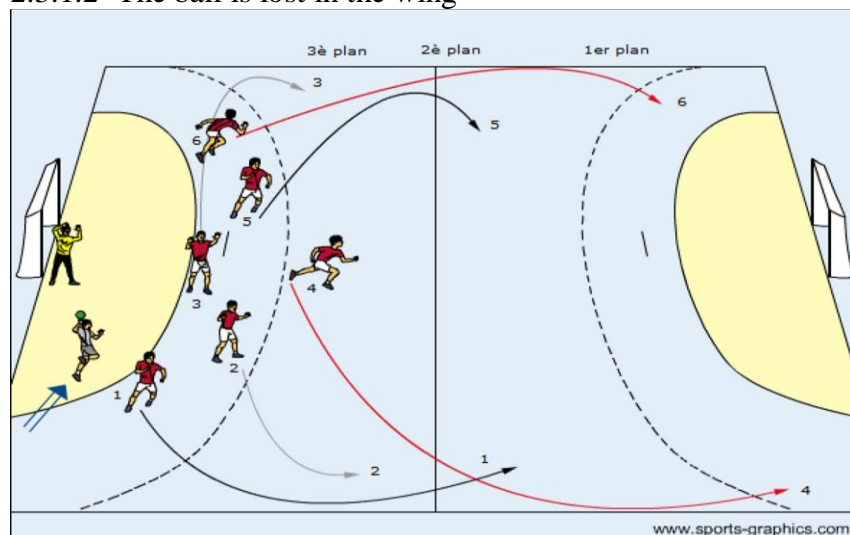


Figure 26 : fast break after high defence

If (2) can help (1) to recover the ball, therefore (1) could be in the 2nd position and (2) in the 3rd

2.3.2 From an aligned 6-0 defence

2.3.2.1 The ball is lost in the centre of the field

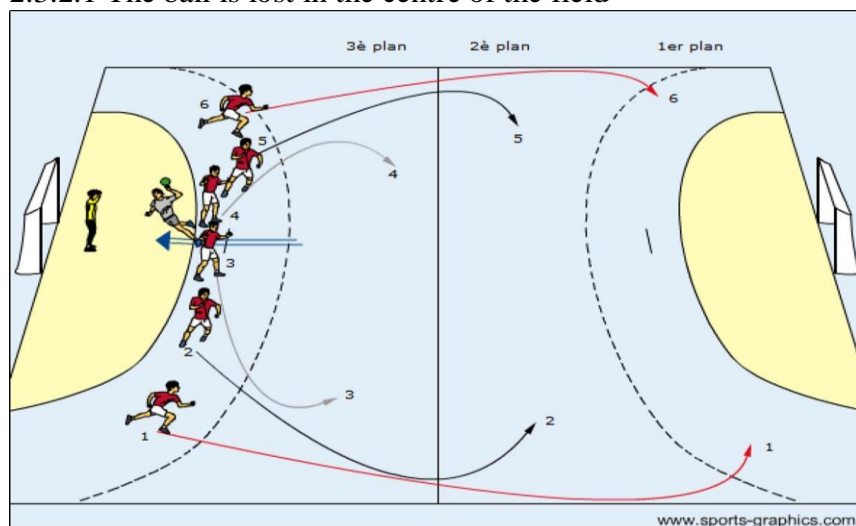


Figure 27: fast break from aligned defence

2.3.2.2 The ball is lost in the wing

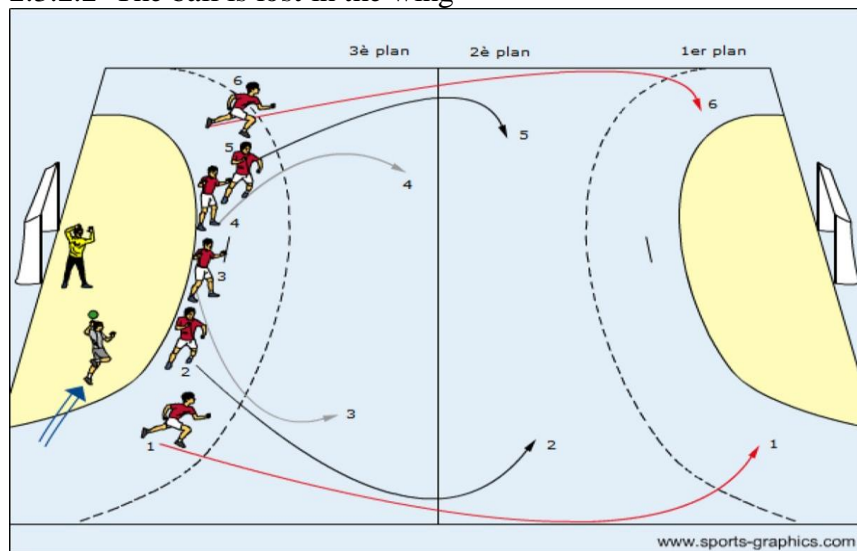


Figure 28: fast break from aligned defence

If (2) can help (1) to recover the ball therefore (1) could be in the 1st position and (2) in the 2nd

IV. Results

Results and analysis from 2001 to 2011 (17 matches of Luxembourgish team)

Counterattack Efficiency– Period 2001/2011 (-3 à +3)								
Matches	Dates	Results	Won	Lost	Fast Break (goal on shot)	Efficiency In fast break	Counter-attack + plays (goal on shot)	Efficiency Counter- attack + plays
Chypre-Lux	2001	24 – 23		- 1	1 on 2	50 %	0 on 1	0 %
Géorgie-Lux	2007	28 – 27		- 1	2 on 3	66 %	6 on 8	78 %
Lux-Belgique	2009	24 – 25		- 1	2 on 5	40 %	5 on 9	55 %
Lux-Belgique	2003	19 – 20		- 1	1 on 3	33 %	2 on 3	66 %
Lux-Belgique	2006	28 – 29		- 1	3 on 6	50 %	5 on 8	62 %
Lux-Israël	2007	25 – 26		- 1	2 on 5	40 %	4 on 7	57 %
Lettonie-Lux	2009	31 – 29		- 2	4 on 6	66 %	5 on 8	62 %
Lux-Lettonie	2002	21 – 23		- 2	2 on 3	33 %	1 on 3	33 %
Lux-Belgique	2002	29 – 31		- 2	3 on 6	50 %	2 on 4	50 %
Lux-Pays Bas	2007	24 – 27		- 3	2 on 3	66 %	1 on 2	50 %
		249 goals 46 %			22 on 42 goals 9 %*	52 %	31 on 52 goals 12%*	60 %
Lux-Lettonie	2006	31 – 30	+ 1		4 on 5	80 %	6 on 8	75 %
Lux-Belgique	2006	24 – 23	+ 1		3 on 5	60 %	6 on 9	66 %
Lux-Chypre	2001	22 – 21	+ 1		2 on 2	100 %	1 on 1	100 %
Faroé-Lux	2011	21 – 22	+ 1		1 on 2	50 %	5 on 6	83 %
Lux-Estonie	2009	25 – 23	+ 2		2 on 3	66 %	6 on 7	86 %
Lux-Autriche	2007	33 – 31	+ 2		4 on 4	100 %	8 on 11	73 %
Lux-Lettonie	2010	34 – 31	+ 3		5 on 6	83 %	6 on 9	66 %
		191 goals 56 %			21 on 27 11% goals*	78 %	38 on 51 20% goals***	75 %

Figure 29: Table 1

In the period between 2001 and 2011 Luxembourg played 17 games they won or lost with a difference of 3 goals. We analysed the counterattacks and play in the games that were won, and those that were lost. The findings showed a considerable evolution regarding the efficacy of the counterattacks, but the number of scored goals does not seem significant (it went from 9% to 11%). The efficacy of the successful counterattacks and plays, on the other hand, is much more significant with the number of scored goals increasing from 12% to 20%.

Luxembourgish players Efficacy– Period 2001/2011 games results (-3 à +3)			
Positions or situations		Efficacy of the positions	Average goals for each positions
Fast Break		62 %	10 %
Counter-Attack		66 %***	16 %***
In Play (excluding fastbreak and Counter-attack)	Back Player	35 %***	31 %
	Wing	53 %	12 %
	Pivots	67 %	18 %
	Penalties	70 %	13 %

Figure 30: Table 2

The analysis of the efficacy of the back-court players shows the advantage of confronting them with counterattacking situations (more than 60%) compared to situations of standing attacks (35% of success). The back-court players have more difficulties in the former situation. Lower level teams, like the Luxembourgish team, have only few opportunities to break the game through its defence in order to start a direct counterattack. It is more likely to score when playing good quality counterattacks and plays.

IV Discussion

Following the above-mentioned results and our analysis, we will propose several situations either with or without opposition, with reduced number of players. Each exercise will give opportunity to the third « plan » many passing or shooting opportunities.

1. Analytical exercises to automate the desire to occupy the field

Run, no dribble, exchange, taking informations.

1.1 Exercise 1: 2 vs 0

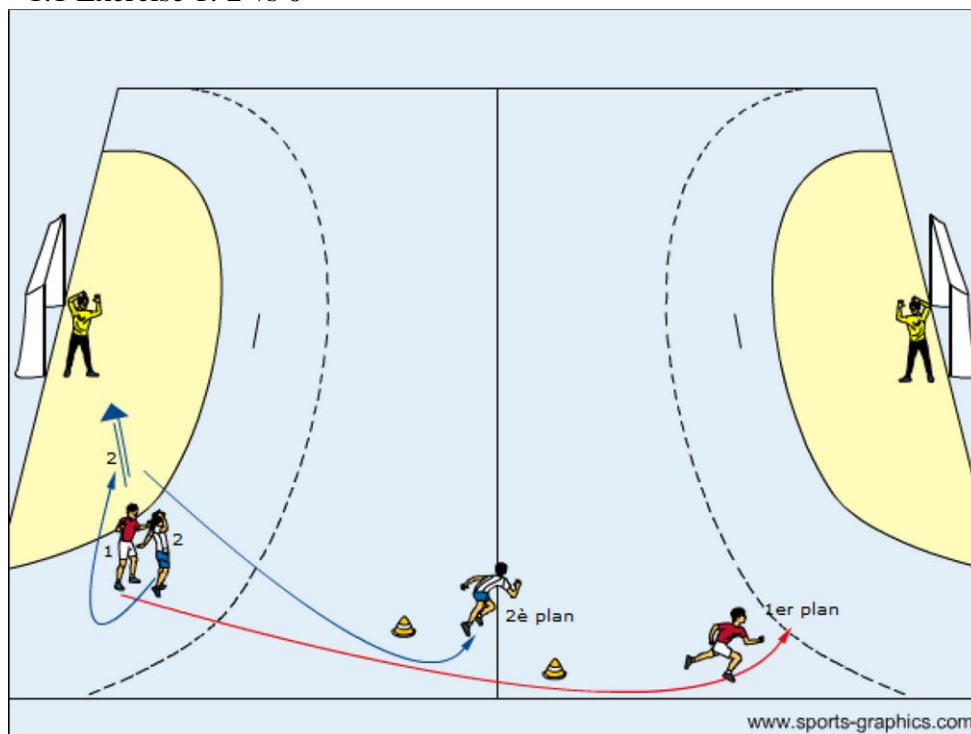


Figure 31a. Sequence 1

How it is working:

- 1GK in each goal
- 1 attacker, 1 defender, 1 ball
- 1 vs 1 and shooting fast break 2 vs 0

After the shooting both players begin attackers

(1) goes on in 1st position very quickly.

(2) goes on 2nd position at the same speed

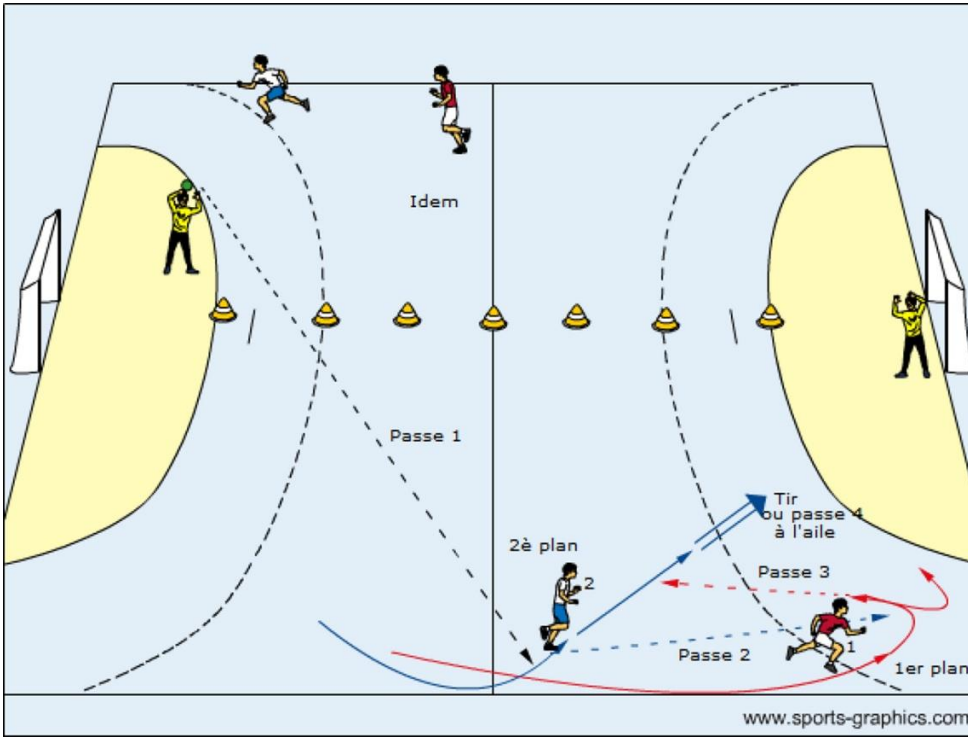


Figure 31b. Sequence 2

The GK gives the ball to the 2nd position who gives to the 1st

The 1st gives back to the 2nd who can shoot

This throw is difficult so it has been worked

1.2 Exercice 2 : 3 vs 0

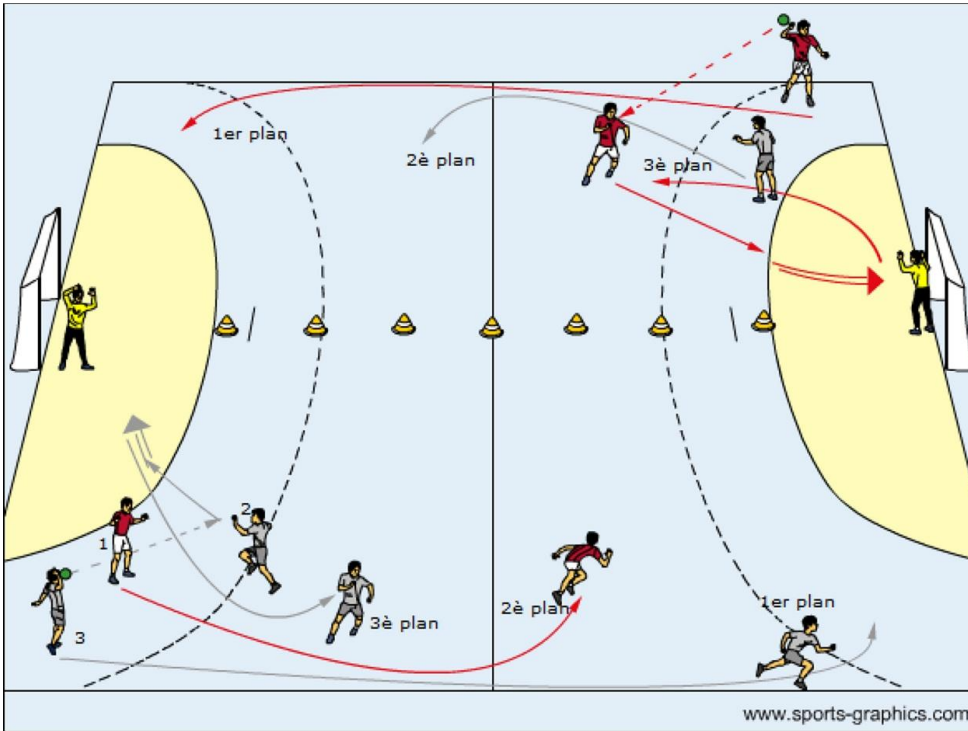


Figure 32a: Sequence 1

How it is working;

- 1GK in each goal
- 1 attacker, 1 defender, 1 ball
- 2 vs 1 and shooting fast break 3 vs 0

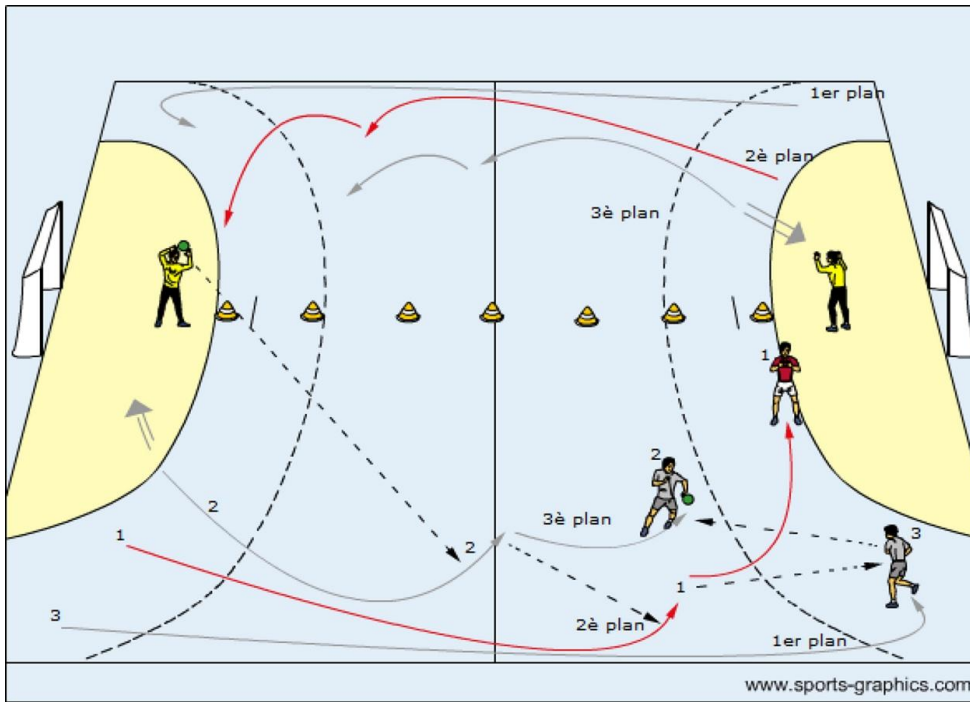


Figure 32b : Sequence 2

After the shooting of (2) or (3) the 3 players begin attackers.

We have to automate the desire to occupy the field according to:

- where the ball is lost
- the future attack organization

Instructions:

When the depth is obtained so the players in 2 first positions search speed. The player who is in the 3rd position has to modulate his speed according to solutions available to him. Be aware to the fact that he has not to be too close of the opponent's area

1.3 Exercise 3: 6 vs 0

How it is working:

- 6 players in the 6 meters area, 3 vs 3
- At the top signal they give the ball to the GK and play a fast break

Goals to reach:

- A quickly balance of 3 players in each outside lane of the field maximum width, depth
- Playing together; the 2 quicker players start in 1st position
- The 2 players in 3rd position wait the ball from the GK
- The ball has to be as fast as possible to the other side of the field

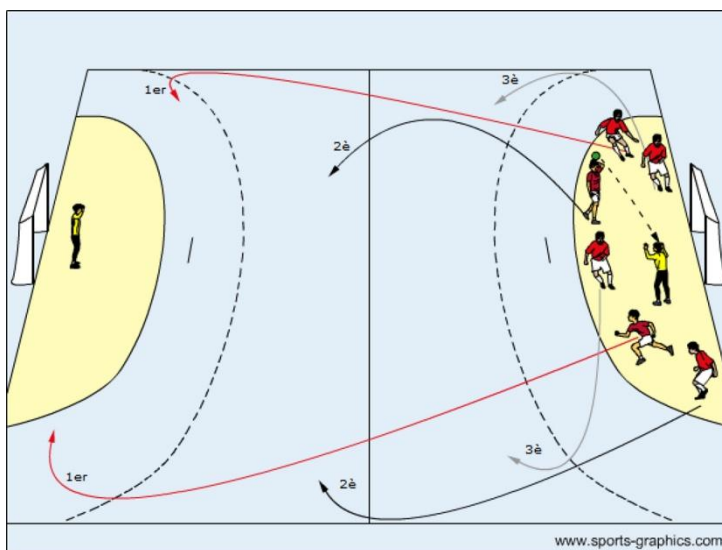


Figure 33a: Sequence 1

When the player in 1st position (1) has the ball so the one in 2nd position (3) as well as the one in the opposite (1) go to play like line players. This player's movement will cause a defensive imbalance.

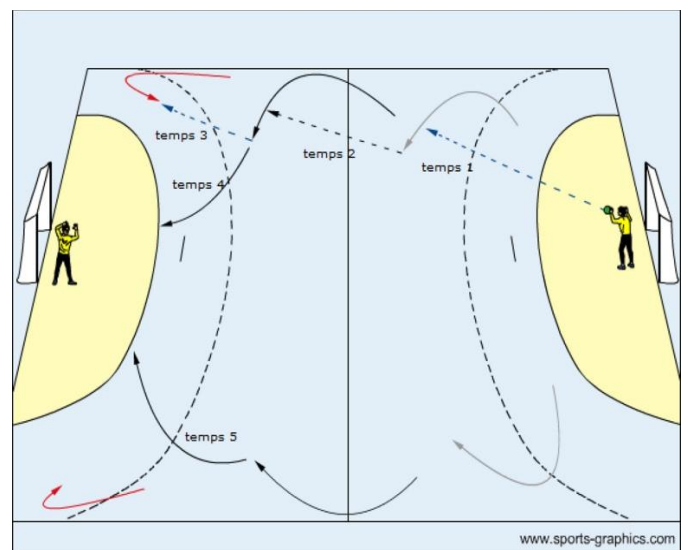


Figure 33b: Sequence 2

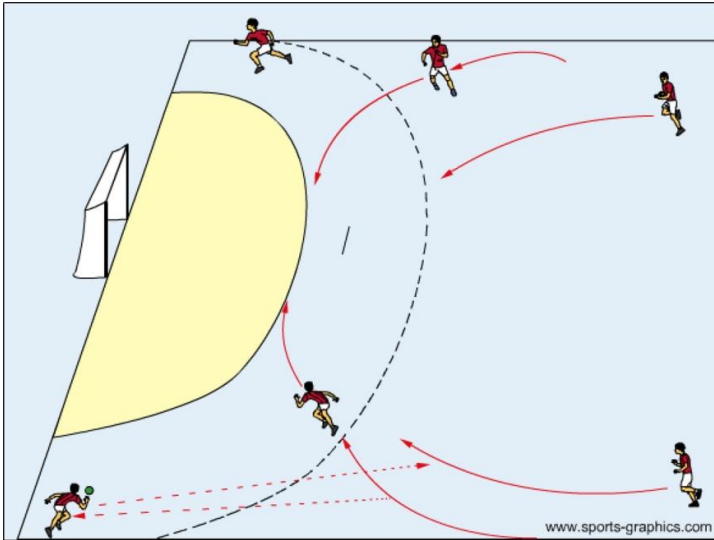


Figure 33c: Sequence 3

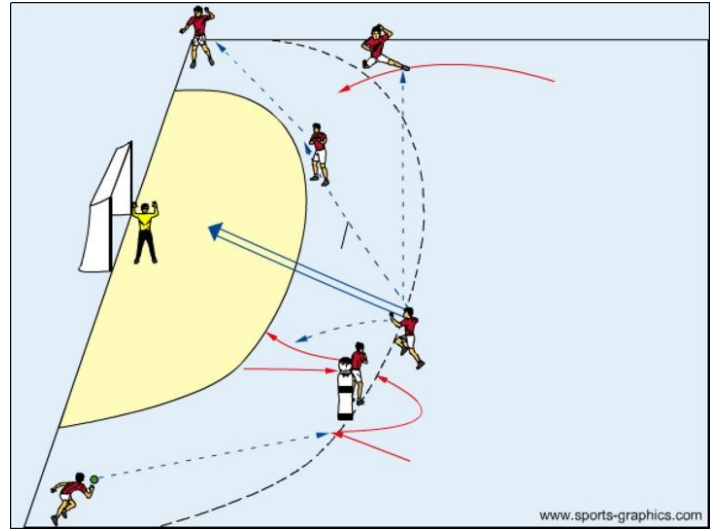


Figure 33d: Sequence 4

In this kind of tactical scheme we can finish the fast break using related actions.

2. Improved individual and collective performance exercises

2.1 Width, depth and attack of de ball in a corridor

Exercise: 6 vs 0 with 3 defenders in the centre of the field

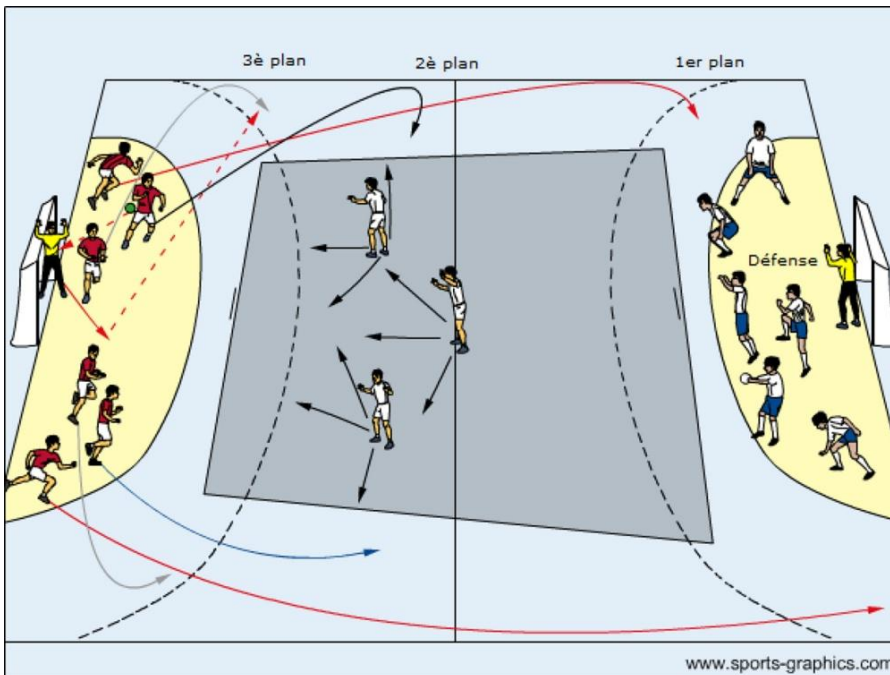


Figure 34: exercise with defenders in the central of the field

How it is working:

- 3 defenders in the centre of the field
- 3 vs 3 inside the 6 meters area
- At the top signal the 6 players play the fast break with or without dribble
- The 3 defenders stay in the central area and discourage the throw

Guidance:

- Try to keep depth and width
- The attackers have to ask the ball outside the centre area

Variation:

- We can play with 4 defenders
- We can play with x defenders and another team in attack at the other side of the field

2.2 Complete teams exercise (6 vs. 6 + 2 GK)

To produce more easy the fast break we require (1) or (2) red players (shooters line player) to touch the bottom line to be delayed.

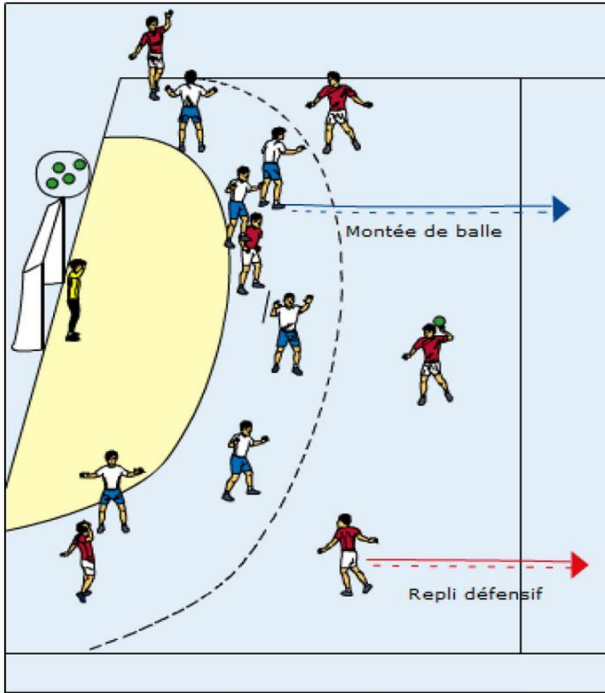


Figure 35a: The plan session 1
Goal or no-goal, loss of ball or interception, the goal keeper is doing the recovery. The red team come back in the defence.

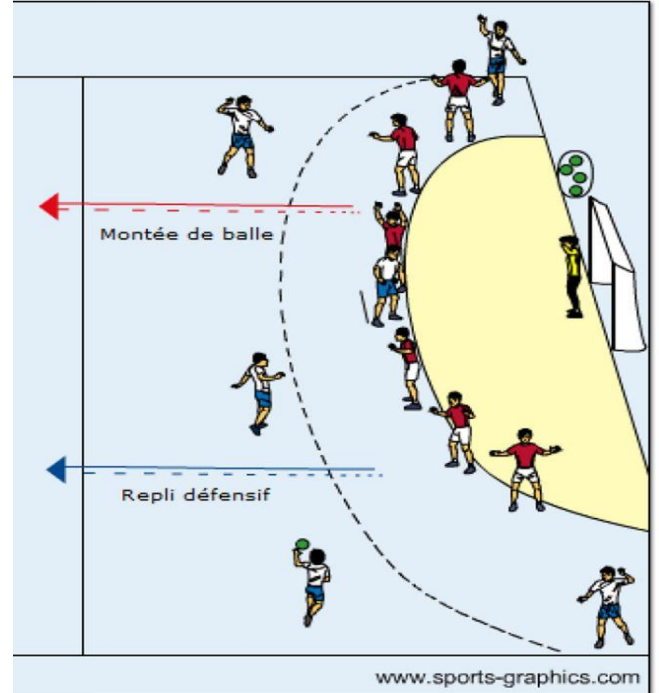


Figure 35b: The plan session 2
At the end of the white fast break, a white player shoot and the red team play a fast break. The white team come back in the defence.

3. Exercises to improve the fast break's skills

3.1 Exercise: 3 vs. 3

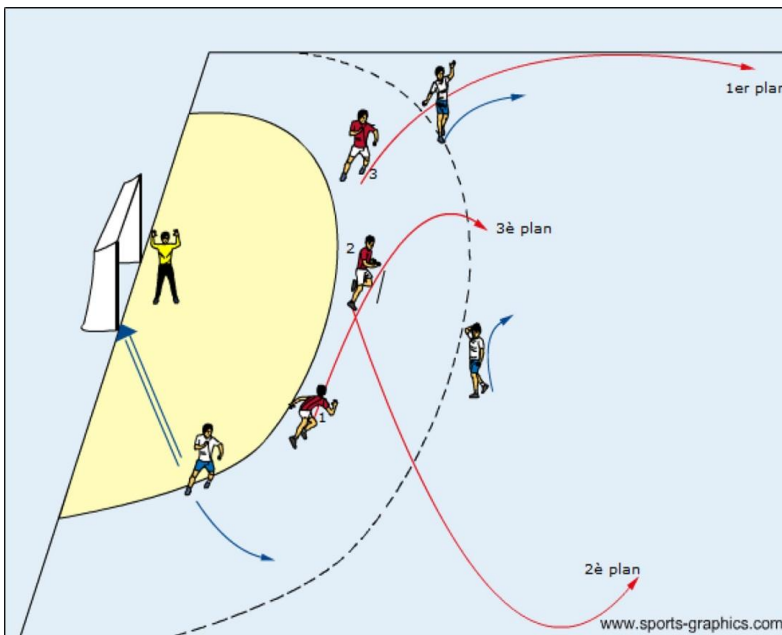


Figure 36 : 3 vs 3

The ball is loosed. The (3) starts from the opposite of the loosing ball
The (2) starts from the same side of the loosing ball watching if the GK has the ball
The (1) from the same side runs as quick as possible in his lateral lane

Adjustment: the player who shot can touch the 6 meters line to be late regarding the opponents fast break. Be aware to adapt his throw

Goals to reach:
- Quick play forward using all the field
- Think to be available for those who have not the ball

3.2 Exercise: 5 vs. 5

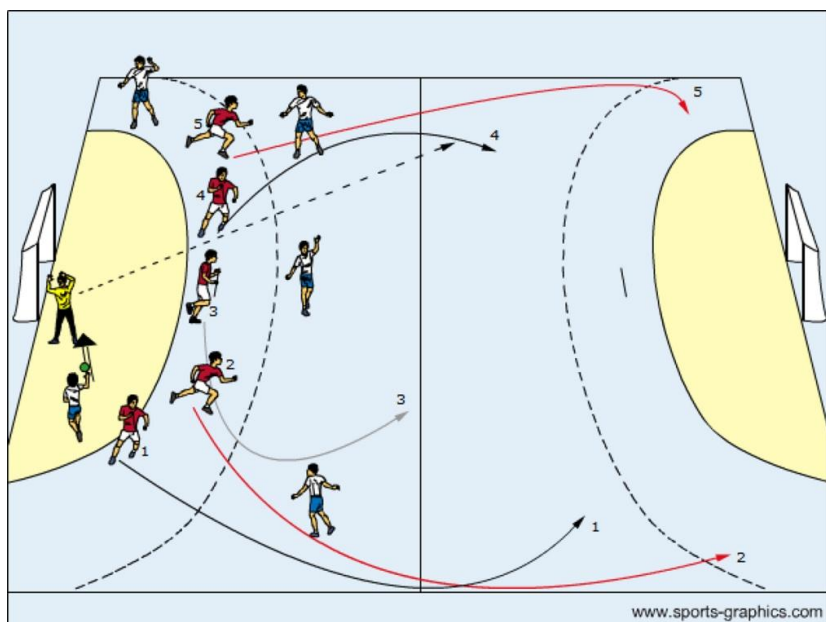


Figure 36: occupation of the field 5 vs 5

How it is working:

The left wing player loses the ball. The opposite (5) starts in 1st position. The (4) in 2nd position and stays in his lane but (2) helps to recover the ball while the (3) starts in 1st position on the side where the shooting is done. The (1) starts in 2nd position.(2) plays like support.

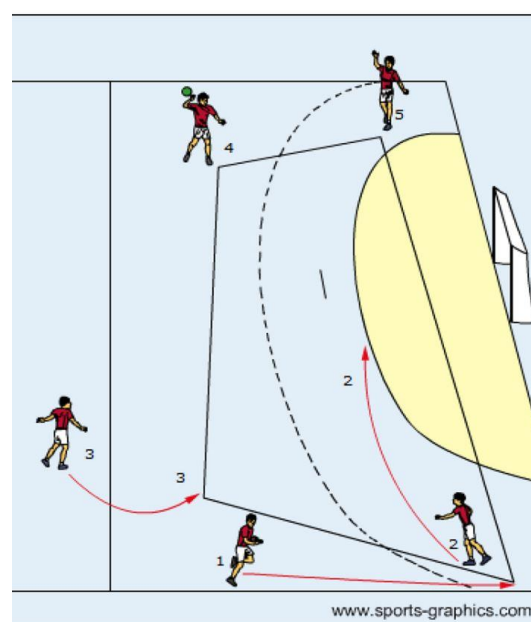


Figure 37: trapeze 5 vs 5

For the end of the fast break (3) is going to play as a line player from the opposite of the ball when (1) is coming to compensate the first plan. (1), (2), (4) and (5) hold the principal position (the trapeze).

V Conclusion

Our purpose was not to demonstrate that at the highest international level fast break is insufficiently exploited because it is the case for the best Nations, but to prove that if the game over all the field becomes a real culture in the initial training therefore small countries have in this area a significant improvement to make the difference between them.

We have seen that the impact of fast break are undeniable for:

- The withdrawal play which have to invest to return to his camp
- The defence which still has a late time to solidify its system
- The same defence when the fast break continues with the same philosophy than in organized attack with two line players.

With this philosophy these two line players promote the 2 backs game in 3rd position, running toward the ball with intentions of perforation, using defensive imbalance or trying to pass on the ball at 6 meters. The throw between the 2 backs has all the ingredients of knowledge worked in the initial training.

This strategy was adopted in consideration of the means of a small nation. Indeed as we can't play "strong" we have to play right inside our fundamentals.

To succeed we have to continue in the rigorous application of our principles without robotics behavior. So we have to federate all players around this game plan at all levels of training.

The positive or encouraging Luxembourg results for 12 years are due to a set of parameters (see the pyramid of success). But we know that the games have been won, among other things, by an organized fast break.

Glossary:

- Back pass: Pass giving a direction change of the ball. Often done against a zone defence.
- Going toward the ball: Defensive movement in the ball circulation direction. The receiver attacks in inverse movement.
- Mirror playing: the free player is front positioned of a gap according to the player carrying the ball. If the player carrying the ball changes of gap the free player changes also of position in parallel.
- Post position: Player who goes out of the defensive the alignment. In general the post position player often serves as support.
- Scaling: to take up the field in depth during the fast break.
- Width: to take up the largest space of the field during the fast break.

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