

GENERAL SKILLS

Head-up Freestyle Swimming

Use: The most primary skill in the sport of water polo is head-up freestyle swimming. This enables the athlete to see the play as it develops, while moving to position.

Method: The athlete must use a shortened arm pull, with a wider hand placement into the water than with normal freestyle, keeping the elbow high during recovery with a rapid stroke rate. Hips should remain high with a strong 6 beat freestyle kick maintained. The head should remain steady and clear of the water.

Drills:

1. Relays with lines. Players line up in groups traveling either the width or the length of the pool.
2. Partner Towing. Players get a partner similar in size and tow them, by grabbing on to the suit or foot, to the other end of the pool swimming head-up freestyle. At the other end of the pool the players switch positions.

Eggbeater Kick

Use: The eggbeater kick is the primary kick that enables the player to support himself in the water while passing, shooting, defending, and resting – horizontally and vertically. It is also used for getting a quick, explosive start, when the player is beginning to swim.

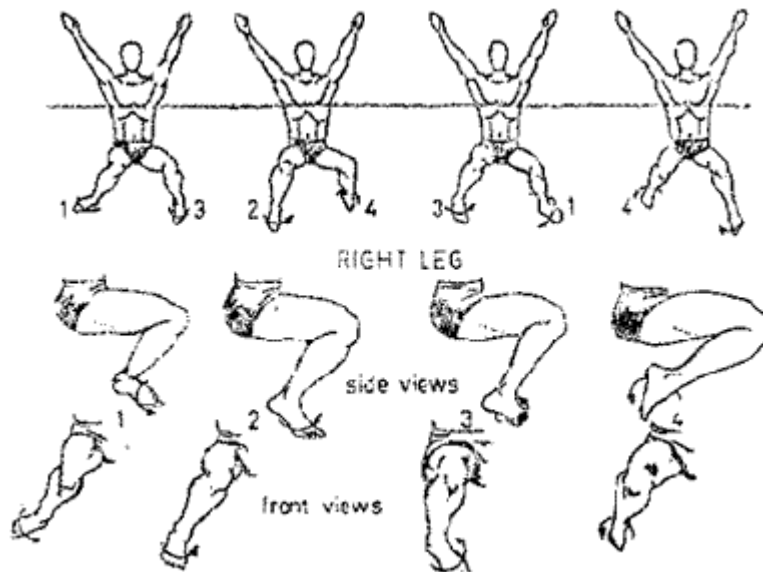
Method: The player positions his body as if they are beginning to stand up from a sitting posture.

The player is slightly bent at the waist, with the knees wider than the shoulders. The feet are moving in half circles in an inverted or outward pointed position, performing a breaststroke whip kick, one leg at a time. In other words, instead of the legs kicking in unison, as in the breaststroke kick, the kick is alternated – one leg going clockwise, the other leg going counter clockwise.

Pressure of the water should be against the arch/inner ankle – with toes toward shin.



As seen by the diagrams, the breaststroke kick is alternated so that each leg operates independently and continuously. While one leg is recovering the other is flexing, and so on. The kick is done with the body in a vertical, or sitting position.



Drills:

1. Players hold onto the side of the pool extending their legs behind them, practicing the kick until they feel comfortable. This enables you to see their mistakes and make corrections easily.
2. Players tread with their hands out of the water on a particular time interval or according to your whistle. They can also use a kickboard to eggbeater across the pool.
3. Player treads widths, facing a different direction each time you blow the whistle.
4. In the leapfrog drill, player A eggbeaters, while player B places his hands on the shoulders of player A from behind. Player B then pushes himself over player A, who is kicking to keep his head above water. Player B now becomes the one treading and player A leaps over him. The players continue this pattern as they progress down the pool. Player's heads should not go under water.

Sculling

Use: Aid in supporting the body – both vertically and horizontally while shooting, passing, head up swimming or in quick starts. To be used in conjunction with these other basic skills.

Method: the player should begin with the palms of his hands facing the bottom of the pool, approximately shoulder width apart. As (s)he moves his hands together, (s)he rotates his palms inward to face one another at a slight angle. As (s)he moves them outward again, the palms are rotated to face the direction in which they are moving. By repeating this action quickly, a player can support himself without kicking.

Drills

1. Vertical sculling. Players should be vertical in the water and not permitted to kick for support. They begin sculling when the whistle blows, supporting themselves until the whistle blows again.
2. Horizontal sculling. Players lie horizontal in the water, kicking their feet just enough to keep them on the surface. They must propel themselves feet first to the other end of the pool by sculling on both stomach and back.
3. Head up flutter kick while sculling.
4. Horizontal and vertical eggbeater kick while sculling
5. Holding the ball over one's head and faking while sculling – the double threat position.

OFFENSIVE SKILLS

Dribbling

Use: Dribbling the ball is the primary method a player use to move the ball in the pool without passing. Essentially, it is swimming with the ball.

Method: Head-up freestyle swimming is used, with the ball placed in front of the head. The wave created by the body position keeps the ball in place. It is essential that the recovery of the arms be short and with a rapid rate, so that the ball doesn't drift off its intended line of direction.

It is also important that the dribbler needs to keep his(her) head over the top of the ball in order to see the field and the other players.

Drills:

1. Relays. Players dribble the ball the width of the pool.
2. Relays. Players dribble the ball swimming zig-zag up and down the length of the pool. (3-5 strokes left at 45 degrees then 3-5 strokes right at 45 degrees).

Picking up the Ball

Use: To be able to pick up the ball in order to take a shot or make a pass to a teammate.

Method: All young players with small hands should learn to pick the ball up from underneath, keeping the hand relaxed and the fingers spread. As the ball is picked up, it should be rotated behind the head with the arm extended and wrist flexed to permit a good pass or a shot. In addition, as part of this motion the player should be sculling with the alternate hand in front for stability and be rotating his(her) body 90 degrees.

A player with large hands may be capable of picking the ball up on top, but (s)he runs the risk of losing control of having the defender push his hand down, forcing the ball under the water and causing a turnover. When picking the ball up from on top, the player should press down slightly. This provides pressure from the water, which will make the ball easier to grasp as (s)he raises it out of the water. **(Picking the ball up from on top is a VARIATION that should only be attempted once picking the ball up from underneath has been mastered!)**

Drills:

1. Players practice picking the ball up underneath and on top before both passing and shooting drills. **Especially with younger players, drills should emphasize picking the ball up from underneath to ensure control.** (have the players count how many of each skill – for example ten on top pick-up throws followed by ten underneath pick-up throws).

Changing Direction - Transition

Use: Changing direction (with or without the ball) with the least amount of wasted time and effort enables a player to react more quickly than his opponent and cover more distance in a shorter time. When carrying the ball, the offensive player may change direction to protect the ball from being stolen.

Method: A player swimming in one direction must draw his legs to his body. Once his legs are drawn close and hips on the surface, (s)he pivots in the opposite direction, while extending his legs once again. The initial kick to begin swimming in the opposite direction should be a strong scissors or quick breaststroke kick, whichever is more comfortable. When changing direction with the ball, the pivot is performed and then the player's hand is placed underneath the ball, lifting it clear of the water as the position changes. It is advantageous for players to learn how to change directions towards a 45, 90, or 180-degree angle for applications in various team situations.

Drills:

1. Suicide drill. Players begin dribbling the ball from the two-meter line at one end of the pool. When they reach the four-meter line they change direction, heading back to the original two-meter line. Once there, they change once again and head to the halfway line. When they reach the halfway line, they turn and head back to the four meter line. They continue in this fashion going forward two lines and back one, until they have returned to the opposite two-meter line. (Similar to the dreaded 'doggies' in Rugby and Hockey!)
2. Positioning drill. The player dribbling the ball must keep in front of the player without the ball as he dribbles down the pool. He does this by constantly altering his path to stay in front of the defender. Once at the other end, the player who was dribbling becomes the defender and their roles reverse.

Dry Passing and Catching

Use: This is the primary building block for the offense. Players use dry passing and catching in all facets of the offensive game, including shooting, which is simply a pass with greater force. An accurate pass will always move faster than a field player or a goalie, and is therefore a potent weapon for the offense in its efforts to out-position the defense.

Method: The ball should be held behind the head, with the arm extended. The hand should be relaxed and flexed, with the fingers spread. As the ball travels forward, the arm remains relatively straight, allowing the elbow to pass in front of the ear before the ball does.

The arm finishes its forward progress by snapping the wrist, with the hand pointing in the direction the ball is intended to travel. The ball should be contacted last by the index and middle finger of the throwing hand, thereby imparting backspin.

The shoulders should rotate with the opposing shoulder pulling away from the direction of the ball after initially being pointed at the target. You should throw a water polo ball with the same type of shoulder rotation required for throwing a tennis ball.

The player receiving the pass should have his arm and hand extended towards the ball. As (s)he makes contact, (s)he absorbs the speed of the pass with a relaxed hand, cradling the ball behind the head once again in preparation for a shot or pass. (this deceleration process is essential in redirecting the force in another direction). Once again, **ambidexterity is a beneficial skill to learn in passing.**

Drills

1. Passing with a partner or in groups.

Position (1) has partners passing in groups of two.

Position (2) has a circle of players surrounding a central passer, who turns slightly as (s)he makes each pass. Adding a ball on the perimeter may increase the difficulty, while the center player passes to individual members on the circle.

Position (3) has a group of three players. The player in the middle must catch from one side, turn 180 degrees, and then pass to the other player.

Position (4) has a group of three players passing in a triangle formation.

Position (5) involves having the players constantly changing their passing distances, getting gradually closer and farther away as they pass with their partners.

Passing under Pressure (On your back or Layout passing)

Use: The layout pass is used to gain room for passing or shooting when a player is closely marked and may be used when he is swimming or stationary.

Method: In a normal situation, the offensive player protects the ball from his defender by facing away from him and toward the ball. To execute the layout pass, (s)he must take a stroke or two, pick the ball up from underneath and extend his arm as (s)he rolls from his stomach to his back. At the same time (s)he rolls, (s)he must use an eggbeater kick to move away from the defender. The combination of extending the arm, rolling onto the back, and

kicking help to separate the offensive player from his defender, enabling the offensive player to make a pass without interference. (note: an alternative method which takes less time utilizes a step-out move - pivoting at the hips to gain distance from the defender).

Drills

1. Players form groups in which one player has the ball, facing away from others. (S)he then executes a layout pass to one of the others in the group, who in turn faces away from the group and does the same. Variations on this drill may use defenders, or players may shoot on the goal rather than pass to another group member.

Flip Pass and Push Pass

Use: These passes are best used when a player wants to make a quick pass (or shot) off the water while dribbling or under pressure by a defender.

Flip Pass Method: (for sideways pass or shot): As the player is dribbling, (s)he places his hand underneath the ball and extends his arm, , using a wrist snap (flexion and extension) to help the ball travel the distance. For better control, the player may reduce his swimming speed slightly before making the pass, allowing the ball to drift away from his head. As with most ball handling skills, it is important for beginners to learn ambidexterity.

Push Pass Method: As a player is dribbling, (s)he reaches on top of the ball and pushes down slightly. As it bounces back from the pressure, (s)he rotates his hand behind the ball and pushes it towards the target. The player must cock(flex) his wrist while flexing the elbow up high and then reverse the process to pass the ball. The more the player can make this motion a smooth and indistinguishable part of his(her) stroke, the better – particularly when shooting the ball.

Drills

1. Players swim laps with their partner, next to each other about 2-3m apart while passing with either hand. Flipping the ball to each other, using right and left hand. Push passing players swim laps with one player in front of the other, push passing the ball forward to their teammate, before swimming forward to the ball on the water and repeating.
2. Players take shots on goal using the flip pass and the push pass to pass the ball to a team mate.

Backhand Passing

(Only to be attempted when players have mastered normal passing)

Use: When a player is defended on one side, his other side will be open, as will his opposite arm. By using a backhand pass, (s)he is able to make a pass to a teammate or take a shot without interference from the defender.

Method: The player places his hand on top to the ball and flexes both the wrist and elbow. (S)he then rotates his hand underneath the ball with his thumb pointing downwards (counterclockwise for right-handers, clockwise for left-handers) and extends the elbow – snapping the wrist. As the player throws backwards, (s)he extends his arm throwing in the opposite direction to which (s)he is facing.

Drills

1. Players form groups of three and four, catching and passing backhand.
2. Players shoot on goal using a backhand shot.

Summary Drill – ‘Keep Away’

A drill that can be used to incorporate all passing skills or practice one type under pressure.

The keep away drill is used to practice all types of passing. Players form small groups of six and eight. Defensive players are not permitted to foul the offensive players. The offensive players swim in confined area with the objective of making flip passes, push passes, dry passes, backhand passes, and layout passes in order to retain possession. The defensive team may only gain possession by steals, not by fouling.

SHOOTING

Shooting is an extension of passing, since a shot is simply a pass thrown with more force. As in any goal-oriented game, good shooting skills will make the differences between winning and losing. As your players progress, they should know several different shots, listed below.

1. Shooting while stationary
2. Shooting from a dribble
3. Shots taken after receiving a pass
4. Shooting from a dribble (T-Shot or Push Shot)
5. Shooting with a player's back to the goal (Back Shot)

Some additional shots are more specialized and should be taught only once the basics have been mastered.

Overhand (Regular) Shooting

Use: There are many times when a player will be open on the perimeter, either by design or by mistake. In either case, the player should be able to take a good shot towards the corner of the goal or to a pre-determined "hole", reducing the chance for the goalie to reach the ball in time. The progressions you use for your shooting drills should very much emphasize player success, as the development of confidence is a major factor in a developing a shooter.

Method: As with the pass, the player should cradle the ball in a relaxed and flexed hand with the arm extended behind the head. The arm without the ball is sculling slightly in front of the body. The shoulder opposite the ball is pointed towards the goal. As the ball travels forward, the shoulders should rotate so that the arm with the ball travels towards the goal, while the opposite hand, which was sculling, pulls away from the goal. As the ball is released, the wrist snaps and the hand follows through in the direction of the goal, much the same as the pitcher throwing a ball in cricket.

Drills

1. Drills involving stationary shooters.
 - (a) A semicircle of players shooting from different angles. This drill can be modified so players make a certain number of dry passes before they can shoot, or so players shoot immediately from a pass.
 - (b) The same drill with shot blockers, who remain in the same location and try to block the shots with either hand.
 - (c) Two shooters with a passer. Each shooter takes a prescribed number of shots in a row and then rotates to another position. Extra players become ball chasers, goalies, or passers.
2. Around the World. Players take shots from specific locations in the pool. (6 places around the D/Arc) If a player scores, (s)he may continue to the next spot. If he misses, he must return the spot until he scores from that location.
3. Players swim to a point in the pool approximately 5-6 meters from the goal, where they receive a pass from behind them and must shoot without letting the ball touch the water. The athletes passing have just finished shooting.

DEFENSIVE SKILLS

Defensive skills are just as important as offensive skills, although coaches and players often find them less glamorous. However, much of the offensive and most of the counterattack are dependent on an excellent defense.

Press

A press means that every player covers his opponent one-on-one. This is the easiest defense to teach because it is the easiest for players to understand. Each player needs to defend someone from the opposing team. In addition, every player must remember his position in relation to his own goal, while guarding his defender. Good positioning for a beginning player requires the defender to stay between his opponent and his own goal. As players advance in ability, situations will call for defenders to move themselves to different positions, depending on the location of the ball. This will demand more from your players in awareness and will take some time to develop.

In a press, the two-meter defender, unlike the other defenders, does not play directly between the two-meter man and the goal. This permits the player to commit an ordinary foul without being too aggressive, or to knock the ball away as it is passed to the two-meter player. If the two-meter player is right-handed, they will more often than not turn to their left (power side) as they shoot. Knowing this, the two-meter defender can 'overplay' that side in order to increase their chances of successfully defending any ball played into the two-meter player.

Defending a Drive

Use: An offensive player swimming quickly towards the goal to get away from his defender is called a driver. Players will need the ability to defend against this offensive player to prevent major fouls and high percentage shots.

Method: Players defending a drive should have their hips on the surface and be attentive to both the ball and the driver. They should have their hips angled in the direction away from where they want their man to drive, giving him a clear path to a location that is easier to defend. Generally, this path is towards the outside of the pool and the driver's weaker angle shot and not across the middle.

Drills

1. Players form lines at one end of the pool. Drivers try to swim in front of their defenders without going over them, while defenders try to stay in front of drivers. At the opposite end, they switch roles. If the driver ends up in front of the defender, he should allow the defender to regain position and continue the drill down the pool.
2. Players line up in front of the goal with a two-meter man player. The driver tries to get in front of his defender and the defender tries to stay on front of the driver, with his hips up and direct him to a poor percentage shot. If the drive gets in front of his defender, the two-meter man gives him the ball for a shot.

A variation on this driving drill requires the defender to keep the driver out of the "Christmas Tree". The "Christmas Tree" describes the triangular shaped area immediately in front of the goal that provides the best shooting angle for the offensive player.

Defending the Center Forward

Use: For your team to be successful on defense, players must be able to reduce the effectiveness of the other team's center forward. If you do not have players capable of defending this individual, your defenders will commit too many major fouls and the opposing team will receive too many high percentage shots.

Method: The center forward is least effective when (s)he cannot reach the ball. To accomplish this task a method called front marking is used. The defender must play between the two-meter player and the ball, which gives the center forward positional advantage in relation to the defender's goal. This is somewhat risky, as the center forward will get a high percentage shot off if (s)he receives the ball. In addition, if the defender makes a mistake and fouls the center as (s)he is receiving the ball, it is a major foul and usually a penalty. If the defender does not front and plays directly behind the center, it gives the center his best access to the ball from his teammates, although the defender does have positional advantage with regards to his own goal. This defensive posture is not as strong as it appears, since it is very difficult to commit an ordinary foul on the two-meter man from this position and still play the ball (committing an ordinary foul in this situation is preferable to allowing the two-meter man to take a high percentage shot). The defender often ends up fouling the two-meter player too aggressively an attempt to reach the ball, resulting in a major foul.

Most defenders therefore try a compromise. Rather than play directly behind or completely in front of the center, a defender will position themselves a little to one side. This enables the defender to make an occasional steal, commit an ordinary foul without being too aggressive, and maintain a reasonably safe defensive position in relation to the goal.

Regardless of where (s)he plays in relation to the center, the center defender should keep his hips up in a horizontal position, while facing the center. The defender should look over his shoulder for the ball and receive communications from the goalie for proper positioning. When the pass in is made to the center, the defender should try to get a piece of the ball without making severe contact with the offense, thereby disrupting the player's efforts at shooting.

Drills

1. Players should form groups of four, with two passers, a center forward, and a center back. Each group should rotate every few minutes to allow players to have a turn at every position. During the drill, the ball is passed between the two passers, who are about four meters apart and facing the center forward and his defender. Each time the ball is passed (it should be passed very slowly), the center defender switches the side (s)he is guarding, without turning his back to his opponent. In this fashion, the defender is guarding the two-meter man against the incoming pass. If the center defender is too slow, the passers should pass the ball to the center and he should pretend to shoot. When a defender is caught out of position, the passer should pass to the open side of the center forward for the pretend shot.

General Strategy

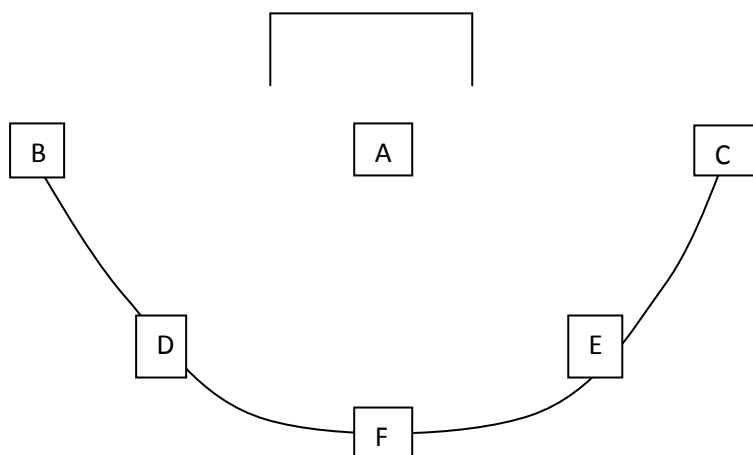
As in any sport with a ball and a goal, water polo involves strategies meant to complement a team's strengths and exploit an opponent's weaknesses. This chapter discusses the different tactics used by teams and is divided into four sections:

1. Set play attack
2. Defense
3. Counterattack (transition from defense to offense)
4. Special situations

What follows does not explain each of the above, but rather aims to provide the reader with a start of the essential concepts. (Drills will be provided for more technical play as the players get older and their skills and understanding of the game improve).

'Set Play' Attack

The area in front of your opponent's goal is normally called the frontcourt or 'front of goal'. Within this area, several offensive 'plays' are commonly used. The most basic play positions the two-meter player/ centre forward, in the middle of the goal 2-3m out (Player A). The remaining field players then line up around him(her), usually spacing themselves equally in a semi-circle. Players B and C are called "wings," players D and E are termed "controls or fetch & carries," and player F is called the "centre back or top-man."



The positioning illustrated above is called "the D/Arc " because of the positioning of the offensive players. It is advantageous for the offense to maintain triangles between the players so that there are passing lanes available. It is also important for the team members to be aware of where each of their teammates are so that all of the above positions can be filled.

Other formations include a 3-3, where the players form more of a rectangle.

Variations on these two offensive schemes are numerous and are explored in more detail in later material. However, almost all teams use these offensive schemes to some degree, even at the Olympic level. They are crucial for your players to learn, and it is from this framework that you will teach your team individual offensive skills.

Offensive Objectives

The general idea in each offensive scheme is to work toward one or more of the following objectives:

1. To free a player for a shot. (Screen, Pick, Drive or other that creates space and time for the shot etc)

2. To draw a major foul, by having the center or a driver place his defender in a position where (s)he makes a mistake.
3. To have the center shoot from the 2m position.
4. To control the ball and therefore the tempo of the game, i.e., keep the other team off balance.

Objective 1

Trying to free an attacking player from his defender is one of the most common challenges facing any coach in a team sport, whether it is in basketball, football, soccer, or water polo. The intent is simple. A player who is unmarked will be more likely to make a good pass or take a better shot than if (s)he were marked.

There are at least two basic methods for getting a defensive player into a poor, vulnerable position. The first is to simply swim faster than the defender. In water polo when this occurs toward the opponent's goal we call it driving. The key is for the offensive player to swim past his defender before that defender can react, due to either his speed or his alertness (or a combination of both). The offensive player in such a scenario is called the "driver."

A second method is termed a "screen," it requires the teamwork and coordination with another attacking player. In this case, offensive player A swims past offensive player B, close enough so that the defender marking A him bumps into offensive player B. Player A continues to swim whilst A's Marker is blocked by player B. This results in offensive player A being open until the defense can recover. Remember attacking player B should also continue moving towards the goal to avoid being called for an offensive foul.

The "pick" is similar to the "screen" and is in fact a combination of both a screen and a drive occurring at the same time. It is more complex than the either of the two mentioned above and so should only be covered once the players have mastered the skills of driving and screening correctly.

Objective 2

The offense can draw a major foul by having the center or a driver place his defender in a position where he makes a mistake and fouls the offensive player from the wrong position. When the attacking player places himself in a specific position in relation to both the goal and his defender, his position is normally termed "inside or goalside." The term comes from the fact that the offensive player has gained a position between his defender and the goal, or "inside" his defender closer to the goal. When this occurs, the defender has been "beaten" to the goalside position by the offensive player ("beaten" is commonly used to describe the situation in which a defender loses his position in relation to the goal).

Although being beaten to the inside position is not a foul, a common mistake for a defender caught in this situation is to try to recover by fouling the offensive player from behind, trying to either regain a good defensive position, or to prevent a shot. When a defensive player fouls from behind in this circumstance (outside the 5meter line), the defender will be ejected. This is how the term "drawing a major foul" is derived. Because the offensive player has placed his defender in a poor position, (s)he has earned the offensive advantage and is given the credit for drawing the foul. If there is a pass that comes back to the driver from the center, this should typically be on the water if made to the center's left side and dry (on the hand) if made to the center forward's right side (reversed for a left-handed driver).

The two-meter player can accomplish the same thing with his defender. One additional benefit is that the foul will generally occur within five meters of his opponent's goal, as (s)he is about to shoot. Instead of drawing an ejection in this instance, a penalty shot should be awarded.

Objective 3

The strategy for having the two-meter player shoot from the center position is obvious. The two-meter man wants to receive the ball where (s)he can move away from his defender in order to shoot without any interference. This may mean (s)he is already in a position of advantage, so that when (s)he receives the ball, the defender would be required to commit a major foul to stop the shot.

Summary

Keep it simple to begin with, teaching your players the concept of driving to get inside (i.e. between the defender and the goal) their defenders or open for a shot. Emphasize quick, explosive movements and being alert to their defenders' positions, as well as to the referee's whistle. Head up swimming is mandatory for all of these movements so as to be aware of possession and the location of the ball. Team strategies should be geared around trying to accomplish one of the three objectives, without getting too complex. Your players will need to learn several of the basics before you can work on complicated strategies.

DEFENSE

Most teams use two basic defensive schemes to some degree, from the younger ages all the way through the Olympics. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, and all players should be exposed to them right from the beginning. The first defense is termed a press or a man-marking defense, while the second is called a drop, or zone defense.

Press/ Tight marking

The basics of the press defense have already been described above. There are however a few important points that can be added about playing the press defense. The first is that it only works effectively if everyone is doing it. If just one player is not marking tight the defense becomes very weak as the opposition centre will have a lot of space in front of him into which the ball can be passed in order to try and shoot or draw an exclusion foul. Secondly, the body position of the defenders is everything in a press defense. Because of the extreme nature in which the defender is trying to press out on the attacker, if the defender drops their hips from the hovercraft position, they become very vulnerable to any drive the attacker may perform, and will struggle to recover without conceding a major foul or a goal. Thirdly, the defender should always be aiming to interrupt the attackers in a press defense. They do this by sitting in the lanes and attempting to intercept any pass that is made to their attacker. If they cannot intercept the pass, they should at the least make a nuisance of themselves by preventing a quick onward pass to another attacker or a quick shot.

Zone/Drop (Slough)

A zone defense is another name for a “drop” defense, in which the defender drops away from his opponent to help cover a player from the opposing team or a specific area of the pool. A zone is used primarily to prevent the opposing two-meter player from receiving the ball with enough room to either shoot or place his defender in a position to commit a major foul. The key in teaching it to your players is to help them understand that they are responsible for an area or space of water in the pool, rather than for a specific player. They need to be active, moving throughout their areas, changing the direction of their focus depending on where the ball is thrown. This is a more difficult defense to learn and should be attempted only after your team has a good concept of a press.

Even in a Zone, the two-meter defender does not play directly behind the two-meter player. (S)he moves to the side of the two-meter man closest to the ball, or what is commonly called the “strong” side, and attempts to push the two-meter player towards a teammate who is zoning/dropping, thereby reducing the space and time for the centre to get a quality shot off.

Defensive Objectives

The general idea in each defensive system is to work towards one or more of the following objectives:

1. To prevent players from getting open for an easy shot.
2. To prevent the ball from getting to two meters easily, in order to reduce the two-meter player's chance at a good shot or drawing a major foul.
3. To force the offensive team to use too much of their possession clock, thereby placing them in a situation where the offense takes a low percentage or hurried shot.
4. To avoid penalty or ejection fouls which give the offense better attacking opportunities.

Objective 1

To prevent players from getting open for an easy shot, make sure each player knows where his opponent is at all times and reacts to his movements, before the opponent can get inside water. The best way to do this is to teach your players to keep their hips up on the surface, staying horizontal in the water. (Hovercraft position) This permits them to react more quickly than if they were vertical, treading water with their hips down. Along with this concept, a defender needs to know where the ball is at all times. This enables him to read the offense

better and predict where his opponent wants to go. In order to be able to see both the player being marked and the ball the defender needs to have his(her) “head on a swivel” so as to look back and forth between the two. Players should also learn to “feel” where an opponent is by continuously pushing and jabbing their opponents slightly, allowing them to watch the ball for as long as possible.

Objective 2

To prevent the ball from getting to two-meters easily, both a press and a zone can be used, but each requires different responses from your players. In a press, you are attempting to put pressure on the offense (without giving them free throws/minor fouls) to force their passes to be inaccurate. Each of your players must be close enough to his player to apply pressure, without committing any fouls on the perimeter. Fouling will only give a free throw, which is normally an easy and accurate pass since the defender is not permitted to interfere. In a zone, a defender moves between the two-meter player and the perimeter in order to steal a pass as it comes into the center. Your players need to be able to move quickly, knowing where the ball is at all times.

Objective 3

Both defenses can force the opposing team to use up their possession time. The key is to maintain pressure without committing a foul, since fouling stops the clock. In addition, it is especially important not to commit a major foul, since the possession time resets when this occurs.

Summary

As your team progresses, you will begin to change your defensive strategy according to the other team's strengths. For the present, concentrate on the tactics listed above. Once the players understand these two defenses and can perform them well, you will be able to move onto the next stage of defensive strategy.

Counterattack

When a team moves from defense to offense it is involved in a counterattack or fast break. Coaching this tactic requires teaching your defensive players how to react to the shot by the opposing team's offense, or to the referee's whistle, or to a likely turnover.

The counterattack is first and foremost an attempt to react faster than the opposition, thereby creating an extra player advantage situation at the other end of the pool and a high percentage shot. If a shot is not taken, the players on counterattack move quickly into set-play attack.

There are appropriate offensive tactics for each of the extra man situations that develop from a counterattack. However, the two most basic ones are the one-on-the goalie and the two-on-one. In the one-on-the goalie situation, a player by virtue of his speed or anticipation has outdistanced the opposing players to the point that (s)he is alone with the ball in front of the other team's goalie. Generally (s)he has a very limited amount of time because the other team is trying to get to him as fast as possible. The main thing (s)he wants to do is to get the ball up in his hand (off the water) and move the goalie laterally. If (s)he is right-handed, (s)he should begin on the right post and move to his/her left while pretending to shoot (faking). As soon as (s)he feels (s)he has an open shot for one of the 4 corners of the goal (s)he should take the shot.

In the two-on-one situation, two players have broken free from all but one defender. Here, the intent is to force the defender to choose which player (s)he will cover from the offensive pair. If the offensive players spread out a little wider than the goal posts as they swim down the pool, they force the defender to choose between them without moving to a poor angled shot. The ideal situation is for the pair of offensive players to force the defender to commit once (s)he gets close to the goal, allowing for a last second pass. This is much more difficult for the goalie to block, since (s)he is not prepared for the direction of the shot. If you are the one trying to defend this situation your defender should choose early which player he will attempt to steal the ball from, thereby preventing the cross-pass and giving the goalie as much time as possible to prepare for the shot from one player.

Since most teams are predominantly right-handed, it is advantageous to advance the ball down the right side of the pool (i.e. the opposite goalie's left side). This will mean that all right-handed players will be able to receive an assist pass on their strong hand. Do not forget though, that the ball can be moved down the left if your team has a strong and fast left hander that breaks up the right side of the pool.

Extra Player Situations

When a team has lost a player for 20 seconds to a major/ exclusion foul, the offensive team is said to be "up a player" or have a player advantage. The defensive team is consequently said to be "down a player", with at least one less player than the offense.

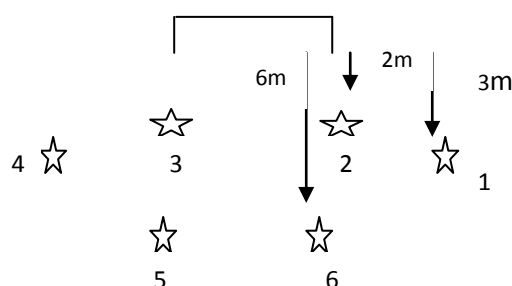
The general intent of the team on offense is to move the ball around the fewer defenders in order to pass to a player left open with a high percentage shot. If possible, the offense should try to exploit the exclusion immediately after the whistle blows and the defense sets up. Ie go for a "quick" goal.

Normally when the exclusion occurs, players arrange themselves in one of two formations--- the 4-2 or the 3-3 formation. The 4-2 gets its name because it describes a formation in which four players are on or near the two-meter line, with the remaining two, approximately six meters away from the goal. This may be more appropriately named a 2-2-2, since they are lined up in pairs, rather than in two lines.

As you can see below the players closest to the goal are in line with one another, the next pair is approximately three meters from the goal, and the final pair is approximately six meters from the goal. The reason for bringing the second pair away from the two-meter line is to improve their shooting and passing angles.

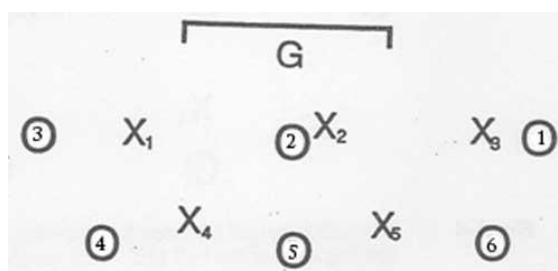
To help coaches and players design different passing combinations within this formation, the positions on offense are given numbers. This enables coaches to communicate clearly with their players about shooting or passing to certain positions in the pool.

4-2 Man up.



The 3-3 offense has three players on the two-meter line spaced equally (middle man can be offset slightly to provide a better shooting opening for the outside players). The remaining three players form a triangle, with the base of the triangle about four meters apart and about five meters from the goal. The point of the triangle is between the two points of the base and about seven meters from the goal. This offensive tactic will likely be easier with the presence of a lefthanded player(s) in the positions on the right hand side of the goal (opposite goalies left).

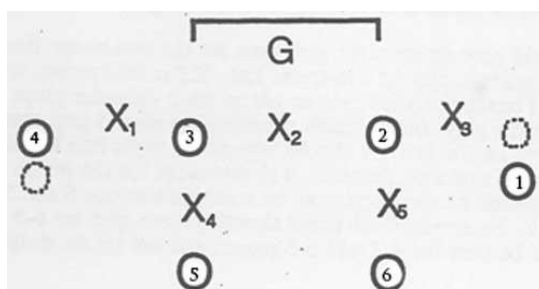
3-3 Man-up



Variations on these two formations involve moving a player from a set position quickly, to create a shooting or passing opening.

Man Down Defense

The man-down defense most often used is a zone type defense, in which each player guards a given area/space in the pool. This usually means that the defender will be responsible for more than one offensive player, since his team has fewer players than the offense. Simple maths suggests that if there are 6 field players on defense and one is excluded, the remaining 5 players need to work 20% harder to make up for the missing player on defense. Defenders should thus be working at 120% on Man-down defense.



Against a 4-2 offense, each defender plays in between two offensive players as seen above. As you examine the illustration, note that defenders (X_5) and (X_4) have a choice to regarding which pair of offensive players to cover. For example, defender (X_5) may choose to cover

positions (1) and (6) on offense or (2) and (6), while defender (X₄) may cover positions (3) and (5) or (4) and (5).

Although there are a host of other defenses that will be explored in later manuals, a man-down defense works best when all team members know their responsibilities at each location and recognizes these quickly after the exclusion call. Once they master the general man-down defense, other defenses will be easier to learn.

AWARENESS DRILLS

Awareness/Reading the game generally separates the really good from the average and is a mixture of having a good conceptual understanding of the different phases of the game, being aware of relevant players' movements and experience. The first can be improved by classroom sessions (which I think is a really good thing to do - 30mins/wk is all that's needed - not only for offense and defense but also for things like passing, shooting, balking, etc.) and the third can be improved by club polo, which gives the guys extra game time against better opposition. As far as the second is concerned, the following can be used:

Using extra-man as an example, when your players are passing around the 4-2 to warm up, stop them every now and then to ask them who the last three passes went to (if they get it wrong the team sprints to halfway and back). Then during the practice of extra-man proper, they have to remember the movements of their relevant defenders (ones that they'll have to beat for a shot or an assist) and/or the goalkeeper (again, if they get it wrong then the whole team sprints to halfway and back). The same principle can be applied to man-down as well as to ordinary offence and defense.

An effective drill that can be used to ensure your players do not 'ball watch' after shooting at goal is to use numbered or colored cards behind the goal. During each shot in a shooting drill, a different number or color is held up by the coach for 1 or 2 seconds. The drill can be made tougher by shortening the time for which the card is held up, or moving the position of the card to the corners of (mimicking the position of possession clocks), or alongside, the pool. To make the drill easier, the card is merely held up for a longer period. This drill aims to test the players' ability to be able to shoot accurately whilst concentrating on other things going around them.

Making use of the 30sec shot clocks is also good for your players' awareness. Whether you only use them in practice scrimmages, or also incorporate them into your set-play and shooting drills, having them available on the side of the pool will familiarise your players with their presence and location, and encourage them to use them more effectively.