

**MÖNCHENGLADBACH FIH WORLDHOCKEY FINAL  
COACHING SEMINAR  
SEPTEMBER 2 - 9, 2006**

**MOVING PRESS SITUATION AND CRUCIAL DECISION  
MAKING MOMENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

There is one fact that is obvious to all players and coaches: it is not possible to effectively defend the whole hockey field with only eleven players. Only about 35-40 per cent of the field can be defended effectively to give the balance of marking, covering, etc, that all teams seek. This is the simple reason why teams have to have group and team strategies for defending.

When performed in harmony, quality defending influences how the opposition plays, reduces their scoring opportunities and increases the chances of the defending team regaining possession.

The moving press situation can be done in different zones of the field, depending on the starting position of the defensive team and the moment this team selects to do the press. The starting position is usually a semi-passive one and it changes to an aggressive one when a sign is given. A crucial point to emphasize is that the moving press situation is a group activity.

During the moving press situation, there are some key elements which give the defensive team those signs to change the press situation and to recover the ball. These key elements could be some kind of passes, runnings with the ball, bad passing or receiving, bad build-up formation, etc, that the team in possession does. These are the signs to start the crucial decision making moments. All the defenders must assess the current situation and act in unison with colleagues. This harmony depends upon the quality of the understanding between players, which is borne out of knowing that decisions made are based upon the same criteria. A fundamental in all group defending is that everyone knows, understands and agrees to the criteria upon which the individual and group decision-making will be based.

**STARTING POSITIONS OF THE DEFENSIVE TEAM**

The defending team has to recognize some basic rules for its defense:

- To defend is a team work.
- To recognize the different playing options for the team in possession.
- To consider the support position and possibilities of their colleagues.
- To reduce the space and time the team in possession has, putting more defensive players in the ball side.
- To bind the team in possession to play out of its playing patterns.

The defensive system that a team employs for a moving press situation during build ups is generally a zonal one. It is used when you have the opposition in their half.

In employing a zonal system, the entire defensive team aligns itself according to where the ball is in relation to the most dangerous pass directly into the middle of the field, which allows the opposition to then dictate the play. The zonal system should allow the opposition a square or backwards passes, giving the team with the ball an easy

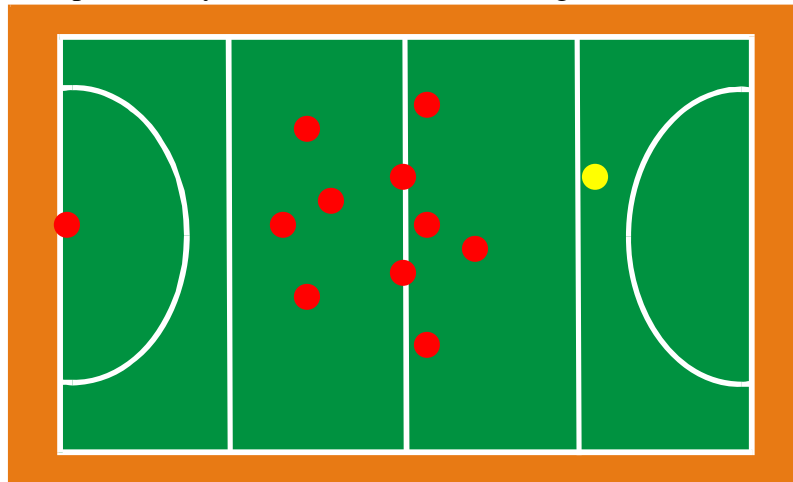
possession in deep positions. Also the shape of the starting position encourages passes into areas of false space. When these passes have been made, the defence should quickly realign themselves with the new dangerous pass options available to the opposition, putting a strong pressure upon the receiver, the passer, or both and upon all the players involved in the ball side.

The zonal system could be modified with any other defensive strategy (man to man marking over opposition key players, mixed defence, etc), to reduce the passing options to the team in possession.

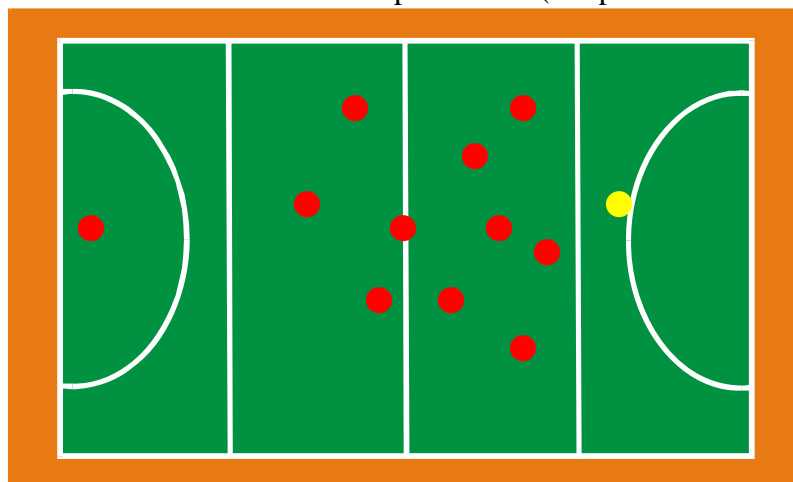
The starting position of this defensive zonal system is placed normally between midfield and the 25 yard line of the team in possession.

The shape of this starting line up could vary upon the place of the field the defensive team wants to put the pressure.

The starting line up is usually like it is shown in this diagram:

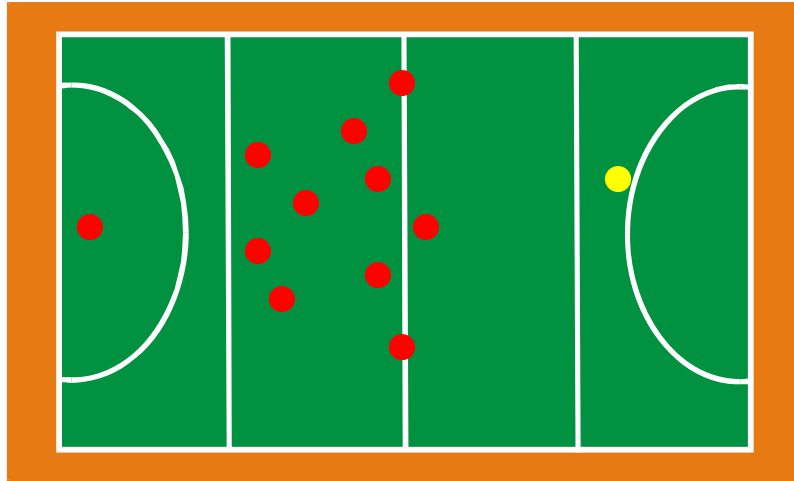


This formation should sometimes be higher up in the field, leaving the zone between the 25 yard line and the end line to the team in possession (3/4 pitch zonal defence).



In this case, midfield and defensive players of the defending team, usually play a mixed defence (man-to-man and zonal), before the sign that change the press situation.

Or it should sometimes be lower down in the field, leaving half of the pitch to the team in possession (half pitch zonal defence).



In this situation, the forward and midfield line of the defending team play zonal defence. The principal key points of these tactics are:

- The set-up of the players in relation to the pressing zone.
- Identify the zone the ball should go into.
- Identify the pressing zone.
- Isolate the ball carrier in the pressing zone.
- Create double or more defence into the pressing zone by dynamic movements.

Each team that is going to do moving press has established when and where this pressure is going to be done. So they set up in the field according to this strategy, waiting the signs to change the press.

### **SIGNS THAT SHOW THE DEFENDING TEAM WHEN TO START THE CRUCIAL DECISION MAKING MOMENTS.**

The starting position of the defensive team dictates where this team wants the ball to be played by the team in possession. If this occurs, they react in order to put pressure on the ball.

In moving press situations, this could happen after the first pass in free hits or 16y-hits, after a number of passes the team in possession makes after a re-start or after the reception of an aerial ball by a defender in his/her midfield zone. It will depend on the strategies the defensive team plans to do the press.

These signs to start the crucial decision making moments should be classified into:

- Passes between defenders (from a central defender to one of the half, between central defenders).
- Passes to the midfield players from the defenders.
- Return passes from the midfield players to the defenders.
- Running with the ball by a selected player during the build up.
- Any mistake in a reception of the ball during the build up.
- The reception of an aerial ball in the defensive zone of a team.
- Any bad line-up of the build-up formation.
- Slow passes during the build-up.
- The reception of the ball by the less technical player.
- Any strategy decision taken by the coach.

All these decision making moments are orientated towards increasing the pressure upon the opponents so that they are forced into errors that cede possession.

### **HOW THE DEFENDING TEAM PRESSES THE OPPONENT TEAM**

One of the main objectives of the moving press situation is to reduce the space the team in possession has to play the ball. Possession in the centre of the field offers the greatest range of passes. The defenders should therefore force the ball wide or to a zone where is better for them. Possession on the flank allows the defenders on the opposite wing to move further infield, increasing the potential effectiveness of the defence, providing better marking and covering while protecting most of the potential long passes out of the defence. A congested or small area is easier to defend than an uncongested or large area.

The movement of the defending team after the sign that gives it the crucial decision making moment, should be a quick one, all the players at the same time, putting a high pressure on the ball carrier and on the ball side, with numerical superiority and the covering of the defenders on the opposite wing. Most of the new positions the players of the defending team take should be advantageous ones over the team in possession. This could facilitate the interception of the passes the ball carrier should play and the build up of the double or more defence over this player.

Also the communication between players and the convincement of the defending team and each player of it is very important to regain possession.

### **CASE STUDY**

#### **ROTTERDAM JUNIOR WORLD CUP 2005**

#### **HOW THE MOVING PRESS SITUATION IS DONE IN THE DEFENSIVE MIDFIELD OF THE TEAM IN POSSESSION AFTER 16Y-HITS**

The analysis is made on the three medal teams: Argentina (Gold medal), Australia (Silver medal) and Spain (Bronze medal).

All these three teams used two starting basic positions during the tournament when doing moving press: Half Court Press (HCP) and  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court Press ( $\frac{3}{4}$ CP). Each team put its specific strategy on them depending on the team they played with.

### **ARGENTINA**

The analysis was made on the matches against Australia (pool match: 3:1) and Germany (pool match: 3:2).

#### **Starting positions**

$\frac{3}{4}$  court press



Half court press



During both situations they started with zone defence by the forward line, man to man marking over side midfielders, with their centre midfielder doing zone defence over the opposite centre midfielder, and the sweeper playing as a free man but always near their defence line.

### **Argentina-Australia:**

(75%  $\frac{3}{4}$  CP and 25% HCP)

#### **Signs**

- Passes to any of the Australian midfield players
- Passes to the left back

#### **How they pressed**

In the first option, as Australian side midfield players were taken in man to man defence, it was Argentinean centre midfielder who often made the double defence over them.

In the second option, the first movement was made by the centre forward, going into the pass-line between both central defenders and then putting pressure on the left back.

All the opponent players in the ball side were taken in man to man defence with the support of the centre midfielder.

Centre midfielder DD



CF putting pressure on left back



### **Argentina-Germany:**

(60%  $\frac{3}{4}$  CP and 40% HCP)

#### **Signs**

- Passes to the right side of the defence
- Passes to the midfield players

#### **How they pressed**

In the first option the first movement was made by the centre forward between both central defenders and the left forward on the right defender. Players on the ball side were taken on man to man marking.

Second option was similar as in the match against Australia.

CF putting pressure on the right back



Pressing the midfield players



## AUSTRALIA

The analysis was made on the matches against Argentina (pool match: 1:3) and India (semi-final: 3:2).

### **Starting positions**

Half court press



$\frac{3}{4}$  court press



In both situations, the centre midfielder and the sweeper (stepping ahead of the marking defenders) were free men, the marking defenders played an anticipation defence, and the rest of the players did zone defence. A curiosity was that the centre players (forward, midfielder and sweeper) were often aligned.

### Australia-Argentina:

(50%  $\frac{3}{4}$  CP, 50% HCP)

### **Signs**

- passes from the left back to the right back
- any forward movements of the central defenders with the ball

### **How they pressed**

The first movement was always made by the centre forward, cutting the communication between the central defenders and then pressurising the one with the ball. Half defenders and midfield players on the ball side were pressured by their opponents, so passes to them were very difficult. Long passes were blocked by one or two free players.

They pressed Argentina Team putting six or seven players in the ball side, always taking a numerical superiority (7:6, 7:5, 6:3, 6:2), pressing the ball carrier with one or more players.

7:5 HC Press



6:3 ¾C Press



### Australia-India:

(50% HCP, 50% ¾ CP)

### **Signs**

- passes to the right half
- any forward movements of the central defenders with the ball

### **How they pressed**

In this match the first movement was also made by the centre forward, cutting firstly the return pass from the right defender to central defenders and secondly putting a strong pressure on the right defender. He was also the player who pressured any forward movements of the central defenders with the ball. Players on the ball side were taken in anticipation defence and long passes were blocked by one or two free man.

They pressed India with six players on the ball side plus the centre forward over the right defender.

7:5 HC Press



7:5 ¾ C Press



### SPAIN

The analysis was made on the matches against England (pool match: 1:0) and India (semi final: 1:1 (5:4 ps)).

## Starting positions

Half court press



3/4 court press



During the half court press, forward line and midfield line played zonal defence, with the free player in the defensive line near the other defenders who were marking man to man, changing the player they marked according to the zone they played.

In the 3/4 court press, the midfield players started marking man to man, supported by the free man in defence, while the marking defenders did the same job as in the half court press.

### Spain-England:

(75% 3/4 CP, 25% HCP)

### Signs

- Passes between the central defenders
- Passes to the midfield players

### How they pressed

In the first option, the initial movement was made by the centre forward, cutting the space between the centre defenders and pressuring the man with the ball. All the opponent players in the ball side were taken in man to man marking, with the support of the centre midfielder and the free defender.

In the second option, the double defence over the player with the ball was made by the centre midfielder player (half court press) or by the forward line (3/4 court press).

Forward line DD



CF putting pressure on the right back



## Spain-India:

(75%  $\frac{3}{4}$  CP, 25% HCP)

### Signs

- Passes to the midfield players
- Passes to the right zone of the defence

### How they pressed

In the first option, when the half court press was done, the Spanish centre midfielder played as a free man with the Spanish centre forward making man to man marking over the Indian centre midfielder. In this situation, the pressure to the Indian midfield players was done by the Spanish midfielder supported by the forward line and the centre midfielder. During the  $\frac{3}{4}$  court press, the pressure over the midfielders was made by the Spanish midfielders, supported by the forward line.

The second option was always done in a  $\frac{3}{4}$  court press. Spain pressured India putting one or two players more in the right zone of India defence (two forwards and two midfield players) obtaining a numerical superiority (4:2 or 4:3) on the ball side.

HCP on the midfielders



Pressuring the right zone



## CONCLUSION

Using the moving press situation, allows the pressing team to win the ball higher up in the field, usually with more players than the team in possession, from where counter attacks should be more effectively.

Aerials balls from the defense are less play, because it is more difficult to play them in movement, so the team in possession has to do more passes to solve the moving press situation, increasing the possibilities of errors in passing and receiving the ball. This increases the crucial decision making moments.

The fact that the press is in movement, a changing one, makes the team in possession to change continuously its playing decisions up to be out of its playing patterns.

All these points are based on the main objective of the moving press situation: to reduce the scoring opportunities of the team in possession and to increase them for the team that is making the moving press.

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