



Youth Handball Trainingsplan **(by Danilo Rojevic, Head Coach SF Calheat Men)**

The objective of this document is to provide directional thoughts on coaching youth athletes and teams, aged 15 to 17 y.o. Youth players play a central role in a sports organization as the talent pool which will ultimately feed the senior team's development and growth. As opposed to players in younger age categories (8-14 y.o.), youth team handball athletes are expected to be equipped with the right technical fundamentals (e.g. passing, 1:1, shooting, defense, pressure, etc.) and are both sensitive and knowledgeable of the collective dynamic of play.

Youth team handball coaches have a different set of responsibilities to ensure youth athletes are set up for success in the senior teams. Those duties consist of: (a) **master fundamentals**, (b) **expand technical portfolio**, (c) **develop tactical awareness and knowledge** and (d) **enhance physical condition**. The challenge for youth coaches is to provide the right mix of training across those four (4) aspects over a 2 to 3 years timeframe.

Master Fundamentals (25% of your practice time)

An enormously important point in handball training across age groups is, of course, to continuously teach handball-related fundamentals through routine training. Youth players, in particular, need an excellent basic technical education to further advance in the sport. Most of the exercises in this area are recommended with a ball, as players need a good feeling for the ball. Never underestimate this aspect of the player's development, as mistaught techniques are often hard (and sometimes impossible) to correct at an adult stage.

Core fundamentals

- Passing (straight overhead pass, jump pass and bounce pass). Pay attention to the arm's position (straight up) and body's orientation towards the goal.
- Footwork. Teach your players to be in constant movement (never static) and develop smooth non-mechanical movements up and down. The players should always reception the ball running forward, and once the ball is released, run a few steps backward.

San Francisco CalHeat

4415 Piper Dr.
San Jose, CA 95129



- Step-Zero. Once the footwork is mastered, coaches should put emphasis on teaching the players the step-zero. This is central to Handball as it helps further develop feinting skills and 1:1 situations.
- Collective understanding of the game in both defense and offense. In defense, coaches are expected to teach the fundamentals of “sideways / forward-backward” movements and shifting. In offense, the focus should be on teaching the players the main principles of pressure in and out, alongside with intervals.

Youth coaches should plan as much time as necessary to teach or drill the fundamentals. For advanced youth players, it is generally recommended to schedule 25 to 30 minutes ideally in the first half of the practice session to go over these fundamentals again, and again. These drills are usually organized by grouping players in pairs, or smaller groups. As opposed to tactical teaching, technical basics need an instruction-led coaching with, of course, a manageable and progressive structure. The objective is to create well-routed automatisms and ‘robotic’ behaviors which will serve to further expand the athlete’s individual portfolio.

Expand Technical Portfolio (25% of your practice time)

Like in any other sport or activity, it is important to challenge the individual and further expand his playing repertoire. For every basic skill, there is a dozen of different technical variations. These exercises are usually added in continuation of basic drills as a way to provide a progressive learning curve to players. It is considered normal for a regular Handball player to be proficient in 3 to 4 different passing and shooting techniques. Below are two examples of the expected development of a youth player as he/she grows from the very young age until youth.

- **Passing.** At the very young age (under 14 years old), we should expect players to become seasoned to the straight overhead pass, jump pass and bounce pass (basic skill). When those players become older, they should continuously repeat those passing drills and learn for instance side passes, hip passes, trick passes, etc.;
- **Shooting.** At the very young age (under 14 years old), we should expect players to become seasoned to jump shots (basic skill). When those players become older, they

San Francisco CalHeat

4415 Piper Dr.
San Jose, CA 95129



should continuously practice on jump shots and learn new ways of shooting, such as hip shots, stem shots, trick shots, etc. Some other jump shot variations (two-foot jump) can also be learnt at that stage.

Regardless of the training content of the team training already mentioned, there is also always the possibility (and sometimes the necessity) of individual player training in handball. For instance, some players such as goalkeepers have a special role within the team and therefore need a special and more individualized training. Some other players, e.g. wing or line players, require a more dedicated session to improve their shooting performance and learn new variations. Through individual training, players can work on their strengths and weaknesses so that the team as a whole becomes even better and more successful.

Develop Tactical Awareness & Knowledge (20% of your practice time)

A passion theme for every coach is the tactics training. Mostly inexistent in the younger ages (14 years old and under), tactical understanding is an indispensable part of the youth team development. Tactical exercises help to (1) bring together all aspects of the game during the practice session and (2) enable players to build on team-based skills. As the players get more seasoned and older, tactics become a major part of the practice. The coach plays a crucial role in teaching new tactics to players. In practice, youth players need to learn from the coach how to behave in particular game situations. The appropriate tactical behavior is important, for example, to counterattack the opponent or initiate a fast-break for ball gain. Of course, in tactics training, it must always be remembered in which position the individual players are active. Defenders naturally need different tactical requirements vs. offensive players in this context.

Those exercises are usually conducted with the whole team in the second half of the practice. It is ideal to provide players with a brief overview of the tactical options predominant in Handball at the beginning of the season but it is then recommended to solely focus on 2-3 tactical elements per season not to overwhelm the players.

- In defense, it is recommended to teach a 6:0 formation before introducing players to more open defense modes (5:1, 3:2:1, 4:2, etc.). For each defense setting, the coach

San Francisco CalHeat

4415 Piper Dr.
San Jose, CA 95129



should clearly (a) lay out the role of each player in the setting, and (b) describe the right movements for every players position. As opposed to the technical teaching, tactics should consist of 'guided discoveries'. In other words, the coach is the one who sets the framework while the players navigate through.

- In offense, the first and most important element is to practice the ball flow (pressure in/out) between the players on the field. Coaches should allocate time to exercise those as much as possible by involving all the field players or smaller group of players per field area (back players, wing to wing, wing and back, etc.). Other important areas of practice are combinations and crossings. Nowadays, there are over hundreds of combinations developed with the only goal to create a shift in the opponent's defense. Combinations can range from being simple to very complex with multiple crossings, and it is important for the coach to rightly gauge the level of complexity to bring in practice.

Enhance Physical Condition (30% of your practice time)

First of all, handball players need a good stamina. The physical conditioning is very important and almost central to the sport. From the young age, kids develop motricity skills and coordination and, as they grow older, the body needs reinforcement. As part of a team handball training, there are a variety of ways in which the coach can work on the physical condition. There are endurance or so called conditioning exercises, which are performed with and without the ball. In addition to the basic stamina, it is also very important for handball players that the speed is trained on short, medium and long distances. Handballers, for example, need a good "reaction" on the first few meters and a high overall sprint speed in the long run to perform a fastbreak. In the conditioning and running segment, nothing is about training but rather about building up progressively a strong physical performance.

Coordination and plyometrics are also essential in the player's development. In a sport that requires such a variety of movements and jumping, coaches must dedicate time to properly build the players' body. The use of agility ladders and rings, hurdles, as well as plyometric boxes can only be beneficial for the young player.

San Francisco CalHeat

4415 Piper Dr.

San Jose, CA 95129



Last but not least, it is important to remember that team handball is a physically more demanding sport than other team sports such as soccer or basketball. It requires the entire body to be (re)activated, on- and off during a game. Regular strength training should then also be on the coach's agenda and should not be underestimated. In particular, defenders must be able to confront themselves physically against the opposing offensive players, which is why strength or general fitness training is also a major part of a competitive handball training. Of course, players can exercise with weights and workout equipment, but self-weight exercises such as push ups or pull-ups can also be very effective. In addition, if players have a high level of physical fitness, they are less prone to injury.