

Pressure Defense: Tactical Component by Guy Baker, Head Coach, Women's National Team

This article will cover our tactical component and the second article will discuss the technical component that supports our tactical component. In addition, the second article will include the steps, progressions and practices for developing that component.

USA Women's Water Polo has four major training components; physical, technical, tactical and psychological. The components are intertwined to form the USA Women's Water Polo system.

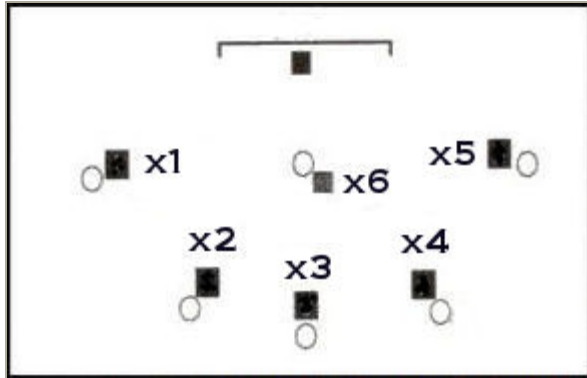
1. **Physical = Conditioning**
2. **Technical = Fundamentals**
3. **Tactical = Game Strategy**
4. **Psychological = Mental Confidence and Toughness**

Our goal is to place superbly conditioned athletes who are fundamentally sound into a system of play that will enhance their abilities and insure they have the mental confidence and toughness to execute in a pressure environment. Our first step is to determine our tactical component and then determine our physical, technical and psychological components that will support the tactical component.

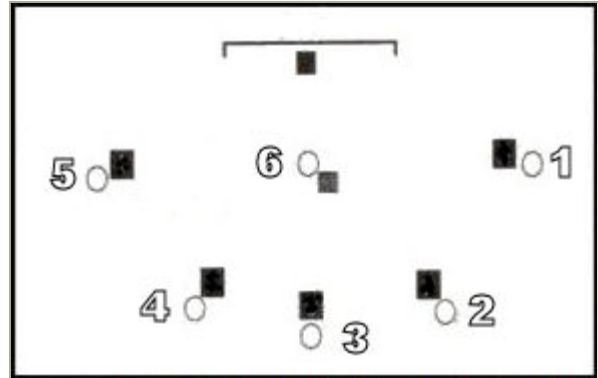
A system is not only tactics. It is the combination of the technical, physical and psychological components required to implement the tactical strategy for defense, counter attack, offense, 6x5 and 5x6. For example; what are the technical, physical and psychological standards to play a press defense? What are the technical, physical and psychological standards to attack a zone defense? What are the technical, physical and psychological standards to create an effective counter attack? What is the best system for the team? What is the experience of the team? A system connects the defense to the counter attack to the offense and back to the defense. A system connects the offense to the 6x5 and the defense to the 5x6. A system connects the center to the perimeter offensive players, the defender to the perimeter defensive players, the goalkeeper to the 5x6 field players, etc... A system is created so every player has a role in every situation in the game and all the players understand not only their responsibilities but the responsibilities of the others.

These articles will focus specifically on the tactical and technical components. This article will cover our tactical component for press defense and will include terminology, philosophy, tactical principles, and game strategy. Our ability to effectively press is an important aspect of our defense. Equally important is our ability to switch from a press to a zone defense once our press has been broken. Some of the information will have to wait until after the Olympic Games

Terminology



Defensive Numbering System



Offensive Numbering System

Strong Side

The side of the pool where the ball is located.

Weak Side

Opposite side of the pool from where the ball is located.
Strong Side and Weak Side dividing line is the center of the goal.

**Ball Side
(Defense)**

Defensive player is between the offensive player and the ball .

Attack Section

Offensive ten-meter line to the goal line..

**Ball, Player,
Area and Center
Awareness**

A defensive player must:
Know the location of the **Ball** is at all times;
Know what your **Player** is doing at all times;
Know what is happening in your **Area** at all times;
Know the location and position of the **Center** at all times.

**Press Base
Position**

Perimeter Ball Side Position
Horizontal on a hip facing the location of the ball in the passing lane.

**Right Hand to
Right Shoulder**

The location of the ball determines the position of the defensive player in relation to the offensive play.e.r
Defensive player in Press Base Position with right hand in contact with the offensive player's right shoulder.

Left Hand to Left Shoulder	The location of the ball determines the position of the defensive player in relation Left Shoulder to the offensive player. Defensive player in Press Base Position with left hand in contact with the offensive player's left shoulder.
Foul and Drop	The offense has an advantage or has gained ball side advantage. The defensive player on the ball fouls and drops back to prevent a pass to the offensive player.
Switch	Changing defensive positioning with a teammate to improve defensive positioning.
Stunt	The change of direction movement to slow down or stop the offense.
Lunging	Movement to maintain Press Base Position. Horizontal movement with a breast kick and one arm moving forward or laterally.
Giving Water	Sculling movement to maintain Press Base Position. Sculling movement: Cycle legs with feet; Hands sculling slightly below the surface; One leg is on top of the other; Alternate legs; Bend knees as cycling; Scoop water with feet.

Philosophy

1. Defense is the foundation of the team
Great defense requires desire, discipline and dedication.
Great defense starts by developing a team's defensive attitude at the first meeting and practice.
2. Each individual must be dedicated to executing their positional responsibilities in order to collectively stop their opponent
3. Defense starts with correct technique and positioning
Most defensive mistakes are created by poor technique, positioning or both.
It has to be consistently emphasized during practice the importance of correct technique and positioning.
Defensive excellence is achieved by consistently practicing correct technique and positioning with the goal that an athlete will instinctively execute the correct technique and positioning in the heat of the game.

4. Prevent or slow down the opponent from effectively getting the ball to their center
For most international teams the focal point of the offense is the center position.
Our defense is designed around neutralizing the center position.
5. A great defense will generate great counter attack opportunities
The defense and the counter attack are connected

Ball, Player, Area and Center Awareness

Ball, Player, Area and Center awareness is the cornerstone of the foundation. This is the most important aspect of our press defense. All defensive players must:

- A. Know the location of the **Ball** is at all times
- B. Know what your **Player** is doing at all times
- C. Know what is happening in your **Area** at all times
- D. Know the location and position of the **Center** at all times

The tendency for the perimeter players while pressing is to focus solely on their player. It is imperative that while we are pressing each player must have Ball, Player, Area and Center awareness. Each perimeter player is in the **Press Base Position** and is always processing the location of the ball, what their player is doing, what is happening in their area and the location and position of the center.

Tactical Principles

1. The offense must control the game. Team defense starts with an offense that is balanced and can control the game. If our offense is balanced and in control, then our offense should never be beaten on the counter attack. If the opponent is unable to create counter attack advantages, then our defense will be able to set their ball side press defense.
2. Gain and Maintain ball side position. The objective of our half court defense is to prevent or slow down our opponent from effectively getting the ball to their center. Each perimeter player by the attack section is in Press Base Position and in the passing lane. Depending on the location of the ball each perimeter player will have their right/left hand to the offensive player's right/left shoulder.
 - A. All players gain ball side position by the attack section
 - B. All players maintain ball side position for as long as possible
3. 1, 2 and 3 away from the ball positioning. The location of the ball and the number of players away from the ball dictates the position of the defensive perimeter player in relation to the offensive perimeter player.
 - . 1-away from the ball
 - a. Denial position (tight) close contact with nearest hand
 - b. Deter direct pass with the other hand
 - c. Force the pass on the water
 - d. When receiving a pass, force the offensive player to turn their back to the goal

- A. 2-away from the ball
 - . Arm length away, maintain contact with nearest hand
 - a. Deter direct pass with the other hand
 - b. Force the pass on the water
 - c. When receiving a pass, force the offensive player to turn their back to the goal
- B. 3-4-away from the ball
 - . Arm length away, with no contact
 - a. Deter direct pass with the other hand
 - b. Force the pass on the water
 - c. When receiving a pass, force the offensive player to turn their back to the goal

Example: Ball is at 2. x3 and x5 will be 1-away from the ball and will be in denial position; x3 will have their right hand on 3's right shoulder; x5 will be left hand to left shoulder; x2 will be 2- away and will be an arm length away and still maintaining contact with right hand to right shoulder; x1 is 3-away and will be an arm length away with no contact.

The common objectives are to force passes on the water and force the offensive player to turn their back to the goal when receiving a pass. If achieved it will be difficult for the defense to break the press and it will allow enough time for our defender to maintain ball side position. Maintaining press base position is critical for the success of the press defense. The perimeter defense must be in the correct position. The defense is always in the passing lane. (Right Hand-Right Shoulder or Left Hand-Left Shoulder) The perimeter defense can maintain Press Base Position by giving water or lunging. The perimeter defense must be able to gain and maintain ball side position, so our defender can do the same. If the perimeter press quickly breaks down then it will be almost impossible for our defender to maintain ball side position. The perimeter and defender work together to gain and maintain ball side position.

- 4. Switch from a press to a zone. When the offense breaks the press we must be immediately ready to switch to a zone defense. There are many variations of a zone defense that can be incorporated. All players must have Ball, Player, Area and Center awareness. The offense must at first break a press, as soon as the press is broken the defense will switch and the offense then will have to attack a zone. If our defense is executing, an efficient offense will have to be able to quickly switch attacks. That is easier said than done.
- 5. Use the shot clock to gain a defensive advantage
 - . Only foul with a purpose to stop a goal or pass that will lead to a goal
 - A. Gain and maintain ball side position
 - B. By keeping the ball out of the opponents center's strong side (ball side) for as long as possible, and by no unnecessary fouling, the opponent will have less time to run an offense

Optimum Defensive Use of Shot Clock:

Shot Clock	Defense	Offense
:30 - :15	Gain Ball Side Position	Counter Attack
:14 - :09	Maintain Ball Side Position	Organize Attack
:08 - :04	Maintain or Switch to Zone	Attack Defense
:03 - :00	Dictate location of shot	Protect-Rotate to Defense

It must be emphasized the importance of gaining ball side position by the attack section. If the opponent's center has ball side position at the conclusion of the counter attack, the offense will have maximum amount of time to run their offense. If the defender has ball side position at the conclusion of the counter attack, but the weak side defense allows an immediate cross pass, the offense again will have maximum amount of time to run their offense.

6. Position players defensively that will support the counter attack, offense and 6x5
As mentioned before a system connects all the components of the game. In the articles covering counter attack, offense and 6x5, the connection to the defense will be discussed. For example; the defensive position of the center can enhance the Transition Counter Attack, defensively positioning players to be in the correct 6x5 position when exclusion occurs....

Game Strategy

Counter Attack Defense

1. An immediate reaction from offense to defense
2. 2, 3 and 4, as soon as possible, must switch from head up free to water polo back stroke and read the counter attack situation
 - A. Apply Player, Area and Center Awareness

3. 1 or 5 cover when the center is behind the offensive counter attack
 - . Communicate switch with the center
4. Only foul with a purpose, either to stop a goal or a pass that will lead to a goal
5. Any switches should occur prior to the attack section
6. Gain ball side position by the attack section

Defending a Counter Attack Advantage

1. Foul and Drop when the free player is behind the ball
2. Stunt when the free player is even with the ball
 - A. Slow down the advancement of the ball
 - B. If advantage is still maintained, always defend the open player closest to the goal
3. Press, no foul when the free player is ahead of the ball
 - . Still apply pressure on the ball

Half Court Defense

1. The Defender forces the center to work for ball side position
 - A. The defender gains ball side position
 - B. Maintains ball side position for as long as possible
2. Perimeter defense forces the perimeter players to work to get the ball in position for a center entry pass
 - . Perimeter players gain ball side position
 - A. Maintain ball side position for as long as possible
 - B. Force the perimeter players to move away from the attack section and/or away from the ball
 - C. Force each pass on the water
 - D. Force the offensive player to turn their back to the goal when receiving the pass
3. If the initial press is broken, switch to a zone defense

The System

Everything is connected; philosophy to tactical principles to game strategy; the perimeter defense to the defender to the goalkeeper; the defense to the counter attack to the offense to the defense. Our offense must control the game in order for our defense to gain ball side position by the attack section. (The location of the ball determines our positioning) We must gain and maintain ball side position to prevent or slow down the offense from the getting the ball in position for a center entry pass. If this is accomplished, the offense will have a limited amount of time to have an effective attack. (By applying Ball, Player, Area and Center awareness we are always ready to respond if the offense gains an advantage) Once there is a missed shot, turnover or expired shot clock our defense must be able to quickly support our counter attack and offense.

The second article will discuss the important fundamentals that support press defense and the steps, progressions and practices that will develop the technical component.