In today’s physical education classroom, many teachers feel starved for new activities to teach. Rather than settle for the standard fare, why not opt for something that is fresh yet has many of the same principles of traditional invasion sports? This article presents team handball (TH) as one such activity. Although TH is not a new activity (it was first played toward the end of the 19th century in countries such as Denmark, Germany and Sweden), for many students in the United States, TH is largely unknown. During a TH unit, students have the opportunity to experience and learn basic locomotor and manipulative skills (Belka, 2004). Additionally, there is a significant cardiorespiratory component, as players can routinely run up to three miles during the course of a one-hour TH game (Clayton & Dwight, 1997).
As with most invasion games, TH helps students develop their decision-making and problem-solving skills (Howarth, 1999). Teaching TH also allows the teacher to help students appreciate diversity by learning an international sport. Research suggests that TH can tap into students’ interest, understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and other nations (McGehee & Reekie, 1999).

Team handball is played on a 20-meter x 40-meter court (see Figure 1). The half-mooned area in front of the goal is known as the goaltender’s area (D zone). Only the goaltender can occupy this area. The D zone is 6 meters wide. Players from either team are restricted from this area unless they are attempting to score (jumping from outside of the D zone).

**Basic Rules**

1. **Play start:** At the beginning of the game and/or after a goal, play starts from behind the center line, as in soccer. After a foul or fault, play starts in the area of the infraction, which also mimics soccer.

2. **Scoring:** The team with the most goals wins the game. A goal is awarded when the entire handball crosses the baseline into the goal. The goal is placed in the center of each baseline and measures 10 feet wide by 7 feet high.

3. **Time:** A game consists of two 30-minute halves with a 10-minute half-time break.

4. **Steps:** A player can take a maximum of three steps before and/or after dribbling the handball. He/she must pass or throw the handball after these three steps have been taken.

5. **Dribbling:** A player can dribble as many times as he/she wants. Players are dissuaded from dribbling too much, as it can negatively impact fluid team movement.

**Rule Violations**

The following infractions result in a change of possession.

1. **Travel:** A player takes more than three steps while in possession of the handball.

2. **Passive game:** A player holding the handball for more than 3 seconds or a team not attacking within 20 to 25 seconds of gaining possession of the handball.

3. **Carry:** Palming the handball while dribbling.

4. **D zone:** Stepping on the line or inside the zone while possessing the handball or gaining advantage while in offense or defense.

5. **Charge:** Running into players from the opposing team.

6. **Out of bounds:** A ball that goes outside the sideline or baseline will go to the other team. If the goaltender is the last one to touch the ball before it goes out of bounds, the attacking team keeps possession of the handball.

7. **Keeper ball:** An attack that misses the goal goes to the goaltender. He/she will start play from inside the D zone.

The following faults may result in penalty throws and/or two-minute expulsion:

1. A player is defending an attacking player, while inside the D zone.

2. A defender holds the attacker’s arm from behind.

3. A player displays unsportsmanlike behavior toward other players or officials.

**Role of Players**

- The center back is like the point guard in basketball. They are responsible for setting the offense and calling the plays.

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**Figure 1. Handball court**
• The left and right backs are usually the taller players who shoot from greater distances.
• The left and right wings play on the corners and are generally the fastest players on a team.
• The circle or pivot is like the center in basketball. They set the pick and roll near the D zone.

Skills and Teaching Progression
The basic skills used in TH are the one-handed pass (overhead/wrist), catching, throwing (while running or in the air) and dribbling. The order in which the skills are presented in this article is the suggested sequence of skill learning, and the skills are arranged from simple to complex (Rink, 2013).

1. Overhead passing
   a. Hold ball in palm of hand with emphasis on pinky and thumb.
   b. Step forward with either foot.
   c. Bring arm up and back but no farther than ear.
   d. Bring arm forward, release ball and follow through toward target.
   (Passing while moving is also known as “piston.” You pass the handball as you move forward and then move forward to receive the pass. This action is repeated throughout the match.)

2. Wrist Pass
   a. Step toward target with the same foot as the throwing arm.
   b. Use “pronation” motion on your wrist.
   c. If passing with the right hand, wrist will rotate counterclockwise. If using the left hand, then rotate clockwise.
   d. Release handball with emphasis on using thumb.
   e. Follow through toward target.

3. Catching
   a. Reach for ball with both hands.
   b. Bring ball to belly to control and protect.
   c. Put thumbs up when it is a low pass and thumbs down if it is a high pass.

4. Shooting
   a. Hold handball on palm of hand with emphasis on pinky and thumb.
   b. Bring arm up and back, then forward and release with follow through toward the target. A goal can be scored with either a straight shot at the goal or on a bounced shot.
   c. While running, throw as you step with either foot prior to the six-meter line.
   d. Jump with either or both feet and throw before landing.

5. Dribbling
   a. Dribble using the palm of your hand.
   b. Keep dribble in front of you.
   c. Avoid palming the handball and avoid dribbling too many times.

Basic Drills and Tactics
Designing a lesson for TH should be similar to lessons used in other invasion games/sports (see Figure 2 for a suggested teaching progression for a seven-day TH unit). Classic pairing or creating groups of three to six students works best for prac-
ticing basic passing skills. As instruction transitions to practicing offense, the focus should be on maintaining possession of the handball. As in other invasion games/sports, the handball should be moved from one wing to the other to make sure all players touch the ball. Ball movement should start slowly and then increase in speed to confuse the defenders as to who will be the main attacker. Several different plays can be produced each time a team attacks. This is a great opportunity to let the students be creative and come up with their own scoring strategies.

In regards to defense, the “6-0” or 6 on the line is the most basic defensive formation that should be taught. The 6-0 occurs when all six players on the defensive side stand directly in front of the six-meter line and wait for the attack. Each player is assigned an opponent to defend. Switches and changes are required once the offense starts their forward movement. The main idea in this defense is to always have two defenders on the player with possession of the handball. Educators can design a variation of the “shell” drill, commonly used in basketball, to help teach defensive positioning.

Modifications
1. Smaller courts: two courts on the gym floor
2. Smaller teams: four or five players on each team
3. Time: less time playing (5- or 10-minute halves)
4. Smaller goals: Floor hockey goals can be used.
5. No goal: using a target on the wall

References


Submissions Welcome!
Readers are encouraged to send “Theory into Practice” submissions to column editor Anthony Parish at anthony.parish@armstrong.edu.

The purpose of the Strategies column “Theory into Practice” is to distill high quality research into understandable and succinct information and to identify key resources to help teachers and coaches improve professional practice and provide high quality programs. Each column (1,000–1,300 words or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages) summarizes research findings about a timely topic of interest to the readership to enable practitioners to apply research, knowledge and evidence-based practice in physical education and sports.