



# Polo Handbook

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# Personal Skills

Personal Skills are the elements of Canoe Polo that are fundamental to performing and enjoying the game. The following section is full of coaching tips and pointers for helping paddlers better understand how to do and develop the individual skills.

## Picking Up the Ball of the Water

- Hand on top of ball
- Roll hand backwards (slight downward pressure)
- Lift up



## Throwing - Passing and Shooting

- Ball in hand
- Sit upright with your body connected to your kayak (hips, bottom, knees, feet, etc.)
- Good trunk rotation - one shoulder in front of the other - throwing arm at the back
- Keep elbow high (ball in line with ear)
- Unwind trunk bringing shoulder through
- Bring elbow through keeping it high
- Flick the wrist, ending it with the fingers pointing in the direction of travel of the ball
- The arm and shoulder keeps moving forwards causing the trim of the boat to alter.

Note: Releasing the ball at different points in the throw will change the trajectory of the throw, e.g. higher release, ball travel upwards. Also twisting wrist at the last moment will cause it to 'bend' in the air.

Practice from all different angles and with both hands.





# Personal Skills

## Catching

- Make a target with your hands ready to receive the ball
- Reach out to meet the ball, you want to gain possession as early as possible
- Relax your arm(s)
- Bring your hand back, matching the speed of the ball then slowing down, controlling the speed of the ball - the wrist, elbow and shoulder act as shock absorbers
- Aim to finish in the wound-up throwing position

## Balancing the Ball on a Paddle

- Balance ball on paddle blade with the drive face facing upwards

**Note:** Changing the angle of the blade causes the ball to roll off or stay on the blade.



## Using Paddle to Bring the Ball to Hand

- Reach out over the ball with the paddle, keeping the paddle as vertical as possible
- Drive face over blade
- Draw paddle and ball towards boat

**Note:** A slight downward movement of the paddle shaft may help.



## Blocking - General

- Try to anticipate the path of the ball as it leaves the hand, where is the goal or receiver?
- Move the paddle to intercept the ball
- Similar to catching, relax the arms, use the paddle, arms, shoulders and elbows to decelerate the ball
- Aim to catch the blocked ball or for it to fall in the water within reach - gaining possession as quickly as possible

**Note:** Different paddle blades and different sides of the blade will alter the deflected path of the ball, e.g. does your paddle have a raised spine?

## Blocking - Goalkeeping

- Know where you are in relation to the goal (maintain a central position)
- Paddle raised in the air, drive face of the top blade facing out
- Hand Grip - different variations in hand grip to enable greatest possible reach whilst keeping a strong grip
- Keep eyes on the ball and try to anticipate the path of the ball
- As for general blocking try to take speed off the ball without the ball crossing the face of the goal
- Aim to catch the blocked ball or for it to fall into the water within reach - gain possession as quickly as possible
- Try moving shoulders and upper body to face the shooter on angled shots

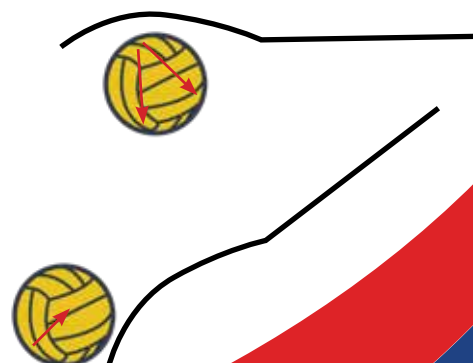


## Dribbling - Hands

- Pick up the ball using the technique described above using one hand, other hand on the paddle ready to go!
- Throw the ball forward just in front of your kayak (hand ending up next to your paddle at the end of your throw, ready to grip and paddle)
- Hand on paddle aim for three strokes (aim for last stroke to be on the side which you are picking up the ball on)
- Reach toward to pick up ball and repeat the above

## Dribbling - Paddle

- Use the paddle to flick the ball forwards
- Using the blade on top of the ball, roll the blade backwards with slight downward pressure, ending with the ball rolling onto the blade
- Using your arms to move the paddle blade forward quickly to flick the ball (note, the height of the top hand will change the flight of the ball)
- Flick the ball forward just in front of your kayak
- Aim for three strokes, the last stroke being on the side you are dribbling on
- Reach forward to flick the ball and repeat the above steps (reaching forward means you get another go before you sail past)

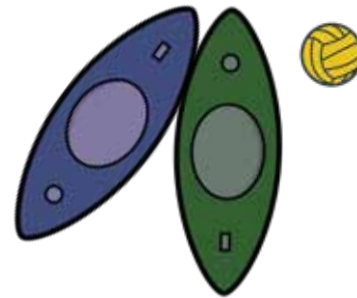


# Personal Skills

## Tackling - Boat Skills

- Use your kayak's bow to turn another player's kayak who has the ball
- Try to turn their kayak by pushing (sustained contact not between 80° - 100°) the bow of their kayak

**Note:** A good reference point is bow side of the footrest bolts.



## Tackling - Hands

A legal tackle is an open hand on the back, shoulder or side when the player is in possession of the ball and it is not dangerous, for example, not near a side or onto other kayaks.

- Practice in pairs in a stationary situation in a safe environment
- One person holds the ball (use the ball by pushing it down onto the surface of the water to prevent capsize support stroke!) the tackler pushes the player on the shoulder with an open hand. Both players get a feel for what a hand tackle is while the coach reinforces what is a legal tackle.

**Note:** Direction of push and your own balance.

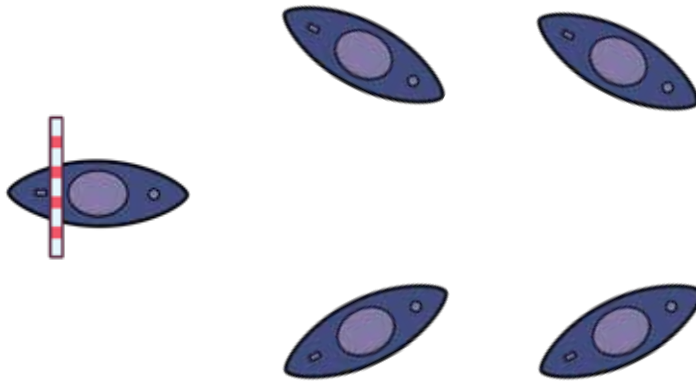
**Defending Points:** No fending off allowed, edge control, use of paddle and ball to support, ability to end up away from tackling player.



# Tactical - Defence

## Defence: Static 2 & 2

- Keeper positioned under goal
- Defending the area, each of the four zone players has an area to defend - like a box
- Anchor (reset) points
- Boat Control - Use boat skills to keep attacking team out. Positive strokes
- Communication

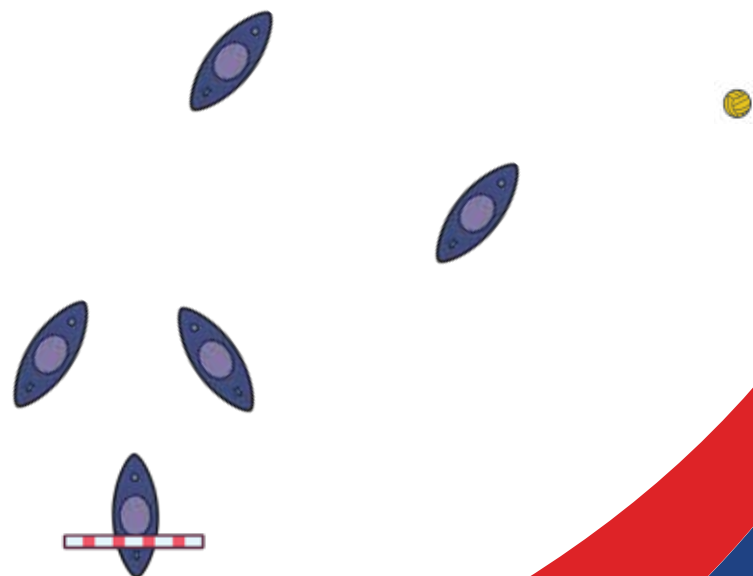


## Defence: Chasing 2

- Keeper under goal
- Anchor (reset) points
- Front to start chasing the ball in an area just in front of back two, back two hold position unless opportunity to win ball or move into different tactic
- Timing
- Communication

**Note:** Between everyone essential, but additional communication in pairs and between pairs.

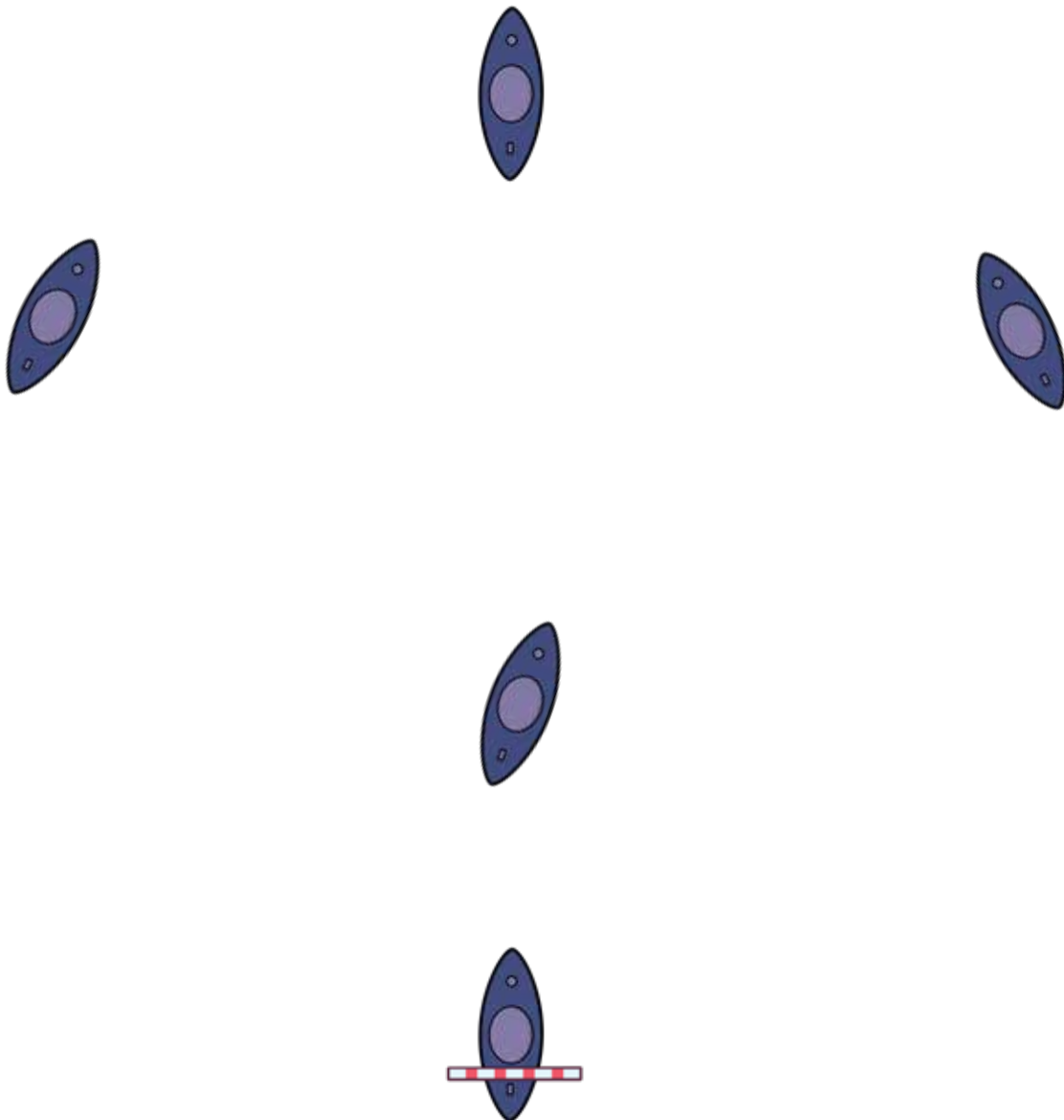
**Note:** Defence: Zone -  
Adaption of chasing 2 to  
reduce holes between  
pairs



# Tactical - Defence

## Defence: Chasing 3

- Keeper positioned under goal
- Anchor (reset) points
- Front three start chasing the ball in their own half (do not let too many go past without getting back to 'help'), back player holds position loosely marking the first attacker through with boat positioned ready to change marker
- Timing
- Communication essential

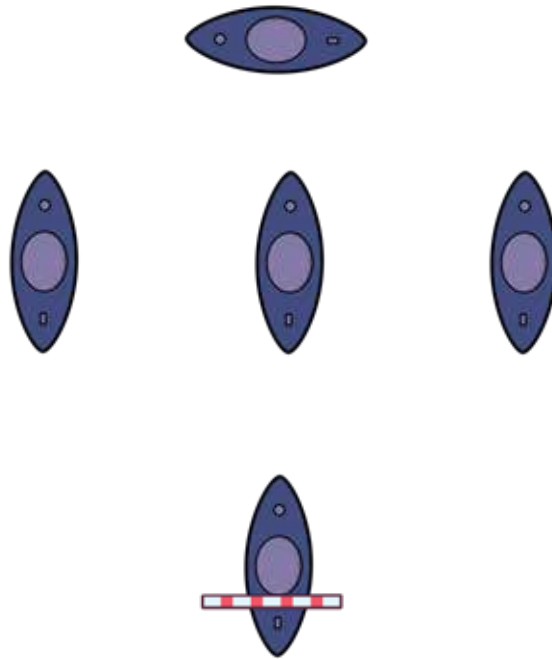




# Tactical - Defence

## Defence: 3 & 1 (Flat 3)

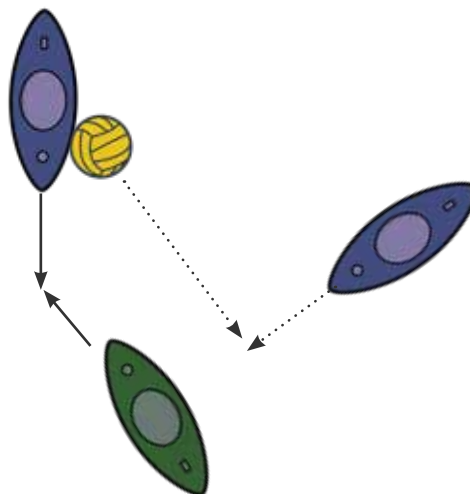
- Keeper positioned under goal
- Defending the area, each of the three zone players has an area to defend. The front player defends the zone without getting caught up on attackers
- Anchor (reset) points
- Boat control - Use boat skills to keep attacking team out. Positive strokes
- Switching positions to deal with the threat
- Communication



# Tactical - Attack

## Attack: The Draw

The basic draw can be described below using a 'two on one' situation.



- The attacking boat paddles forward causing the defending boat to paddle towards them (drawn towards the player with the ball)
- Once the defender is committed, the attacker passes the ball to their teammate, taking care to avoid the defender's paddles (timing is key here)

Several 'draws' can be put together to attack a zone in order to commit multiple players creating a space and/or a 'one on one' shot with the goal keeper.

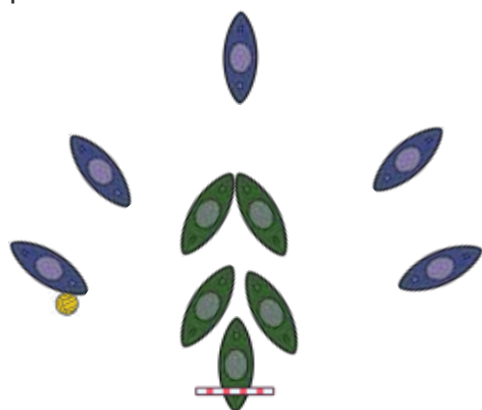


Fig 1

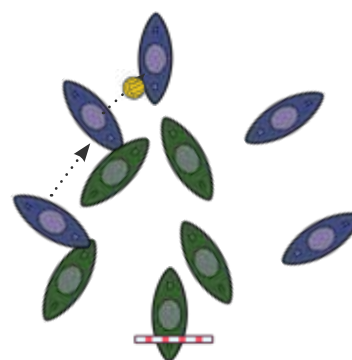


Fig 2

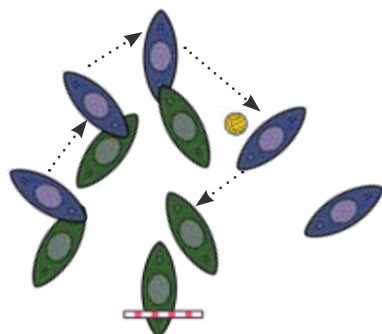


Fig 3

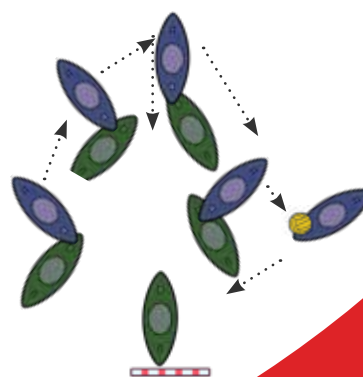


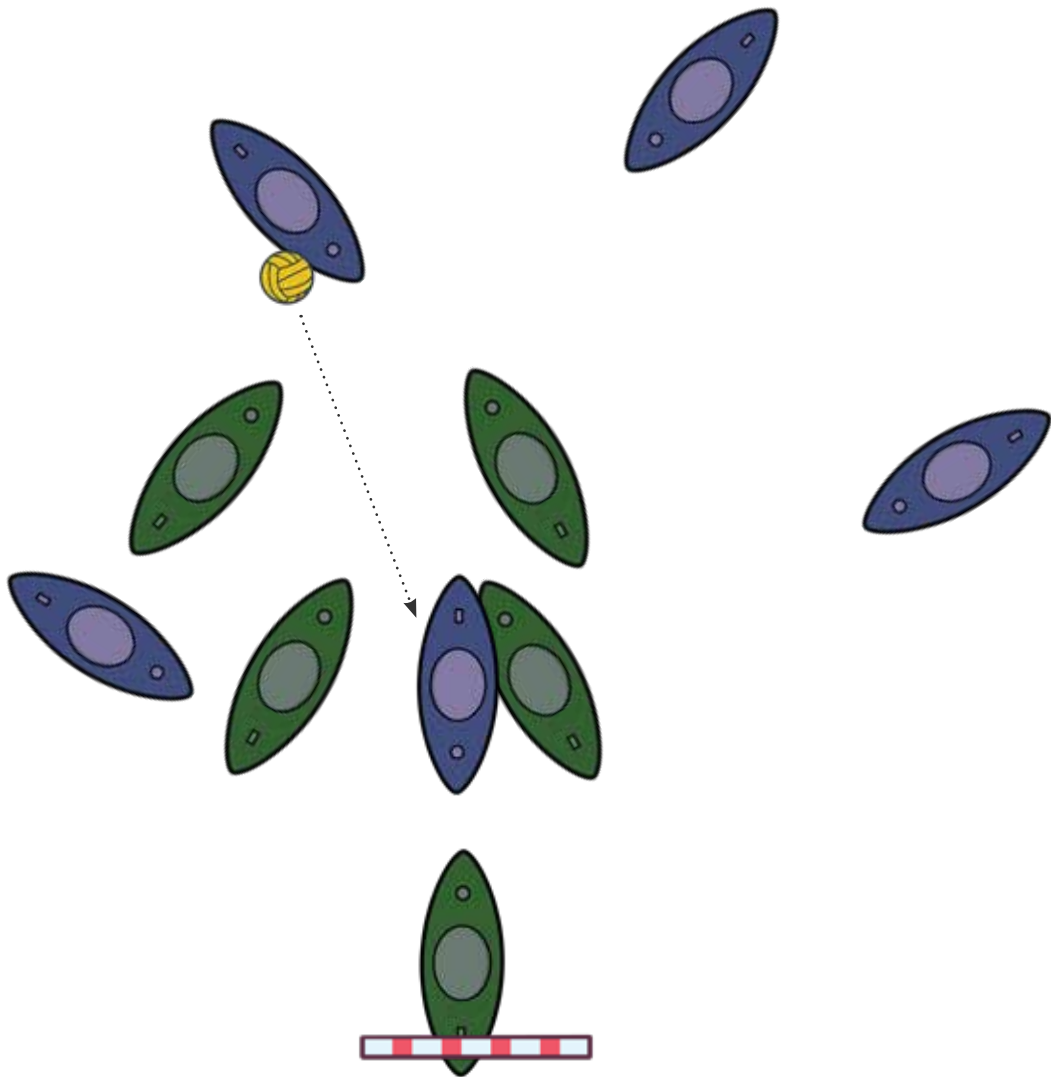
Fig 4

**Note:** The draw is often combined with other tactical moves to make a set play.

# Tactical - Attack

## Attack: The Centre Person

- The team work to position a player into the centre
- Attackers and the ball keep moving to keep defence occupied
- Aiming for a clear pass without opposition paddles into the centre person
- This tactic is usually combined with other moves to create the space for that clear pass



# Tactical - Attack

## Attack: Overload

- Start deep to get boat speed
- Timing is essential. First chance on initial contact (defender drops paddle), then second chance once player has 'worked' the defender
- Communication
- Preventing front defender from covering

Fig 1

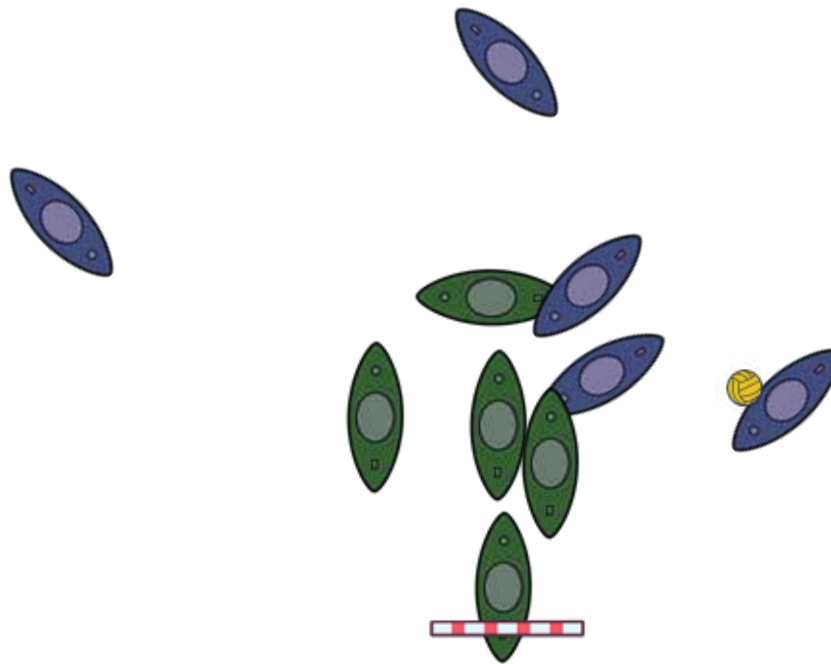
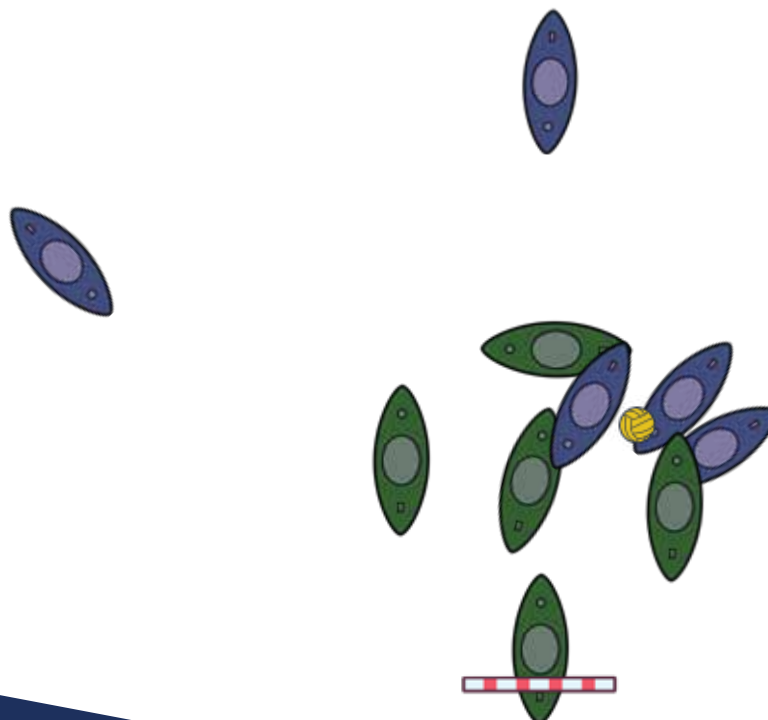


Fig 2



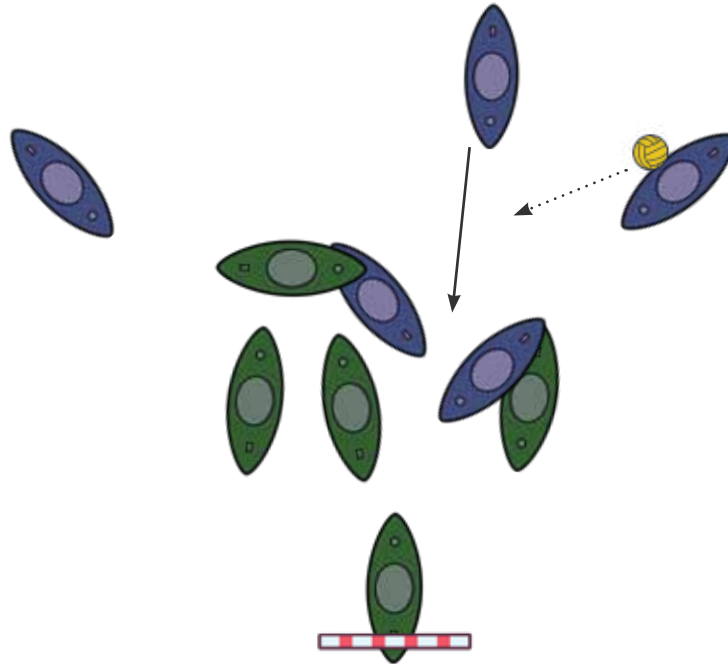


# Tactical - Attack

## Attack: Split

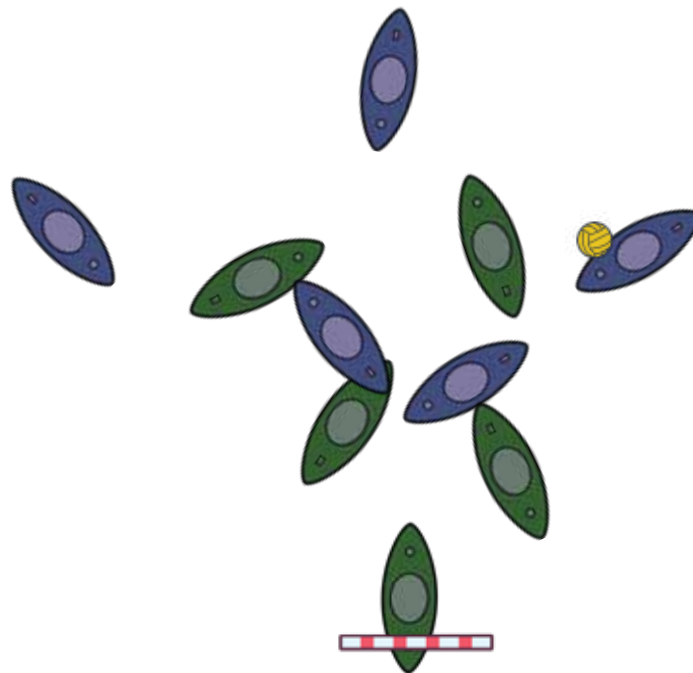
- Timing - wait for an opportunity
- Communication
- Boat positioning - speed on boat, timing, edge control and trim
- Shot at from runner at speed or into the gap and either right handed or left handed player

### Split attacking a 2 & 2 Zone



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### Split attacking a 2 & 2 Zone



# Tactical - 5 Out

## Generic Points

- Communication - relay information. Include substitutions
- Trust
- Positive strokes
- Legal - if they do not have the ball, do not touch them or their equipment

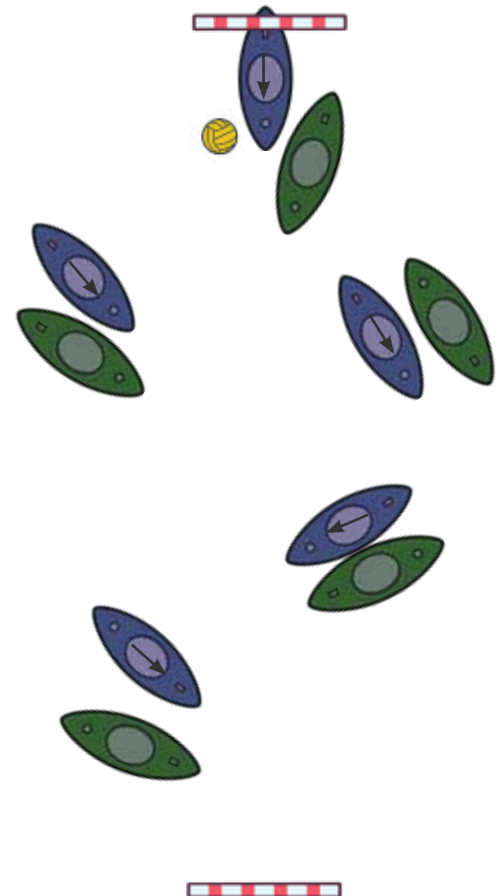
## When the team has possession of the ball

- Supporting passes
- Boat position
- Put defender on your weaker side
- Movement, speed and changes of speed
- Individual roles (job description - and any other duty)
- Reset position
- Possession
- Awareness
  - of opposition
  - of Pitch
  - of Ability of team
- Looping (supporting teammate from 'safe' side)

## When the team is defending

- Communication
  - Help
  - No questions, say what you are doing
  - Relay calls round the team
- Switching
- No fouls
- Awareness
  - of opposition
  - of Pitch
  - where ball is
- Marking Player
  - tight
  - in position to stay in front of player at all times including when turning

## Starting positions in possession



# Tactical - Transitions

**Choice of tactics may be decided by your team's ethos on how the game is to be played.**

**Other factors may include:**

- The strengths of players within your team.**
- The strengths and weaknesses within your opposition.**
- The tactics which your opposition are playing.**

Transition of tactics can happen during the game, reasons include your team deciding to deploy more defensive or more attacking tactics depending on the game and/or a change of opposition tactics.

Practising these transitions between tactic develops understanding between team members and timings and positioning of individual players.

Some tactics flow well between each other, practising these develops team members' understanding. For example, a chasing 2 + 2 pushing to chasing 3.

Teaching individuals the strengths and weaknesses of each defensive and attacking tactic develops a player's understanding and will help them make appropriate decisions during the game.



# Planning a Session

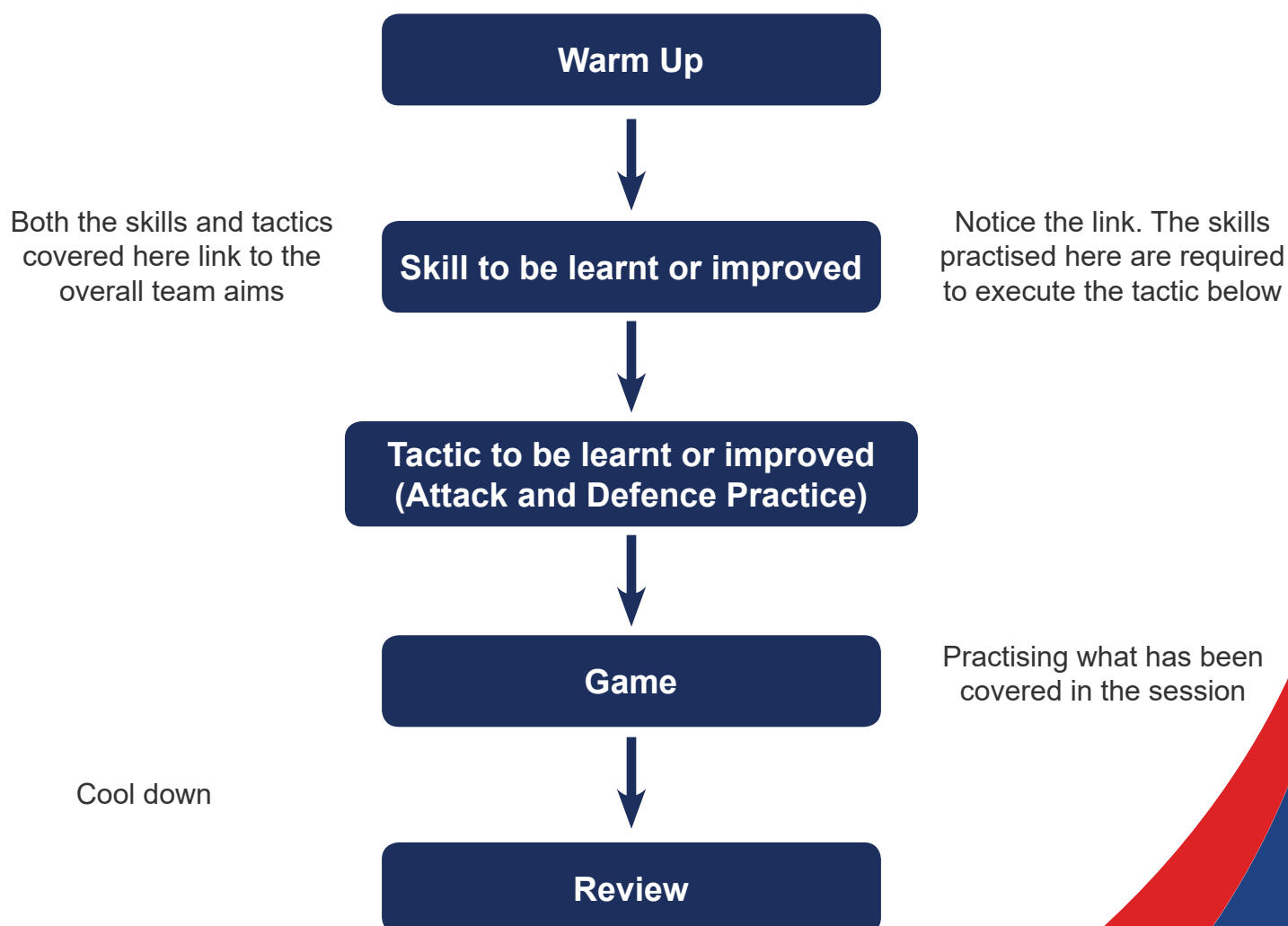
To make the most efficient use of time, you need to know what you are aiming to achieve during your session. To know this, you need to know what your aims for the team are and what the aims are for the individuals fitting into that team.

This helps you decide your content for the session.

You need to know what resources you have or require.

You can then plan the detail of the session.

**An ideal structure:**





# Polo Warm Ups

Key principles: Land based to water based. Raising body temperature, joint mobility, appropriates of stretching before and after, intensity of session and content of session.

Fun ways for polo specific warm ups including games and drills.

General examples:

- 'stuck' in the mud
- relay race games
- funny dances
- paper scissors stone - with warm up forfeit, jog and/or star jumps
- pass the paddle and or ball, etc.

Polo related examples:

- static passing and catching in pairs (both hands, different weight of pass)
- moving - pass and run to end of line
- passing in circle with people's names
- include coaching points in the above exercises.

Handball can also be used as a competitive land based warm up.

Boat based examples:

- Tag (ball and boat)
- Paddling and turning (solo and/or team)
- Paddling trains
- Dribbling relay
- Follow my leader
- Paddling and passing drills
- Static passing drills, etc.

**Note. Please encourage participants to warm up slowly especially regarding passing for example, short distances first only moving to long passes and shots once fully warmed up \*high risk of injury if care not exercised.**

# Skills and Drills

## Example 1:

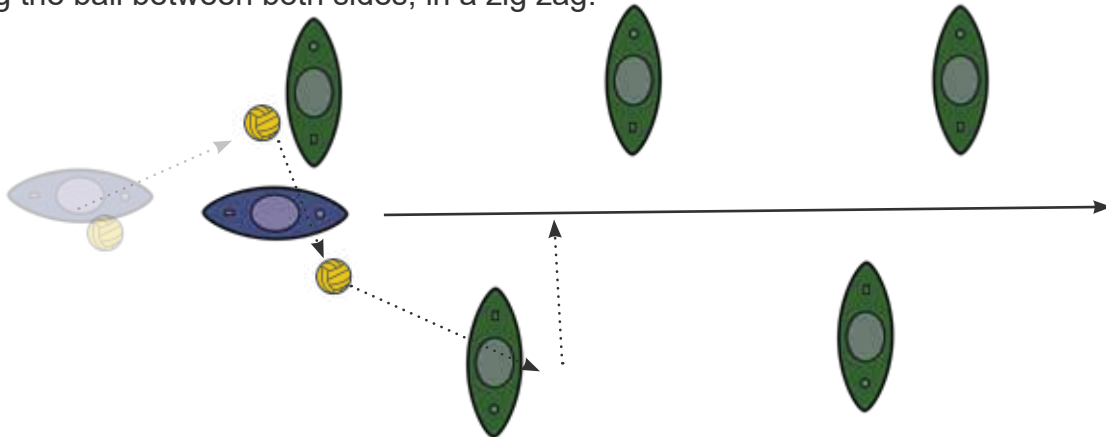
Technical - skills drills (passing and catching, dribbling and ball control)  
Linking with tactical - attack and defence, overload, split and static 2v2.

### Passing and Catching

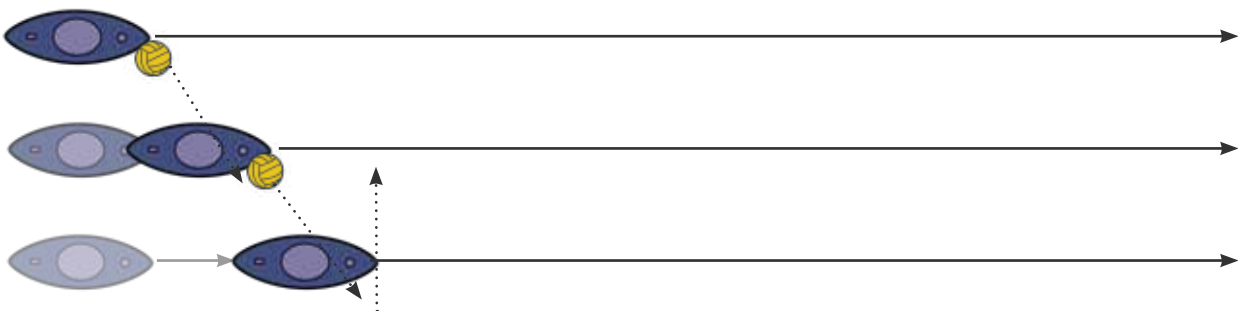
- Start with stationary passing (work on accuracy - where is the finger pointing at the end of the throw?) and catching one handed (work on early control and taking the speed of the ball) in pairs.



- Passing on the move. Pass and move in a set area (work on keeping ball dry and acceleration strokes)
- Passing on the move. The drill is to paddle down between two lines of other paddlers passing and catching the ball between both sides, in a zig zag.



- Pass on move. Up and down pitch (coaching points, where to pass and catch - sideways and keeping boat running straight)



These are a few examples of passing and catching drills, there are many other examples. Try to build up the difficulty so that the paddlers are thinking of passing, catching and paddling, using different angles and from different directions. These will make it more realistic to game play. Other sports such as basketball, football, rugby, etc. have all sorts of different ideas for passing and catching drills. Adapt them to polo and see what you think.

# Skills and Drills

## Ball Control and Dribbling

- Ball control - move ball round boat - clock (changing hand grips). Next, move ball round boat without changing hand grip - over deck, edging boats
- Ball control - balancing on blade (moving blade angle)
- Ball control - paddle flick (roll over ball, slight pressure, angle of paddle to control ball up and on to blade)
- Dribbling - Hand - up and down relays (work on - reaching forward to pick up ball and rolling hand over back of ball, throw ball forward keeping other hand on paddle, hand to paddle and first stroke on same side). Progression, both sides, swapping sides at given points, races, races with other tasks)
- Dribbling - Paddle - paddle flick as above (note side of blade used). Drills as above.
- Start with passing, starting with small distances building up as an extra warm up



## Blocking Drills

- Pairs throwing to each other to block (try to control the blocked ball to land at your side)
- In the middle - introduce a third player, two pass with the third blocking in the middle (different distances and weight of pass, note aim to practice blocking)
- Introduce a fourth player, three passing one blocking.



# Skills and Drills

## Example 2:

Technical - Skills drills (shooting and goal keeping, hand tackling and boat tackling).  
Linking with Tactical - attack and defence, draw and chasing 2v2.

### Shooting and Goalkeeping

Shooting and goal keeping - Players swapping positions so everyone has a go in goal (especially important at early stages). Pointers on goalkeeping and shooting.

- Drill - static shots at goal from different positions (shooters sit in semi circle round goal, everyone has one or two shots each, then everyone swaps round a place - including goal keeper)
- Shooting on the move - shooter paddles forward and receives a ball from a stationary 'feeder' and shoots, then recovers ball and leaves in next to the feeder and goes to back of the line. While next shooter goes, etc. vary angle of run from shooters and where they are aiming at for goalkeepers to have varied practice. (Position of feeder can be altered to practice receiving ball from different areas of the pitch - more game specific)
- No goalkeeper - 'round the clock' - shooters aim at top right corner until they get a goal in that specific spot then bottom right, bottom left, top left, then centre of the goal - winner is the first person to get all spots in least amount of attempts.
- No goalkeeper - knock out competition - each round at a different distance or angle, keep going until all 'out'

### Tackling

Tackling - Hand - open hand on back, shoulder or side, when player is in possession of ball and not dangerous. Practice in pairs in stationary situation in safe environment. One person holds the ball (use the ball - by pushing it down on to the surface of the water to prevent capsizing - support stroke!) the tackler pushes player on shoulder with open hand. Both players get a feel for what a hand tackle is while coach reinforces what is a legal tackle. Note - coaching points, legal, direction of push and your own balance. Defending points - no fending off aloud, edge control, use of paddle and ball to support, ability to end up away from tackling player.

Tackling - Boat - introduction level - turning the opposition's kayak legally and on top of deck and driving legally. Practice in pairs, the tackler pushes the other persons kayak with their own kayak below footrest bolts with sustained contact not at 90 degrees in order to turn the other. The defending player can practice shielding the ball at the same time. Note - coaching points, legal, position of boat contact - turning motion.



# Attack and Defence

Attack and Defence: Half of the players introduce the attack and half the defence. Practice, then swap over.

## Example 1:

Defence - Zone - Static 2 and 2 - introduce concept (visual - magnet board or video before) defending the area, each of the four zone players has an area to defend - like a box. Keeper under goal. Used boats to keep others out, note anchor points.

Attack - Overload - introduce concept. First two players tackle the two zone players 'overloading' that side, the third attacker takes the shot (timing when defenders' paddles go down one on one shot with keeper).

Same defense but introduce 'split' attack - Two attackers drive into zone to create a wedge with their boats and split the zone. The ball which is moving between the other players, is either passed between those two players for a shot or taken in by third player who either takes front defender away and passes or takes the shot.

## Practice:

Attack and defence: Half of the players introduce the attack and half the defence. Practice then swap over.

## Example 2:

Defence - Zone - Chasing 2 and 2 - introduce concept (visual - magnet board or video before)

**Attack - Draw - introduce concept - practice.**

**Attack - Split - introduce concept - practice.**

## Games and/or games with aims (that is goals or restrictions)

Game practice with the coach encouraging players to use what has just been learnt.

Ways could include giving players/teams restrictions for example, you cannot use paddles to bring in a loose ball, this encourages accurate passing and good boat control.

Or setting goals for the session, for example, focus on 100% accurate passing.

## Review

### Summary of session.

Coach to lead quick summary of what was just covered on the water.

### Review of session.

Participants fully participating in coach lead/peer led group discussion. Consider where to carry out the review, on the water or once everyone changed (weather conditions?)