

Sweden's flexible zone defence

by

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(Photos: Uros Hocevar)

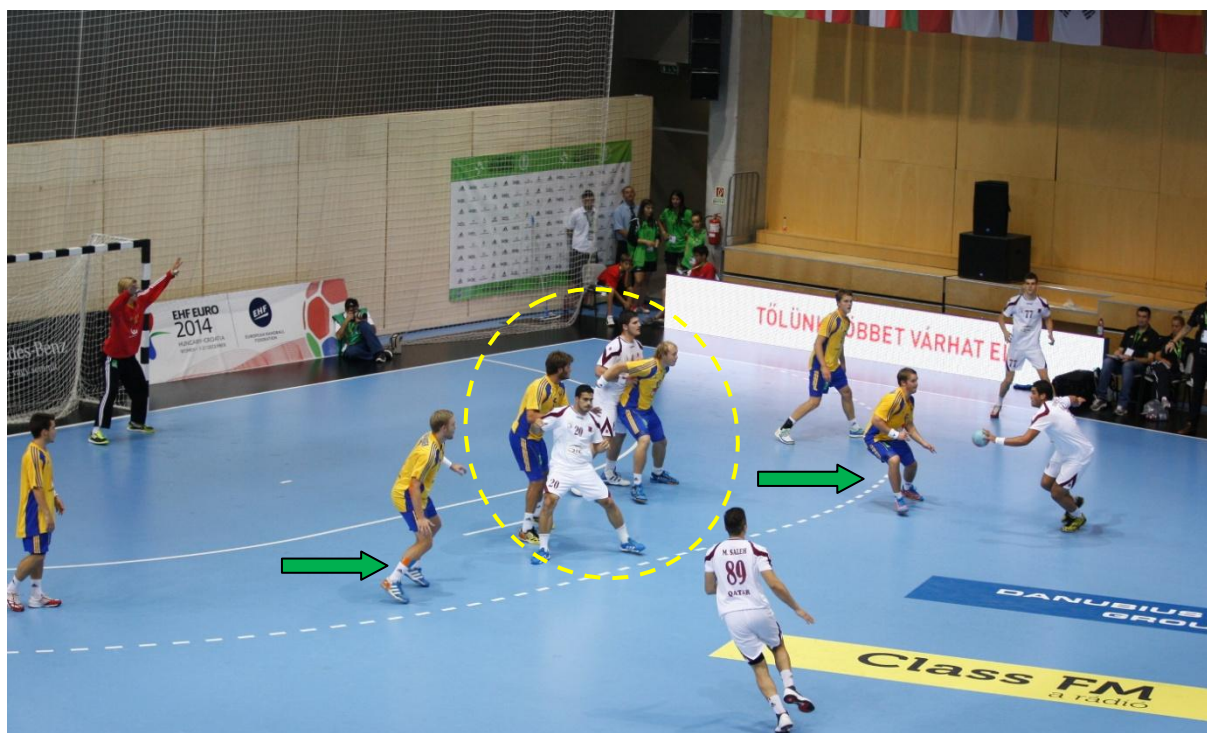
Alongside Denmark and Germany, Sweden has the best defending record so far in the 24 teams participating at the Youth World Championship, conceding 142 goals in 7 games (an average of 20 goals / game). As usual, strong zone defence supported by excellent goalkeeping is the key factor for this impressive record. However, contrary to the traditional way of Scandinavian defence - that is, staying close to the goal-area line and moving mostly in the width of the court - the Swedish team go through a wide range of zone defence formations from time to time. Following their quick retreat they move back gradually, in waves, leaving a few players in the back court. Or they occasionally leave the safe goal area a little to disturb the attack organisation then move back again to form a tight zone around their goal. This type of flexible defence behaviour can be seen in picture row 1-10: at first the Swedish defence stretches out from a 6:0 to a 5:1 / 4:2 formation against Qatar (**Picture row 1-5**) then on the contrary, from an open 4:2 / 3:2:1 formation, the defenders switch back to a more defensive 6:0 zone against Tunisia (**Picture row 6-10**).



Picture 1. The Swedish zoning defenders take position close to the goal-area line.



Picture 2. Following a position change, RB runs-in to the defence line while CB moves to RB.



Picture 3. CH defenders control the pivots, allowing RH and LH defenders to move out.



Picture 4. The 4 half defenders control their attackers one-on-one, while OL and OR are zoning.



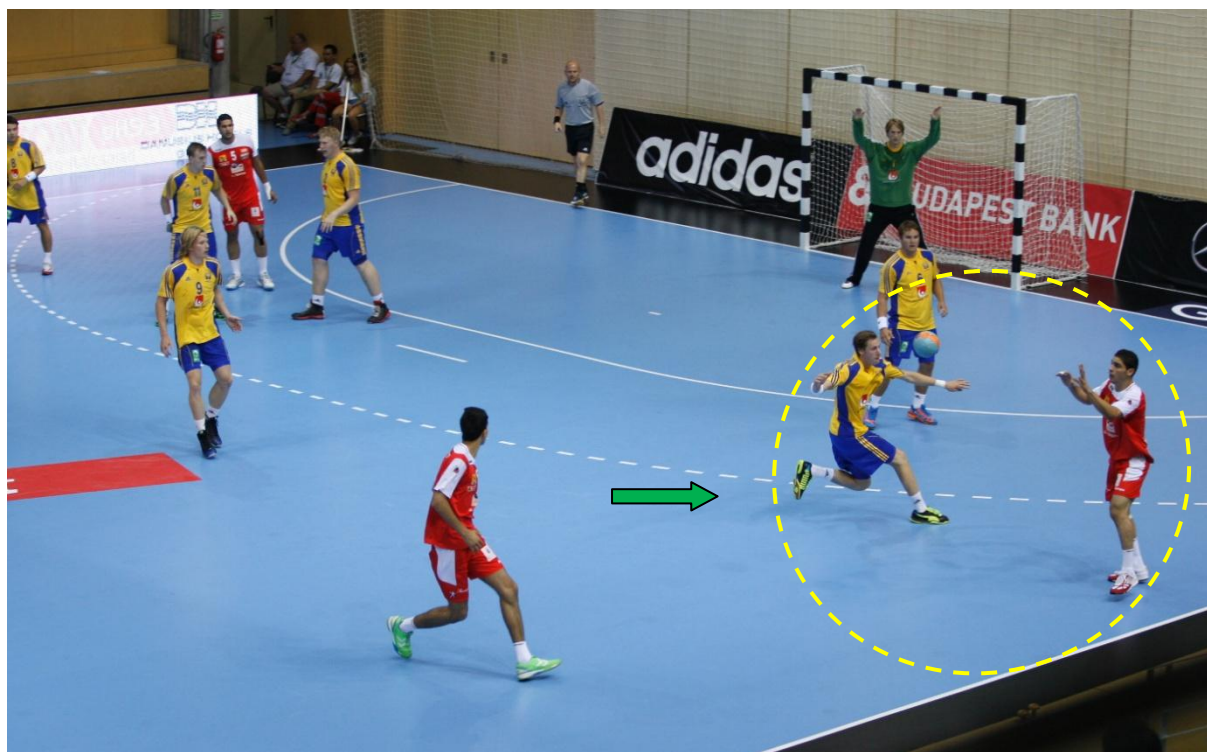
Picture 5. Anticipating the CB's pass the RH defender is able to steal the ball from LB.



Picture 6. Sweden applies an open 3:2:1, 3:3, 4:2 zone defence formation against TUN.



Picture 7. The defenders always shifts towards the direction of the ball passed.



Picture 8. The Forward defender controls the RW with the ball and then moves back...



Picture 9. ...while OL shifts to RB when the attacker receives the pass from RW.



Picture 10. The defence moves back to a 6:0 formation when there is no direct danger.