

6-a-side Intermediate and Secondary Hockey

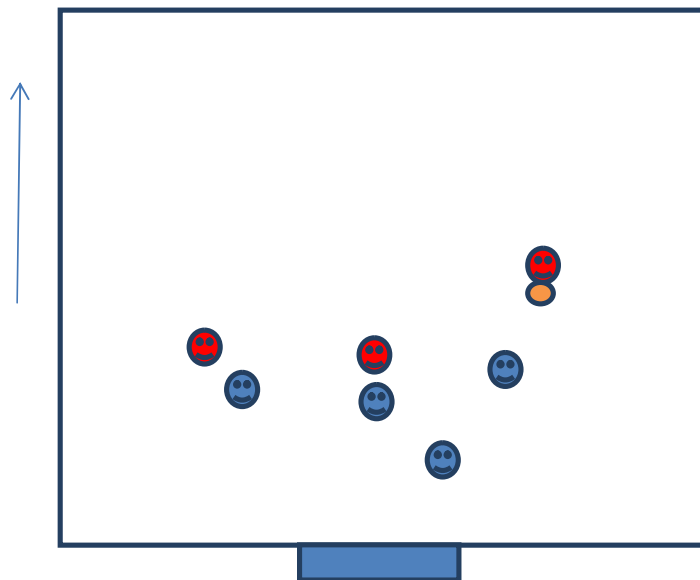


Guide to positional play

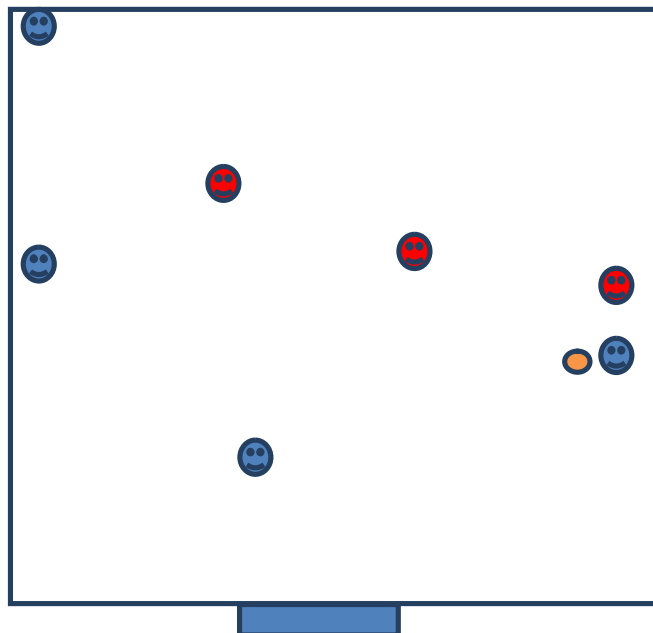
The purpose of this guide is to assist coaches and players with positional play and basic patterns of play for 6-a-side ½ field hockey. The ultimate aim is to ensure that what we are teaching our players at this level provides a seamless transition to 11-a-side hockey in the future.

In the past, 11-a-side hockey positions have been very territorially defined. For example, the left full back stayed on the left side of the field and stayed behind the left half and centre half. The speed of modern turf hockey has forced a change to this thinking. It is still appropriate at mini hockey to assign positions based on territory because these players have not yet developed spacial awareness and keeping them spread out is often the biggest challenge. For Y7 players and above, we should be encouraging them to be more mobile and not impeded by imaginary line on the turf that they should not venture over. We still need to have some boundaries, but rather than these boundaries being territorial, they should be more about function and “shape”.

With senior 11-a-side hockey, this shape will be defined by what situation has occurred on the field. A good example of this would be the defensive shape. When the opposition (red) have the ball our “back 4” (blue) might be set up like this:



Once we (blue) have the ball the back 4 might set a more attacking shape like this. It doesn't matter who takes up what position, as long as all of the positions are filled quickly:



Basic positions

In 11-a-side hockey, traditionally we had a formation that was described as 5 – 3 – 2 – 1. The first 5 were in the front line (slightly staggered) and were left and right wing, left and right inside and centre forward. The next line was the 3 halves and then the 2 backs followed by the goal keeper. Then the 3-3-3-1-1 formation came along and we had 3 strikers, 3 midfielders, 3 backs, a sweeper and a goal keeper. So confusion about the names of the roles was an issue for newer players.

It is now universally accepted that the roles, regardless of the formation you use, players should be grouped into 3 areas:

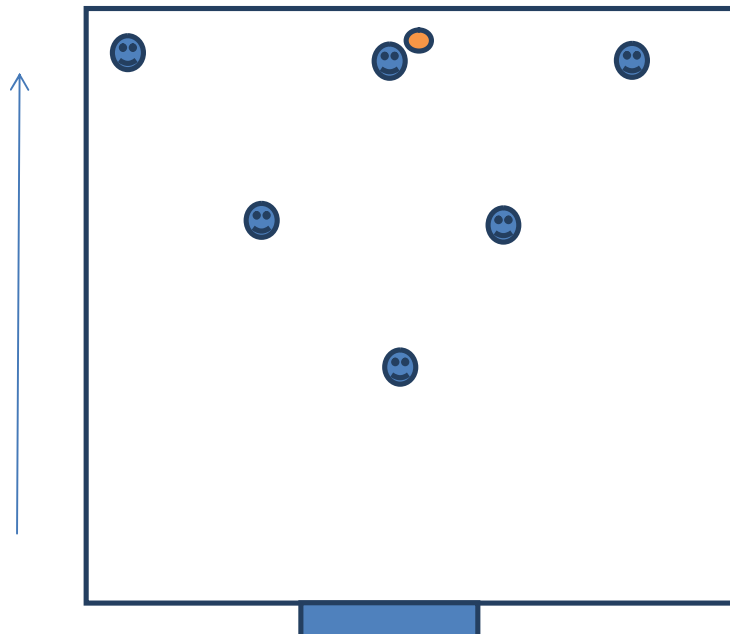
- Strikers
- Midfielders
- Defenders

These groups of players have attributes that lend themselves to a group of positions. Strikers are fast and decisive with quick reactions. Midfielders have good vision, are composed and can pass effectively in all directions. Defenders are patient, direct players in front of them well and are mobile.

For 6-a-side hockey the positions should be:

- 3 x strikers
- 2 x midfielders
- 1 x defender

Although players will start the game set up as below, they will play in the position that is most efficient, effective and timely for any given situation



“With the ball” and “Without the ball”

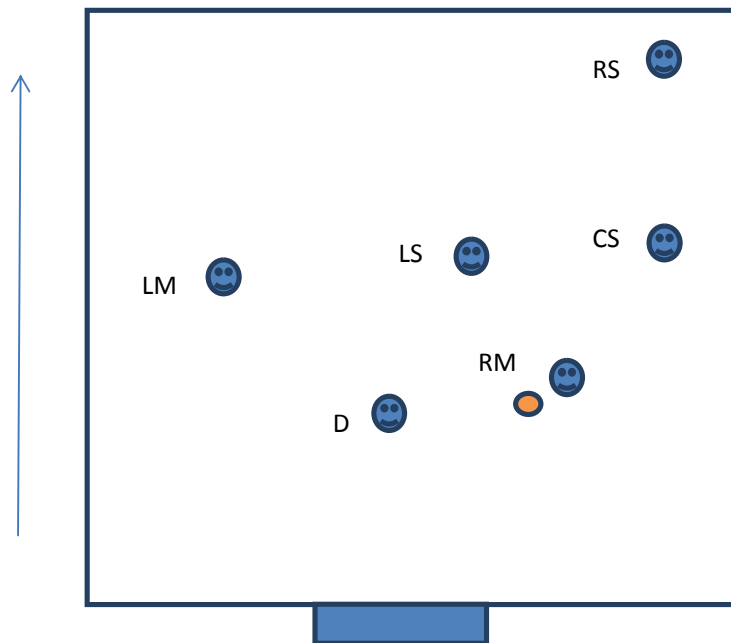
To keep it really simple we now talk about the whole team and what we do with or without the ball.

A key concept here is that when we have the ball we are all thinking about attack and when we don't have the ball we are all thinking about defence.

When we have the ball

When we have the ball we need to look to get one of our strikers “high”. On a 6-a-side ½ field this means that they will probably be in or near the edge of the attacking circle. This does 2 things. Firstly it engages the opposition's defender and if one of our players breaks through with the ball the defender need to make a decision: to go for the ball carrier or to mark the high striker. The second thing it does is provide a target for our other players to pass the ball to that will put us in behind most of the opposition's players.

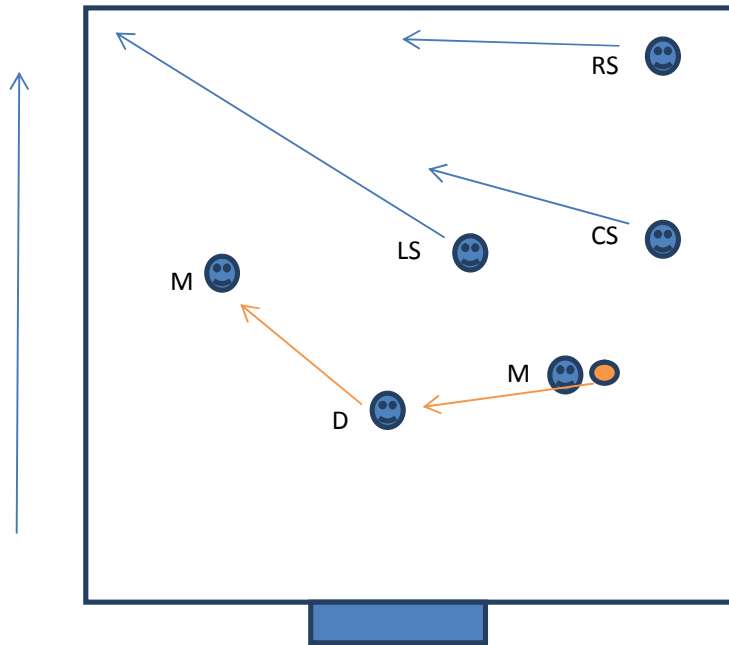
Initially, as the coach, you may need to specify which position goes high when we have the ball. For example, you might specify that if we have the ball on the right, the right striker goes high and the other 2 strikers slide over towards the right.



The other thing you will notice is that the opposite side midfielder has drifted wide and the defender has positioned themselves so that the ball can be transferred to the opposite side of the field if the left attacking option is blocked (all players thinking attack). If the ball is transferred to the right the 3 strikers need to reposition quickly to form a mirror image of what they had on the left. The striker in the middle of the field would run diagonally to the corner of the field. The high striker would run to get in front of the goal and the striker on the left would get to the top of the circle. The left midfielder now has 3 attacking pass options and can still opt to pull the ball back out to the defender if everything closes down in front of them.

The strikers should always look to form an "L" shape (or triangle) between themselves, or in conjunction with one of the midfielders.

The 2 midfielders and the defender should also look to form triangles. When we have the ball the triangle can be quite large to enable us to get good width and depth in our play. When we don't have the ball we need to shorten up the sides of the triangle and concentrate our defensive shape.



When we don't have the ball

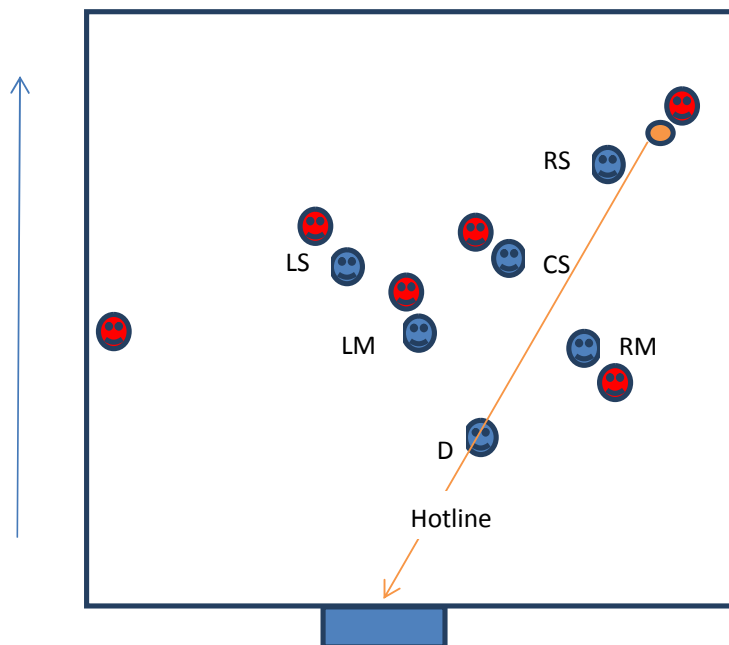
When we don't have the ball we need to get as many players behind the ball as possible (between the opposition and the goal we are defending). The strikers in particular need to work really hard to get back and get behind the ball. This is no time for the high striker to say, "I'll just stay here so I am ready for the next attack". This will create an overlap (6 v 5) and someone will be unmarked. If the opposition find this person and get them the ball they will have a free run to the goal.

So transition from attack to defence is critical and it must be fast and instinctive. From defence to attack is not as critical but teams should be encouraged to break away fast if they turn the ball over and they can see a numerical advantage in front of them.

We need to compress our defensive shape (width wise) and concentrate on defending the middle of the field more than the edges of the field. (If you have to leave a player free, make sure it is the widest player.)

The shape is also slightly skewed when the ball is on one side of the field. For example, if the ball is on the left then our players on the right will slide infield and deeper to provide cover defence. The old concept of help side – ball side still applies.

The other concept that we can introduce is "getting on the hotline". The hotline is an imaginary line between the opposition ball carrier and the goal they are attacking. The deepest player in our team should stay as close to this line as possible. The theory is that at some point the ball has to come along the hot line to get to the goal. If one player is on this line there will not be an open goal. If the deepest player is marking someone, they should mark them on the hotline side of their opponent.



Penalty corners

The new format only allows for 3 field players to defend the penalty corner. The other 3 need to retire to the oppositions circle. The roles of the 3 defending players should be:

1. First runner – their job is to run out as fast as possible to the receiver and stop them hitting the ball directly at the goal. They are also responsible for any ball that is laid off to their forehand side at the top of the circle.
2. Second runner – their job is to run out quickly about 4m to the left of the first runner and stop about 4m inside the edge of the circle. Their job is to pick up any ball passed to the first runner's reverse side and also to tackle the receiver if they dribble past the first runner.
3. Third runner – their job is to run out about 4m from the centre of the goal. Their goal is to tackle anyone that gets the ball in behind the first and second runner. They can also stop the direct shots on goal

NOTE: If you have elected to have a goal keeper, the third runner can run from the right hand post out 4m. they still tackle anyone that gets the ball in behind the first and second runner but they leave the goal keeper to stop the shots.

Field size implications

The 6-a-side field width is about 45m – a standard field is 55m. So it is **marginally skinnier**. The 6-a-side field length is 55m – a standard field is 90m. So it is **significantly shorter**. This shortening of the field is also not proportional to the goal scoring zones. The circles are still 15m. The distance between the top of each of the circles is therefore only 25m rather than 60m on a standard field. This is extremely significant.

If we elect to play in the middle 1/3rd of the pitch, we will effectively have 12 players in a 25m x 15m grid. So we will need to make sure we are using width in our game when we have the ball to get the flow going. This will require players that don't have the ball moving towards the edges of the field quickly. It will also require the players to pass the ball accurately, with pace, over some distance. This will be a major coaching point to get right and time spent at training in this area will reap big rewards.

The other aspect of the 6-a-side field to be aware of is that one side will be bordered by a piece of drain-flow which is a "live" side-line. This should be used to your advantage. There is a definite skill in weighting the ball at the correct angle to get it to roll down the pipe to your team-mate. Practice this if you can, it's like having a 7th player on the field.

If you have any questions about any aspects of hockey coaching, please contact:

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