Concepts in Teambuilding

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1 Introduction

Hello everybody, my name is Uberpyro, and I wanted to create a guide to teambuilding. I have been playing for quite a while, as I started playing competitively in early BW2 and I slowly learned the game from the ladder. I wanted to make this guide because, quite frankly, every other teambuilding guide I've seen is severely flawed in some way or another, and I know that the community sorely needs a good one, as I have seen a lot of people in the OU room chat ask for teambuilding help. Instead of individually showing the teambuilding process to every newcomer that comes along, I figured it would be better to have it all written down. So without further ado, let's a-do.

Teambuilding is both an art and a science. Creativity is the most important part in making a highly effective team, but it needs to have solid reasoning and calculations to back it up. The development of teambuilding skills can be modeled by the various ranks on the ladder. Low ladder (Elo $<\approx1400$) teams generally do not have an objective, and are filled with Pokémon that are often times random and with no general purpose. Sometimes, a surprise set or unexpected threat can catch a more skilled player off guard, but more often than not, the more skilled player pulls through. As we rise up to mid ladder ($\approx$1500-1600) we see teams that are completely devoid of creativity, but include sound or "standard" Pokémon that are proven effective in the current metagame. However, they are very predictable, which causes their downfall when facing highly skilled players. Upper ladder ($\approx$1750+) teams are similar to mid ladder, but they have heavy use of creativity and of less prepared for strategies which give them the edge when facing other teams. In general, the randomness that is seen in the lower ladder is first eradicated by the mid ladder, and then comes back, but in the form of useful innovation, in the upper ladder. My goal with this guide is to ascend new players to the higher ranks through building solid, innovative teams. Obviously it takes both battling skill and a good team to rise to the Upper Ladder. However, since the two skills go hand and hand, by becoming a better teambuilder, you become a better battler, and vice versa. Lastly, don't expect to become a ladder hero after reading this guide. This will get you on the right track, but you, the player, must learn from playing the game.

2 The Objective

Every team should have an objective, or a center around which everything revolves. This can include a single Pokémon (a wincondition, usually a sweeper), a core (of two or three Pokémon), or a general concept (such as VoltTurn, or rain). You can be creative when deciding upon a concept for your team, but make sure it is doable. It's better to have a solid standard idea here and then incorporate some innovation in how you support the team. This objective of your team is like the "thesis" of a research paper. All of the Pokémon you choose should help the team accomplish its objective in some way or another. For example, if a team is based around Mega Charizard Y, then the rest of the team should support this Pokemon. A Tyranitar (Ttar) can be used to pursuit trap the Lati twins, Keldeo can be used to help defeat teams with Chansey, and a hazard remover of your own would be necessary due to Charizard's double weakness to Stealth Rocks.

2.1 Single Pokemon/Sweepers

Having a single Pokémon as the center for a team is probably the most solid and straightforward objective. As I had shown in the example above, the rest of the team simply supports the main Pokémon. These Pokémon are generally set-up sweepers, Pokémon that boost up with moves like Swords Dance (SD), Dragon Dance (DD), Quiver Dance, Rock Polish, Agility, ect., but they can also include other winconditions on some of the more creative teams (like shedinja, a subseeder, toxic stall gliscor, and other rarely seen movesets or Pokémon).

2.2 Cores

A core is a group of two to three Pokémon that have extremely good synergy, that is, they work extremely well together. This means any two Pokémon that have some sort of synergy do not form a core, as they might not work just well enough. An example of a core is SD Bisharp and Trickscarf Gothitelle (Goth). Goth can trap many of Bisharp's checks, such as Keldeo and Mega Lopunny (if Goth has full HP), and precede to kill them. Additionally, Goth can use Energy Ball on Quagsire and Hippowdon. Furthermore, Goth can trickscarf a Pokémon into a move that Bisharp resists that might be targeted at it, like Shadow Ball, and then have Bisharp come in and safely SD up. Therefore, Bisharp and Goth form a core.

Supporting a core can be just like supporting a single Pokémon, or it can be entirely different. In Bish + Goth's case, Bisharp is the real sweeper here, so the rest of the

team would be focused on supporting Bisharp and using support moves like SR, as well as supporting attackers like Thundurus, ect., to secure the sweep. An example of a core that would be entirely different would be Heatran + Amoonguss/Mega Venusaur + Slowbro/Quagsire. A core like this is meant for bulkier (Pokémon with high defenses) teams like stall and semistall.

2.3 Concepts

Centering a team on a concept is, by definition, more abstract, but it can be treated the same way like other team objectives. Although it might not be obvious at first, the concept usually dictates what archetype the team will be, i.e. offense, stall, or balance. For example, rain teams work best when treated like a Hyper Offense (HO) team, ignoring defensive synergy and focusing entirely on breaking up the opponent's team. Another example of a concept is VoltTurn. When an offensive pivot threatens the opposition with the pivot move directly, the opposing Pokémon must either switch or faint, and when the switch-in comes in, the pivot can then bounce off and go to a new check. These kinds of teams are best treated like Bulky Offense (BO) teams, where they must be offensive to force out the opponents but have lots of defensive roots.

3 The Archetypes, and How to Build Them

In competitive Pokemon, there are three overarching archetypes: Offence, Balance, and Stall. Each of these archetypes can be further divided into sub-archetypes, such as Hyper Offense, Bulky Offense, Rain, Trick Room, VoltTurn, Semi Stall, and Full Stall, as well as many more. Here, I'm going to go over the main three in depth, and explain the teambuilding process behind each one.

3.1 Offense

Offense is an archetype that focuses on offensive synergy, using—often frail—hard hitting Pokémon. This playstyle generally has a Stealth Rock (SR) lead, a number of (offense) breakers and stallbreakers, and multiple set-up sweepers to finish the match. Since offensive double switches are used often in this playstyle, you generally want Pokémon that can check threats and types that some of your other Pokémon can't. For example, Mega Charizard Y and Keldeo could be used on the same team. Say Mega Charizard Y is active, and Chansey is expected to come in. Instead of firing off a fire blast that is ultimately going to do nothing, Keldeo could come in as Chansey comes in, and pressure the opponent. Considering offensive synergy is generally the way to go when building offense, and the sweepers are where everything leads to, covering the final threats of the team as they are usually the final Pokémon to come out.

Hyper Offense is a variant of Offense where Pokémon are sacked rather than saved. . . and while this might sound idiotic at first, the strength of the Pokémon usually warrants the fact that there is never a good switch in. Good HO teams are actually comprised of several (like 2-4) stat-upping Pokémon, that usually set each other up so that the next one has an opportunity to boost. For example, Bisharp might cause Keldeo to come in, in which case Dragonite or Gyarados could be the next Pokémon in line. Also, HO generally has a suicide lead, like Azlef or Aerodactyl. These teams are able to muscle their way past bulkier teams, and HO is commonly considered to have the best match up versus stall, however, there are still many cases where HO loses.

Bulky Offense is another variant of Offense, and contrary to HO, BO teams have a lot of Pokémon with resistances and immunities that are used to unreliably come in on different threats. These teams generally have only 1-2 stat-uppers, functioning as the sweepers, and the rest of the team, besides the lead, is generally dedicated to being able to come in on different checks and pressure out the opponent. Essentially these teams have defensively synergistic roots.

3.2 Balance

Balance is the archetype all about defensive pivoting and synergy, even more so than stall. It is all about coming in on Talonflame with a Pokémon like Slowbro, expecting them to switch out, and double switching to a Pokémon like Mega Lopunny. Resistances are commonly used to bring Pokémon in safely, and for what I call "relaying," where you double switch on the same Pokémon, but come in on different resisted attacks (so let's say you have a Scizor in on Infernape. First he uses Flare Blitz as you go to Heatran, then he uses Close Combat as you go to Gengar). Balance teams generally have two or three defensive pivots like Slowbro that can come in and immediately switch out. Then they have several breakers, utility Pokémon (SR and possibly Defog), and possibly a set-up sweeper. When building Balance, defensive synergy should always be kept in mind. Let's say that one of our breakers is Mega Lopunny. Mega Lop is checked by Pokémon like Talonflame and Keldeo at full health. Therefore, a Pokémon like Slowbro would be a logical option because it could come in on those Pokémon, and then immediately switch out to try to check the Pokémon coming in or to a teammate that resists the move the opponent is likely to make. You get the idea.

3.3 Stall

Stall can be defined as an archetype that tries to inhibit the opponent's strategy through any means possible, but generally through the use of very bulky walls. It must counter, or eliminate, the opponent's threats. This is the most antimeta playstyle, as it tries to cover as many threats as possible, and as a result, most stall teams are short-lived, and only work in certain metagames (but of course there are exceptions to this!). Stall makes use of defensive synergy to a large extent, but it is more so threat coverage, as was just stated, as opposed to type coverage, as common stall Pokémon are so bulky that they do not need to necessarily come in on the resisted attack. Traditional stall teams consist of multiple walls, and some utility Pokémon, however they can also include trappers like Gothitelle that can defeat or trickscarf-cripple many stallbreaking threats. Building a stall team is all about considering threat coverage. Some redundancy is preferable, as opposing lure Pokémon could unexpectedly incapacitate an important stall Pokémon or the staller can suffer from hax, which is more likely to happen when a Pokémon is receiving many hits. Overall, however, it is best to focus covering all of the major threats in the metagame, and even reaching down to some of the less used threats, as to minimize the chance of a bad matchup.

Full stall is a variant of stall that has a large focus on "passive" Pokémon. This means Pokémon that do not use attacking moves to weaken the opposing team. These teams use unaware Pokémon to stop set-up sweepers, Mega Sableye to block hazards, walls that use status and entry hazards to attack back, and stallbreakers that make use of taunt + status.

Semi-stall is similar to stall but considered its own archetype. These teams also counter a wide range of Pokémon, however, they make less use of status, and tend to use attacks

to wear down the opposing team. These teams usually use either a fast Pokémon, a ditto, or just normal walls to block set-up sweepers, Defog, Rapid Spin, or Mega Sableye to remove hazards, stallbreakers that use their power to break through walls, and they are more likely to use trappers (however, full stall teams and semi-stall teams are not always 100% passive or active, in fact, more often than not, there is mixing between what is most commonly used). The advantage of using semi-stall over stall, is that the pressure applied makes the team "active," meaning that the opponent can't do whatever it wants, like versus full stall. A Pokémon cannot just set up and sweep because it could be checked by a semi-stall attacker. However, this is at the cost of less walling power. Usually semi-stall contains walls with lower defenses than those found on full stall, so semi-stall teams cannot reliably counter as many Pokémon. Lastly, defensive VoltTurn cores are a common choice on semi-stalls because they help the team apply pressure and stay a step ahead of the opponent, particularly with the Pokémon Tornadus-T.

4 Choosing Pokémon

There are two main factors that come into play when choosing Pokémon: how the individual Pokémon contributes to the team, and how that Pokémon fairs against the metagame. Ultimately, these two factors come together to determine how viable the Pokémon is for the team. In other words, sometimes there is a Pokémon that fits the objective of your team perfectly, but it is not very viable in terms of the metagame. The teambuilder then has to decide: does this Pokémon's function outweigh its flaws, or does the function not make up for the lack in raw power, and/or the weakness towards what is meta. Another factor to consider is whether or not to surface a lower-tier threat, but more on that later.

5 Fundamental Teambuilding Devices

These are the strategies that teambuilders employ to increase the effectiveness of their team. Some of these strategies are integral with how you battle, essentially setting the user up to make plays before the battle even begins. Others simply help make the team for effective. The last strategies listed will be associated with risk/reward, and strategies that may be frowned upon do to them being considered "skilless".

5.1 Offensive Pivoting

Although a battling strategy, this is one of those techniques the teambuilder must be mindful of when creative a team as to set up plays proactively. Offensive pivoting is a strategy often employed on offense where the opponent is forced to switch out, and the user predicts this, switching into a check that defeats the opponent's switch in. Often the Pokémon that is maneuvered in can put in more work than the one that was in beforehand. Also, this strategy "maintains momentum." This strategy can be incorporated in a team by considering what Pokémon a breaker loses to, and then using a breaker or sweeper that defeats those checks, generally a heavier hitter.

5.2 Defensive Pivoting

This is another technique that the teambuilder must be mindful of as to set up plays before they ever happen. Defensive pivoting is a strategy mostly seen on balance where the opponent is checking the user's active Pokémon (In other words, the opponent has the "momentum"), so the user goes to a counter to the opponent's check, and then double switches, predicting the opponent's next action. Essentially, this strategy reverses momentum, from the opponent to the user. This strategy can be incorporated into a team by considering what Pokémon check a breaker, and choosing a counter to those checks. A further step can be taken to then say, what Pokémon are likely to then come in on this pivot, and therefore what second breaker should I include that beats these checks. Lastly, Pokémon with the ability Regenerator make the best defensive pivots (Slowbro, Tornadus-T, Amoonguss, Tangrowth, and Slowking are the big ones).

5.3 Pivoting with Moves

Offensive and defensive pivoting can be assisted with the use of a pivot move (U-turn, Volt Switch, or Baton Pass). However, it isn't necessary, as Pokémon can double switch.

Using these moves essentially guarantees that the Pokémon coming in is safe, which is useful when maneuvering in a critically important trapper or sweeper.

5.4 Offensive Synergy

Offensive synergy is often considered on offensive teams. It is when teammates cover each other's checks, and cover a broad range of threats. This can be used on a team by considering what Pokémon a breaker or sweeper on your team loses to, and then choosing a check to that Pokémon.

5.5 Defensive Synergy

Defensive synergy is used on balance and stall teams, and it is when Pokémon are able to come in on a wide range of threats or move types. It is more so move types on balance and BO teams, and more so threat coverage on stall teams. This can be included on a team by considering what moves Pokémon on my team are weak to, and then choosing a Pokémon that resists or is immune to those moves. Preferably the Pokémon that comes in can put in some work (otherwise the player should offensively double switch into a Pokémon that can actually put in work).

Also note that cores are just extreme examples of offensive and defensive synergy, and they too are useful teambuilding devices.

5.6 VoltTurn Core

While all cores exercise synergy in some way, VoltTurn cores are special. They consist of a U-turn user, and a Volt Switch user, and they tend to work best when they are offensive so that they actually force out the Pokémon they are in on. Many established VoltTurn cores happen to have strong defensive synergy (Scizor-Wash, Lando-T + M Manectric), which make them popular choices on bulky offense and some balance teams.

5.7 Redundancy

When battling, it is necessary to weaken opposing checks to open an opportunity for a wincon to sweep. However, this can be difficult to accomplish, because if you bring in a check into a Pokémon you have to beat, then the opponent simply switches. One way around this are (offensive) redundancy strategies (Some others are lures and trappers, more on those later). For example, BirdSpam involves Talonflame and Pinsir using their flying type moves, so that if one weakens a check, then the other can sweep. Another strategy is rain. Similarly, they use water type moves to weaken the opponent's water type resists. A somewhat different strategy is to repeatedly pivot the same breaker in. For example, Latios can be pivoted in and use Draco Meteor, and although a steel type

might be able to take one or two, that Pokémon cannot take them repeatedly over the course of the battle (and I know there are fairies and such but this is an example).

Redundancy is the major technique behind HO in general. HO, containing several set-up sweepers, use the first couple of set-up sweepers to weaken walls, and the last (couple) to break through and win.

5.8 Shifting

Shifting is what I call it when a team is fully or almost fully built, but it is weak to a common threat or lacks an important utility move (SR) and therefore needs to be tweaked. However, changing just one Pokémon doesn't solve the problem because it messes up something else. An example that CTC gave in his interview with Clone is that a team with Gliscor + Ferrothorn + Slowbro, which is weak to Thundurus, can be changed to Gastrodon + Tangrowth + Heatran, to still have coverage against Lati@s + M Charizard X/M Gyarados + sand + Keldeo, but preform much better against Thundurus.

5.9 Weather

Serious weather teams are not commonly used in this generation, however Ttar + Excadrill is common core in the current metagame, as it provides most of the support balanced and offensive teams need. Sun and hail are best left untouched (sorry!). However, rain teams are a cool and viable option.

Rain teams are usually composed of a Politoad, two swift swimmers, a steel type, an electric or dragon type, and a lead. Politoad is necessary for setting rain. There are a lot of options for swift swimmers, such as Mega Swampert, Kabutops, Kingdra, and Omastar. Also, Keldeo can be used, benefitting enough just from the damage boost. Steel types are used because they have many resistances and help versus a lot of rain team threats. Electric types are used to help handle thundurus, and because they benefit from the 100% accurate thunder. Lasty, the lead or pivot can be any Pokémon that sets up rocks, rain, or be another attacker like Tornadus-T.

5.10 Lower-Tier Pokémon

Unearthing a Pokémon from the lower tiers is essentially a risk-reward strategy. These Pokémon can be very effective, devastating teams that are not prepared for them, however they can also preform less than that of a standard Pokémon. Essentially, the deviation of performance is higher—they are less reliable. In many cases though, they are worth using. Including one or two on a team is usually a good idea, however do not be afraid to put on more or less if it would help the team execute its strategy.

5.11 Lure Movesets

Similar to unprepared for Pokémon, lure sets can be very effective at unexpectedly eliminating a key Pokémon of the opponent's team. For example, a team containing an SD Bisharp might want to run Power Herb Solar Beam Heatran, or Explosion Cloyster. In fact, I would strongly recommend having at least one on an offensive team due to their effectiveness, however, do keep in mind of the cost of having a lure moveset is that the lure Pokémon checks a lot less Pokémon than it does with the normal moveset, so it may lose to Pokémon it should beat.

5.12 Hax

Hax is basically the dark arts of Pokémon. Strategies like Sand Veil, Thunder Wave (twave), or confusion + Substitute are all strategies, with twave being the seen most often due to its other effect of slowing Pokémon. Yes, hax is something that will plague competitive Pokémon forever and we have to accept it. The strategies I have mentioned, as well as many more, despite being frowned upon, are real, and are sometimes seen in competitive play.

5.13 Trapping

Trapping is using a Pokémon with a trapping ability, or pursuit, to prevent a Pokémon from switching out and defeating it. It is a very effective way of eliminating a check for a sweeper because it is very hard to stop—whenever the check is brought out, it is in extreme danger of being caught by the trapper. Trappers can be made more effective with the use of pivots with the intention of luring certain Pokémon in. For example, what is the number one most often switch-in to Rotom-W? Lati@s. Therefore, a good strategy could be to have Rotom-W Volt Switch off of Lati@s, and then go to something like Pursuit Weavile, which is a Pokémon that can run pursuit while still being an effective attacker. Trapping is a very effective strategy, however it is sometimes frowned upon do to the fact that there is no skill in trying to weaken the opposing Pokémon—it's just trapped and killed (however, players' feelings towards trappers are worsened by Goth's ability to set up on defensive Pokémon; I wouldn't hesitate to use other trappers and normal Goth sets for the time being).

6 Conclusion

There is more to teambuilding than what can be put into words, and my meaning there is twofold: to really learn how to teambuild it takes practice, and, this guide is getting too long. The best way to get better at teambuilding is ironically to battle. As I said earlier, teambuilding and battling go hand and hand. All the tools are laid out here, however to truly understand them, they have to be experienced in battle. So, for all you future teambuilders, it is best to build your own team, regardless of how good or bad it is, get out there, and battle with it. Learn from your mistakes!

If you read this guide from start to finish then I congratulate you, and if you have been poking around at different parts, well, that's probably a more effective use of time. Thanks for reading!

6.1 The Community

If you guys have any corrections to make, any sections you want to write, or any suggestion of any kind, let me know! I realize that this monstrous wall of text may be inaccessible to some people, so maybe we can do something about that? Pictures? A video series? Any help would be appreciated. PMing me or starting a convo is a great way to reach me.