

Qualitative analysis of European Championship M'18 /Poland/

1. Basic statements

Basic data (venue, event, circumstances, spectators, etc.)

The 2014 Men's 18 European Handball Championship was held in Gdańsk and Gdynia, Poland, from 14 to 24 August 2014. 56 matches were played during the tournament, 28 per each city. This edition of the competition was played with 16 teams: 15 of them qualified from qualification groups in which 34 national junior teams competed, and Poland qualified directly as host of the final tournament.

The tournament was organised perfectly, which was also due to the experience of the women's 17 European Championship that had been held in Gdańsk and Gdynia last year. Both cities, together with Sopot situated in between, constitute one agglomeration (called the Tri-City) with a convenient transport network, which made it very easy for fans, delegates, referees and representatives of all participating teams to move between hotels and sports halls where matches were played.

The standard of the hotel base offered to participants of the ECh by Gdańsk and Gdynia was very good. It is also worth noting that during the ECh both cities offered many summer attractions, such as beaches, bathing areas and seasonal cultural and music events. On rest-days, all participants had an opportunity to cruise on the Gdańsk Bay and to sightsee the Old Town of Gdańsk, the Sopot beach and the Gdynia oceanarium. The proximity of the modern airport in Gdańsk (about 15 km away from the city centre) was very convenient for participants of the ECh and fans, as well.

The sporting atmosphere on the stands during matches was excellent. Numerous groups of fans arrived to see their teams. All matches were watched altogether by over 20,000 spectators.

During the Championship, the European Handball Federation (EHF) together with the Polish Handball Federation (PHF) organised a Youth Coaches Course in the facilities of the Academy of Physical Education and Sport (AWFiS) in Gdańsk, in which about 70 coaches participated. Sessions during the course were conducted, among others, by lecturers nominated by the EHF: Klaus Feldmann (GER), Wolfgang Pollany (AUT) and Wojciech Nowiński (POL). Apart from the opportunity to enhance their coaching knowledge, participants of the course could also watch selected matches of the ECh.

Another event held in the facilities of the AWFiS under the auspices of the EHF at that time was a Summer Camp for handball players, in which almost 130 young boys (born 1999-2001) took part. In this case, the EHF's lecturers: Wolfgang Pollany and Wojciech Nowiński also helped coaches to co-ordinate their training activities.

Ranking

1.		FRA	France
2.		HUN	Hungary
3.		ESP	Spain
4.		DEN	Denmark
5.		SWE	Sweden
6.		SUI	Switzerland
7.		GER	Germany
8.		POL	Poland
9.		ISL	Iceland
10.		CRO	Croatia
11.		BLR	Belarus
12.		RUS	Russia
13.		SRB	Serbia
14.		CZE	Czech Republic
15.		MKD	Fyr Macedonia
16.		ROU	Romania

2. General trends

Attack general systems: 6x6, 6x5, 5x6, fast break

Although teams participating in the ECh presented various tactical solutions in order to overcome the opponent's defence, most of the team actions were based on a co-operation of 2-3 players. The manner of starting an attack was often similar to solutions used by national senior teams of a given country. Attacks often began with a cross without ball in the middle and side sector of the court, with the line player running towards the 2nd line and wing players running to the inside. Tactical actions of individual teams were not very complicated, and the quality of performance of technical elements (passes, dribbles, throws) was of basic importance, both with regard to speed and precision. This thesis seems to be confirmed by the average number of ball losses by players of top teams (see table below) during one match. Taking into consideration the age of players, the rank of the tournament and the pace of the game, we can admit that the number of technical errors was on an acceptable level (11-12 on average during one match). The speed of action was a characteristic element of the positional attack.

Structure of attack

	AS	R7	BS	TO	ST	BT	FB
FRA	134	23	10	78	39	15/17	44/57
HUN	113	24	23	74	32	21/22	44/52
ESP	101	14	7	88	45	11 13	25/36
DEN	108	17	9	84	32	1--1	39/56

AS Assists R7 Received 7-metre Shots BS Blocked Shots TO Turnovers ST Steals BT Breakthroughs FB Fast Breaks

Structure of throws

	goals	shots	%	7m	%7m	6m	9m	wing
FRA	231	365	63	15/23	65	60/81	64/123	33/63
HUN	238	360	66	17/23	74	63/86	74/144	19/32
ESP	185	310	60	16/25	64	52/80	58/117	23/39
DEN	208	340	61	14/18	78	56/81	69/136	29/48

Attack 6x6

In most of the teams, tactics of the positional attack were characterised mainly by the manner of fast play in strips of operation. A definite majority of teams used the possibility of substituting a player (usually one or two back players) in attack. Each national team had players who were able to create an advantage in a specific sector of the court through effective 1x1 play. Also, every team had players with an ability to score a goal from the 2nd line (from a distance). This was particularly visible in national teams of the countries that reached top places in the ECh. The tournament confirmed the thesis that the basis of an effective positional attack is a high level of technical skills and motor abilities of players in each position. This gives the possibility of making diverse play and using many tactical variants, and wing players with a high shot efficiency make it possible to play an attack also in external sectors. Excellent skills in playing techniques and the high level of physical fitness of 1st-line players (wingers, line players) were used also for actions that had previously been assigned to back players (long-distance shots after running around one's position, passes to line players). In most of the cases, wing players were very active in the positional attack, doing more than just waiting for a ball to be passed to them in the corner of the court. In the organisation of the positional attack, three tactical variants were used more frequently: taking the line player towards the 2nd line, running of a winger to the inside and shifting the ball between back players.

Attack 6x5

During this year's ECh, two different tactical forms of playing with a numerical advantage could be observed: the lack of a planned special action or playing one previously prepared tactical action until it becomes effective. In the first case, the ball was passed in the same rhythms as previously, with the attack being finished with a shot from the 1st or 2nd line, depending on the behaviour (or possible error) of the defence. The most frequent form of special action planned in the case of a numerical advantage was the one where a back player (mainly the centre back) assumed the position of the second line player – this tactical solution has recently been the most popular one in many senior teams.

Attack 5x6

Most of the teams had prepared tactics of playing in a numerical disadvantage. In the first phase of the positional attack, a team action was played at a relatively slow pace in order to stay in possession of the ball as long as possible. A tactical means to achieve this goal was an active play of wingers, who left their nominal positions and shifted positions between each other or with back players. One of the wingers often stayed in the position of the line player, whereas another returned to his position; attempts to create a good opportunity to throw the ball at the goal were often made on that side. Individual solutions were also used, usually by players with best technical skills in their own teams.

Fast break

The best teams of the tournament put special emphasis on the efficiency of fast breaks. The top three teams scored an average number of 6-7 goals from fast breaks in each match, which accounted for over 20% of all goals scored by players of these teams. The skilful use of this element of playing is a necessary condition for achieving a good sporting result. The motor preparation of players and the implementation of planned and trained methods of moving on the court ensured the effectiveness of fast breaks. The following 2 basic methods of organising a team fast break could be observed during the ECh:

- attack in strips of operation in the triangle: winger – line player – back player (e.g. DEN, SWE);
- cross between the left back and the right back (e.g. GER, POL).

A fast throw-off was used by a majority of teams, but the **speed and good organisation of retreat** did not allow the opposite team to score many goals when using this tactical element. This undoubtedly made it difficult to substitute attack players in defence.

Defence basic systems and alternatives: 6x6, 5x6, 6x5, retreat

The basic defence system that prevailed in the M 18 European Championship was 6:0 (used by 11 teams), but the fulfilment of defence tasks was different in particular teams. Only four national teams used 5:1 as the basic system of defence. In teams from

Scandinavian counties, central defenders were the most active, which – when combined with perfect co-operation with the goalkeeper – considerably increased fast break opportunities. We could also notice the advancing specialisation in defence play in positions 1, 2 and 3. Most of the teams introduced/substituted one player, or even two players, for defence, usually in the central sector. These players usually participated in fast breaks, and the reverse substitution took place only after the beginning of the subsequent positional attack. The defence play of some teams (FRA, DEN) was characterised by a large number of attack interruptions (AI). The Spanish used the same defence system as their senior team does, i.e. 5:1 or 3:2:1, which resulted in the biggest number of steals (ST – 45, which gives an average number of over 6 per match). The biggest number of throws was blocked by the FRA team (150).

Structure of defence

	DB	AI	ST	YC	RC	2m	2+2	EX
FRA	24	87	39	20	0	29	0	0
HUN	15	17	32	17	1	36	1	0
ESP	11	53	45	17	1	16	1	0
DEN	9	94	32	21	0	28	0	0

Defence 6x6

A characteristic element of defence in the numerical balance during this ECh was a decrease in the number of attempts to interrupt play with a clinch. Defence actions were rather aimed at acquiring the ball by stealing it or making it possible for an opposite player to throw the ball from a difficult position.

Defence 6x5

The differentiated actions of players of various teams in defence during a numerical advantage depended on the opponent's action, particularly on whether the attacking team put a player in the line player's position or decided to play in the 2:0:3 system. Individual covering of the best player of the opposite team or the condensation of the defence centre and individual covering of wing players was often used.

Defence 5x6

During defence actions with a numerical disadvantage, teams usually attempted to condense their defence in the central sector in order to prevent a shot at the goal from this area of the field of play. Attempts to steal the ball were also often undertaken by defenders on the basis of the previous analysis of the opposing team's play during a numerical advantage.

Retreat

Thanks to very good physical preparation, players could organise their retreat quickly both after losing the ball and after scoring a goal (fast throw-off). The high tactical discipline of top teams helped them to protect the goal properly against the opponent's fast breaks. Each of the teams that made it to the medal zone (finals) of this ECh had a good defence supported by a fast and effective retreat.

Defence aggressiveness

Team		MP	YC	2MIN	RC	EX	Points	
							Total	Avg.
SUI	Switzerland	7	18	19	0	0	61	8,7
ESP	Spain	7	19	16	1	0	73	10,4
FRA	France	7	21	29	0	0	83	11,9
DEN	Denmark	7	23	28	0	0	87	12,4
CZE	Czech Republic	7	21	28	1	0	91	13
BLR	Belarus	7	19	30	1	0	97	13,9
ISL	Iceland	7	20	34	1	0	98	14
HUN	Hungary	7	17	36	1	0	103	14,7
SRB	Serbia	7	22	28	1	0	105	15
RUS	Russia	7	19	24	4	0	107	15,3
CRO	Croatia	7	21	29	0	1	107	15,3
GER	Germany	7	21	38	1	0	107	15,3
POL	Poland	7	20	35	2	0	114	16,3
ROU	Romania	7	20	37	2	0	118	16,9
SWE	Sweden	7	23	33	2	0	121	17,3
MKD	FYR Macedonia	7	18	40	1	0	125	17,9

Note: players punishment points = (YC) x 1 + (2MIN) x 2 + (RC) x 10 + (EX) x 20
officials punishment points = (YC) x 5 + (2MIN) x 7 + (RC) x 10 + (EX) x 20

Goalkeeper's performance

This year's M 18 ECh was another confirmation of the thesis about the very important – sometimes almost direct – influence of goalkeepers' play on the final result achieved by the team in the tournament. Tall players with good physical fitness are still sought for this position. In most of the cases, the more or less formalised co-operation of the goalkeeper with defenders was clearly visible, and the initiation of a fast break with a long direct pass (individual fast break) or a quick short pass to the designated player (team fast break) was a very important element of the goalkeeper's play.

On the basis of the observation of ECh matchers, we can distinguish three different styles of goalkeepers' play:

1. Positional play, making use of very good physical conditions: height of the body and reach of arms (France, Spain).
2. Consistent co-operation with defenders, in accordance with the "classic" principle of saving a shot in a straight line towards the short corner of the goal (Denmark, Sweden, Germany).

3. Spontaneous play, without clearly specified co-operation with the defence (Poland, Hungary).

However, in all of the aforementioned cases, we could clearly see not only high technical skills of goalkeepers, but also their adequate tactical preparation carried out on the basis of the pre-match analysis of shots of leading players of opposite teams. It must be pointed out that training staffs of many teams participating in the ECh included goalkeeper training specialists (most of them were excellent goalkeepers of national teams who had already ended their career), which clearly confirmed the goalkeeper's role in a team and the influence of his play on the final success of his team.

Total Shots (top 20)

Rank	No.	Name	Team	MP	Saves	Shots	%
1	4	Rubin L.	SUI	7	1	1	100
2	27	Stanojlovic L.	SRB	7	13	29	45
3	81	Milosavljev D.	SRB	7	110	270	41
4	16	Meyer J.	FRA	7	74	188	39
5	12	Locatelli S.	SUI	7	12	32	38
5	16	Nielsen E.	DEN	7	76	201	38
7	16	Ledo X.	ESP	7	52	139	37
8	20	Gade S.	DEN	7	29	80	36
8	1	Kizkij N.	MKD	7	37	102	36
8	16	Pettersson E.	SWE	7	43	121	36
8	12	Rozsavolgyi G.	HUN	7	60	168	36
8	14	Yuryuk A.	BLR	7	5	14	36
13	1	Grana D.	SUI	7	67	194	35
13	16	Gudjonsson G.	ISL	7	69	198	35
13	12	Porath P.	GER	7	69	199	35
13	16	Sergeev I.	RUS	6	67	193	35
17	16	Birlehm J.	GER	7	28	83	34
18	1	Baldvinsson E.	ISL	7	28	88	32
18	12	Ukhau M.	BLR	7	38	120	32
20	1	Bjorkman-Myhr A.	SWE	7	38	121	31

Goalkeepers

Team	MP	6m		6mO		Wing		9m		7m		FB		FTO		BT		Total	
		Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%	Saves/Shots	%
BLR	7	18/76	24	0/1	0	14/39	36	46/116	40	2/14	14	10/47	21	0/4	0	1/13	8	91/310	29
CRO	7	12/55	22	0/1	0	16/49	33	46/128	36	1/13	8	10/50	20	0/0	0	0/10	0	85/306	28
CZE	7	14/67	21	0/0	0	13/34	38	34/99	34	3/18	17	12/52	23	0/0	0	0/13	0	76/283	27
DEN	7	25/76	33	0/0	0	8/29	28	63/121	52	6/27	22	2/22	9	0/0	0	0/5	0	104/280	37
ESP	7	12/52	23	0/0	0	13/30	43	37/93	40	0/9	0	11/38	29	0/1	0	0/2	0	73/225	32
FRA	7	17/68	25	0/0	0	14/29	48	54/115	47	4/17	24	9/28	32	0/0	0	4/29	14	102/286	36
GER	7	15/45	33	1/1	100	14/37	38	45/109	41	7/25	28	11/40	28	0/0	0	4/25	16	97/282	34
HUN	7	9/48	19	2/6	33	18/46	39	50/103	49	5/21	24	7/34	21	0/1	0	1/17	6	92/276	33
ISL	7	18/67	27	0/1	0	10/33	30	56/122	46	4/22	18	9/41	22	0/0	0	0/0	0	97/286	34
MKD	7	22/69	32	0/0	0	13/35	37	37/107	35	4/24	17	15/60	25	0/1	0	0/0	0	91/296	31
POL	7	10/59	17	0/2	0	8/22	36	50/126	40	1/19	5	8/31	26	0/2	0	0/9	0	77/270	29
ROU	7	11/65	17	1/1	100	14/51	27	53/114	46	5/20	25	10/73	14	0/0	0	1/17	6	95/341	28
RUS	7	26/86	30	0/1	0	12/55	22	50/125	40	3/14	21	11/55	20	0/0	0	0/0	0	102/336	30
SRB	7	18/46	39	0/0	0	25/48	52	57/112	51	6/26	23	17/67	25	0/0	0	0/0	0	123/299	41
SUI	6	17/67	25	0/0	0	12/27	44	43/99	43	1/10	10	7/19	37	0/3	0	0/3	0	80/228	35
SWE	6	9/45	20	0/0	0	11/25	44	51/118	43	2/22	9	8/30	27	0/0	0	0/2	0	81/242	33
Total	110	253/991	26	4/14	29	215/589	37	772/1807	43	54/301	18	157/687	23	0/12	0	11/145	8	1466/4546	32

Evaluation of the first four teams

France

Although teams from this country are ranked among top world teams in all age categories, both in men's and women's competitions, they do not win very often the highest places in younger age categories competition (YAC). The main training emphasis is put on the training and preparation of players for the needs of senior teams. This time, however, the French team performed brilliantly, particularly during the last two matches, and won the title of the European Champion deservedly. The Frenchmen reached proper conclusions from their severe defeat against Hungary in the first phase of the championship and took revenge on this opponent in the final match of the tournament. The advantages of the French team included excellent technical skills of all players, very good motor preparation (strength, jumping ability, dynamics), versatility - understood as the skill of playing 1x1 both in attack and in defence, adequate tactical preparation, i.e., simple yet effective playing solutions in the positional attack (binding attack, cross between the centre back and the left back and passing the ball to the opposite side of the field, frequent passes without involvement of the nearest partner, e.g. from the centre back to a winger). Another advantage of the French team was the very good and effective use of 5-1 defence (the biggest number of blocked throws) supported by the good efficiency of goalkeepers. The forward defender successfully restricted the opponents' freedom in passing the ball to a side back, thus limiting their field of play and reducing the smoothness of the positional attack of opponents.

Hungary

The Hungarian team won all matches but... the last one: in the final, Hungarians lost to France, which they had defeated convincingly in the group phase of the ECh - in the

context of their performance during the tournament, that was a remarkable surprise both for experts and for the audience. Characterised by very high physical abilities level and good technical skills, Hungarian players won convincingly and crushingly all of their ECh matches until the final. The tough and fast play of Hungarians was very spectacular and met with a high applause of the audience. In the positional attack, the Hungarian team had 2nd-line players (play maker, left and right back) whose advantages were powerful shots from a distance and excellent co-operation with line players. Their typical action in the positional attack was a cross between the centre back and the right back preceded with a ball shift. The effectiveness of 6:0 defence was ensured mainly by tall and strong centre defenders in the central sector, and side defenders were responsible for directing the opponent's action to this sector (position 2). The high sporting level of the Hungarian team is perfectly illustrated by the fact that Adam Juhasz received the title of MVP of the tournament, Patrick Ligetvari became the best defender, and the left back Matyas Gyori was nominated for the all stars team.

Spain

The most characteristic element of play of the Spanish team and the reason of their success in the ECh was their excellent forward defence systems 5:1 and 3:2:1, which often allowed them to steal the ball and make an immediate fast break. Because of their more modest physical posture and smaller physical strength, Spanish players had to rely more strongly on their agility and unconventional tactical solutions in 2x2 and 3x3 situations. The best players of this team were wingers, who were nominated for the All-stars team of the M 18 ECh: Jaime Fernandez (left wing) and Kauldi Odriozola (right wing). In the positional attack, as a result of empty crosses, wingers often took positions of side backs, which considerably accelerated the pace of play. When playing in defence, the Spanish team focused on acquiring the ball, which is reflected by a large number of steals (45 in 7 matches).

Denmark

Denmark was the only Scandinavian team that made it to the medal zone (finals) of this year's ECh. The three teams that ranked higher had a larger number of valuable players; however, this does not necessarily mean that this situation will repeat in senior teams in a couple of years. One of the strongest point of the Danish team was their good performance in defence supported by effective co-operation with the goalkeeper Emil Nielsen, who was chosen the best goalkeeper of the ECh. The organisation of defence actions (active 6:0 system, co-operation between all players of the defensive line) and the performance of fast breaks (the role of the goalkeeper and the line player) were distinguishing features of Scandinavian teams. In the positional attack, Danish players tried to shift their defence to

the left or to the right in order to isolate one defender and play a 1x 1 situation. Apart from that, Danish wingers often ran towards 2nd- line positions.

3. Summary conclusions, trends

New elements of attack/defence

- ✓ Activity of wingers – instead of staying passively in the corners of the court, players in wing positions actively participate in team actions in the positional attack.
- ✓ Smaller number of play interruptions in defence – instead of interrupting the opponent's actions (an interruption results in a free throw for the opponent), defence players try to acquire the ball through a steal or after the opponent's shot from a difficult position, i.e. by blocking the ball or through the goalkeeper's save.
- ✓ High number of ball interception – players focus on acquiring the ball rather than stopping the opponent.
- ✓ Small number of technical errors – technical skills of players and uncomplicated team play in positional attack result in a reduction of ball losses.
- ✓ Some teams (GER, ESP, SUI) introduced the team performance of a free throw as a regular tactical element of the positional attack.
- ✓ Only the Swiss team systematically introduced an additional player (as a substitute for the goalkeeper) to the field of play in 6x6, 6x5 and 5x6 situations.

Special players /all stars team/

Goalkeeper:	Emil NIELSEN (DEN)
Left wing:	Jaime FERNANDEZ (ESP)
Left back:	Matyas GYORI (HUN)
Centre back:	Bjorn ZINTEL (GER)
Right back:	Melvin RICHARDSON (FRA)
Right wing:	Kauldi ODRIOSOLA (ESP)
Line player:	Ludovic FABREGAS (FRA)

Most Valuable Player (MVP):	Adam JUHASZ (HUN)
Top scorer:	Aliaksandr PADSHYVALAU (BLR) 45 goals
Best defender:	Patrik LIGETVARI (HUN)

Future trends

- ✓ High level of motor preparation (speed - strength abilities and physical fitness level) of all players in the team, maintaining a very fast pace of play for the entire match in all technical and tactical elements.
- ✓ Very good mastery of basic technical elements, allowing players to perform individual and team tactical tasks at a high speed of play.
- ✓ Large number of short and fast positional attacks (up to 4 passes) finished with a shot at the goal.
- ✓ Frequent use of simple individual tactical and technical elements allowing players to score goals after 1x1 play (isolation of defence player).
- ✓ High activity of middle and side defenders, which increases the opportunity to acquire the ball and makes it difficult for the opponent to carry out a planned team action by disturbing their rhythm and increasing the risk of committing a technical error (catching/passing errors, steps, double dribbling) on the part of attackers.
- ✓ In defence play, there is a clear tendency to increase the number of blocked throws and ball steals at the expense of clinches.