Qualitative analysis of the 
“4th European Beach Handball Championships”

A. Gehrer, 
M. Trespidi, 
G.S. Bebetsos, MSc 

July 2006
Topics

Introduction
Purpose
Event
Data
Results
Comparison
Discussion
Conclusions
Introduction
Introduction

• Analysis of structural elements of the game
• Philosophical aspects of the game
• Tactical aspects of the game
Purpose
Purpose

• Balance between the different phases of offence and defence
• Strategies of using the specialist (Gk)
• Fair Play and conduct of players and coaches
• Creative and spectacular goals
• Speed of the game
Purpose (cont.)

- Attractiveness
- Interesting tactical elements
Event
Event

- 4th European Beach Handball Championships, Cuxhaven/GER, 11-16 July 2006
Data
European Championships Participants – 30 Teams

14 Women's Teams - 47%
16 Men's Teams - 53%
Match Percentages

- 235 - 20%
- 924 - 80%

© Gehrer, Trespidi, Bebetsos
July 06
Results
Results
Goals

1-point 20%
2-point 80%
Results (cont.)

Goal percentage per game

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6m throw</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-flight</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirouette</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gk (Specialist)</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Gehrer, Trespidi, Bebetsos
July 06
Results (cont.)

Average goals per game

- **Overall**: 1159
- **1-point**: 235
- **2-point**: 924
Goal Analysis

- 6m throw: 176
- In-flight: 350
- Pirouette: 620
- Gk (Specialist): 702
- Total: 1848
Results (cont.)

Goal Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>2083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-point</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-point</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gehrer, Trespidi, Bebetsos
July 06
Comparison
Comparison (cont.)

Events

- World Games (IOC), Duisburg/GER, 5 - 12 July 2005
- 4th European Beach Handball Championships (EHF), Cuxhaven/GER, 11 - 16 July 2006
Comparison
Games overall

6m throw 9%
In-flight 19%
Pirouette 34%
Gk (Specialist) 38%

© Gehrer, Trespidi, Bebetsos
July 06
Comparison
Events (cont.)

Average points per game

© Gehrer, Trespadi, Bebetsos
July 06
Comparison Events (cont.)

Goal percentage

© Gehrer, Trespidi, Bebetsos
July 06

4th Beach Echs

World Games
Discussion
Discussion

• Improvement in defence

• Defence gradually moving from 3:0 to 2:1

• Team improvement as tournament progressed - gap closing

• Increased use of the specialist resulting in a higher level of goalkeeping and playmaking

• Teams entered EChs better prepared
Discussion (cont.)

- No innovation in creative/spectacular goals
- Increased number of goals by gk and pirouettes decreased by in-flights
- Problem with referees defining a full pirouette
- Gk sub resulting in a faster game
- Pressure defence making passing game more difficult
Discussion (cont.)

- Increased Fair Play
- More mistakes found in the pirouette execution by women
- Increasingly high performance from the referees
Conclusions
Conclusions

• *We need to ask ourselves is the pirouette still spectacular and creative?*

• There is a need for further referee education on recognising a complete actions

• Fair Play has become apparent element to all

• The national federations, with encouragement, need to actively promote this sport discipline
Conclusions (cont.)

• Need for more education on technical and tactical aspects of the game
• Players should be encouraged to use their imagination
1. General impression of the participants’ performance:

(a) Experienced teams:
- Improvement in defence (individual and group tactics)
- Stagnation in offence (no new group tactics or spectacular elements)
- More reliability in the play actions (less unforced errors)

(b) Intermediate teams:
- In the men’s competition the teams ranked 5-8 approached the level of the experienced teams (all teams were level within this group; all quarterfinals were decided by shoot out).
- In the women’s competition there is a noticeable difference between the semi-finalists and the runners-up. The teams ranked 5-8 improved during the tournament and came closer to closer the gap.

(c) Newcomers:
- In both categories teams ranked 9-14 (W) and 9-16 (M) to begin with played more or less “Indoor Handball on Sand” displaying only the tactical elements from the hall. During the tournament these teams learned from the experienced teams and tried to install these tactics within their own playbook.
- The best improvement could be observed with the teams from SUI (M) and NED (M), who both played in the consolation round with a lot of in-flights as well as BUL (W) and NOR (W) who even managed to enter the placement round.

(d) The final ranking (with comments and conclusions):
- In the men’s competition the eight favourite teams entered the quarterfinal. Here, a shoot-out determined the outcome of matches as all teams were able to defeat their opponents. All of these teams play attractive Beach Handball. The other eight teams, intermediates and newcomers learned from the top teams which is, in my opinion, a good strategy.
- In the women’s competition the four semi-finalists dominated the tournament and demonstrated beautiful Beach Handball. The teams ranked 5-8 improved a lot and closed the large gap right from the start of the tournament. The teams ranked 9-14 also improved. However, on the whole, the level of the women’s competition (in comparison to previous EChs) stagnated.

(e) The number of “Golden goals” and “shoot-outs” (absolute and % )

→ Marco Trespidi has all the data that we collated during the tournament.
2. Analyses on structural level in general:

(a) The balance between the different phases in offence and defence:
- Defence: A lot of teams meanwhile use the “Pressure Defence” in the first phase of defence, which was first showed by ESP (M) in Cadiz (2002). After this first phase most teams prefer the “3:0” defence, but more and more teams (esp. the experienced ones – see finals) also use the “2:1” defence to put more pressure on the specialist.
- Offence: Most teams have a little gap between ball possession and the fast break. The easy first goal by leaving the field in defence and entering in offence is not seen very often any more. This is also a credit of improved defence.

(b) The strategies of using of the specialist (Goalkeeper):
- All teams meanwhile substitute the goalkeeper consequently for a playmaker / specialist. This takes some speed from the fast break but facilitates a higher level of goalkeeping and playmaking.

3. Philosophical aspects:

(a) Fair Play and the conduct of players and coaches:
- In regards to Fair Play these EChs were a big step in the right direction of our sport discipline. The best teams only succumbed to 7 (W) / 8 (M) personal suspensions during the entire tournament. Also the behaviour of coaches and officials was very fair; there was no case for the Disciplinary Commission.

(b) Creative and spectacular goals:
- For the first time in the history of the Beach Handball ECh there was no innovation with the creative and spectacular goals. This may be due to the fact, that the teams have already enough different elements to play the game.
- We could observe an increase with the goalkeeper goals and the pirouettes and a decrease with the in-flight goals.
→ Marco Trespidi has all the data that we collated during the tournament.
- Especially with the pirouette there was much discussion about referee decisions. For them it is nearly impossible to say, how many degrees the player has turned in the air. Apart from that we could demonstrate that a pirouette from the wing can never be 360 degrees.

(c) Speed of the games:
- Apart from the delay owing to the goalkeeper substitution, the speed of the games was very high. Due to the “Pressure Defence” the easy first pass to the first entering offence player was nearly impossible.

(d) Attractiveness:
- In this context we have to discuss the decrease of the in-flight goals!
4. Tactical aspects:

(a) Interesting tactical elements:
- Offence: Direct passes to pivot pirouettes, playing back to the specialist after pirouette / in-flight
- Defence: “Pressure Defence”, “2:1” defence, parallel jumping of the wing defender with the pirouette / in-flight

(b) More detailed tactical issues of the best 4 teams:
- ESP (M): Pressure Defence (see picture)
- HUN (M): Playing back to specialist after pirouette (see picture)
- TUR (M): Direct pivot pass (see picture)
- GER (M): Pirouette isolation on the wing (see picture)
- GER (W): Specialist decision (see picture)
- RUS (W): Blocking for the specialist (see picture)
- CRO (W): 2:1 defence (see picture)
- TUR (W): Passing back to the specialist (see picture)

5. Overall conclusion:

(a) Organisation, atmosphere, refereeing, team's performances:
The organisation and the atmosphere of the 4th European Beach Handball Championships were outstanding. The four courts were well prepared. The atmosphere was of course also great because of the weather, which has a big influence in our outdoor sport. The work with the time- and scorekeepers was mostly professional. The level of referees and teams increased during the tournament a lot.

(b) Looking into the future of beach handball:
Regarding the attractiveness of our sport we have to deal with the pirouette in two ways. First, it is very difficult for the referees to decide whether it was a 1-or a 2-pointer. Nearly every pirouette leads to discussions, which is also not good for the marketing aspect of Beach Handball. The second aspect of the pirouette is that the number of the (more spectacular) in-flights decreased with the pirouette.

Regarding the aspect of Fair Play we are heading in the right direction, this is really good. As we become more and more a Beach Handball “family” every player, coach, referee and last but not least delegate respects the others.

Alex Gehrer
Delegate (GER)
1. General Impression of the Participants’ Performance:

In general it was possible to observe that no particular tactics were executed by the teams participating in this ECh. Only in the defensive phase were some interesting new solutions seen by the most experienced teams (HUN, ESP). The advent of “pirouette” has dramatically decreased the occasions in which the “in-flight” shot is researched as a two point action.

This option has, in my opinion, brought the teams much closer; in fact is much easier to find a player with natural physical and coordinative qualities and afterwards insert him in an attack power play with constant superiority, than looking for the tactical construction of “in-flight” situations that includes the work of more players with “timing” as first issue.

In this way we have assisted an incredible number of “pirouettes” from the wings (we can say at least 75%) where it was easy to find the space for jumping inside the goal area. We notice that the concept of 360° in this situation is not enforceable; a shot after a 360° will drive the player to shoot into the tribunes considering the concept of having the feet towards the goal at the moment of the jump.

The last analysis of this situation generated much discussion due to the fact that the limit between a good action and a “goal area violation” at the arrival of the jump is very close. This situation was particularly noticeable in women’s competition. Observing the performance of the newcomers, it is possible to notice how in the low tactical and technical level of women’s competition, the team of Bulgaria and Norway who were essentially playing “handball on the sand” with good indoor handball players, had the opportunity to claim important places in final ranking (although not present at the previous ECh - BUL ranked 8th, NOR ranked 5th in 2006 and 11th in 2004).

As noticed in all previous EChs almost all teams improved their play while practicing during the matches, but clearly in men’s competition more teams arrived at the event better prepared than in the past. HUN showed enormous improvement as did SUI and TUR, ESP maintained a very high level and was, in all the matches observed, the only team searching with a consistent frequency for the “in-flight” goal and in any case the only team using the “goalkeeper” as a main player in constructing “in-flight” actions.

In my opinion the final ranking reflects an absolute correct ranking of the teams present in Cuxhaven. The most attractive beach handball was clearly played by the first 8 men teams.
The women’s competition brought team GER together with RUS the defending champion, nevertheless CRO and TUR showed really big improvements in play than in the previous ECh. In particular CRO was in the condition to express the most attractive Beach Handball together with GER. Team RUS lost the final due to the inexperience of some players, even though this team has been restructured, they managed to improve play throughout this championship.

The number of “Golden Goals” was of little relevance as the number of shoot-outs in main round and finals in men’s competition (16 out of 30 matches) showed an increased equilibrium among the first teams. In women’s competition the system was different and we may consider the preliminary round and the final with tenuous relevance in this tactical situation (13 out of 54 matches). It was not possible to make a comparison with last ECh due to the different qualification system for the finals.

The general conclusion is that there is a widespread of improvement in Beach Handball play; however, from the EHF there must be a clear indication as to technical and tactical patterns that are to be developed within national federations with the aim of furthering this sport art in a more spectacular way. Too often as is the case, it is not possible to see the issues in our sport discipline and Beach Handball is used as a simple power play situation.

2. Analyses on structural level in general:

Comparing the 2006 EChs to previous EChs, there was a large decrease in the actions that lead to a direct goal by the goalkeeper (this situation may be less possible because the goalkeeper in attack is allowed to exit even from side line of the opponent’s goal area) or to a first shot with direct passage from goalkeeper to entering player in attack.

This last solution may be interpreted as a better and quicker defence disposition from the opponents after the end of attacking action. We even saw “press” defence in the first phase of opponent’s attack in the attempt to get the ball back or in any case to have the possibility to avoid quick actions in speed. This solution did not lead to particular advantages as a very little number of balls were retrieved on the occasions observed.

More often instead we saw a particular situation of the defensive “press” against the goalkeeper, who in almost all situations plays in the middle position. This defensive situation was easily overcome in tactical situations in which the opponent pivot was tall and a good “in-flight” shooter due to the space he got from this type of “triangle” defence.

The use of the “specialist” as said before, was in all teams determinate by the entrance on the court of shooter specialist, almost always in the position of middle, with some slight variations in the position of pivot (evident in situations in which the “in-flight” shot from wings was researched).
Team ESP used a different solution (not always, but often during the ECh) with a very quick “specialist” and instead of a shooter, only with the purpose to create a situation with a close defence in the centre to avoid his entrances, granting him the possibility of preparing “in-flight” shots from the wings.

The option of a goalkeeper leaving the goal areas to play directly in attack after finishing the defensive action without changing with a specialist has totally disappeared.

3. Philosophical aspects:

In comparison to what was seen at the ECh in Alanya, the behaviour of both the players and coaches was absolutely admirable, we are most certainly heading in the right direction.

The total absence of cases for Disciplinary Commission testify to the real sportsmanlike behaviour of all the participants; nonetheless, I want to point out that this correct behaviour was helped by the really high performance of the referee couples. From the very beginning they showed a good performance level and this increased match after match allowing very fair and equal treatment for every participating team.

During the Championships Alex Gehrer and I tried to produce a light study about how the scorings decided the matches, and though the number of matches observed (35) is not relevant, we think that it is a good starting point for the evaluations.

It is important to know that the matches observed were divided between men and women and after the analysis of the first ten matches, the percentages did not, in a relevant way, changed the summation of the results in the other matches. Overall the conclusion is that we may consider the above situation a clear picture of the tactical preferences of the various teams:

**Matches Analysed – 35:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men - 18</th>
<th>Women - 17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Total points scored - 2.083: | 235 - One point actions (11.5%) | 924 – Two point actions (88.5%) |

| Total points scored in two-point actions: 1.848 |
| Goalkeeper (Specialist) points: 702 (38%) |
| Pirouette: 620 (33.5%) |
| In-flight: 350 (19%) |
| Penalties: 176 (9.5%) |

What conclusions can we draw from this situation?

To begin, the fact that the advent of “pirouette” has almost drained the imagination of our players and coaches, this is actually the only spectacular action taken over by players together with “in-flight” actions.

So the question stands, can we still consider “spectacular” an action that in this very moment is become a “standard” action?
The easy solution of the “pirouette” seems to have taken the capacity to analyse the better qualities of their teams from the coaches: it was clear, for example, that the biggest difficulties in the correct execution of “pirouettes” was found in women’s competition, with many “one point” being awarded if the action was not deemed “goal area violation”.

Recent studies demonstrate that the strength in the lower limbs of women is around 40% lower than in their male counterparts. The direct consequence of this analysis is that it will be easier for a woman to work towards “in-flight” scoring because in a vertical jump it will be easier to exploit all their strength. This is just an example, but I think it is time to try and indicate some lines for future technical work for national coaches.

I am sure that Alex can provide many more items for a more technical discussion in the future based on his ranging experience all these years. It is a fact that we are not moving towards any new actions and we must give a “shocking” input to restart the imagination of our players all over again. Very important in this aspect is the evaluation of “pirouettes” in shoot-out situations, in the end it will be the referee and not the player who decides the outcome of a match awarding “one point” action instead of a two point action and we must help our referees in making such decisions wholeheartedly.

Marco Trespidi (ITA)
EHF BH Delegate