10th Men’s 18 European Handball Championship
12th – 22nd August 2010 in Montenegro

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

By Zoran Abramovic/MNE
Montenegrin Men’s 18 National Team Assistant Coach.
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Abramovic Zoran – Qualitative Analysis of 2010 Men’s 18 European Championship
1. INTRODUCTION

10th Men’s 18 European Handball Championship took place in Montenegro from 12th to 22nd August 2010. Sixteen national teams convened in the cities of Pogorica and Niksic and played 56 matches across two venues: the sports center Moraca in Podgorica (spectator capacity of 5000) and Niksic hall (capacity 4000). Teams were divided in four groups. Matches were played in two cities: Pogorica (Preliminary Round for groups A and B, Main Round for groups M1 and M2, Placement Matches 1-8) and Niksic (Preliminary Round for groups C and D, Main Round for groups I1 and I2 and Placement Matches 9-16).

This Championship marks the first time the Handball Federation of Montenegro as a host of an event on behalf of the EHF. It was the first time that National Handball Federation of Montenegro organized such an event and it was a great challenge. A lot of effort was put organizing this event to make it successful.

Team accommodation was in local hotels. Team training was held in the sport halls, two in both cities. Conditions were good, hotels were near the halls. Bus transport was organized for participants, too. In the spare time the organizer provided trips to the nearby sea, lake or mountain for participants who showed interest.

The qualitative analysis of this Championship is mainly based on the placement matches to the next phase of tournament and the most important semi-final and final matches. I choose to pay attention to the best-ranked teams (Top 4) by using video clips of some play situations. Statistics are used to underscore my analysis. It is important to keep in mind that the statistics can be useful but also misleading if taken out of context.

I must emphasize that the analysis was based on the games I watched and played during this tournament and on my experience as a player and as a coach. I was not only a spectator but also a participant of this Championship, and therefore I had a better insight in many factors of this tournament. Contacts with some of the coaches after matches provided me with important information for analyzing this championship.

FINAL STANDING:

1. 🇭🇷 Croatia
2. 🇪🇸 Spain
3. 🇩🇰 Denmark
4. 🇩🇪 Germany
5. 🇷🇸 Serbia
6. 🇨🇭 Switzerland
7. 🇸🇪 Sweden
8. 🇸🇮 Slovenia
9. 🇷🇺 Russia
10. 🇵🇱 Poland
11. 🇨🇿 Czech Republic
12. 🇮🇸 Iceland
13. 🇳🇴 Norway
14. 🇵🇹 Portugal
15. 🇬🇧 Montenegro
16. 🇸🇰 Slovakia

Abramovic Zoran – Qualitative Analysis of 2010 Men’s 18 European Championship
**FINAL RESULTS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1/2</th>
<th>CRO – ESP</th>
<th>27:26 (13:11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>SRB – SUI</td>
<td>29:26 (15:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>SWE – SLO</td>
<td>35:30 (13:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>RUS – POL</td>
<td>29:27 (17:15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>CZE – ISL</td>
<td>32:20 (18:13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/14</td>
<td>NOR – POR</td>
<td>43:28 (21:14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/16</td>
<td>MNE – SVK</td>
<td>31:28 (14:17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ALL STAR TEAM AND BEST PLAYERS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal keeper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Feliks Storbek</td>
<td>GER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left wing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Viktor Saez</td>
<td>ESP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left back</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Filip Weber</td>
<td>GER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle back</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ante Kaleb</td>
<td>CRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line player</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Teo Coric</td>
<td>CRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right back</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jonas Langerhuus</td>
<td>DEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right wing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Daniel Peterson</td>
<td>SWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top scorer</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kevin Jud</td>
<td>SWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best defense</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Huan Hose Fernandes</td>
<td>ESP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most valuable player</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ante Kaleb</td>
<td>CRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special fair play reward</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first 9 teams qualified for the IHF Youth World Championship in Argentina from 24th July to 2nd August 2011.

10th Men’s 18 European Handball Championship was declared officially over by the EHF President Tor Lian.
2. STATISTICAL PARAMETARS

2.1. RANKING HISTORY – EUROPEAN YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>POR</td>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>RUS</td>
<td>ISL</td>
<td>SRB/MNE</td>
<td>CRO</td>
<td>GER</td>
<td>CRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>HUN</td>
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<td>SWE</td>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>DEN</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>ISR</td>
<td>GRE</td>
<td>RUS</td>
<td>ROM</td>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>SLO</td>
<td>POL</td>
<td>ISL</td>
<td>GER</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>SLO</td>
<td>SLO</td>
<td>FRA</td>
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<td>GER</td>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>CRO</td>
<td>SRB</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>MKD*</td>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>POL</td>
<td>SVK</td>
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<td>SVK</td>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>SUI</td>
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<td>POR</td>
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<td>AUS</td>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>BLR*</td>
<td>TUR*</td>
<td>NOR</td>
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<td>AUS</td>
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<td>GER</td>
<td>SLO</td>
<td>RUS</td>
<td></td>
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<td>UKR*</td>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>LUX*</td>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>SRB</td>
<td>POL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>BUL</td>
<td>EST</td>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>CRO</td>
<td>RUS</td>
<td>SVK</td>
<td>BIH*</td>
<td>CZE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>SVK</td>
<td>ISL</td>
<td>RUS</td>
<td>ISL</td>
<td>EST</td>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>ISL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>SLO</td>
<td>CZE</td>
<td>NOR</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>EST</td>
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<td>RUS</td>
<td>POR</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>CZE</td>
<td>SVK</td>
<td>MNE*</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>RUS</td>
<td>FIN*</td>
<td>SVK</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Shows the results from all eight organized European Youth Championships

Montenegrin host team was a newcomer.

Teams marked with* participated only once in European Championships.
Croatian national team was the first to win the European Championship twice. It is interesting to notice that Danish team was eight times in the Top3, but never won the first place (they won the second place three times, and five times third place).

Finalists of this tournament have already met in 2008. in Czech on European Championship when Croatia won the placement match 5/6.

Only once the host team won the championship: Serbia and Montenegro in 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Participating in ECH</th>
<th>Medals</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRO</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>DEN</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNE</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>POR</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUS</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLO</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRB</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVK</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUI</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the participating and past performance of the 16 participating teams in EURO 2010.
As can be seen from Table 2 teams from Russia and Denmark competed 9 times. Denmark missed only one ECH in Switzerland 1992. and Russia missed the third ECH in Estonia 1997.

National team from Slovenia has made it to last eight championships (they missed only the first two) and Slovakian and Croatian teams took part in last seven championships.

The first four places on EURO 2010 were taken by teams that have so far had the most won medals. Montenegro squad for the first time participated in the European Championship. They had two wins and five losses, of which two games were lost tightly in the last minutes of games. It can be explained by lack of the experience necessary for this kind of competition.

Number of participants in all European Cadets Championships – Finals:

3 Finals: Croatia, Spain, Denmark

2 Finals: Germany, Portugal, Russia

1 Final: Czech Republic, Iceland, Sweden
3. DEFENSE

3.1. ORGANIZED DEFENSE PLAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Formation in organized defense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CRO  | - Mainly 5:1 up to 9m  
- Alternative 6:0 up to 9m, third and fourth defender going out, second and fifth closing the pivot |
| ESP  | - Mainly 5:1 aggressive and deep  
- Alternative 6:0 very aggressively and dynamically played, second and fifth defender going out  
- 5:1 having a numerical superiority |
| DEN  | - Mainly 6:0, second and fifth defender going out  
- Alternative 5:1 up to 10m |
| GER  | - Mainly 6:0, third and fourth defender going out  
- 6:0 with a player more |
| SRB  | - Mainly 6:0 very aggressive and dynamic, especially second and fifth defender  
- Alternative 5:1, deeply  
- 5+1 with a player more |
| SUI  | - Mainly 6:0 up to 9m |
| SWE  | - 3:2:1 very aggressive front center and two halves, deeply up to 11m  
- 6:0 classic up to 9m, lateral players (first and sixth) aggressive  
- 6:0 up to 9m with a player more |
| SLO  | - Mainly 5:1 up to 10m with fast throw-off  
- Alternatively 6:0 up to 9m, classic |
| RUS  | - 5:1 very aggressive and deep, up to 12m  
- Fast throw-off  
- 3:2:1 aggressive, deep  
- 5:1 with a player more in game |
| POL  | - Mainly 6:0, second and fifth defender going out in the direction of the ball  
- Alternative 5:1 |
| CZE  | - Mainly 6:0, second and fifth defender going out up to 9m opposite of the ball (first and sixth aggressive)  
- Alternative 4:2, two front players play deeply  
- 5+1 with a player more |
| ISL  | - Mainly 6:0 very aggressive and dynamic, third and fourth defender going out up to 9m  
- Fast throw-off |
| NOR  | - Mainly 6:0, classic, with third and fourth defender output  
- Alternative 5:1 |
| POR  | - 3:2:1 aggressive, dynamic and deep  
- 5:1, front player deeply  
- 5+1 |
| MNE  | - 3:2:1 aggressive and dynamic  
- 5:1 up to 10m |
| SVK  | - Mainly 6:0 to 9m, second and fifth defender going out  
- Alternative 3:2:1 aggressive and deep |

Table 3 shows the standard and most commonly used formations of the participating teams.
Each team had a specific primary defense system. Obviously, the 6:0 formations were the most common for most of 16 teams.

CROATIA /DEFENCE

Croatia played 5:1 defense. It is their standard defensive system with Kaleb A. (No.7) as a front center. He has a great range of hands and covers a large area. He is particularly effective when the opponent backcourt players are trying to hire pivot. This defense is characterized by the center front, which is going in front the opponent’s attackers, up to 10m. In this way he creates a density and gives security to five players who play behind his back. When the opponent manage to pass one of two other defenders there is always a central front player to help and make a foul (it’s the base for every good defense). Two other defenders, together with the third one, are trying to leave the pivot behind and block shoots from 9m. Two lateral defenders come to 9m when the ball is at the opposite opponent’s back.

Alternative Croatian defense was 6:0. It is interesting that, in the final match against Spain, Croatia managed to reverse the result in their favor only after the defense system was changed to 6:0, not going out from 9m. The third and fourth defender went out to 9m in the middle, the second and fifth defensive players were taking the pivot behind. The second and fifth defensive players were coming up to 9m when the opponent’s central back had the ball (in the direction of the ball) if the pivot wasn’t near them.

In seven matches, Croatia has received 165 goals. It is 23,5 per game, which puts them in the first place on this parameter. It means that they had the best defense in this Championship. The Croatian defense had overall 35 defensive blocks (5 per game) and takes the third place (after Germany, with 43 blocks and Serbia with 38 defensive blocks).

Croatia has had 105 successful attack interruptions (15 per game) and 43 steals (6.1 per game) and is in the eighth place on this parameter. The highest number of stolen balls had a team of Iceland (82; 11.7 per game) and the Czech Republic (65; 9.2 per game). It is a great indicator of risking the defensive tasks. However, Iceland is a team that received most goals in the tournament (226; 32.2 per game). Croatian goalkeepers had total saves of 98 out of 263 shots, which gives a saving percentage of 37% (14 per game).

SPAIN/DEFENCE

The base of Spain defense was 5:1 formation. They played very aggressive and dynamic, with aggressive and dynamic front- center. Depending on who the central back in the game is, in the position of front center plays No.11 Arino B. (middle back) or No.18 Saez V.(left wing; both members of “Barcelona”), playing between 10 and 15m from the goal. When in numerical superiority they remain in the 5:1
defense, trying not to make foul. They were disrupting opponent’s players trying to bring about a passive game or shots from bad angles.

Their alternative defense formation was 6:0, which they tried in the finals against Croatia. Two other defense players (2 and 5) used to go out in the direction of the ball from the central back to left or right back. Their most valuable asset was the shoot blocking, helping goalkeeper to deal with less challenging shots.

Spanish player No.15 Fernandez Huan Hose was named the best defender in this Championship.

They received 166 goals or 23.7 per game, taking the second place in this parameter (received only one goal more then Croatia). With 25 defensive blocks (3.5 per game) they took the seventh place. There were 100 (14.2 per game) attack interruptings and 40 steals (5.7 per game). The goalkeepers were quite successful: 79 saves out of 245 shots, which is 32% saving percentage (11.2 saves per game).

**DENMARK/DEFENSE**

Denmark mainly played 6:0 defense. Their second and fifth defenders usually went out deeply, in the direction of the ball. They blocked their opponent’s backs while the attacking central back had the ball, and the pivot was between third and fourth defender. The main characteristic is that four players in the middle are very tall and block shots easily.

They are the only team which defeated Croatia, European Champions.

Fast transformation from defense formation to collective or group fast break is their main quality. Whenever the opponent failed in attack and the attacker delayed in returning to the defense, Denmark performed group or collective fast break, making an easy shot in the position of missing defense player. (Video1)(Video2)

Alternative defense formation for Denmark was 5:1, with central front player who goes out up to 10m.

Denmark national team received 186 goals in this Championship (which is 26.5 per game and put them in the sixth place). They had only 19 defensive blocks (2.7 per game), because most of the teams which played against Denmark tried to finish their actions from 6-7m. They had 145 attack interruptions and 52 steals (7.4 per game and fifth place). Goalkeepers had 117 saves out of 303 shots which is 16.7 saves per game.

**GERMANY/DEFENSE**

German team mostly play classic 6:0 defense, moving to 9m and blocking the opponent’s shots from 9m. The third and the fourth defenders effectively stopped almost all shots from 9m.
They had the best goalkeeper in this Championship - No.1 Felix Storbek.

While having an extra player, they remained in 6:0 defense, but moving forward up to 9m. Without making a foul they tried to force the opponent player to shoot from distance bigger than 9m, maintaining good contact with their goalkeeper Storbek F.

The defenders were also taking good care of pivot by pushing him in front of them.

They often changed one player in defense and attack (second pivot went in and changed one of the backs). Depending on which side the bench is, they changed No.20 left back Weber F. or No.14 right back Foprstbauer, avoiding diagonal running in the field.

German team received overall 175 goals or 25 per game which put them in the third place in this parameter (after CRO and ESP).

They had 43 defense blocks (6.1 per game) and are on the first place in this parameter. It is an outstanding result and the explanation may be their tough and dynamic 6:0 defense. There were 113 attack interruptions, 58 steals (8.2 per game and the third place) which is excellent since they play not deep 6:0 defense.

Goalkeepers had 92 saves out of 267 shots or 34% saving percentage (13.1 savings per game).

### 3.2. GOALKEEPERS

*Individual Statistics – Goalkeepers (TOP20) [Table](#) (Total Shots and 7m Penalty Shots)*

*Overall Team Statistics – Goalkeepers* [Table](#)

There are more important factors which should be taken into consideration while talking about individual goalkeeper performance.

It is very important which team we are talking about, what kind of defense they play, what the goalkeeper’s playing time is, the importance of the game and the importance of the goalkeeper’s intervention (the moment when the team needs goalkeepers defenses the most).

- The largest number of saves had the Montenegrin goalkeeper Simic N. (92 saves out of 270 shots or 34% saving percentage). He also had the longest playing time in his team (366 min), but he played less important games than semi-final and final matches.
• Great performance was seen by Croatian goalkeeper Ivic F. (61 saves out of 176 shots which equals 35% saving percentage), but he didn’t play one game and had 297:09 minutes playing time.

• Danish goalkeeper had excellent performance as well. Lenthe J. had 81 saves out of 215 shots (38%) and spent 307:22 min in the in the tournament.

• German goalkeeper Storback F. deserved to be declared the best goalkeeper in this Championship. He had 76 saves out of 217 shots (35%) and 358:25 min playing time.

• The goalkeeper of Swedish team Jonahannesson P. was quite successful with 63 saves out of 180 shots (35%) and 293:35 min playing time.

• Russian goalkeeper Snovalov R. had 87 saves out of 253 shots (34%) and 343:41 min playing time.

Among the goalkeepers who spent less time in the game imposed themselves:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>saves/shots</th>
<th>saving percentage</th>
<th>playing time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asanin M. (CRO)</td>
<td>36/83</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>118:19min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freis T. (DEN)</td>
<td>36/88</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>122:38min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hellberg A. (SWE)</td>
<td>42/102</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>126:25min</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 4

If we consider goalkeeper couples then performance is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>saves/shots</th>
<th>saving percentage</th>
<th>average</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>117/303</td>
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<td>16.7</td>
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<td>SWE</td>
<td>105/283</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUS</td>
<td>102/304</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRO</td>
<td>99/264</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>92/266</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>101/300</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNE</td>
<td>101/306</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5
As mentioned before MNE and NOR goalkeepers played less important matches as their teams didn’t manage to qualify for MR.

On 7m penalties I noticed low efficiency of goalkeepers. Neither of them had significant 7m saving percentage. However, Slovakian goalkeeper saved 6 out of 20 7m- throws (which gives 33%). There were 318 7m- throws in 56 games (5.6 per game), 72 of them were saved (1.2 per game or 23%).

Russian and Portuguese goalkeepers had some great 7-meter saves (Sновалев Р. (RUS) 5/13 – 38%; Magelhaes F. (POR) 3/4 - 75%).

3.3. **INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS – PUNISHMENTS**

Individual Statistics- Punishments (TOP 40) [Table]

As shown in the Table, the highest number of 2min suspensions (9) had No.9 Jakobsen H. (NOR). However, the player with the highest number of negative points was No.15 Borovnik M. (SLO): he was suspended 3 times and got two red cards too). Therefore he played only 4 games. It is about a player who is very important for Slovenian team.

3.4. **TEAM FAIR PLAY**

Team Fair Play [Table]

In the Table we can see that the Spain had the smallest number of suspensions in this Championship (19) and Slovenian team had 35 suspensions and 4 red cards! Only Portugal had more suspensions (39), but 1 red card only. Therefore Slovenian team gained the highest number of negative points.

3.5. **CHANGING PLAYERS IN DEFENSE/ATTACK**

Most teams changed at least one player in defense and attack. The attack player who didn’t play defense was usually the best scorer of the team. An example is Spanish team which constantly changed player. Depending on defense tactics Dujshebajev (who plays in attack) was changed by pivot (No.4 Plaza I, No.5 Kramarz S. or No.6 Ferrer S.). There were situations when they couldn’t make change (diagonal changing if Dujshebajev played opposite the bench). In these situations Spanish defense was weaker, but their collective fast breaks were much better and efficient if they would reach the ball.

It was interesting to see tactical competitions of coaches while making defense/attack changes. Island, Russian and Czech team often took advantage of these situations: after receiving a goal, while the opponent was changing players, they played fast throw-off and scored. That’s the reason why there was the highest number of goals in games they played.
4. ATTACK

4.1. ORGANIZED ATTACK

For a good and organized attack the most important factor is backcourt players, especially a central back who is “extended coach’s hand” in the field. So it was in this Championship.

I decided to pay attention on Top 4 teams.

Among Top 3 teams central back was not only the main organizer of attacks but also the best player in the team (No.7 Kaleb A. (CRO), No.11 Arino A. (ESP), No.7 Larsen M. (DEN)). Only in German team left back No.20 Weber F. was a crucial player.

If opponent played 6:0 defense attacks were characterized by crossing and drawing back players; in case of deeper defense formations (3:2:1, 5:1, 4:2), running in and out from the defense was typical for the attack.

Most common offensive actions were 2:2 plays (back-pivot) if opponent’s backcourt players weren’t very tall (like ESP) or 1:1 play if back players were taller and physically stronger (CRO, DEN, GER).

CROATIA/ATTACK

Croatian offensive formation has players with extraordinary physical characteristics and almost looks like senior players. All backcourt players are among 195-200cm tall, and pivot No.18 Coric T. is 198cm tall. Even wings (No.17 Celic F. and No.13 Srsen I.) are very tall (193cm).

In their set-up play most of offensive actions were finished from 9m.

(Vide03- No.20 Mandalinic S.) (Video5- No.10 Herceg M.)
(Vide04- No.10 Herceg M.) (Video6- No.5 Ivic S.)

In Croatian team even wings managed to create good shooting positions from 8-9m. (Video7- No.17 Celic F.)

Since Croatian backcourt players are very strong they often managed to go through their opponent’s defense and score from 6m. (Video8- No.7 Kaleb A.)

Two Croatian players were nominated for the All Star Team: No.7 Kaleb Ante (best central back and MVP of the Championship) and No.18 Coric Teo (best pivot).

Croatian national team won the Championship by scoring 183 out of 330 shots (55% or 26.1 per game) which puts them in 13th position in this parameter. This is an example how statistics could be misleading.
if taken out of context. Czech team scored 220 but received 206 goals (11th place at the end of the Championship); Norway scored 216 and received 199 goals (13th place) and Island scored 212 and received 226 (finished the Championship in 12th place). However, there were games which leading teams played wisely as much as they needed, saving strength for more important games.

Breakthrough efficiency was 32/36; fast breaks 20/28, 18 of their shoots were blocked (2.5 per game which put them in 6th place together with SWE). They had 66 turnovers (9.4 per game; 4th place), and 90 assists (12.8 per game).

**SPAIN/ATTACK**

Spanish set-up play in attack included constant drawing, crossing and running through opponent’s defense. Their attacks were fast, passing the ball quickly around defense. Central backs (No.11 Arino A. player of “Barcelona” and No.19 Cacheda P. player of “Octavio”) were main organizers, equally successful. It is interesting to notice that both of them already play in Asobal League in Spain (1st National League).

Considering height of players, Spain had one of the shortest teams. The tallest player in the team was goalkeeper No.1 Douderis C. (200cm), than pivot No.4 Plaza H. (192cm). Only two external players are more than 190cm tall: No.7 Costoya A. (192cm) and No. 15 Fernandez J. (192 cm) who was later named the best defense player in the Championship.

Lack of height was compensated by fast ball transition and active sticking into opponent defense. That’s the way they forced judges to give them more time in attack. And that was their main characteristic: in organized attack they played fast on the edge of passive play and in the last moments they resolved situations by individual actions. (Video9) . Some of these situations (cooperation between central back and pivot) can be seen in the (Video10).

Spanish back players passed the ball quickly, leaving no space for defenders to make a foul. In this way they created good shooting situations for one of them (Video11 – No.11 Arino A.) (Video12).

Extraordinary individual quality of central back Arino A. can be seen in the (Video13).

Despite lack of backcourt’s formation height, right back No.10 Dujshenbaev made some shoots from distance: (Video14) (Video15). It wasn’t very often, usually they were searching for solutions at 6-7m.

Left wing of Spanish team, No.18 Saez Victor was nominated for All Star Team.

Spain scored 180 out of 293 shoots (61%, the second best percentage behind Poland with 62%).This is 25.7 per game and is only better than Portugal and Slovakia. I have already explained this “statistical problem” when discussing Croatian attacks.
Spain made 9/10 breakthroughs, 20/26 fast breaks and had only 14 blocked shots (2 per game; shared 2nd place with Poland). They made 59 turnovers (8.4 per game) which put them on 2nd place after Germany (58). They had 51 assists.

DENMARK/ATTACK

Danish team often changed offensive actions, showing many combinations and tactical varieties. Their typical set-up play implied three left-handed attackers (right wing, right back and central back). Both backs “covered” both positions. They frequently used this advantage: right wing runs to the 6m line, backs just move one position to the right and the team has left handed shooters at both positions again. This kind of offensive formations was rather unusual and uncomfortable for most Danish opponents.

Fast ball transition from right wing to right back (No.9 Langerhuus - later named the best right back in this Championship and All Star Team member), who was very dangerous for opponent’s defense and creating space for central back (No.7 Larsen M.) by drawing not only one but often two defenders. Surprisingly for defenders and goalkeeper, central back is a left-handed player and usually make most of these superior situations! Some of these situations can be seen in the (Video16- No.7 Larsen M.) (Video17- No.7 Larsen M.)

Both back players (Langerhuus and Larsen) organize attacks by drawing, crossing, changing places and thereby gaining superiority. Due to their outstanding individual skills most actions were based on these two players: (Video18- No.9 Langerhuus J.) (Video19- No.9 Langerhuus)

However, if one of them rests, central back No.3 Larsen (right handed player) is a substitution. Attack strategy then had to be changed, and actions usually started from the other side.

Danish National Team scored overall 200 out of 358 attempts (56% or 28.5 goals per game and 7th place). They made 18 out of 23 breakthroughs, 34 out of 45 fast breaks. Since most of their actions were finished out of 9m line one shouldn’t be surprised that 27 shoots were blocked (3.8 per game- 11th place). They also had high number of turnovers (80 or 11.4 per game) and share 9th place with Czech team. They had 111 assists (15.8 per game ); as they were very collective in their offensive actions they finished the Championship in the 2nd place in this parameter (along with Sweden).

GERMANY/ATTACK

Germans set-up play in attack included different varieties organized by central backs No.13 Schmidt P. and No.18.Stark M. But during the game left back No.20 Weber F. usually imposed himself. He was later named the best left back in the Championship. German attacks mostly relied on him and right back player No. 14 Forstbauer J. whose performance was excellent throughout the whole tournament: (Video20- No.14 Forstbauer J.) (Video21- No.14 Forstbauer J.)(Video22- No.14 Forstbauer J.)
It was evident that conception of the organized attack was based on these two players. Unlike Forstbauer J, whose most of tactical options were based on shooting from external positions, Weber imposed himself not only as a scorer, but also as an assistant: (Video23 - assist) (Video24 - individual fast break)

Even two of German players are nominated for All Star Team: above mentioned left back No.20 Weber F. and goalkeeper No.1 Strobek F.

Germans scored 184 out of 345 attempts (53% or 26.2 goals per game) which put them in the 12th place by this parameter, the same situation like CRO and ESP. They made it 4 out of 6 breakthroughs, 21 out of 32 fast breaks. Their 19 shoots were blocked (2.7 per game and 8th place). They made 58 technical mistakes (8.2 per game) and took 1st place. This is an indicator of outstanding technical skills of German team. They had 83 assists (11.8 per game) and took 8th place in this parameter.

4.2. INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS- GOALSCORERS

Individual Statistics – Goalsocers (TOP 40) Table

As shown in the Table among Top 40 best scorers are 27 backcourt players, 9 wings and 4 pivots. In Top10 scorers are 7 backcourt players and 3 wing players. The best scorer of the Championship is central back No.20 Jud K. (SUI) with 65 goals out of 97 attempts. It gives 67%, but 18 of these were 7m shots. Central back No.9 Laugerhuus J. (DEN) took the second place with 57 out of 87 attempts (66%), and all of his goals were scored from actions. The highest percentage on the list has pivot No. 14 Cizmovic S. (MNE). Considering the position he plays, 35 goals out of 44 shots (88%) is understandable.

5. REFEREE PERFORMANCE

The overall performance of the referees at the European Men’s 18 Championship was good, despite a few mistakes. A former problem with application of progressive penalties was revealed. Most teams had problems in Preliminary Round due to the new rules refering to pivot making foul in attack and contact with defender when passing to 6m line. Referees sanctioned a huge number of these fouls in the Preliminary Round, particularly when an attacker was passing to 6m line trying to threaten the opponent’s goalkeeper. Every chest contact of these two players was characterized as a foul, although in most cases defenders held attackers with at least one hand. Similarly, any attempt of pivot to make a screen with using a hand or a leg was sanctioned.
I got the impression that in the PR referees tried to sanction as many of these situations as possible. Therefore, there is a large number of technical mistakes in PR. Due to these rules most of the backcourt players gained some insecurity while trying to make good shooting positions at 6-7m. And again, they didn’t have a support of the pivot whose movements were also restricted by the new rules.

The new rule refering to goalkeepers (every contact of a goalkeeper with opponent player out of 6m means red card for the goalkeeper) contributed well to fair play game - there were no such situations. The referees sanctioned every hit in the opponent’s head area with red card and did a good job. Later, in the Main Round, semi-final and final matches it was evident that the judges had reduced the criteria. In this way, both players and referees found "golden middle" and both of them adapted to the new rules of the handball game.

I would like to point out another problem in handball game. Modern handball tends to be faster, with more fast breaks, goals and more attractive for spectators. The problem is referee’s opinion if the game should be stopped (fast break, fast through-off) in a situation when opponent player lies on the floor. It is an important issue particularly considering last moments of tight games. Sometimes it may be a part of opponent’s tactical solution for stopping high-speed play. These special situations in play were quite important and in some cases may have been decisive for the final result. In my opinion such a simulation for the sake of preventing the opponent in fast attacking action ought to be strictly sanctioned, especially in the important moments of the match. It is another challenge for referees and I’m sure they will continue to focus on these problems in the future.

6. CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

Major changes in result were among the main characteristics of European Men’s 18 Championship. In many games there were alternations in result: an advantage of up to 7-8 goals wasn’t always a victory guarantee. On the contrary, it happened more than once that a team was leading with 5-6 goals and after 20-25min of the game the opponent managed to change the result in their favor with even 5 goals in advantage. Most teams weren’t able to play constantly well for more than 30-40min which was the main reason for result variations. However, we must consider the players age. They are 18 years old or younger. Many of them were born in 1993, and even in 1994! Therefore, these oscillations were not a surprise.

Apart from semi-final and final matches, 9/10 Placement match was very important. Teams ranked 1-9 received their entry passes to the IHF Youth World Championship in Argentina. Russian team in 9/10 Placement match defeated Poland (29:27 (17:15)) in a very tight game. These two teams have already met in Intermediate Round when Russian team managed to win Poland with 34:33, scoring from 9m after 60` of game expired.
Here are some of my impressions of the Championship.

1. The overall performance of the goalkeepers was very good. They contributed a lot to successes of their teams. Goalkeepers from Top8 teams had 92-117 saves in 7 games (except for ESP 79). It gives 13.1-16.7 saves per game and represents an important factor for their team.

2. Defense formation depended on the opponent and the result, but most teams relied on 6:0 or 5:1 defense system. Some teams changed defense formations during the tournament. An example is the final match CRO-ESP. While both Spain and Croatia were playing 5:1 defense system Spanish team was leading. But, 15min till the end of the game Croatian team changed defence formation to 6:0 and gained the advantage, won the match and the Championship! Spain also tried to change to 6:0 defense, but it was too late to change the result. In some moments of the game Spain had the advantage of even 3 goals (in 38’ the result was 17:14). After changing their defense formation, Croatian team was leading in 58’ with 26:22! Once again, the result of the game was uncertain at last moments: Spain first tried to play 6:0 defense and after that total pressing on their side. In this way they reached tight final result.

   It is important to say that Spanish National Team has had 75 days of training and many international games played together this year.

3. Most of the teams had one or two their defense specialists and changed those players in defense and attack without having problems. One of the reasons can be that teams have been improving the fast retreat phase. In many matches both teams did the same and didn’t pressure each other when changing players in defense/attack.

4. There were situations that some of defense specialists had joined their team in fast breaks or extended fast breaks before changing with attacker after estimating the possibilities for success. They tried to prevent opponent to make the defense/attack change and make a good shooting position at the position of the non-changed player.

5. Fast, dynamic and modern handball was demonstrated in some matches of Preliminary, Intermediate and Main Round not only by leading teams. RUS, ISL, CZE, NOR and SVK National Teams have played modern handball, too.

6. In some Championships there is a problem of tight-match-scheduling. Players are tired because of the great number of games played in short time and games are loosing speed and dynamics. However, this wasn’t the case. In my opinion, the match schedule was excelent. Top 8 teams had four, and the other teams had three rest days. Players renewed strength and were ready for upcoming games. That is the main reason why final matches didn’t loose speed and dynamics and showed modern handball interesting for spectators. Nevertheless, there is a space for improvement for some teams because they don’t use fast throw-off.
7. Best ranked teams had few common characteristics: their best players were back players; they had “long bench” (great possibilities for rotation); their back players were physically very strong in 1:1 situations and often draw the attention of two defenders; they are able to score from 9m-line.

8. It was evident that the back players of best teams have developed various shooting techniques, surprising the opponent. The central becks were initiators of attack actions, creating good shooting situations for their teammates.

9. In play set-up in attack the most common offensive actions were drawings, crossings, transitions from wings and different variations of cooperation the back players and pivots, depending of opponents defense formation.

10. Numbers of technical faults still one of the main factors witch are the keys for success.

Finally, my opinion why the Croatian team won 10th European Men’s 18 Championship:

Croatian team absolutely deserved the first place. The coach was wisely coaching the players during the tournament. Outstanding trained players made strong and well-coordinated team with good tactical solution for most of the situations. In crucial moments they remained calm and focused. At all playing positions the coach had two good players to rotate and made important changes at the right time. Each of back players was able to won the game, performing outstanding physical, technical and mental abilities.

Croatian team had the best defense and the lowest number of received goals. They played dynamic and aggressive enough 5:1 defence. This kind of defense has enabled them a lot of possibilities for fast breaks (individual, group or collective) and they used them wisely.

Their central back No.7 Kaleb Ante was named the best player of the Championship. Not only was he the best organizer of the play but also the best scorer. This team has 7 back players who are able to score from 9m or further.

Their pivot No.18 Coric Teo (197cm tall) is in the All Star Team of the Championship.

I’d like to point out that finalists of this Championship (CRO and ESP) have already met in the final match of Mediterranean Championship held earlier this year in Montenegro. Spanish team won that match convincingly with 10 goals of advantage. Croatian team then missed the first goalkeeper Ivic F.

Few months later Croatian National Team won this more important Championship and became European Champion.

They learned lessons from the previous match, played strong and dynamic defense and patient and effective attack organized by strong back players who gave important goals from outside 9m line.
Amazing information is that Croatian back players scored even 23 out of 27 goals in the final match (left backs 11, central backs 7, and right backs 5)! Of those 23 goals, even 13 have been sent out of line 9m, 8 from transitions and 2 from 7m line.

Considering that Spanish team improved fast retreat phase, Croatian team had some difficulties to perform fast breaks against them. It was clear that Croatian players had to find a way to deal with organized Spanish defense. It can be seen in statistical parameters: Croatia achieved only one goal from fast break (Spain also- probably the importance of the final game caused playing without a risk).

And finally, Croatian handball Federation has put a lot of effort in improving this sport. They have almost the same system of work for youth and senior teams. It has shown very good results, producing young players who are fully prepared for future challenges. The most important in this system is the selection of players still in the pioneering age. Only a few selected back players do not grow up 195-200cm while still in younger categories.

Once again we can see that the work with young categories paid off: Croatian National Team became Men’s 18 World Champions. Croatia will probably continue to play an important role in the upcoming handball competitions.

Montenegro, September 2010.

Zoran Abramovic