Beach Handball Enters a New Dimension

Seven years after the Italian premiere and three more continental championships later, Italy hosted the biggest European Beach Handball Championship so far. At the beaches of Misano Adriatico (near Rimini) 18 national teams (both men and women) competed for the continental title in Beach Handball. In the excellent environment of a beautiful holiday area, the championships took place from 10 to 15 July 2007.

The 5th edition of the Beach Handball European Championships marked a milestone in the evolution of our sport. Beach Handball entered a new dimension: 178 matches were played within six days by 36 teams from 21 different nations. An incredible high number of spectators followed the events on the beach of Misano Adriatico and a massive TV-coverage was provided by SKY and EUROSPORT. All this, together with an internet live streaming, showed the high interest and resonance all over Europe.

Now it is our task to follow this path and continue an intensive campaign for the development of a sport that in July 2007 has seen its biggest event so far, organized by the EHF together with the FIGH.

According to an opposite tendency to the past Championships, the possibilities for newcomers were limited this time to the Italian women’s team. All the best ranked teams are in fact ranked almost in similar positions in indoor handball. This means that the high level of specialisation in Beach Handball needs improved personal technical skills as well as physical qualities.
Technical developments in the game

Despite the increasing popularity of Beach Handball, no brand new technical solutions were invented by the coaches of the teams. The fact that there was only one year between the 4th and the 5th European Championship may also explain this.

Since the “pirouette” is an easy way of scoring two points from a single action, no initiative was taken to develop new solutions. Especially the more complicated group actions for scoring two points (e.g. the in-flight) are avoided by the coaches and players because of its high risk.

However, as noticed during the previous European Championships in Cuxhaven, the pirouette leads to a lot of “goal area violations” in particular in women’s matches. The only remarkable improvement in this respect is the increased use of the “one leg” jump instead of the traditional “two legs” jump with parallel feet.

We are pretty sure that this practice can only cause more difficulties for the referees making the decision whether it was a “one point” or a “two point” action. The advantage of the player is clear: more dynamic action, no stop before the jump, due to pre-rotation (shoulders) the ball can be better protected against the defender and possibly more efficient and stronger shots.

On the other hand, analysing many of these actions during the matches, it was also clear that it is almost impossible with this anticipating movement of the shoulders to have a real “360° pirouette”, so the 70-80% of these actions were, in our opinion, just one point actions.

This question of evaluating the “pirouette” actions is almost unresolved. From a technical side we have already fixed that is not possible for a wing player (right handed from left side and left handed from right side) to perform a real 360° spin before shooting. Accordingly, the technical experts of the EHF have to make a decision to help referees to have less trouble with the evaluation of this particular situation.

Our suggestion is to always award a “one point” action and try to stimulate the fantasy of our coaches and players to find new solutions for scoring “two points” from a single action.
Refereeing and FAIR PLAY

Concerning refereeing, as it was the case in Cuxhaven, the protests were really limited and the principle of FAIR PLAY was almost clear for the players as well as for the coaches.

Unluckily, we had few but serious cases in Misano Adriatico where the main principle of Beach Handball was violated, FAIR PLAY. Especially the newcomers, but also experienced teams were involved in such cases that depict “not such a nice picture of our sport”. In our opinion, we should use the first technical meeting for a briefing to all the teams, coaches and players etc. to explain what we expect from them during the upcoming championships. Here we should clarify the meaning of FAIR PLAY and the share our vision with them on what picture we want to show the public. A Players’ Party on the very first evening could also help to decrease aggression in the players and portray them more or less the image of a Beach Handball family.

But there were also good examples of respecting the principle of FAIR PLAY during the 5th European Beach Handball Championships.

Let’s highlight a particular situation in the shoot-out of the men’s final, Croatia vs Russia. In the third attempt for Russia, the player scores with a “pirouette” but the line of the goal area moved (because of the sand as the TV replay showed afterwards). It was a decisive moment as immediately after this the Croatian player missed and Russia won the continental title. The Croatian side noticed it, but there was absolutely no protest at the end of the match: this was a moment or real FAIR PLAY. It is easy respect FAIR PLAY when there is nothing at stake, but that moment was really the right picture for our sport: fun, sun and entertainment with a creative spirit in a highly technical sport.
Team performance

Coming back to team performances, without a doubt the best nation was Croatia. The development of their playing quality is clear and outstanding – both their teams reached the final and they gained one European title. This is their reward for a continuous development in particular in the case of the men’s team. The Croatian women, based on the experience from the WBHC Kontesa Nera, have been on the top since a long time.

Norway, after playing “handball on sand” in Cuxhaven, have optimised the skill of their talented players to reach third position at the women’s tournament. This is the best result ever for a Scandinavian team in Beach Handball.

The Russian men’s team, with the usual mixture of physical strength and technical abilities, are on the top of Europe again. At the same time, the women’s team showed a slow decline after being on top for a long time in Europe and in the world as well.

The German women confirmed their great attitude for Beach Handball in general, while in contrast to the Russian trend, the men’s team needs to find their way back to the brilliant play that allowed them to play with a chance against the best teams in the World.

The difficulties of the Hungarian women’s team after changing coach have given greater emphasis to the excellent performance of the men’s team. The Hungarian men confirmed their place on the podium, making their Beach Handball one of the best in Europe. Their tactical solutions, great interpretation of FAIR PLAY in defence and the individual preparation of all their players is difficult to find in other teams.

The Italian home teams showed mixed performance at the Championships: the women were third in their preliminary round, while men ranked second. However, an incredible second round took the “Azzurro” girls to the 5th place, which means a very valuable qualification for the 2008 Beach Handball World Championships in Cadiz (ESP). On the other hand, the pressure of playing at home tricked the men’s team with a 12th position, which is the same result that they reached in Cuxhaven.

Spain seem to be in decline with both their teams ending in mid-table that does not reflect their great qualities and potentials. We are sure that they will return to their earlier levels at the 2008 World Championships on home ground.

Serbia’s 4th place for the men and a good result for the women maintain their strong traditions in our sport.

Having 36 teams guaranteed 6 days of great performance on all courts, stands crowded with spectators from the very beginning. On the closing day thousands gathered on the central court for the finals played on a beautiful sunny day.
Statistics of shoot-out situations

The European Beach Handball elite is expanding. There are many very close matches and the outcome of these games depends on a single moment. The balance between the top teams is reflected in the following data:

**Matches decided with “shoot-out” (men’s Tournament):**

- 28 out of 89 matches played in total
- 8 out of 45 in the preliminary round
- 10 out of 24 played in the main round
- 4 out of 12 in the consolation round
- 2 out of 4 at the placement matches

**4 out of 4 in the semi-finals and finals**

**Matches decided in the “shoot-out” (women’s tournament):**

- 30 out of 89 matches played in total
- 7 out of 45 in the preliminary round
- 11 out of 24 in the main round
- 7 out of 12 in the consolation round
- 2 out of 4 at the placement matches

**3 out of 4 in the semi-finals and finals**
Conclusions

What can be the conclusion after all? Every Beach Handball player knows very well how easily a referee’s decision can decide the outcome of such matches. The referees also know it, so we need to improve their skills and allow them to gain experience to avoid awarding the title to the wrong team.

To help the referees in their hard job, it is necessary to have a clearer interpretation of the “two-point” actions and we also have to give the possibility and the duty for the referees nominated for an event to take part in preparation tournaments (eg. the EBT) before to the European Championships.

We always have to help the referees improve their performance. With all the matches played, we have seen really excellent performance with the lowest possible amount of mistakes on the final days. We need cut the “warm-up” period of the first two days. This is only possible by having well prepared referees in Beach Handball after a whole season of indoor handball.

Before the event, we have to clarify for all participants of the European Beach Handball Tournament (players, coaches, referees, delegates, etc.) what we expect from them. We have to show everyone involved the picture of our beautiful sport that we want to project for the public. For this we need to have something like an “Educational Video” or “handout” that we can hand out to all participants before the event. We have to be strict against the violations of FAIR PLAY. With a Player’s Party on the very first evening we can already create the atmosphere we want.

To improve the level of the debutant teams, we have to offer courses for coaches and players before the European championships where they can gain the necessary knowledge to take part in a continental competition.

The possibilities of our sport are immense, we are on a really good way, but we have to stay on this track and become more professional in many ways. Meet you on the beach 😊

Marco Trespidi  
Beach Handball Delegate

Alex Gehrer  
Beach Handball Delegate