EURO 2000 IN CROATIA - REFEREES

by Jozef Ambrusz / President of EHF Competitions Commission

Introductory Words

The EURO 2000 was a perfectly organized European Championship with a record number of spectators (75% tickets sold) and representatives from all kinds of media, which culminated in a high-rate and dramatic final. Now it is quite evident and the spectators' interest is a proof that:

- the shift of the period of a CH from summer to winter was the right decision,
- the system of qualification for a CH increased the number of teams capable of playing an efficient role in each game and with each competitor in the final round,
- the absolute majority of teams, functionaries, and spectators understood and acted in compliance with fair play,
- the performance of referees (38 matches), despite some mistakes, was steady and contributed to the good sporting level of the tournament.

1. Nomination of Referees

From the start it should be noted that there was a total of 10 referee couples in the CH with 2 of them already being referees in all preceding CH. Nine couples were referees in the last WC in Egypt; seven are candidates for the selection for the Olympic Games in Sydney 2000, 4 couples were "neutral" and all couples belong to the elite group of IHF referees. Let us not forget that from the original nomination for this EURO 2000 two couples could not come and had to be replaced by the substitute couples. Furthermore, one of the best couples had, due to family problems, to leave earlier. Here is a brief recapitulation of the nomination:

- An elite group of referees from among the best in the world was nominated.
- The nominations were based on earlier good and steady results.
- If a further part of our evaluation were to criticize the referees, the intention is not to devalue their endeavour. On the contrary, the purpose of the criticism is to eliminate mistakes.

2. Preparation of the Seminar

We are aware that the reviews on the performance of referees remain to be different also after this CH. We claim that for the preparation of referees in all aspects the respective federations and chief referees are responsible in the first place. We rightly expect that their professional, physical and health preparation would be adequate in regard to the importance of the nomination for a CH.

The age structure 38/1, 39/1, 40/1, 41/1, 42/3, 43/1, 44/2, 45/4, 48/4, 50/2 is not catastrophic but not favourable either. Without any intention to discredit the results of physical and theoretical tests I have to state that our expectations were met only partly.

- Physical test: Shuttlerun
  Four referees out of 4 different couples did not finish within the limit.
3. Arbitration Plans and Rules

Neutrality
There are many reasons which make me believe that the referees in this field in spite of two questionable performances came out of the test better than some officials of some teams. Exaggerated and uncontrolled emotion never solved the real problems. We reject to consider the referee’s performance strictly in relation with his nationality.

Uniform line
The first three playing days of the tournament went smoothly. Later, unfortunately, the deep-rooted (and for EHF unacceptable) “domestic” bad habits of referees were highlighted. We do not claim that referees are not willing to accept the recommended line but we were disappointed that some of them were unable to assert it throughout the whole tournament. In which points did the plan differ from reality?

Languages
In December 1999 the EHF ended the first stage of checking the languages skills of international referees. Among those, where the results did not correspond with the requirements, are, unfortunately, also 4 referees from this ECh. The results of all tests will be subject of discussion in the EHF CC.

The main purpose of the seminar
In order to eliminate the differences in the domestically deep rooted, but not always correct interpretation of the rules we targeted the seminar to the minimum number of tasks, which constitute a superstructure of expected knowledge.

1. For the referees neutrality is a law. Nothing could harm the handball image more than a one-sided arbitration.

2. We required:
   - A uniform and easily identifiable line of refereeing, which would not change in the course of the tournament and for which the teams might technically and tactically prepare themselves
   - Uniform consideration of fouls in the conduct of opponents
   - We wanted to minimize the shortcomings of the last ECh and WCh by considering the passive play and offensive fouls.

3. To make the control of both the tasks and aims of the seminar more simple we made it clear that for the evaluation of the performance of referees not only the observation of the delegate and teams but mainly the comparison of the planned and achieved aims would apply.

Concentration of certain referees depended on the number of playing days. In the course of the tournament the number of controversial decisions increased.

After the first 10 minutes of the game the line of the referees regarding what is permitted and what is prohibited should be clear for each participant. The efficiency of this principle varied. To the benefit of the referees it should be mentioned that this is connected, to a large extent, with the willingness of the players not to use prohibited resources.

We have nothing against the discussion between players and referees. But we strongly object a referee discussing each decision with the players on the playing court.

Handball rule test
This test, in which a referee/ a delegate could reach 46 points at maximum, ended with an average of 36.1 points for referees (78.3%) and 33.25 points for delegates (72.3%). A good result was achieved in the regulation test.

Languages
In December 1999 the EHF ended the first stage of checking the languages skills of international referees. Among those, where the results did not correspond with the requirements, are, unfortunately, also 4 referees from this ECh. The results of all tests will be subject of discussion in the EHF CC.

The main purpose of the seminar
In order to eliminate the differences in the domestically deep rooted, but not always correct interpretation of the rules we targeted the seminar to the minimum number of tasks, which constitute a superstructure of expected knowledge.

1. For the referees neutrality is a law. Nothing could harm the handball image more than a one-sided arbitration.

2. We required:
   - A uniform and easily identifiable line of refereeing, which would not change in the course of the tournament and for which the teams might technically and tactically prepare themselves
   - Uniform consideration of fouls in the conduct of opponents
   - We wanted to minimize the shortcomings of the last ECh and WCh by considering the passive play and offensive fouls.

3. To make the control of both the tasks and aims of the seminar more simple we made it clear that for the evaluation of the performance of referees not only the observation of the delegate and teams but mainly the comparison of the planned and achieved aims would apply.

Languages
In December 1999 the EHF ended the first stage of checking the languages skills of international referees. Among those, where the results did not correspond with the requirements, are, unfortunately, also 4 referees from this ECh. The results of all tests will be subject of discussion in the EHF CC.

The main purpose of the seminar
In order to eliminate the differences in the domestically deep rooted, but not always correct interpretation of the rules we targeted the seminar to the minimum number of tasks, which constitute a superstructure of expected knowledge.

1. For the referees neutrality is a law. Nothing could harm the handball image more than a one-sided arbitration.

2. We required:
   - A uniform and easily identifiable line of refereeing, which would not change in the course of the tournament and for which the teams might technically and tactically prepare themselves
   - Uniform consideration of fouls in the conduct of opponents
   - We wanted to minimize the shortcomings of the last ECh and WCh by considering the passive play and offensive fouls.

3. To make the control of both the tasks and aims of the seminar more simple we made it clear that for the evaluation of the performance of referees not only the observation of the delegate and teams but mainly the comparison of the planned and achieved aims would apply.

Languages
In December 1999 the EHF ended the first stage of checking the languages skills of international referees. Among those, where the results did not correspond with the requirements, are, unfortunately, also 4 referees from this ECh. The results of all tests will be subject of discussion in the EHF CC.

The main purpose of the seminar
In order to eliminate the differences in the domestically deep rooted, but not always correct interpretation of the rules we targeted the seminar to the minimum number of tasks, which constitute a superstructure of expected knowledge.

1. For the referees neutrality is a law. Nothing could harm the handball image more than a one-sided arbitration.

2. We required:
   - A uniform and easily identifiable line of refereeing, which would not change in the course of the tournament and for which the teams might technically and tactically prepare themselves
   - Uniform consideration of fouls in the conduct of opponents
   - We wanted to minimize the shortcomings of the last ECh and WCh by considering the passive play and offensive fouls.

3. To make the control of both the tasks and aims of the seminar more simple we made it clear that for the evaluation of the performance of referees not only the observation of the delegate and teams but mainly the comparison of the planned and achieved aims would apply.

Languages
In December 1999 the EHF ended the first stage of checking the languages skills of international referees. Among those, where the results did not correspond with the requirements, are, unfortunately, also 4 referees from this ECh. The results of all tests will be subject of discussion in the EHF CC.

The main purpose of the seminar
In order to eliminate the differences in the domestically deep rooted, but not always correct interpretation of the rules we targeted the seminar to the minimum number of tasks, which constitute a superstructure of expected knowledge.

1. For the referees neutrality is a law. Nothing could harm the handball image more than a one-sided arbitration.

2. We required:
   - A uniform and easily identifiable line of refereeing, which would not change in the course of the tournament and for which the teams might technically and tactically prepare themselves
   - Uniform consideration of fouls in the conduct of opponents
   - We wanted to minimize the shortcomings of the last ECh and WCh by considering the passive play and offensive fouls.

3. To make the control of both the tasks and aims of the seminar more simple we made it clear that for the evaluation of the performance of referees not only the observation of the delegate and teams but mainly the comparison of the planned and achieved aims would apply.
Uniform consideration of offences against the opponent

In general
The main task set out at the seminar by EHF-CC was clear and simple.
- We want to punish the same offences equally, no matter who is a referee, who plays with whom and what minute the offence occurs.
- We demanded a clear and strict interpretation of all rules.
- We did not want "automation" in showing yellow cards.
- We did not want the referee to "look" for fouls when they do not occur.
- We did not want the referees to hide their possible mistakes by punishment or by 7 metres throws.
- We did not want the punishment of fouls, especially in the last minutes of the game, to result in a loss of intensity of the game.
- And finally, we did not want confused, incomprehensible and hasty signalization by the referees.
- All in all, we simply wanted equal conditions of the work for all parties involved in the matches.

Results
We talked about the progressiveness of punishment for pushing, holding, holding shirt etc., a long time ago. We knew what negative effect those fouls have for the game. The referees know about it. It is a mystery for us, why some game the fouls were not punished as it is necessary because of lacking authority and comprehension of the problem. Liable reasons for those non-acceptable tolerance were:
- Not strong enough psychological resistance,
- Loss of concentration for a short time,
- Predominance of a wrong attitude,
- Not very strong situation flexibility.

Advantage Rule understanding
6.0 - 6.6 - result = better than good
The achievements not only had quality but also stability. These good results were not achieved in the placement games in Rijeka.

Deficiencies:
- Very frequent interrupting of the game because of repeated, but not punished fouls
- Not punished fouls within the passive zones of the game
- Mistakes by applying the basic tasks of the rule 18:7 and 18:9, rights and obligations of the court and goal-line referees

Offensive Fouls: 6.0 - 6.3 result = good
In a statistical comparison with other ECHs we would be satisfied with Croatia. With the renowned referees nominated for this ECH, we expected more.

The problems were decisions that resulted in counterattacks caused by wrong interpretation. We did not wonder about the objections because the players and the coaches felt cheated.

Deficiencies:
- Whistling an attack foul, when the defender defended evidently, repeatedly and purposely in the goal area,
- Whistling an attack foul, when the defender was taking a defensive position first and was not moving ahead.

Progressive Punishments 6.0 - 6.0 Result = Good
The tendency of the 6:0 defensive system, eventually 5:1, continued also in this ECH. Both an enormous physical disposition and a contact 1 to 1 are determined by the system. We know about this and we warned the referees about the main problems of the various systems and combinations before and during the tournament. During the whole tournament only 4 direct disqualifications were given. It is a negative reality that by applying different progressiveness of punishment a negative influence for the uniformity of the decision line become evident. Therefore this topic was one of the main ones of the seminar.

Deficiencies:
- Couple: different punishing of the same fouls - non-uniform line,
- Individuals: the dominating referee in the couple is often more stricter than his partner
- Generally: after the first restriction of allowed and
notallowedactionsthelinethroughoutthegame
changedtotheworseandfadeddowntilltheend
ofthegame.

Tasks Forthe Future
At present ECh referee evaluation of the games
(based on the observation reports) is made shortly
after the game-without video tape. A video is used
only in complicated cases. I recommend a system
which, after the game, the delegate’s notes and
comments are supported by analysing a video
recording. Comparing positive and negative
observations will be more integral and more
authentic.

Offensive Fouls: 6.0-6.3
Result = Good

The referees had and still have problems with the
exact interpretation of this rule. Now let us compare
the instructions of the seminar with reality. We
assume that by a correct interpretation of this rule, a
playing rhythm should be respected in the whole
game in order to give the teams an appropriate
time for preparing their attack combinations. This
principle should not be disturbed. The referees must
recognize, if it is a scheduled tactical combination
for scoring or just a retaining of the ball without any
clear purpose. Any change of commonly accepted
“rules”, to whistle passive play in the game or in the
tournament, could cause unbelievable disadvantages and damages.

We have the problem of interpreting this rule not only
among the different couples, but also among the
well skilled referees. We observe the differences
mostly when one of the teams is reduced by one or
two players, when there are many substitutions of
players, when the throw offs are delayed on purpose,
etc.

Deficiencies:
- very good defence of a team leading to a
  passive play for the attacker must not be punished,
- whistling of passive play falls into the category of
  subjective decisions of one of the referees.
  That’s why he has to have a visual contact with
  his partner, who can or cannot feel the
  passiveness of the team in the same way.
- pressure from the audience must never be a
  reason for whistling passive play!

Co-operation of the Referees: 6.0/6.8 - Result = Better Than Good

By analysing this very complicated dual career
partnership/DualCareerCouple DCC/, there is a
valid principle that a common success always depends
on the ability to synchronize common interests. This
type of referees’ relationships based on the fact that
whoever from the couple has an understanding for
the plans and ambitions of the other one supports
him in his working concept. Couples in which the
referees are not only partners but also managers are
more or less prototype. DCCs are hands-on, individual, adaptable, self-possessed and extremely
resistant on the playground. That is why they are so
capable of quickly going up the scale of career. I know that I am speaking about the public criteria of co-
operation. But I assure that those aspects were the
basis of good results for most of the couples in the
ECh. The co-operation of the referees is not measurable by short-time results. We are looking for
tenable along-term co-operation.

The biggest burden in the ECh was the so-called
“black hole of routine”. Referees were not able to
assume and respect newly innovated impulses.
Improved and cultivated fragments, which are the
central point of influence of collaboration and co-
operation of the referees, are the major and long-
time tasks for the chief referee. For dedicated people
it is a known reality that the disregarding of DCC
principles, incorrectly defined selective mechanism
of couples and especially the remaining innmaking
mistakes are the beginning of the end of a lot of not
only young referees.

Which knowledge was brought up by this ECh
concerning how to evaluate a referee personality?

Stability of the best couples
Moreover this ECh showed that in cases, where the
referees are guided by creative and systematic work
(if people do not forget the existence of “informal
rules”), success in career comes simpler and lasts
longer. The speed of a successful career also
depends on the aspects like culture, morality, habits,
social formula of behaviour, knowledge of the
language, resistance, adaptability, ability for self-
education, etc.

Regulation barriers
It is not good if the couple is forced to supersede
barriers of a new practice by themselves. We saw this,
especially where regulation barriers were caused by a limited process of preparation before the ECh, the self-reforming process and adaptation for the changed conditions of the ECh were only partly effective.

**Human factor**

The human factor has a key role in the relationship of two equivalent and equal “right” partners. DCC simply demands a high level of competence, creativity and personal responsibility not only from the referees, but first of all from their chiefs. Wherever these principles work, the results will automatically be good.

**Personality of The Referees:** 6.0 / 6.5

Result = Good

We didn’t expect anything else and the result is not a surprise. The tendency of stabilization in the elite group continued. The basis of success was created in the first 3-4 days. Practice showed us that it is not necessary, especially from the long-term aspect that a couple has one “charismatic” leader. Not single referees, but well-balanced couples must be the aim. Couples cannot have only one aim. Couples should have a variety of targets. The best couples in the ECh concentrated on their own mistakes and shortcomings and not how to beat their rivals. They didn’t regard it as success to beat their rivals as their main goal, but only as a useful consequence of asking the question “how to be better, how to do things better tomorrow than today.” It was good that we were asking the same question every day of the tournament. We need the couples with the vision: “Every step ahead is only one of the next thousands.”

**Atmosphere:** 6.0 - 6.1

Result = Good

**Positive aspects**

Violence and unsportsmanlike conduct are decreasing. The improvements were speed, techniques and variability of the games systems. Only in 4 games out of 38, the atmosphere rate was only satisfactory. In all other 34 matches the atmosphere was either good or very good.

**Negative aspects**

The atmosphere in the ECh was influenced by sometimes correct, but mostly one-way criticism of the referees and delegates. We struggle to understand critics and to learn from them. But the circle will be closed only, if the critics go the same way.

**Final remark**

Stabilization of performance of the elite group of referees is realized in the course of action. The structure of the composition of the group is directly dependent on the level of the preparation in the federations. Good preparation means good results and goes automatically along with advancement in the career of referees. There is a dilemma to which extent the federations are willing to help in the stabilization of the couples consciously with the “minimum losses” or to which extent they really concentrate on the spontaneous processes, where the calculated result is uncertain and accidental.

4. **Conclusion**

The teams that wanted to play handball regardless of taking the risk of applying prohibited fouls and being subsequently punished were, at the end, successful. In each of the games the referees had some problems, but each serious foul was “visible” and punished acceptably. Other problems, not only related to the referees, came up in games, where the lack of skills was compensated by the engagement accompanied by rudeness. I assume that this development did not please the majority of the teams. The referees also will not be totally satisfied with their work. This is a guarantee of further progress.