Analysis of Referee Performance at the Women’s ECh in ROM 2000

Manfred Prause / GER / EHF CCR

1. Selection Criteria

The referees selected for the ECh were drawn from the IHF’s performance-based lists of elite and prospective referees. 3 pairs had already served in the 1999 Women’s WCh in N O R, 5 in the Junior WChs in China and Q a-tar; the female team from YUG had successfully directed games at the Sydney O lympics! The criticism raised by some nations - which were not been very successful at this ECh - that the referees appointed were too young and inexperienced for an ECh therefore lacks any real basis.

2. Preparation

For the first time in the history of the EHF, a preparatory course was held in ROM 3 weeks before the beginning of the ECh. It included the usual tests as well as training focusing in particular on

- passive play
- advantage / unnecessary whistling

and the adoption of a “common line”: 

- the aim in all decisions is to win the players’ confidence through consistent behaviour
- to structure decisions clearly to give players assistance in the form of early warnings
- to enforce decisions not on the basis of the “power” conferred by the Rules of the Game but through accepted and recognized authority.

As a result, all referees are now able to anticipate what a player, who is in possession of the ball, can still gain in a situation in which his opponent uses body checking. As a negative point in this area it must be mentioned that some pairs still have problems with assessing advantage / steps!

3. Referee Performance

Relating to the Ability of “Leading the Game” (table)

3.1. Concept of Play / Advantage

As already known from former ECh analyses the assessment of „advantage“ plays a great role. In this area - compare also figures in the table - 13,16% above the average of 75% - intensive training has led to the fact, that all referees are capable of anticipating options by the player in possession of the ball despite severe physical involvement of the defender. The only negative remark in this connection has to be made concerning the assessment of advantage / steps that still means a problem for some couples.

3.2. Passive Play

Even though passive play had been one of the main topics in the preparatory course, the interpretation of the Rules still varied too much from referee pair to referee pair and players found it hard to adapt to the different approaches to Rules interpretation.

From a Rules and tactical perspective, the assessment of passive play is based primarily on the following criteria:

- warning signals for slow player substitution or deliberately slow transition from defence to offence play
- playing the ball forward and starting the build-up phase
Table: Overall Statistics of the Evaluation of the Observer’s Report

- warning signals for late substitution of players in the build-up phase
- warning signals - preparatory passing in the build-up phase takes too much time
- warning signals in the new build-up phase following a failed attack (without / with interruption of the game)

While the coaches argue that teams must be allowed a build-up phase as a matter of principle, the referees are faced with the problem of whether the aim of the action is

- to prepare group- or team-tactical means for attack
- to remain in possession of the ball to gain time or
- or whether the action observed is just “ineffective moves” in the face of the opponents’ defence.

To solve these complex situations we do not need Rule experts but referees that can “read” the game!

3.3 New Trends in Defence Behaviour

a) “Inflation“ of action in and around the goal area...
- deliberate running into the goal area (particularly from outside positions)
- defence against line players in the goal area
- “defensive” blocking of long-distance throws in the goal area
- “collisions” at the outside positions

b) The chance to launch a break is nipped in the bud...
In the past, players used to run back immediately when they had lost possession of the ball. Today, new trends are emerging in such situations. After the loss of the ball, one or two players seek to disrupt the launching of a counter-attack by committing “simple” fouls that render fast playing impossible. The aim is, on the one hand, to impede any fast playing and, on the other hand, to allow their own defence / offence specialists to leave or enter the court.

This, in effect, constitutes a deliberate destruction of a positive element of the game and calls for the unconditional imposition of progressive penalties by the referees! This is an area with an urgent need for training at all levels!
3.4 “Attackers’ Offences - “Play-acting”?

As a result of the ever increasing speed of the game, “attackers’ fouls” without the ball are committed more frequently. Players charging forward in a counter-attack look only at the ball and frequently pay no attention to defence players that block their paths in accordance with the Rules. Here the motto applies: Those who have taken their positions in accordance with the Rules first are in the right!

Even if such decisions are unpopular, such fouls by attackers have to be sanctioned consistently!

Similar offences committed by attack players:
- a back player enters the throwing area close to the goal and collides with a defender;
- a line player blocks defenders in violation of the Rules so that these cannot close ranks in time to ward off a break-through by their opponents;
- a line player grabs his opponent, thereby preventing proper timing between 2 defenders who are about to pass on / take over offence players.

In assessing the severity of attackers’ offences it is a must to pay adequate attention to the increasing art of “play-acting”. The players’ inventiveness in this regard is apparently without limits:
- provocation of attackers’ fouls
- “provocation” of infractions that result in the other
- dramatic jumping not justified by the game and “pi-rouetting” in the outside positions
- “crying out before the fall” belongs to the players’ standard repertory today!

3.5 7-m Assessment:

In this area we unfortunately had to accept justified criticism from all participants, which is also in line with the observation result shown in the table (survey No. 6 - 5.3%).

General principles:
- a one-to-one defence/offence situation that starts before the free-throw line cannot end with the awarding of 7-m in the goal area;
- line and outside players must have the ball under control and have a clear chance of scoring a goal;
- if this is the case, a 7-m throw must be awarded;
- if the thrower remains in control of the ball and his body despite being obstructed, the referee must not award a 7-m throw retroactively. This is an inappropriate perception of advantage and contrary to the idea of the game as well as the Rules;
- an assessment of shots taken by players from back positions is more difficult. Hitting the throwing arm in the 8 - 9 m area may, however, also be interpreted as obstructing a clear chance of scoring a goal.

In addition, it is very important to assess whether a player only obstructed a clear chance to score a goal or whether the imposition of a progressive penalty is also called for. Unfortunately, this was another area in which no clear line was identifiable.

Defensive actions taken against an outside player about to jump into the goal area have to be penalized progressively, if they include
- hitting the throwing arm
- body checking in the air (pushing with the hip or the arms)
- running “under a player” resulting in a collision
- trying to hold the attacker’s leg as he jumps

4. Referee Observation by Participating Nations

In view of the highly positive results of the past EChs (ITA, NED, CRO), the coaches were once again integrated into the assessment of referee performance. The observation criteria were made available to all participants in time and explained once again briefly during the technical meeting. Given that teams that were not that successful this time (Olympic or World Champions) expressed their dissatisfaction by rating referee performance with 33, 34 or 43 points, the viability of any future co-operation at this level will unfortunately have to be questioned.