Preparations:

The European Championship, organised every second year, is a great showcase for all teams, officials and referees alike.

In the middle of the Olympic cycle, the event had special importance as the eventual winner gained direct qualification for the Olympic Games; furthermore, the teams had a chance to test new talents before the upcoming World Championship.

Due to the above mentioned factors, the preparation and performance of the referees had a special importance.

The preparations began in the first half of 2005 when at a meeting between the EHF and the Swedish Organising Committee specific requests have emerged: a greater number of women should take part in the competition as supervisors, delegates and referees.

The number of women referee couples with continental refereeing status was 15, plus there were two more mixed couples.

Majority of the pairs are young: below or just above 30 years, three of them had experience at European Championships.

The first important situation of the preparation process was in October 2005 when Jan Tuik and myself worked with three referee couples at a tournament of six nations organised by the Dutch Handball Federation.

Apart from refereeing in practice and theoretical presentations, video analysis also helped the preparations.

In 2005, there were pre-qualification tournaments for places to the euro06. There were six women pairs involved in these games.

In May 2006, the Turkish Handball Federation organised a tournament and invited four female referee pairs and two male pairs.

The last opportunity for the preparation was in August 2006 at Bad Urach where again four pairs were invited under the professional supervision of two mentors.

Based on our experience from the preparations phase three women pairs were invited for the European Championship, the Finnish Förström-Mitrune, the Swedish Hagen-Hallberg and the Ukrainian Rakytna-Tkachuk. There was one more lady refereeing at the tournament, the Spanish Fernandez, together with her male referee partner, Rios.

The Serbian pair, Maric-Gardinovacki would also have been present at the euro06, but one of them bore a child in October.
Nomination:

Knowing the nationalities of the women referees, we were able to set the criteria to make suggestions for the nomination of men pairs.

It was a consideration that those who had been nominated for the 2007 World Championship in Germany should concentrate on that challenge.

As euro06 also decided qualification places for the Olympic Games, it was important to invite experienced pairs who are able to face difficult tasks with success. Consequently, the Danish La Cour Laursen-Nielsen, the Norwegian Hansen-Petersen, the Lithuanian Liachovicius-Paskevicius, the Polish Baum-Goralczyk and the Portuguese Goulau-Macau were nominated. The remaining three places were given to pairs who showed positive performance at the recent European Cup games, namely the Croatian Sokol-Posavec, the Israeli Cohen-Perez and the Romanian Bejenariu-Cirligeau.

Preparation-Schedule-Tasks:

We prepared an exact action plan before the Swiss European Championship with the help of the office and the Competition Commission. The experience gained was positive. Knowing the tasks, deadlines and the responsible persons, everything went according to schedule.

The information letters on rule application were delivered 40 days before the beginning of the European Championship to all nominated team leaders, officials and referees.

The DVDs illustrating the critical situations reached all recipients one month before euro06. We have to make a critical remark, however: the way of posting the DVDs was not satisfactory.

The referees, delegates and supervisors analysed the DVDs at home and sent their solutions for the various questions to Sándor Andorka. Based on the answers, we gained an essence of the material that was presented at the Officials’ Conference in order to have a shared philosophy.

The referees were informed about the nominations and also about the physical test they had to do – a Shuttle Run this time. The expectation was level 9.5 for men and level 8.5 for women. To be able to give this performance, a minimum of two months training was necessary. As a result, the referees arrived to the championship in good physical condition.

An important milestone of the preparation was the presentation of the referees. These were usually high quality PowerPoint presentations. The best ones will be published on the website of the EHF.

Another important moment of the preparation was the practical refereeing. The World Cup organised in Denmark just before euro06 was a great occasion for us. The Danish Federation invited three pairs of minor experience. The EHF paid the costs of Sándor Andorka and the Danish Federation guaranteed the help of the Danish EHF delegates.

There was an analysis session every morning during the tournament where the previous days’ games were discussed. Due to the existing good relationship, it was possible to get an invitation for all nominated referees. As a result, all referee pairs were invited to a high quality tournament only one month before the European Championship.
Officials’ Conference:

The content and the form were basically good. The time at disposal was little, while the activity of the participants was not constant.

The participants arrived at the venue of the conference only a few hours before the start. Since they had to wake up in the early morning and they travelled hours, they were obviously not refreshed.

I suggest for the future European Championships to arrange the arrival for the preceding day and start the conference in the morning. Fewer topics should be on the agenda, we should discuss them in groups with more interactivity and then my presentation should follow.

The following topics were discussed at the refereeing section of the Officials' Conference:

- Progressive Punishment build-up strategy – Baum/Goralczyk, Bejenariu/Cirligeanu
- Passive Play – Förström/Mitrinen, Goulao/Macau
- Defending in Goal Area – Fernandez/Rios, Liachovicius/Paskevicius
- Pivot Players, Special Situations – Sokol/Posavec, Dobrovits/Tájok
- Communication of Referees and Team Officials – Hagen/Hallberg, Cohen/Peretz
- Communication/Cooperation Referees and EHF Officials – Rakitina/Tkachuk
- Mental Preparation – La Cour/Nielsen

The briefing to the delegates and supervisors was very short. During the championship the importance of a unified way of thinking and a shared work style has become clear as it was difficult for the teams to adapt themselves to different approaches. An example: celebration is an absolutely normal reaction and emotion after an important goal. However, there were officials who acted immediately by making everyone sit back on the bench. On the other hand, the experience showed that the protests of the coaches after certain decisions by the referee remained without reaction. Having a common line and acting accordingly is very important.

We can draw the general conclusion that the session dedicated to refereeing at the conference was of high quality; the only problem was the lack of time. To make the work of delegates and supervisors more organised, special topics need to be confronted in 2008.

Working System during the Championship:

Apart from the referees directing the games, reserve pairs were also nominated for every match. They had special tasks, such as to observe the application of certain rules (passive play, progressiveness, etc).

There were regular morning meetings following the games. The reserve pairs presented their remarks and then the supervisor delegates also made their comments.

Robert Kleiner was at disposal during the course of the championship and regularly provided pictures to be discussed. The interactive meetings worked out well, the performances improved day by day.

In the following phase of the evaluation work, the supervisors evaluated the matches face to face with the referees.
**Observation System:**

During euro06 we used a new observation sheet containing 25 observation criteria. To get a more objective picture, we asked for the cooperation of the referees and teams, not only that of the supervisor.

We have mixed experience with the evaluation sheets. Some of the referees have not filled in the form or did not understand the evaluation criteria. As a result, the difference between the points given by the supervisors and the referees is significant. The most important for referees to make improvement, is to have realistic judgement on their own performance. An unreal evaluation gives a distorted image. Most teams have cooperated, but it also has to be said that the losing side underrated the performance, while the winning side gave a "bonus" for the referees.

The coordination between the venues was solved and I had regular feedback on refereeing. This was the basic of nominations for the latter phases.

There were four group venues at the championship. A basic nomination principle was to give one pair only one game of one team. In consequence, there were several pairs who arbitrated at three venues.

There were five pairs in Gothenburg, six in Stockholm during the main round, as the Hungarian Dobrovits/Tájok directed only during the group phase.

**Experience regarding Rule Application:**

The performance of referees was basically positive. Needless to say, there were outstanding, good and some weaker performances as well.

The preparation and selection proved that the women were capable of solving difficult tasks at the European Championship. It is our task for the future to prepare as many young and talented pairs for 2008 as possible.

It was remarkable that the referees were able to concentrate for all 60 minutes of the games during the tournament.

It was also apparent that the progressive penalties were in line with the modern expectations. The referees were able to spot the punishable incidents at the early stages of the matches and they were ready to give two-minute penalties. It was a negative development that the referees did not dare to punish the really dangerous challenges with red card in many occasions. Due to the continuous video analysis, there was a major improvement on this field for the major part of the tournament.

Seven-meter penalties: the biggest problem – also apparent in the first phase of the championship – was that the referees awarded too many seven-meter shots. It often happened that after a fault between the 6 and 9-meter lines, the players “wrestled” with each other and the referees awarded penalty shots easily.

The rules are absolutely clear: when there is no CLEAR SCORING CHANCE, no seven-meter throw may be awarded.

The number of fast breaks has increased with the change in the playing style. The referees were basically able to follow and judge these actions, but the cooperation between the two referees must be improved. Important task: both referees must follow and coordinate the actions.

It appeared as a new trend – mostly seen from the Scandinavian teams - that the coaches send on
court an additional field player wearing a special goalkeeper's jersey when their team plays with one man down. Important task: the referees must check the jersey before the game whether it is in conformity with the rules; they must control during the game that there can be only one goalkeeper on the court at once.

The feedback is positive in connection with the step rules and the quickly taken throw-offs.

The referees paid due attention to the actions involving the pivot. This question is on top of the agenda as it has various implications: illegal blocking, elbowing by the pivot, crossing the goal area. The referees usually judged these situations well.

Dividing the tasks and cooperation: it was an especially positive phenomenon that the pairs assumed 50-50 responsibility. This must be seen as an absolutely positive tendency.

**Summary:**

I give a positive judgement on refereeing at euro06. Needless to say, there are always new tasks to solve and new objectives to reach.

The continuous preparations must go on for the future, and the systematic selection must start in the year preceding the European Championships.

Preparing DVDs is an important task. It is a good possibility to call the attention to the current trends, it gives suggestions how to tackle them; furthermore, the teams also get reliable information.

The subjects and methods of the Officials' Conference must be adjusted.

The daily meetings were ideal to create uniformity, while the technical possibilities (DVD, video) must be fully utilised.

Nomination is a complex task. It is obvious that a European Championship final must be directed by the best possible pair. In Sweden, they were the otherwise modest Baum/Goralczyk who gave an outstanding performance on the court.

We have seen a successful European Championship in December 2006 and the good quality of refereeing also made a contribution to this.

For the report Sándor Andorka
21 Feb. 2007