EURO 2008 MKD - Evaluation of Referee Performances

During the 2008 Olympic Games, the IHF PRC resumed the discussion pertaining to referees in the aim to find a solution to the strategic questions for the forthcoming period. According to the discussion, it was clear that the largest contingent of referees came from Europe with thirteen pairs officiating in Croatia. Respectively, these pairs, based on their achievements over the past years at the Junior World Championships, have the potential and most probably participate at the 2009 Women’s World Championship in China.

The selection criteria for the referees to the Euro 2008 in FYR Macedonia were as follows:

- assignments in the past years (ECh, YAC ECh, Junior WC)
- neutrality
- long-term plans in the case of fixed couples
- confirmation from the National Federation
- where possible, the nomination of female referees

The preliminary recommendation list for the selection of referees was composed by Sándor Andorka. The Chairman of the Competitions Commission, Mr. Jan Tuik, proffered valuable insight at this step in the proceedings and Markus Glaser (EHF Competitions Senior Manager) and Marcos Bestilleiro (Referees and Delegates) actively took part in the operational procedure. Resulting from this joint effort, 10 pairs were nominated of which 3 referee couples were present at Euro 2006 Sweden. Additionally, the National Teams representing the countries of 5 couples did not participate in the competition; therefore these couples were completely neutral.

Preparation for Euro 2008 MKD

The nominations were publicised in mid-September, at the same time the referee couples and the respective National Federations were informed of the subsequent procedures. The EHF took the following steps:

- consequent nomination to the EC matches
- nomination of referee expert for the fixed matches who also acts as mentor to the nominated couples
- the Interpretation of the Rules in written form are distributed amongst the referees, officials and participating teams
- a DVD compilation of rule interpretation containing media files from the Olympic Games is issued
- coordination of the invitations to the different preparation tournaments
- development of lifestyle, fitness and nutrition plan as recommended by Prof. Hans Holdhaus

Official’s Conference in Skopje

Substantial preparation went into the selection of the guest presenters, who gave positive input to the participants, however, the time required to negotiate the professional matters (e.g. problematic cases of rule interpretation) was inadequate. At the next edition of the Euro, the expectations in connection with rule interpretation have to be emphasised. For future reference, it is important to hold interactive training in small groups to minimise the idleness amongst the participants.
Physical Assessment and Outcome
The compulsory level of achievement in the Shuttle Run is common knowledge. Even so, four referees, from HUN, MKD, NOR and SRB, did not achieve or had great difficulties in achieving the expected result. It can be argued that the Shuttle Run is the optimal assessment and the management stated that the situation with the referees in question was an obvious exception to the rule. Nevertheless, in order to avoid a recurrence of this situation, concrete procedures must be defined:

✓ the selection of the referees must take place three months before the European Championship, at this time, the professional directives are also to be imparted
✓ physical assessment should take place at the time of the selection
✓ the Shuttle Run file is to be sent to all nominees approximately two months before the start of the event
✓ monitoring of physical condition shortly before the European Championship match
✓ those who do not meet the requisite physical standards should only be permitted to officiate in the preliminary round before travelling home

Observations
Observations were undertaken from the tribune; this allowed for the colleagues at the table to concentrate on their responsibilities and allowing the observer to focus on the referee. The presentation of interesting match situations that were discussed the following day in Skopje was acceptable, in Ohrid, however, it was unsatisfactory, as technical knowledge was lacking. The education of the referees is a highly important element; however, this cannot be achieved without the necessary technical information. In my experience, many observers were no strict enough during the discussions; they were too “loyal”, this led to the referees’ not taking critique and observations seriously. It has become necessary to discuss the professional experiences between observers and referees on a daily basis!

Main Experiences with Rule Interpretation
The DVD with the various media clips proved helpful during the preparation period. The explanations of the different scenes by the referees were mostly correct (unfortunately, some of the delegates failed to return the evaluation sheets provided!). Of the situations emphasised in the preparations, it seems that the referees succeeded giving more attention to the “collision/struggle between the pivot and defender”.

The issue of the 7m throws was once again highlighted at the Officials’ Conference, in recent years at various championships and in the European Cup; this has proven to be a basic problem. There were too many 7m throws awarded without reason. This area is clearly defined in Rule no.14 and Clarification no.8

✓ -ball and body control, scoring chance
✓ -destroying the scoring chance by illegal methods
✓ -active defender behaviour, any part of the feet on the goal area line
✓ -moving through the goal area to have a time profit for better position
✓ -beginning the blocking from the goal area and blocking in flight

This was a common problem in the area of rule interpretation; a lot of incorrect decisions and for the coaches, it was difficult to understand the criteria! The next problem area was fouls.
Many of the teams use concentrated defence work in the middle area and both corner areas are quite open. For the attackers, this is a lot of open space. For the defenders, there is only one possibility and that is to run through the goal area and destroy the scoring chance by using various means. The referees have to watch out for dangerous fouls at the moment when the wing player is jumping and in flight over the goal area. The slightest touch/hit on the arm/shoulder may cause injury. In this case, it is not enough to issue a 7m throw, the opponent must also be punished. In many cases the defenders also displace (without using the arms) the wing player who is jumping on the outside of the defender, causing the attacker to lose balance or be forced into a worse angle.

Similarly, we were not satisfied with the use of the red card. The main task of the referees, in a preventative role, is to protect the health of the players! Fouls which endanger the opponent’s health – forcible hit to face/neck, pulling down from the side or behind the arm of an attacker – should be punished by disqualification. In some cases the referees reacted well, but in other cases, the main problem seemed to be a lack of courage on the part of the referees.

On the contrary, we were satisfied with the understanding of too many steps, of some severe fouls and the comprehension of intentional offensive fouls without the ball at the 6m line. The cooperation between the table and the substitution areas was very acceptable, in particular, excellent with the SRB coach!

Summary
The performance of the referees did not realise the necessary level at this Euro! In the future, other criteria must be considered in the selection. The Euro is an event of the highest quality on the continent and it is not permissible that it be treated in an experimental manner. It is necessary that the majority of the nominated referees be experienced referees and in addition to the veteran officiators, referees who show talent are also to be considered. The observation feedback sessions should be supporting and motivating and aim towards improvement, but not “loyal” to the referees. Improvement will not come about unless constructive criticism is accepted. On the whole, from a refereeing standpoint, this was not our best competition. However, with the various experiences, it was a necessary tool to assist in the evaluation of our work in a correct manner.

Sándor Andorka / HUN / CC Member Refereeing