COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EHF M18 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP 2016 / CRO

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The event took place in the two towns of Zagreb and Koprivnica in Croatia from August 11-21 2016.

16 teams were qualified and played in four preliminary groups. The format went on with two main groups of 4 teams each and intermediate rounds for the other teams leading to cross-over matches and a final play-off.

All the results are presented in the annex. Here are the final standings and the matches that were picked for the analyses.


Placement matches
ISL – SRB 32-30 (16-17)
DEN – ESP 28-24 (11-9)

Semifinals
FRA – GER 39-38 (13-18, 32-32)
CRO – SLO 40-36 (21-17)

Finals
GER – SLO 32-31 (9-12, 22-22, 26-26)
FRA – CRO 40-38 (18-19)

With goalkeeper Till Klimpke (16) and left back Sebastian Heymann (10), two Germans made it into the All-star team.

From France right wing Benjamin Richert (2) and Kyllian Villeminot (9) as MVP made the cut. Croatia sent line player Adrian Milicevic (18) and right back Ivan Martinovic (5) to the All-stars.

Serbia's Stefan Sunajko (8) became best left wing and Spain's Ian Tarrafeta Serrano (28) became best centre back and also the tournament's top scorer with 58 goals.
General Trends

Defense

It was very interesting to see that the medal winning teams all played a 5-1 zone defense.

All of them did an offense/defense switch of a specialist who commanded the defense. There was a difference in the position of the point defender. GER (as well as ESP) had the left wing player in this position whereas FRA had this position taken by their centre back that at the same time was the playmaker in offense. CRO had two options; either they had their centre back in this place or they switched to a specialist (# 4).

SLO played an aggressive 6-0 with all the four defenders in the centre falling out very high, SRB practiced an orthodox 6-0 and the teams of DEN and ISL played Scandinavian 6-0, DEN more alike SLO and ISL in the old fashioned way.

The only teams not using an O/D-switch were SLO and DEN, all the others had their specialists.

Offense

Regular set-play 6-6

All the teams started in a 3-3 set-up and almost all of them used an extended turntable system as the basic move in offense that was taken from the top teams in Europe obviously.

![Diagram of a semicircular cut](image)

The LP will move up in a semicircular cut and receive the ball from the PM. This move is coordinated with a crossing without the ball PM – LB. The LP gives the ball to the LB and continues to the line again with the LB pushing into the central area with the ball.

From this a couple of different continuations are possible and all the teams are capable of using several ones according to the positioning of the defense. The most common are passing back to the PM and parallel-thrust with the RB. FRA showed diagonal passes to either wing from this move with great success.
The second move that was shown by all the teams was a transition to 4-2 with a wing sweep from either side with the LP positioned against the outside defender on this side.

In most of these cases the wing sweep was coordinated with a crossing move of the PM to the start side of the move. This concept was used from left and from right by all participating teams in fact. Some did it from the left side only, some from the right. The top teams were able to play it from either side.

ESP had a nice alternative to this move:

This one is played like the regular “Russian Crossing” between CB and RB which will lead to breakthrough of the CB or loading the RW in the corner. Usually the LP will be in the very centre between the two inside defenders.

In this case the LP will be on the side of the move start. The crossing will take place between the CB and the RW who will continue his inside rush. In the meanwhile the RB will move to the corner wing position in sprint and finalize the play after receiving the ball from the CB.
Play 6-5

In this situation all of the teams used a transition from 3-3 to 4-2. Most of them had the PM moving in to the line, some teams preferred a diagonal transition by one of the backcourt players.

This was the most common solution, in this case shown by FRA in the semi vs. GER. As mentioned before this is a widespread move that could be seen in the flip-flop version as well.

A very interesting move was shown by FRA as an extension of the regular crossing without the ball in the backcourt:

Both playmakers are on court, the ball goes from the CB to the RB who will thrust to the middle. After passing the CB will go for a crossing without the ball with the LB. But this one will extend the move and instead of staying in the middle position he will continue a very fast cut behind the RB and pushing between OL defender and the BL defender. Receiving the ball he will aim for breakthrough or continue with a pass to the RW.
Another interesting variation was executed by CRO in the match vs. ESP having the LB moving to the line and shifting the final termination from the centre to the wing.

![Diagram](image)

The LB will give the ball to the LW in a line-wing position and move to the circle. The LP in this case will remain in the centre of the defense. The PM will come running very fast around the pick of the LB, receive the ball from the LW who will go for the corner immediately and aim for the breakthrough. In case the RO-defender will close the gap the pass to the LW will follow.

**Goalkeepers**

It was evident that all the GK of all the teams had their strongest actions in the 1-1 situation, especially against the shots of the LP, the breakthrough, and in the fastbreak confrontation. The performance in case of wing shots was oscillating not only with different GKS but with the same GK during the match as well.

Respecting the good performance in those situations it was surprising to notice that the appearance against shots from distance has to be rated poor. Obviously there was a lack of cooperation between the respective GKS and their defense players. Many makes were conceded in the “classical” spots like the diagonal shots to the so called short side of the goal. This could be due to the general statement that the performance of almost all of the players in the defense was far below that one in offense. This we will discuss a little later in more detail.

And if we consider that these are young GK with little experience then we have to raise the question about their preparation and the coaching of the young goalkeepers in the nations in general. It seems that the focus for them was put in athletics and reaction in the first place and tactics had not been a key issue yet in their education.
General statements

The most impressive experience is to see the absolute top level of the players in terms of individual offense actions. The athleticism and the shooting power of all the players are extraordinary. Most of the players are able to do 1-1 breakthrough actions to either side; all of them are capable of all kinds of shots – ground shots, jump shots in different variations, fall shots, dives. Blocking and rolling is an integrated action of the entire LP and many of the wings.

An interesting fact is the dominant role of the CB not only as a playmaker but as a scorer as well. In five of the top 8 teams the CB was the top scorer of the team as well (FRA, SLO, DEN, ESP, ISL) and they were all among the top 8 scorers in the final table. And as it was mentioned before, in some of the teams the CB played the role of the point defender in the 5-1 defense as well. This is a situation that was not expected in such a clear way therefore there will be additional attention to be paid on this detail for the next analyses of this age category and it must be compared with the findings in the next age category.

In contrast to the top education in offensive activity the performance in defense is mediocre with most of the players. This holds good for the footwork as well as the positioning, the anticipation and the sense for collective activity in defense. Of course the low level in terms of individual defense puts a strain in the defense set-play as well. Therefore most of the teams prefer just one system for the set-defense and there is very little move in terms of tactics and/or creativity in the defense play overall.

The best teams in defense were the two to fight for the gold medal. At the end of the day the team of CRO was a little bit better in defense even, they played very well individually and the proof of that is that they were able to stand in a 4-1 defense formation when they had to play shorthanded. FRA on the other hand was able to execute their special 5-1 in a very effective way close to the end of the decisive matches. GER played a good 5-1 as well; they fell because of individual flaws in terms of discipline (tactical in the first place) not because of general weaknesses.

To sum it up the performance in defense could not cope with the outstanding individual offense performance of the players; as a trend we have to state that all the medals were won by teams playing a 5-1 set-up in defense as the basic formation.

New elements

Defense

Although it cannot be claimed a new element it has to be mentioned that CRO played a 4-1 defense set-up when they were shorthanded. Most of the teams had quite a problem to solve against this play because it seemed to be a completely unexpected experience for them. The point is that most teams shifted to a 4-2 offense set-play in man advantage and
were absolutely frightened by the aggressive point defender threatening to cut the passes between the two remaining backcourt players.

Another interesting fact is the shift to a 1-5 defense formation by some teams when they were trailing. This usually happened with 10 minutes to go in the first period as well as in the second. This action showed short term success in almost all of the cases but the final outcome was disputable.

At the end of the day the defense was somewhat disappointing and there was a clear gap between the impressive performance in the offense play and the level of the defense play in total.

**Offense**

The teams of GER and FRA were the most creative in offense. When the Scandinavian teams showed extreme shooting power and 1-1 breakthrough ability of their backcourt players and the Balkan teams shone with the same plus additional action of their LPs, these two teams were the best in group and team tactics by far.

Both teams took well known basic moves and extended them to surprising actions which will be shown now but before this there is a look at a move of the team from ISL:

The ball runs CB – LB – LW and the CB follows receiving the ball on 9m in front of the second defender. Due to his very strong 1-1 he will break through. In the unlikely case he will not succeed he will play on to the LW or the LB behind him who will move to the middle of the court with the ball and shoot over the LP.
GER showed some variations on the very old turntable system in the transition from 3-3 to 4-2. They had three different versions at hand and they were able to surprise any defense time after time with that move.

The characteristics of this concept is that in any case the CB will not stay in a line-position after the flip-flop with the LP but he will continue with a switch of the direction of running and move towards the LP thus doubling the defense player on that position.

In this simple version the move will result in a shot of the LB or (as shown) in a pass to the LP for a shot from his position. If neither one of that is possible there will be a diagonal pass to the thrusting RB for breakthrough.

The second version is more sophisticated, having the LP running a very long cut deep into the midfield and involving all the backcourt players.

In this move all the play is pulled to the right side of the offense and even the point will be forced to approach the RB who is a dangerous striker. That will open the centre of the court for the LB after an inside sweep from a fast running feint. This version was extremely successful.
The most complex version will bring the CB in shooting position from the line.

In this move the LP will switch the running direction and move back to his previous side thus deploying some crossing without the ball with the CB on 8m approx. The RB will pull the point in the usual way but he will not continue with a diagonal pass to the main striker LB. From his inside move he will launch a counter-move pass to the sweeping CB who will aim for the breakthrough. Continuation to the RW is an additional option.

With those moves the team GER was very successful and they dominated the semifinal match vs. FRA for almost 40 minutes by using the diagonal move from RB to the line or one of the systems shown above. It is very strange that they changed the offense tactics to simple inside sweep of the wings after that. The defense of FRA could cope with this move much better than with that one before and step by step they got grip on their defense and command over the match.

FRA in all their matches was very successful with using diagonal passes in various forms. They will play that passes LB – RB with the CB always pulling or pushing the point defender of the opponent or the central positions in defense. They also played passes RB – LW and LB – RW frequently. And they had passes wing – wing as well. All that goes as a proof of the aforementioned top education of the players in terms of individual technical skills in offense. With these technical skills we have to look forward to their further development. Besides that FRA was the only team having two playmakers of almost the same level and they were extremely dangerous when they decided to have both of them on court at the same time.

**Finally a word on the play without GK by using an extra court player.** We have to take into account that the time was very short for preparing a complex issue like that for application in such an important tournament.

Several teams made use of that tactics in case of a suspension to avoid shorthanded offense play. The outcome was disputable since the concept did not seem to be properly handled by the teams yet. There must be more to come.

GER was the only team trying a 7-6 set-up in the offense play but the same holds good here as well.
### Semifinals and Cross matches

#### Cross Matches 13-16

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### Finals and Placement matches

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### Ranking

1. FRA France
2. CRO Croatia
3. GER Germany
4. SLO Slovenia
5. DEN Denmark
6. ESP Spain
7. ISL Iceland
8. SRB Serbia
9. SWE Sweden
10. POR Portugal
11. RUS Russia
12. NOR Norway
13. POL Poland
14. SUI Switzerland
15. CZE Czech Republic
16. SVK Slovakia