By Wolfgang Pollany / EHF Lecturer

The event took place in the two towns of Kolding and Vamdrup in Denmark from July 28th to August 7th.

As usual in events of the YAC the atmosphere was friendly and fair; unfortunately the audience was pretty poor with the number of spectators lower than expected.

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 – POL 38-33 (21-14)
NOR - DEN 36-35 (16-16, 31-31)

Semifinals
FRA – GER 33-35 (15-15, 30-30)
ESP - CRO 31-21 (17-8)

Finals
FRA – CRO 35-30 (18-12)
ESP – GER 30-29 (12-9, 25-25)

The All-Stars are not mentioned on purpose because I do think that there were at least two or maybe even three extremely impressive players on every position and it would fall short to just number one of them.
General trends

Defense

There were two groups in terms of the basic set-up in defense 5-1 and 6-0.

5-1 was played by ESP (with the BR player falling far out as well), FRA, ISL and POL. CRO and GER (for 10 min only vs ESP) had it as an alternative.

6-0 was the first pick of GER, DEN, NOR and CRO (vs. ESP with the BL falling out).

3-2-1 played CRO vs. FRA (switched to 5-1 and back again), and FRA for the first 15 minutes vs. GER.

There was quite a variety of different interpretations of the concepts overall. The best example were DEN and NOR when both teams picked Scandinavian 6-0 but DEN fell out with all four middle defenders to 10 and 11 meters as NOR kept their players on 8-9 meters maximum.

All the teams had their defense specialists, ESP, ISL and NOR switched two players all the time, all the others one player.

The position of the point in 5-1 was quite interesting and represented the national school to some extent: CRO had the LP in this position; FRA their playmaker (CB), POL had the LW and ESP LW and RW alternating. ISL sent in the specialist to take this position and so did GER in the short time they played it.

In shorthanded defense all the teams stood in 5-0, in the man advantage situation all the teams kept their regular set-up, GER was to only team to shift to a 5-1 from their usual 6-0.

All in all the performance in set-defense was pretty disappointing. Compared to the top level individual skills in offense many players lack a mountain of defense skills. This does not mean their athletics – they are strong and tough in man-to-man – but most of them are slow in the specific footwork and they have huge deficiencies in terms of individual tactics. Anticipation and reading of the game is very low and group tactics in defense simply not present.

Due to this imbalance of offense and defense skills there were many high-score games, for the neutral spectator nice to watch but from the view of a technician…

Goalkeepers

Brilliant saves by many of them in the 1-1situation, shaky appearances behind the defense line. Most of the GKS now try to play the “Swedish school” with the switch of the side of responsibility according to the kind of shot of the striker. But most of them are still in some kind of doubt which makes them hesitate and therefore they are too late in the action.
I might be mistaken but for me this was the only explanation for the poor appearance of the GK of a nation like CRO. In the semi with ESP 9 makes were recorded in “his” side of the goal that due to the old “Croatian school” should have been saved by the GK. I still strongly believe in a clear coordination between GK and defense. In this respect there seem to be some deficits within the teams of this tournament from my point of view.

In terms of athletics and reaction all of the GK were on high level, some of them with good shooting capacity as well thus being able to take profit of the empty net situations arising because of the new rule with the extra player.

Once again most of them were outstanding in 1-1 situations, courageous, fast moving; it looks like a generation of rising stars in that position.

**Offense**

**Regular play 6-6**

All the teams start with a 3-3 set-up which is transformed to a 4-2 in many cases. This is done most frequently by a wing sweep with the LP between the defenders 1 and 2 on the side of the wing running and the wing taking a position at the line between the defenders 2 and 3 on the opposite 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.

As many teams used this move just for bringing some motion into their play and with no real drive towards the opponent’s goal sometimes it seemed to be an instrument to run down the clock for a few seconds without the risk of warning because of delay of play. Because of that I would like to point out that this move could be very effective indeed and I want to show a couple of situations that will proof this.
This move gives a mismatch between the outside defender and the LP in most of the situations and that can lead to an easy goal or to a penalty shot as a direct result. And even if the outside defender levels the wrestling match in many cases a suspension of the defender will be the result. The following situation is picked from the NOR-DEN match and clearly shows this action.

This move starts with the CB (PM) in the RB position and the lefthander in the middle. The OR decides to fall out against the LB after the empty crossing on the other side and this is used for a fall-shot by the LP from the wing position. This solution of course asks for good training of the LP since there is no chance for a long jump.

A different solution was also showed by NOR with the backcourt players in their regular positions.

After a standard crossing with the ball the left-handed RB starts for a long run that is supported by an outside move of the LB. this counter move opens a gap between the defenders 2 and 3 through which the leftie fires a fast ground shot and scores from the “wrong” side.

Another nice variation of the wing sweep was done by DEN and gave them the equalizer against NOR in two crucial situations of the match. In this version the move was coordinated with a Kempa-shot by the RW. They just played it two times in the match – under great pressure as already mentioned – and scored with both attempts.
The position of the LP and the outside move of the LB will pull the defense in a counter move to the wing sweep. By this the OR in defense will be without opponent and the switch of the running direction by the CB will cause the IL defender to take on the CB (the IR cannot tackle in order to avoid a pass to the LP). This results in superiority on the right side of the offense. The RB will move inside and the OL defender will lose the RW because he has to take care of the LW at the line denying the direct pass RB-LW. That will give a lot of space for the RW for to jump high and far for the Kempa.

The second move that was played by all teams was an extended turntable move of the LP coordinated with some kind of crossing in the backcourt. In this case the same applies as said before. Many times this was just used for starting some motion in the play without any drive to the goal.

This well known move was altered by both the Scandinavian teams DEN and NOR. They used to coordinate the run of the LP with an absolute parallel run of the LB on 11-12 meters thus resulting in a crossing without the ball in the backcourt and the ball going to the RB at the same time. The obvious aim was to bring their CB (top dangerous in 1-1 actions) in a close range breakthrough situation at the position of LB. With the wing moving to the corner the second defender was totally isolated - a perfect set-up for a 1-1 specialist.
This was the basic concept of the team of NOR. The funny thing is that the move was played rather slowly and just parallel to the 9m line until the final pass LB – CB. Then the breakthrough came with an explosive move.

An absolute old-fashioned version was practiced by the team of CRO against the 5-1 defense set-up of FRA.

The CB will meet the LP in a counter move and continue to fix the BR in defense. The left-handed RB will move inside thus pulling the point as the BC must be in charge of the LP. This will offer a fine scoring chance for the LB after the pass from the RB. This is a flip-flop version of the original that was played by the strong Swiss team of the 70s with Martin Rubin as the scoring RB.

Of course all the teams in their repertoire had all kinds of crossings in the backcourt and the “Swedish crossing” between backcourt and wing on either side as well and they used it frequently. These forms of crossings usually were the start of the final action for termination in the 6-6 set-offense.

Some teams played with two playmakers at the same time which was pretty effective, FRA had a playmaking lefthander at hand which was also giving a lot of troubles to their respective opponents.

In contrast to the low level of group tactics and team work in defense these factors were on a pretty high level in the offense play with all the teams.
Special situations

Play 6-5

There were a lot of different solutions in man advantage; the first to show was just an application of the basic turntable system by the team GER.

The “trick” in this system is the position switch of the LP with the PM (CB) who will start the move from flip-flopped positions. That will fix the second defender because the CB is a dangerous 1-1 player. Thus the central defender will be forced to approach the RB which will offer big space for the LP and the LW.

Very simple solutions were executed by the Scandinavian teams, the most simple by team DEN:

Absolute traditional play based upon the ability to fire high speed passes and the good performance of the LP. Together with the high level of the backcourt players in 1-1 the move opens wide the centre of the line for the LP.

Another traditional move for the respective national school was shown by the team of ISL. It is the well known transition to a 4-2 by the CB but in this case the additional effect came from a backhand pass by the lefthander to the CB at the line. If that one did not seem to be safe enough there was the continuation to the LB and the LP as usual for teams from ISL.
This concept was obviously well rehearsed and worked successfully in every man advantage situation.

NOR had another very simple solution based upon the 1-1 threat by their playmaker who started the move.

This version with the empty crossing fixed the final result in the extra time of the placement match with DEN with just a few seconds on the clock. Sometimes they started the crossing CB-RB with the ball and continued with another pass back from the RB to the CB.

This is a very simple traditional move done by CRO. It is just based upon the capacity of their LB in shooting and decision making. It makes use of the mismatch in the wing position and you might remember that diagonal passes to either wing have been the
most common solution of the men’s team of CRO for several years. These passes were done by both the LB and the RB respectively.

Other teams had more complex concepts in the 6-5 situation; we will have a look at some of them.

New champions ESP played a very simple transition from 3-3 to 4-2 with extreme efficiency. This concept is based upon the 1-1 quality of their playmaker and his ability to delay the final pass to the very last moment. The move was extended to the RW if necessary.

FRA extended the concept that we saw with the team of ISL already.

According to the reaction of the BL defender to the crossing CB-RB the CB continued his move either to the line or he went on for the position RB. So if the BL should tackle and the pass to the LB will make no sense the RB will play the ball to the CB and this one will go for breakthrough with the option of continuation to the RW. We have to take into account that this player is a top level playmaker with high quality in 1-1 and even more – he is a lefthander which makes things even worse for the defense.

Now let’s take a look at the reverse situation, the shorthanded play in offense.
The play 5 – 6

There is a common move that was created by some club teams and the National team of GER a couple of years ago. In the meanwhile most teams across Europe do play this concept in case of a suspension suffered by them.

In this concept there is no LP, the wings will both sweep inside and the starting wing will return to his position after crossing with the other wing. This one will take a position at the line – between defender 2 and 3 in most cases. After this opening move the ball will be with the CB again who will decide how to play on.

FRA showed two variations of this basic move in the tournament according to the reaction of the defense. In this move of the team FRA the LW will not go back but he will take the aforementioned position on the other side of the defense.

In this first version the OL defender decided to play man to man with the RB. This one started an inside move and played the ball from the first step before the OL was able to stop the move by a foul. The result was a 2-1 set-up against the BL and a score of the RW.
So in the following offense play (still 5-6) the OL decided not to leave his position and to close the space against the RW returning. That gave the RB the chance to receive the ball without pressure since there was a screen deployed by the LW and he could continue to the middle with all the space and time in the world.

Being a high level long range striker there was no problem for this player to score from this position in many cases.

New champions ESP demonstrated a completely different set-up as they had their LP starting a diagonal sweep-in from the position of RB.

That means that in this concept there is a delayed crossing move first and then the CB will start a crossing with the ball with the LB. The LB after that fires a diagonal pass to the RW who scores due to the support of the LW who had fixed an outside block on the OL defender.

This solution might be an exception decided by the configuration showing up in this very moment but the main approach of the team in shorthanded play was the same all the time like it has been described above.

The following move was played most often by the team ESP. The focus is to bring their main shooter in a good position for scoring. In this case even a 5+1 pressing of the GER defense could not prevent the Spaniards from completing the move.
The set-up is identical with the LP in the position RB. After the pass RW-LP (as RB) the BL defender decided to press away the playmaker because there would be less danger coming from the LP on the inside move than from the CB. The LP continued with a pass to the LB and went for the line to fix the attention of two defenders. The LB pushes with the ball and the defense is completely concentrated on the possible 2-2 play of LB together with the LP. This gives the LB the chance for a diagonal pass to the LW who had sneaked back to his position unattended.

Because of their successful play in the shorthanded situation ESP and FRA stayed with these concepts as many other teams took off their goalkeeper for playing 6-6 in case of a suspension. In this case they would rely on their regular moves with pretty different outcome. Some were successful like GER and all the Scandinavians as on the other hand POL and even more CRO had big troubles in executing this play (3 empty net makes conceded in the bronze medal match with FRA).

The team that was prepared best to play without GK was GER. They took the GK off in every shorthanded play and made use of the extra player.

**New element**

**Play 7 – 6**

Although the time was pretty short after the rule change some teams seemed to have prepared themselves for and against the situation of the play 7-6 with empty net behind them.

Two teams made use of this play frequently CRO and GER. And as for the Croatian team the outcome was disputable at least the German team had a couple of different moves at hand and they played it with great effectiveness. These moves seemed to be very well rehearsed and they achieved the turnaround in the semi against FRA by the consequent use of this concept.

But first we will turn to the concept of CRO which is more or less an extension of their play 6-5.
Like in the 6-5 play the main plot is the inside moves of both the RB and the LB. In this move the CB is the extra player and right after his first pass he will go for the switch with the GK.

As already mentioned it is the traditional solution of CRO in man advantage situations with both backcourt players being able to deploy diagonal passes to either wing. This makes the concept extremely difficult to defend. According to the high level of the decision making requested not all of the backcourt players will be able to take the right decision in the right moment thus limiting the success of this very versatile play.

Taking this into account obviously the Croatian team made use of another concept that might not be as fast and as spectacular but reduces the risk to some extent.

The inside moves of the two backcourt players stay the same but the CB is included into the play in a decisive function. If the gap will open and offer a chance for the CB by himself he will grab it. If the tackle of the BC (middle defender) does not allow for this he will play on to the LB and make a screen. Now the LB can shoot or pass to the LP. The short passes will reduce the risk of technical faults quite a lot but the problem arising is that with all the backcourt players involved the distant wing player will have to go for the switch with the GK.

This fact will help the defense in fighting the concept and decrease the chances for scoring because the space that they have to cover will narrow remarkably.
GER had quite a couple of concepts at hand and they used it in almost every offense play.

This first version is just an application of the regular turntable move with the high coming LP not continuing the cut but after a switch taking a central position. The RB might take a chance for shooting but in most of the cases he will do the diagonal pass to the CB. The LB will just fake the empty crossing and go for the switch with the GK.

The second concept is totally different including a long run of the RW behind the backcourt players.

In this move the 2-1 situation is created against the BR defender thus final pass might go to the RW as well. Since this one will be a lefthander he has all the options for breakthrough and for continuation to the LW. The CB will go for the switch; the RB will remain in his position to offer an address for a diagonal pass of the LB.

There was another version tried by the German team with 3 LPs. One between the defenders 1 and 2 on either side and the third one in the very centre. This version with two backcourt players only could not fulfill their expectations obviously. It was only played a few times and without any score. So they returned back to the two concepts shown above.

As a final statement the play 7-6 prooved two be a twin-biting sword even for the German team which seemed to be prepared in the best way by far for this kind of offense play.
They managed the turnaround in the game with FRA by constant and successful use of this concept. They continued playing this in every offensive play in the final with ESP. And there they conceded 5 empty net makes and it has to be mentioned that there was a phase in this gold medal game when the application of the concept was more than disputable.

They stood at one goal up with less than 1 minute to go in the first period of extra time. Instead of running down the clock they took full risk and suffered from an empty net goal of ESP.

At the score levelled in the first offense play of the second period of the extra time the same thing happened again and even one more time when they were down by one goal in the next offense play. So at the end of the day they had conceded three empty net makes straight in three offense plays.

From the view of the analysis this means that the application of the play 7-6 has to be considered thoroughly and yet we are on the start of the line and have to think again on this matter.

At the end of the day we will have to think again of the rules concerning the GK out of his goal area as well. The present legislation falls short of the development of the game and how will you rectify a red card against a GK who was just run over in a collision with an opponent player during the switch? There has to be a full scale solution on this matter in a very short term and not a jigsaw puzzle alike the present situation.
### 2016 Men's 20 European Championship

**FINAL ROUND**

**OFFICIAL RESULT BULLETIN**

## Semifinals and Cross matches

### Cross Matches 13-16

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## Finals and Placement matches

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## Ranking

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