



*The qualitative analysis of the EHF Men's 20 European Championship was written by EHF coaching lecturer Mag. Roman Filz.*

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## 1. List of Abbreviations

### Positions

CB ... center back, playmaker

GK ... goalkeeper

LB ... left back

LP ... line player, pivot

LW ... left wing

RB ... right back

RW ... right wing

### Other Abbreviations

eg ... example given

etc ... et cetera

cf ... confer

ie ... id est

pp ... pages



## 2. Basic Statements

**Basic data.** The EHF Men's 20 European Championship took place in (Upper) Austria. The 56 matches involving 16 qualified teams were played between the 24<sup>th</sup> of July and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2014 in a nice atmosphere in Linz (Tips arena: capacity 6.000) and Traun (Haka arena: capacity 1.500).

**Variety.** In the time frame available the European Championship was not the only thing that required organisation.

- Simultaneously the **2014 EHF Young Coaches Workshop** was taking place. It was accompanied by EHF Methods Commission Chairman Peter Kovacs (HUN) and the EHF lecturer Milan Petronijevic (SRB). Fourteen young coaches worked with two demonstration teams consisting of players from the Austrian National Team Squad for boys born 1998 and later.
- On the last three days there was an international **Further Education Seminar for Handball Coaches**. Experts like Bob Hanning (GER) and Patrekur Johannesson (ISL) provided insights from their fields of work in theory and in practice, again with the Austrian National Team for boys born 1996 and later.
- On the final weekend the Austrian National **Elite – Referees** had a **workshop** with themes like “disqualification” and “penalty” supported by the EHF delegates Sandor Andorka (HUN) and Dragan Nachevski (MKD).

**Vision.** As an education researcher I welcome events for people of many different professions and origins. A great idea for the future might be to consider how different people could **learn from each other** during the event(s) or even afterwards.

**Organisation.** From my point of view the European Championship was organized well. On the internet you could watch the live-stream from [www.laola.tv](http://www.laola.tv) and not only the full time match reports but also the daily bulletins could be read on <http://handball-euro2014.at> - you were also able to find fixtures and more.

**Spectators.** The number of spectators attending the games was relatively low. The final game between Germany and Sweden had a crowd attendance of 1.500 people. This game was also broadcasted nationwide on Austrian television. The match with the highest attendance of this age group was the third place game at the IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013 in Hungary with 2.500 spectators when GER could beat ESP. <http://www.ihf.info/files/CompetitionData/141/pdf/99OMR.pdf>

As expected there were supporters of some main round teams who were a little louder than the others, but I am pleased to say that the crowds were mostly well-behaved.

**Introduction.** In this age group (boys born in 1994 and younger) it was the third international tournament after the EHF Men's 18 European Championship 2012 in Austria and the IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013 in Hungary. Austria seemed to be a successful venue for the German team, as they defended their European title, this time even undefeated with seven wins in seven games. The next event for this age group will be the IHF Men's 21 World Championship 2015 in Brazil.

**Method.** The analysis is based on direct match observations. Every team was watched at least two times, the teams from the main round at least three times and the semi-final qualifiers more often. However I was unable to watch every single game of the tournament. After the tournament I evaluated the statistics and match reports.

**Investigated Group.** Sixteen teams had qualified for this tournament. Germany and Sweden clinched direct qualification as finalists of the EHF Men's 18 European Championship 2012 and Austria was qualified as the host nation. So the rest of the teams had to qualify in the beginning of April 2014. There were 32 teams in eight groups playing for the final thirteen spots.

- There are three nations which have often been regular guests when there are big tournaments for boys, but they did not qualify for any European Championship in this age group: POL, POR, RUS.
- Some nations which had qualified for the EHF Men's 18 European Championship 2012 did not qualify this time: CRO, ROU, CZE, ISL, FIN.
- Some nations qualified for a European Championship for the first time in this age group: HUN, SVK, EST, ISR, MKD.
- There are ten teams – **the regular 1994 and younger guests** – which played all three big tournaments: the EHF Men's 18 European Championship 2012 in AUT, the IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013 in HUN and the EHF Men's 20 European Championship 2014 in AUT: GER, SWE, ESP, DEN, SLO, AUT, FRA, SRB, NOR, BLR. These teams are marked **yellow** in the following table.
- Even if it was not an official EHF tournament, I have listed below the first sixteen teams of the IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013 played in Hungary. From Europe only the best eleven teams of the EHF Men's 18 European Championship 2012 were allowed to take part at IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013. FRA was only permitted to take part, because Oceania forfeited their spot. HUN took part as the host nation. There were three teams (\*) from countries outside Europe. All the teams from position 17 to 24 were from Non-European nations and are not listed in this paper.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Men's\\_Youth\\_World\\_Handball\\_Championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Men's_Youth_World_Handball_Championship)

Place	EHF Men's 18 2012	IHF Men's 19 2013	EHF Men's 20 2014
1	GER	DEN	GER
2	SWE	CRO	SWE
3	DEN	GER	ESP
4	ESP	ESP	DEN
5	SLO	NOR	SLO
6	AUT	SWE	AUT
7	CRO	SRB	FRA
8	BLR	SLO	SRB
9	NOR	BRA *	HUN
10	SRB	HUN	NOR
11	ROU	ROU	BLR
12	FRA	BLR	SUI
13	SUI	FRA	SVK
14	CZE	EGY *	EST
15	ISL	QAT *	ISR
16	FIN	AUT	MKD

Table 1: The results: the big tournaments of the male age group 1994 and younger 2012, 2013 and 2014

### 3. General Trends

**Attack Systems in 6:6.** Generally, there is nothing new in the way of innovation. You find clips of some typical attack systems in the end of this paper (pp 10-12), but there were no new tricks, no new plays, no new inventions. Nearly every standard system consists of a combination of

- transition,
- blocking
- crossing with or without the ball,
- playing with the line player (eg double passes) or
- parallel thrust.

Therefore one of handball's walking encyclopedias, Bob Hanning (GER), claims that there could not be much change to attack systems, because there are few options left for more creative ideas ie new attack systems. He thinks that playing creative in defence would have much potential.

I agree with him, but even if the attack systems of all teams are similar and nearly the same, there are differences: better teams have better players, who

- know better solutions,
- choose these solutions faster and, most importantly, they
- recognise more possibilities.

Therefore, it is important to not only concentrate on the different training topics in isolation (eg for the backcourt players: ground shots, jump shots, pass variations to the LPs, one on one, etc.) but to instruct players on how to make the "right" decisions in the "right" situation.

What does that mean for the training process? **Decision training drills.**

In my opinion it is a good idea for the coaches

- to demonstrate the relevant possibilities,
- then the players train the possibilities,
- then the players can choose the possibilities which suit themselves and
- then they can decide between the different possibilities in the match situations.

**Trigger Action and Follow-up Action.** In particular GER have shown some fine decision making in attack over the whole tournament. Their idea is to start their attack with a trigger action (eg crossing without the ball), then they choose their follow-up action from a variety of possibilities (eg two on two play of the RB in cooperation with the LP). The idea behind it is: Everybody on the field tries to watch the game, because everybody is allowed to make decisions. This means that a good visual control is necessary: not only should all players see their opponents but furthermore also their colleagues on the field. Further it means:

- Continuous screening, watching and judging during the game is necessary.
- The players should always be dangerous for the defence (eg by attacking the free space, by being able to shoot or by being able to pass to the line player). Everybody is ready for that.
- The more "experienced deciders" you have in your team, the more dangerous it is for the defence of the opponent.

**Something Uncommon.** SWE were even with five goals behind against SLO. They really had problems with the strong Slovenian 3/2/1 defence. So in the second half they put out the LP in the attack and acted with four backcourt players, ie one RB, two CBs, and one LB. Thanks to my colleague Rene Kramer (AUT) for pointing that out and encouraging me to watch it on the live-stream. This tactical move was one of the key factors for SWE in turning around this important preliminary round game in the end, as this game blocked the route to the semi-finals for SLO.

**Attack Systems in 6:5, 5:6 and Fastbreak.** It is the same thing as in the 6:6 attack, nothing new really. In the 6:5 attack the players can use more space, but the same decisions have to be made. In the 5:6 attack many teams play without a LP. Very often the RW comes inside and crosses with the LW or the other way round. Then they go to the LP position, and the backplayers try to play with the new LPs. If that does not work, they go back to their original position and they start from the beginning.

SUI sometimes used an additional field player in the offense, not only at crunch time in the end but also during the "normal" the game in two situations: When they wanted to bring an additional LP into a 7:6 situation, and when one player was suspended, and they could avoid a 5:6 attack by bringing an additional field player instead of the goalkeeper.

Also HUN tried to bring an additional field player in a 5:6 situation in attack instead of the goalkeeper.

SLO and ISR were the two top fastbreak nations with 45/62 and 43/54 goals made through fastbreak. Both teams also played offensive sometimes even very offensive defence systems.

Especially the defence of SLO often annoyed the opponents with clever moves like sudden pressing and moving back, they could provoke many passing mistakes by good footwork. They also did that when they played 6/0. I suggest that their field players have running skills far above the average.

**Defence Basic Systems and Alternatives in 6:6.** Most teams especially the Scandinavian teams were staunchly dedicated to the common 6/0 defence.

- So the 6/0 was played by GER, SWE, DEN, ESP, FRA, SRB, SUI, NOR.
- The second popular system was the 3/2/1, often played by AUT, SLO, MKD and sometimes by GER, HUN.
- ISR also played an offensive system, sometimes 3/3, sometimes they even changed their system in to man to man pressing, often starting even by the middle line or earlier.
- 4+2 was only used as a crunch time system in the end, for example, by AUT against GER in the preliminary round.

**Defence Basic Systems and Alternatives in 6:5 and 5:6.** If there was a backcourt player on a good run in the attack, many teams immediately switched to a 5+1 defence against this player, when the attacking team got a suspension and they were 6:5 in defence.

ISR often responded by switching immediately to a man to man defence, trying to steal the ball at a very early time in the 6:5 defence. The player who did not have to defend against another particular player acted as a sweeper in the centre.

Most teams acted with a 5/0 defence in the 5:6 play after getting a suspension.

**Goalkeeper's Performances.** In this tournament the saving range of all goalkeepers went from 41% to 12%, but it is important to consider the playing time. In the overall ranking the first four spots were filled with backup keepers, who all had much less game time than their goalkeeper colleagues:

	Nation & number	Name	Saving percentage	Playing time in minutes in the whole tournament
1	SVK #12	Michal Konecny	41%	94
2	SRB #16	Vladmir Cupara	38%	135
2	DEN #20	Mike Jensen	38%	109
4	NOR #12	Vegard Bakken Oeien	37%	58

*Table 2: Percentage of the top 4 goalkeepers combined with playing time*

So at the fifth position appeared the first starting goalkeeper in this ranking. He was #16 Sebastian Leth Frandsen from Denmark, who saved 36% of the shots playing a little bit more than 310 (out of possible 420) minutes in this tournament. This means that the Danes really had a good goalkeeper team, both placed in the top five. Sebastian Leth Frandsen was elected as the best goalkeeper in the IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013 in Hungary.

A similar good performance can be found in the Hungarian team: #12 Gergö Miklos and #16 Adam Borbely contributed nearly the same playing time (48% - 52%), and both finished among the top 10 (6<sup>th</sup> place and 8<sup>th</sup> place).

SWE #1 Tobias Thulin (6<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking with the same percentage as HUN #12 Gergö Miklos) was elected best goalkeeper, and he got a lot of playing time. He was one of the key factors, when he saved a penalty with about one minute to play in a tight battle against SLO in the preliminary round. His backup #20 Renny Svennberg also contributed 31% saved shots, but he just played a little bit more than forty minutes over the whole championship. So the playing time in the Swedish goalkeeper team was 90% to 10% to the benefit of Tobias Thulin.

Two years ago Niklas Kraft, also a Swedish goalkeeper, was elected best goalkeeper in the EHF Men's 18 European Championship 2012, also in Austria. He was not in the Swedish team this time.

Most teams put two goalkeepers on the paper, only some teams like SVK or SRB came with three goalkeepers.

GER played with #12 Jonas Maier (10<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking, 31% saved, about 60% of the total playing time) and #16 Christopher Rudeck (17<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking, 29% saved, about 40% of the total playing time), both different types. Like both Hungarian goalkeepers, they could be changed easily which was a clear advantage for their coaches. They knew that the quality of the keeper on the bench was high as well. Probably both German goalkeepers would not get a lot playing time on a high level in their home country, so Jonas Maier changed to Kadetten Schaffhausen (highest league, SUI) last season, and Christopher Rudeck changes to Mors-Thy Handball (highest league, Denmark).

For the goalkeepers (and the field players) playing time in their clubs on a high level is better than sitting time on the bench or even on the tribune. More to the issue "players in other countries" further below in the summary.

The saving average at the EHF Men's Championship in Denmark 2014 was 31% cf. [http://home.eurohandball.com/ehf\\_files/specificHBI/ECh\\_Analyses/2014/DEN/3/11th%20EUROPEAN%20CHAMPIONSHIP%20FOR%20MEN.pdf](http://home.eurohandball.com/ehf_files/specificHBI/ECh_Analyses/2014/DEN/3/11th%20EUROPEAN%20CHAMPIONSHIP%20FOR%20MEN.pdf) So this number should be in mind of the young goalkeepers.

**Evaluation of the First Four Teams.** GER defeated SWE in the final, ESP defeated DEN to take the bronze.

- They have one thing in common. None of them used the in-flight shot as a tactical weapon very often. In 28 games all these teams just made two (!) in flight shot tries, both successful goals by the way, one by Mario Lopez Alvarez (ESP) and the other by Pontus Zetterman (SWE) right before the buzzer.
- Not a single player of these four nations received a red card in 28 games. On the other hand only five red cards were shown throughout the whole tournament. This low figure signifies a commendable trend in handball.

**GER.** In my opinion the Germans played like their coaches Markus Baur and Axel Kromer wanted them to play:

- Clear and simple attack systems with no complicated hush-hush and
- Backplayers who are able to shoot whenever it is necessary.
- They have two solid goalkeepers who can bring the ball into the game very fast. When they rushed with nice speed from the defence into the attack, it often needed just two or three passes after the goalkeeper brought the ball back into the game.
- The backplayers cooperated nicely with the LP #8 Jannik Kohlbacher, who had a fine shooting percentage.
- They had all-star winger #15 Yves Kunkel as a 7m specialist who only missed two shots in the whole tournament (20/22).
- They did not have a weak position.
- I think their biggest advantage was the fact that many players had quite much experience from playing in the first league, even if it was the rookie season for most of them. So #18 Fabian Wiede, #10 Paul Drux (both Füchse Berlin) or the wingers #15 Yves Kunkel (GWD Minden) and #20 Timo Kastening (Recken Burgdorf) were allowed to play in the German Bundesliga. Other players got a lot of playing time in the second league like Tim Sutton, who was even the best scorer in the league, when he played for Saarlouis in 2013/14.
- By winning seven of seven games they kept a clear record.
- They could switch from 6/0 to 3/2/1.

**SWE.** They won five games (of seven), and only lost (two times) against GER.

- They were the best Scandinavian team.
- They really played nicely in power play, because they knew how to use the space. Even if the quality of the **video SWE 1** (cf 5. Typical attack systems) is not very good and even if the winger missed the shot, you can see in this video a good pass of the backplayer to the RW right after a transition. The wing defender made an individual mistake and then the pass came with very good timing.

- Against an offensive defence formation they often combine transitions with crossing, as you can see in the **video SWE 2** (cf 5. Typical attack systems).
- As all Scandinavian teams they prefer the 6/0 defence.

**ESP.** They reached the first (bronze) medal in this 1994 and younger age group.

- They had two excellent LPs with #4 Ignacio Plaza Jimenez and #10 Diego Pineiro Martin.
- Most of the backcourt players used the cooperation with the LPs well.
- One of their systems was the transition of the RB position, so they often put one of the two LPs on this position in the attack, and after the transition they continued playing with two LPs.
- When they had a suspension, and they had to play 5:6 in the attack, they played without a LP, put the "real" LP to the missing position (eg LW), and they played transition from there at the next possible opportunity.
- With #28 Pablo Paredes Lapena they had one really big guy with 2,01m at the LB position, with a very dangerous jumper from the distance, when well prepared. The other backcourt players were not so tall and used other weapons: ground shots, one on one and cooperation with the LP.
- Eleven players scored in double figures.

**DEN.** They finished in fourth place after having won the IHF Men's 19 World Championship 2013 in HUN.

- They really played outstanding in the preliminary round, then they had problems in the first half against ESP. But in this main round game they were able to turn it around after a strong second half.
- Ten players scored in double figures and there are six players in the Danish team who contribute ten or more assists throughout the tournament. This means that not only the starters but also the substitutes take responsibility when they are in the game.
- They like the cooperation with the LP, their favourite pass is the head layer pass like in the **video DEN** (cf. 5. Typical attack systems).
- They also preferred the 6/0 defence coordinated by the all-star defence player #14 Simon Hald Jensen who also performed nicely at the LP position.

#### 4. Summary, Conclusion and Trends

**New elements in attacks and defence.** No new innovative elements. The only uncommon thing from my point of view was the previously mentioned successful position play of SWE against the 3/2/1 of SLO in the main round, when SWE played with two CBs and put out the LP in the 6:6 play.



**Special field players.** All players who took part at this tournament are special players, there are some very good players in the All – star team. Some deserve a special mention (in alphabetical order of the surname):

Jon Azkue Saizar	ESP #30	Backplayer, righthander, nice ground shots and one on one moves
Nikola Bylik	AUT #53	All-star CB, top shooter (55 goals) of the tournament with a shooting percentage of 67% with only five 7m goals, played also a key role in the Austrian defence, born even in 1996 (!)
Paul Drux	GER #10	All-star LB, patient in position play, can play for his teammates and shoots nicely
Peter Hornyak	HUN #2	RW, very good one on one moves
Blaz Janc	SLO #8	All-star RB (lefthander), courageous and dangerous from 9m and 6m as well, good in fastbreak, 28 assists
Vid Levč	SLO #14	LB, good jump shot from the distance
Nemanja Mladenovic	SRB #31	Backplayer, righthander, great in the preliminary round, good decisions, good eye
Niklas Mörk	SWE #17	All-star RW, nearly 80% shooting percentage, good in fast break

*Table 3: special field players in alphabetical order*

**Players for the Future.** On this level it is not easy to predict players for the future. For me a player for the future can play on a higher level than expected. Therefore these three 1996 born players should be mentioned here (in alphabetical order):

Nikola Bylik	AUT #53	CB, top shooter of the tournament
Blaz Janc	SLO #8	All-star RB (lefthander), courageous and dangerous from 9m and 6m as well, good in fastbreak, and 28 assists
Tim Sutton	GER #24	CB, nice drive to the goal, good ground shot

*Table 4: players for the future: 1996 born players in alphabetical order*

**Summary.** The 2014 EHF Men's 20 European Championship was a tournament held in a pleasant atmosphere. Even though spectator numbers were low, it was great to see families, who were not typical handball fans, enjoying the championship and its spectacular games.

All the teams were very encouraging, and even though MKD finished last place in this tournament, they also showed some nice moves like in the **video MKD** (cf. 5. Typical attack systems).

**Importance.** I think a lot of nations invest a lot of time and money to improve their youngsters on a very high level.

- Some nations like SLO have been together for about two months before the championship.

- Other teams like HUN or AUT even are allowed to play regular matches in the highest league.
- In the team of AUT there were eight players who had more than 60 games with their national team before the tournament.

**International Transfers.** I think that globalisation in handball was evident at this championship. There were more players who play for club-teams of other countries than in previous championships. For a player who is twenty years or younger, this can be a big step, but if better opportunities can be found somewhere else, it is understandable to change the centre of one's life. At least eleven players play for teams in other countries, GER is in the first position in this category, with four players away from home.

I think that you can profit from getting to know other cultures, languages and countries I would even go one step further: international cooperation between federations, clubs or schools should be enabled and promoted (eg terms abroad for exchange student in combination with training and playing as well, handball camps, etc).

**Future trends.** Fair play:

- Hopefully one trend will continue: the lesser amount of red cards throughout the whole tournament.
- AUT won the fair play contest with just 12 (!) two minutes suspensions throughout the whole tournament, although they mostly played 3/2/1. I think less suspensions in handball is a good trend.
- Also noted on the plus side, that there was little or next to no continuous discussion/ debate from coaches with referees and/ or delegates all the times.

## 5. Clips of typical attack systems

Here you find clips from some nations (in alphabetical order). All the clips were taken from [www.laola.at](http://www.laola.at)



**DEN.** Transition of the LW without the ball in combination with their favourite pass – the head layer – to the LP

	<p><b>GER 1.</b> Crossing with the LP, the RB passes to the RW in the corner</p>
	<p><b>GER 2.</b> Crossing with the LP, this time the LB and the CB changed positions before the move in order to change to the original position after the crossing</p>
	<p><b>GER 3.</b> Empty crossing with a jumper from the RB</p>
	<p><b>MKD.</b> In flight try of the LW after crossing</p>

	<p><b>SLO.</b> Crossing without the ball and bringing the RB into the middle after an additional crossing with the ball</p>
	<p><b>SWE 1.</b> Clever 6 to 5 play with a diagonal pass to the RW after a transition from the CB</p>
	<p><b>SWE 2.</b> Crossing and transition play against a 3/2/1 defence</p>