

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

M18 EHF CHAMPIONSHIP I & II

2–9 August 2026

Mark Hawkins / GBR





CONTENTS

Tournament - facts & figures	4
Competition	4
Team performance	5
All-star Team	7
Tactics - defence	8
General defence aspects	8
Defence systems	9
Goalkeeper cooperation	10
Tactics - offence	11
General offence aspects	12
Tactical aspect	13
Transition	14
Technical	15
Players to watch	16





The M18 EHF Championship I & II Qualitative Analysis offers an in-depth look at the performances of the six participating teams in each competition and the players who took part in the tournaments. Championship I was held in Skopje/ North Macedonia 3-9 August, while Championship II took place in Telavi/ Georgia 2-9 August.

Going beyond the final results, the analysis explores the technical and tactical trends that shaped the tournaments, using data and insights from Handball.ai and XPS Network. These findings are brought to life through selected video clips from the M18 EHF Championship I & II, providing a closer look at key situations and recurring patterns of play.

The report also connects the identified technical trends with practical coaching approaches, offering coaches valuable insights and ideas that can be applied directly to training and match preparation.

EHF ANALYST

Mark Hawkins

- Head coach of the Great Britain women's national team
- EHF analyst for the previous five seasons
- Former coach/analyst of the Chinese women's national team and Saudi Arabia men's national team

TOURNAMENT – FACTS & FIGURES



COMPETITION

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- Eight national teams qualified for the championship
- The competition was split into two groups of four teams each. Crossover placement matches were then played between the teams of the two groups. First in group A playing second in group B for the semi-finals and vice versa. The placement matches followed the same format with third vs fourth in respective groups.
- Important overall statistics:
 - 1,066 goals were scored at an average of 53.3 goals per game
 - 433 saves were made at a rate of 29.6 per cent
 - Evangelos Evgenidis – Greece (38 goals), Theo Werner – Luxembourg (34 goals) and Timo Roomere – Estonia (30 goals) were the leading individual scorers
 - Ionut Ionescu – Romania (36 saves) made the most saves and had the highest save rate (37.9 per cent)

Final ranking

1		Romania
2		Lithuania
3		Greece
4		Luxembourg
5		Estonia
6		Netherlands
7		Latvia
8		Ukraine

CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Six teams entered the competition
- The competition was played in a round-robin format, each team played each other once and a placement game was played between first and second, third and fourth, and fifth and sixth in the group phase.
- 18 games were played
- Important overall statistics
 - 1,092 goals were scored at an average of 60.67 goals per game
 - 405 saves were made at a rate of 27.5 per cent
 - Daniel Ivanov – Bulgaria (58 goals), Thiebe Fiers – Belgium (54 goals) and Nikoloz Mamulashvili – Georgia (48 goals) were the leading individual scorers
 - Art Selaci – Kosovo (69 saves) made the most saves
 - Levan Tvildiani – Georgia (37.2 per cent) had the best save rate

Final ranking

1		Bulgaria
2		Georgia
3		Belgium
4		Kosovo
5		Cyprus
6		Great Britain

TOURNAMENT – FACTS & FIGURES

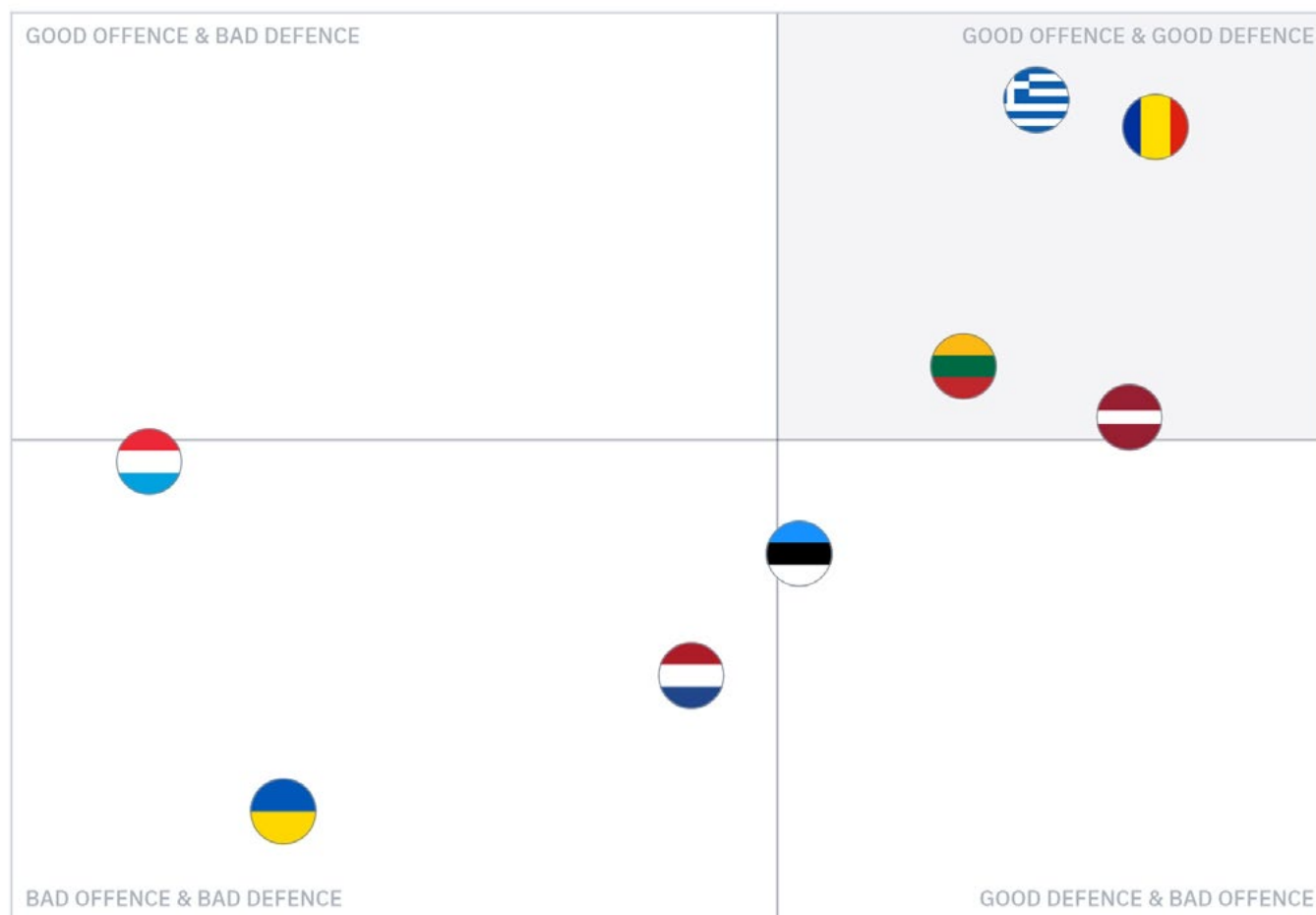


TEAM PERFORMANCE

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- Luxembourg who finished in fourth place had the most efficient defence (47.2 per cent). Latvia – despite a seventh place finish – conceded the fewest goals with just 119 against.
- Romania had the best attack with 163 goals (#1) but just the second most efficient attack (54.5 per cent) behind Greece (54.6 per cent) Latvia, again, had the lowest lost ball per cent (18.0 per cent)
- Group A was incredibly competitive, with three teams finishing equal on four points, Latvia missing out on a place in the semi-finals by a single goal (and even topping the group by two goals.) The two teams who came off better in the head to head were Lithuania and Romania who both went on to contest the final.
- Group B was more straightforward. Estonia however were an interesting case, starting with a 10-goal defeat to the Netherlands, they steadily improved throughout the group against teams who would finish with higher rankings and went on to beat Latvia in the first placement match and ended by reversing the 10-goal defeat to the Netherlands in the first match with a 10-goal victory to claim fifth place.
- Romania ended up champions, their only loss coming in the group stage against Latvia who eventually finished in eighth place.

Goals scored per 50 possessions vs goals conceded per 50 possessions



The chart analyses goals scored and conceded per 50 possessions, calculated as goals scored/conceded divided by the total number of possessions, multiplied by 50. The intersection represents the tournament average, with standard deviation used to define the four performance areas. This shows which teams performed above or below average in offence and defence, and by how much.

TOURNAMENT – FACTS & FIGURES



TEAM PERFORMANCE

CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Kosovo, who finished in fourth place, had the most efficient defence (47.9 per cent). Supported by the goalkeeper with the most saves. Georgia conceded the fewest goals (173)
- Bulgaria had the best attack with 227 goals (#1) and the most efficient attack (60.7 per cent) and the lowest lost ball percentage (14.9 per cent)
- Each team won at least one match during the tournament. Interestingly, Georgia beat Bulgaria in the round-robin phase (35:32) after a three-way tie including Belgium. It was Bulgaria who topped the group and Georgia who finished in 2nd place.
- In the placement games there were two reverses out of the three fixtures compared to the group phase match. (Bulgaria lost to Georgia in the group phase and won the final as did Cyprus who lost to Great Britain in the group phase but won the placement match.)

Goals scored per 50 possessions vs goals conceded per 50 possessions



The chart analyses goals scored and conceded per 50 possessions, calculated as goals scored/conceded divided by the total number of possessions, multiplied by 50. The intersection represents the tournament average, with standard deviation used to define the four performance areas. This shows which teams performed above or below average in offence and defence, and by how much.

TOURNAMENT – FACTS & FIGURES



ALL-STAR TEAM

CHAMPIONSHIP I

GOALKEEPER Marcin Jevsa			RIGHT BACK Thomas Van Vliet		
LEFT WING David Andrei Comanici			RIGHT WING Vitas Venckunas		
LEFT BACK Teo Werner			DEFENDER Orestis Saravanos		
CENTRE BACK Ianis Alexandru Chirut			TOP SCORER Evangelos Evgenidis		
LINE PLAYER Mihai Matei Andrei			MVP Teo Werner		

ALL-STAR TEAM

CHAMPIONSHIP II

GOALKEEPER Art Selaci			RIGHT BACK Vakhtangi Kharebashvili		
LEFT WING Erno De Novellis			RIGHT WING Anastasios Fterakides		
LEFT BACK Nikoloz Mamulashvili			DEFENDER Ivo Ivanov		
CENTRE BACK Thiebe Fiers			TOP SCORER Daniel Ivanov		
LINE PLAYER Vano Gurgенidze			MVP Daniel Ivanov		

DEFENCE GENERAL ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- 6:0 was the overwhelming defensive system used throughout the competition – Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine using it almost exclusively. Luxembourg and the Netherlands had some use of a 5:1 system, although they were still very heavily reliant on a 6:0. Estonia used 5:1 and 6:0 in equal measure, whereas Greece were very flexible in defensive structure moving a lot between open and closed defences, and with a very player-orientated focus on the defence which involved following of individual players on occasion.
- Latvia had the best defence despite finishing in seventh place, conceding only 119 goals, and had a very high efficiency in positional defence (58.2 per cent). Romania and Lithuania were the next two most efficient positional defences, both over 57 per cent. These three teams – alongside Greece – had the best four defences on goals conceded by 50 defences.
- Despite Latvia finishing in seventh, the group phase performance, which was extremely close with both Romania and Lithuania, shows a very strong defensive performance and some relation to the final rankings of the group phase at least.
- Greece, with their open defensive systems, forced the most turnovers per 50 defences (13.5), clear of Romania in second place, they also forced the most lost balls and were second in steals made, showing a clear impact of the open defence on their opponents.

CHAMPIONSHIP II

- The main defensive system over the tournament was a 6:0 defence, five out of the six teams played predominantly 6:0. Belgium were the outlier, with a primary defensive system of 5:1. Apart from Georgia, who played exclusively 6:0, the other four nations all played alternate defensive systems (5:1 or 3:2:1) for notable periods, within 20-40 per cent of their defences being a 'secondary system'.
- Interestingly, the teams who played a greater proportion of 6:0 defences had a better defensive efficiency. Belgium, who played a 5:1 defence, were the least efficient (54.4 per cent) and Bulgaria, who played the next most open defences were second worst (53.5 per cent) despite finishing first and third in the competition respectively.
- Georgia had the best defence in terms of goals conceded, with 173, Bulgaria second with 173 and Belgium third with 177 were all very close. The next three teams Kosovo & Cyprus conceded 190 and Great Britain conceded 188 – suggesting a distinction between the top three and bottom three.
- Belgium forced the most opponent turnovers (13.1 per 50 defences), second was Bulgaria (11.7 per 50 defences) – again the two teams who played most open defences. In third, interestingly, was Great Britain with 11.4 per 50 despite finishing lower in the rankings.
- Belgium (45) made the most steals and Great Britain were second (37). Despite a lower final ranking, the Great Britain team showed remarkably good defensive statistics, befitting of a defence that could be higher in the final rankings.

TACTICS – DEFENCE

DEFENCE SYSTEMS



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- Greek defence was very open, it also was very focused on the players as opposed to protecting spaces, all defenders would follow their player if they went as a pivot either from back or wing, as well as the middle back defender tried to always stay with the opposing pivot.
- The central defenders from both Lithuania and Romania were very active to pressure the middle and make steals, maintaining position to pressure the pass from the side to the middle.
- Latvia defensively had very good control, each player was very good at defending their own space with little help to their team mate, meaning there was very little excess movement and they were hard to be drawn out of position and maintained good control over protecting the goal area.



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- There was very good individual pressure from both Bulgaria and Great Britain proactively taking away passing options amongst the back players, and therefore forcing attackers to undesirable actions from dribbling in many scenarios. These two teams (despite Great Britain having a low ranking) were amongst the top three of forcing turnovers.
- Belgium played solely in an open defence, often a 5:1 and the front of the defence maintained good control with the body position to force attackers to the side of the court they wanted, condensing the play and creating overloaded defensive situations.



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- The general trends are that the wing save percentage is quite important to show the final ranking, teams had very similar amounts of saves from the wing positions, but the top teams faced fewer shots from here, showing an much better efficiency from this position.
- The top teams also forced more shots from nine metres, but crucially compared to lower ranked teams who forced more shots, maintained an higher expected save ratio here, this meant that they were saving the shots they were expected to, allowing them to take advantage of the strategy as opposed to some of the lower ranked teams who could force these shots but not make the saves necessary to support the defence.
- The Netherlands and Ukraine both had some very good goalkeeping performances in positional attack, maintaining similar profile to the higher ranked teams with a good wing percentage and good nine-metre percentage, but fell down the rankings due to other aspects of team performance.

CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Despite clearly making the most raw saves, Kosovo goalkeeper Art Selaci faced a very large amount of shots from six metres (72). Despite having an excellent percentage, the volume of shots afforded a lot of goals against Kosovo from this position.
- The difference was the save percentages from nine metres. The top three sides all had goalkeepers with a save percentage from this position over 50 whereas Kosovo in fourth and below were all under 40 per cent. Reflected in the expected save statistics, this shows the necessity to make the saves from positions teams wanted to force the shots from.
- Secondary to this again was the shots from the wing, all the higher ranked teams had better save percentages here – these being the two key areas which stood out as difference within the rankings.
- Art Selaci had 10 assists, showing a very high impact in the individual fast break, also highlighted the arrival phase 7v6 attack from Bulgaria required a high speed in actions and substitutions from the goalkeeper from Bulgaria to start the break and allow the seventh player on in good timing.
- Art Selaci – Kosovo (69 saves) made the most saves.
- Levan Tvildiani – Georgia (37.2 per cent) had the best save rate.



TACTICS – OFFENCE



GENERAL OFFENCE ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- A total of 1,066 goals were scored from 1,734 shots at a success rate of 61.4 per cent.
- Romania and Greece were clearly the best two attacks in the competition, scoring 163 and 156 goals respectively, third place was a tie between Lithuania and Luxembourg, both being 24 goals behind Greece.
- Greece were slightly more efficient than Romania by just 0.6 per cent and both score 23.4 goals per 50 attacks, again with some distance to the next best teams.
- Ukraine had the most technical mistakes (90), 13 clear of Luxembourg in second (77) whilst Latvia were most efficient, with just 48 lost balls, Greece the next most efficient with 55. Latvia with this very good efficiency showed strong signs of a good offensive performance and structure, however they scored at a rate of only 48 per cent, meaning they weren't able to capitalise on the extra shots they created for themselves.
- Latvia may have had a lower shooting percentage due to the fact they shot 34 per cent of their shots from nine metres. This is the clearest distinction between final rankings of all parameters – the bottom four teams all took 35 per cent or more shots from nine metres, whereas the top three were all less than 22 per cent. This equates to approximately six to seven extra shots from nine metres per match for the lower ranked teams.
- Despite Latvia's strong offensive performance considering this, Romania (16 per cent) and Greece (18 per cent) shows very definitively this was a key element to having a better scoring rate per 50 attacks, total goals scored and shot efficiency. All of these factors had a clear gap between these two nations and the other teams, showing a very clear ability to create good goal-scoring chances and finish them efficiently, it is no surprise to see them as overall winners and the winners of a group, despite meeting in the semi-finals.
- Highlight certain shooting patterns (e.g. Slovakia scored 50 per cent from the wing, etc.)
- Evangelos Evgenidis – Greece (38 goals), Teo Wener – Luxembourg (34 goals), & Timo Roomere – Estonia (30 goals) were the leading individual scorers.
- 7:6 was only consistently used by Ukraine – 59 possessions scoring 20 goals (33 per cent efficiency), slightly below their total offensive efficiency (39.3 per cent). The only other teams to use it more than isolated incidents was Romania – 22 attacks with six goals (27 per cent) way below their overall efficiency. In total, teams played 101 attacks, scoring 30 goals, way below the tournament offensive efficiency.



TACTICS – OFFENCE

GENERAL OFFENCE ASPECTS



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- A total of 1,092 goals were scored from 1,789 shots at 61 per cent success rate.
- Bulgaria and Belgium were clearly the best two teams in attack with 227 and 213 goals, respectively. There was a big gap to Georgia (188) and Kosovo (174) and again to Cyprus (151) and Great Britain (139).
- Georgia, however, were far more efficient, playing at a lower pace on average, they scored 24.1 goals per 50 attacks, just behind Bulgaria with 24.8 and above Belgium with 23.15. Again there was a gap between these teams and the bottom three.
- Technical mistakes showed the biggest correlation with the final ranking, both in absolute numbers and per 50 attacks. Bulgaria being the most efficient (6.27) and Georgia with (9.74) were the only two teams below 10 mistakes per 50 attacks. Great Britain with 15.1 mistakes per 50 attacks were clear of Kosovo (11.5) and Cyprus (11.7).
- Most teams took 70-76 per cent of their shots from inside nine metres, it was only Georgia and Great Britain who did not with a big gap, both just over half (55 per cent) of their shots coming from there and as a result took a far greater proportion from nine metres.
- Georgia, however, did score a very impressive 62 per cent of their nine metres shots, whereas many teams (Kosovo, Cyprus, Great Britain) all shot below 40 per cent. This shows an interesting profile from Georgia, that they played at a slower tempo than most, and had to rely on a very good efficiency from nine metres to score. This could be seen as a risky strategy as it requires an 'overperformance' than the expected outcome from nine metres shooting and relying on harder shots to make up the goals, which they were able to do in this tournament.
- Daniel Ivanov – Bulgaria (58 goals), Thiebe Fiers – Belgium (54 goals) & Nikoloz Mamulashvili – Georgia (48 goals) were the leading individual scorers.
- Bulgaria were the main protagonists of the 7v6 system in attack, scoring 20 goals from their 42 attacks (48 per cent efficiency) – very similar to their overall attack efficiency. Kosovo, Cyprus and Great Britain were the only other teams to play any 7v6 attack, but only sparingly. Between the three teams they only attempted it 36 times, scoring just six goals (16 per cent efficiency)



TACTICS – OFFENCE

TACTICAL ASPECT



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- Luxembourg regularly used four back players in attack, spreading defences and creating many opportunities for individual attack 1v1.
- Individual play to create superiority was the overwhelming strategy used especially amongst the top teams. Isolating a defender and starting the attack from a 1v1 of their desired duel either opened direct chances or drew defenders to make space for others.
- Greece were very effective when getting a free throw and had a deliberate strategy to place the line player directly on top of a defender from the free throw, making it very difficult for the defender to get in front of the line player and allowed the line player to use the size advantage to earn a shot or a seven-metre penalty.



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Belgium played regularly with four back players in the start of the attack, one often being a line player who would arrive and set screens on defenders, actively defending the back players, creating superiority situations the back players were very skilled in exploiting.
- Belgium also utilised this in an innovative way to play 6v5. Changing the areas defenders had to be aware of, created good chances in the superiority situations.
- Bulgaria created a large percentage of chances from inside nine metres, only Belgium were similar in the ratio of shots taken. This was, however, created by having threatening back court players, they attacked in meaningful ways and this drew the defence away from six metres and allowed the pivot to take advantage of the space, achieving many very clear chances.



TACTICS – OFFENCE

TRANSITION



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- Greece and Romania were the two teams with the most ambition to play fast handball. Greece were first in fastbreak and fast restart attempts, Romania second in fastbreaks and third in fast restarts.
- Greece and Romania were the two teams who made the most steals, in particular with Greece's offensive style of defence, it points to a clear tactical strategy.
- Greece in particular had a style that was not dependant on securing individual fast breaks, but played quickly on the fast restart or second wave, focussed around movement from the line player to the side with the ball to open space.
- No goalkeeper achieved any more than three assists during the tournament, suggesting an emphasis to play in the second wave/counter phase instead of direct individual fast breaks.



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Belgium and Bulgaria were the two teams who had most ambition to play with fast breaks, with 40 per cent of their attacks being fast breaks or fast restarts; Cyprus were close behind with 37 per cent. Great Britain and Kosovo had a much more conservative pace with just 20 per cent fast attacks.
- Belgium and Bulgaria were the two teams with the most forced turnovers and seemingly were able to turn these into fast break chances. Great Britain in third, however, clearly made a tactical choice not to attempt as many fast breaks.
- The three Belgian goalkeepers also combined for 10 assists, which was the highest of any teams' goalkeepers, showing them as a source of the fast breaks.
- Bulgaria used a quick change of the goalkeeper in the transition phase to play 7v6 against a return defence on a regular basis, leading to good opportunities to score on the second wave.



TECHNICAL



The collaboration between EHF and Learn Handball brings the findings from the EHF YAC Analysis Reports directly into practice. Key insights from the tournament are connected to practical exercises, giving coaches the opportunity to apply the findings directly in their training sessions and turn analysis into action.

Want to explore it yourself? Learn Handball offers a 14-day free trial, so you can discover the platform, try the exercises, and see how it can support your coaching. Click the logo below and give it a try!



LEARN HANDBALL

Start your 14-days free trial.



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- In offence, some of the key trends of tactical adaptations were attacking with four back players as well as adding this to the isolation of defenders to make 1v1 attack really important to be able to draw players and continue to keep the ball moving.



Learn handball: Stine's challenge 1v1 middle



- Pressuring attacking players off the ball and to be able to protect bigger areas and influence where the attackers can play (or hopefully not play) are incredibly important, as seen by Greece and Romania and their defensive positions.



Learn handball: Learn to move in defense | Carlos Ortega



- The goalkeeping from the wing and save rate here had a big impact on the final rankings, below is some guidance to positioning and saving from the wing from Mikael Appelgren.



Learn Handball: Ready position on the wing – Mikael Appelgren



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Belgium were very effective at using the line player to set screens from a wide position and creating overloads like this for their attack to exploit.



Learn Handball: Pivot cooperation in the middle – Juri Knorr



- In defence, there were many situations where controlling the position of attackers was really well applied, in particular the 5:1 defence from Belgium, the front defender was very clever at being able to control the position of the attacker, defending with good body position can be seen in the exercise below.



Learn Handball – Tobias Karlsson – defend without arms



- The goalkeeping from the wing and save rate here had a big impact on the final rankings, below is some guidance to positioning and saving from the wing from Mikael Appelgren.



Learn Handball: Ready position on the wing – Mikael Appelgren



PLAYERS TO WATCH



CHAMPIONSHIP I



Evangelos Evgenidis

Position: Right back

Year of birth: 2010

Club: Ikast Håndbold (DEN)

Goals: 38

Assists: 7



- Top goalscorer and scored top three most above expectation showing the shooting quality. Also was very prevalent: he was able to manufacture shots closer to the goal, taking more than from the six-metre line than the nine-metre line as is the trend of modern back players.

- Comparable player: Kiko Costa



Šarunas Vižinis

Position: Left back

Year of birth: 2009

Club: VMSM Sostines Tauras (LTU)

Goals: 27

Assists: 10

Steals: 6



- Two-way player who played in the centre of the defence, led the competition in steals made as well as being fourth in goals scored and sixth in assists, truly displayed an all-round skill set at the heart of the team.

- Comparable player: Thibaud Briet



Ionut Raul Ionescu

Position: Goalkeeper

Year of birth: 2008

Club: CSU Pitesti (ROU)

Saves : 36 (37.9 per cent)



- 36 per cent saves in final 10 minutes of matches.
- Very strong performances, making more saves as the tournament went on, one of the best from six-metre in saves and percentage led to saving a lot more than xS would predict.

- Comparable player: Andreas Palicka



PLAYERS TO WATCH



CHAMPIONSHIP II



Daniel Ivanov

Position: Centre back
Year of birth: 2008
Club: HK Osam Lovech (BUL)
Goals: 58
Assists: 22
Steals: 9



- Top goalscorer, second most assists and most steals made him a threat across all elements of the game whilst leading Bulgaria to victory in the tournament. Scored second highest above expected goals, showing ability to score difficult shots.

- Comparable player: Gergö Fazekas



Thiebe Fiers

Position: Centre back
Year of birth: 2009
Club: Sporting Pelt (BEL)
Goals: 54
Seven metres: 14/16
Assists: 19
Steals: 9



- Second best goalscorer, third most assists and most steals made him a threat across all elements of the game whilst a key figure in the results for Belgium.

- Comparable player: Tobias Grøndahl



Romain Antonie van Simaeys

Position: Left back
Year of birth: 2009
Club: Estudiantes Tournai (BEL)
Goals: 25
Assists: 10
Steals: 5
Seven metres provoked: 5



- Contributed across all elements statistically for Belgium but was importantly a key figure in the front of the open defence, played this position very well whilst supporting the team in attack.

- Comparable player: Ian Barrufet (defence)





EHF Sport & Game Services
Platz des Europäischen Handballs
Baumgasse 60A
1030 Vienna
Austria

EHF
EUROPEAN HANDBALL
FEDERATION