

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

M20 EHF CHAMPIONSHIP I & II

12–19 July 2026

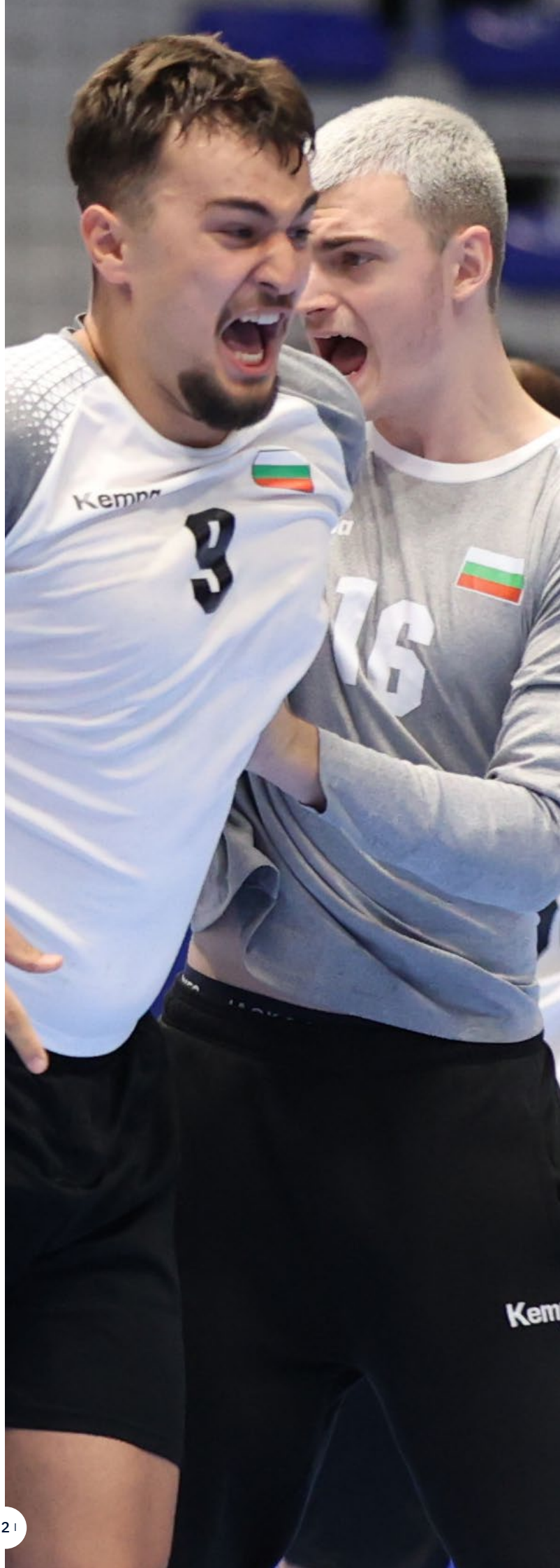
Óscar Gutiérrez Aguilar





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The M20 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 on 12–19 July 2026. Both competitions were held at the Pallati i Rinisë dhe Sportit in Prishtina, Kosovo.

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 select video clips from the M20 EHF Championships I and 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.

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TOURNAMENT – FACTS & FIGURES



COMPETITION

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- The Men's 20 EHF Championship was divided into two tournaments (I and II), with six teams in each.
- In the preliminary round, the six teams played against each other to establish an initial ranking. The teams then progressed directly into the placement matches: 5/6 placement match, 3/4 placement match and final.
- All matches were played over eight competition days, with two rest days.
- The top three positions in tournament I went to the Netherlands, Estonia and Kosovo, while in tournament II they went to Finland, Slovakia and Bulgaria.
- In tournament I, the average shooting efficiency was 58.9 per cent, with the champions, the Netherlands, more than 10 percentage points above the rest of the teams, at 69.8 per cent. The average shooting efficiency in tournament II was more than three percentage points higher, at 62.5 per cent, driven by Belgium's outstanding shooting performance – a shooting efficiency of 73.7 per cent.
- A total of 2,061 goals were scored in 36 matches, with 18 matches in each tournament. In tournament I, 1,008 goals were scored – an average of 56 goals per match. In tournament II, 1,053 goals were scored, corresponding to an average of 58.5 goals per match.
- 135 saves were recorded in tournament I (average 7.5 per match), with an average rate of 28.1 per cent. In tournament II, the number was 100 saves (average 5.5 per match), with an average rate of 25.3 per cent. In both tournaments, the champions were the teams with the highest save percentages: The Netherlands in tournament I, with a rate of 40 per cent, and Finland in tournament II, with 43 per cent.
- The top-scoring teams were, in tournament I, the Netherlands, with an average of 32.3 goals per match, and in tournament II, Belgium, with 31.8 goals per match. On the individual level, Belgium's Sacha Dubuc led the scoring charts in tournament II, with 43 goals and a 75 per cent shooting efficiency. In tournament I, Kosovo's Olsi Mulaj scored 46 goals with a 66 per cent shooting efficiency, making him the top scorer across both events.
- The goalkeeper with the most saves in tournament I was Estonia's Oliver Nobel, with 23 saves and a 28.4 per cent save rate. In tournament II, Finland's Viljo Ukkonen recorded the most saves, with 32 in total and a 42.7 per cent save rate.

CHAMPIONSHIP I Final ranking

		Netherlands
		Estonia
		Kosovo
4		Italy
5		Georgia
6		Montenegro

CHAMPIONSHIP II Final ranking

		Finland
		Slovakia
		Bulgaria
4		Belgium
5		Luxembourg
6		Great Britain

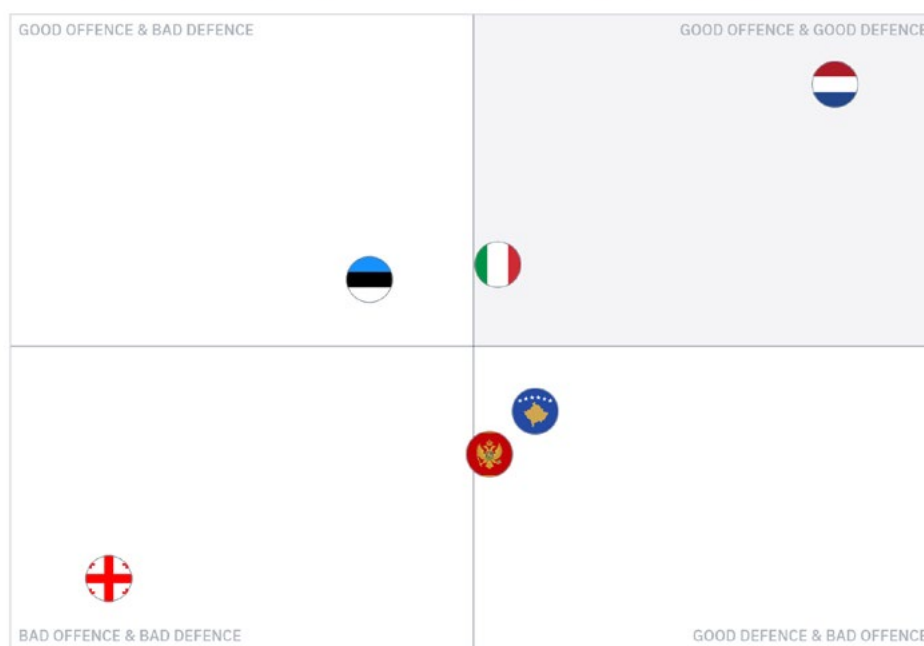
TOURNAMENT – FACTS & FIGURES



TEAM PERFORMANCE

- In tournament I, the Netherlands were the undisputed champions, not only topping the standings on points but also ranking first in almost all statistics analysed (highest attacking efficiency, best defensive efficiency, lowest turnover rate, highest shooting percentage, most 7-metre throws won, most blocked shots, and most fouls committed). The only ranking where the Netherlands were not number one was in steals, where they ranked third.
- Finland's dominance in tournament II was less pronounced, although they led in key areas such as attacking efficiency (57.8 per cent), defensive efficiency (56.3 per cent) and lowest number of turnovers (3.8 per match). In this tournament, the highest attacking and defensive efficiency figures belonged to Luxembourg, at 59.2 per cent and 63.4 per cent, respectively.

Goals scored per 50 possessions vs goals conceded per 50 possessions



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 Kabashi Olt  	RIGHT BACK Marek Skwarczynsky  
LEFT WING Gabriele Somma  	RIGHT WING Knezevic Alexa  
LEFT BACK Markus Leidsaar  	DEFENDER Antonio Capozzoli  
CENTRE BACK Pajaziti Suad  	MVP Marek Skwarczynsky  
LINE PLAYER Pirk Jaan  	TOP SCORER Olsi Mulaj  

ALL-STAR TEAM

CHAMPIONSHIP II

GOALKEEPER Viljo Ukkonen  	RIGHT BACK Bob Mousel  
LEFT WING Benjamin Gagyi  	RIGHT WING Oliver Aalto  
LEFT BACK Tomas Obulany  	DEFENDER Astor Sjöblom  
CENTRE BACK Arne Berglund  	MVP Sacha Dubuc  
LINE PLAYER Zlatomir Kolev  	TOP SCORERS Sacha Dubuc Simon Dupont  

DEFENCE GENERAL ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- Two teams in this tournament relied entirely on a single defensive system, 6-0, although they implemented it in different ways. The Netherlands based their defensive success on a compact 6-0 defence, while Kosovo worked more aggressively within the 6-0 system, putting pressure on both direct and indirect opponents to force errors.
- The other teams in the tournament alternated between 6-0 defence and more open defensive structures (5-1 or 3-2-1), while maintaining the same underlying philosophy. If they did not apply much pressure to attacking players in the 6-0 defence, they maintained the same approach in the 5-1 or 3-2-1, and vice versa.
- Among the teams with a more reactive defensive approach were the Netherlands, Italy and Georgia, while Montenegro, Kosovo and Estonia adopted a more proactive defensive approach, looking to force more errors and anticipate offensive actions.
- Except the Netherlands, who, as already mentioned, dominated all game statistics, the next three best defensive performances came from the three teams that applied more anticipatory defensive systems: Kosovo (55 per cent), Montenegro (52 per cent) and Estonia (51 per cent).
- The best defensive performances helped their teams finish at the top of the standings, as was the case with Netherlands (58 per cent), Estonia (51 per cent) and Kosovo (55 per cent). However, Montenegro, despite having the third-best defensive performance (52 per cent and 167 goals conceded), saw their position in the standings negatively affected by the second-worst offensive performance (44 per cent).

CHAMPIONSHIP II

- The same pattern was observed in the other tournament, with the 6-0 defensive system being the most widely used by all teams. The cases of Luxembourg and Great Britain are particularly noteworthy, as they made very limited use of more open defensive structures, such as the 5-1 or 3-2-1. However, their 6-0 defence was implemented with a highly proactive approach, applying significant pressure to attacking players and, in practice, turning it into a more open defensive system.
- Finland were not only the best team in the tournament, but also conceded the fewest goals across both championships (25.6 goals per match). Their overall success was largely underpinned by their defensive performance (56.3 per cent).
- Belgium saw their final ranking negatively affected by a poor defensive performance, with a defensive efficiency of 49 per cent.
- In this tournament, defensive performance was not as decisive in determining the final standings. Although the champions, Finland, recorded the highest defensive efficiency at 56.3 per cent, the other teams did not show a clear correlation between defensive performance and final ranking (Belgium had the second-best defensive performance, 53.5 per cent, but finished fourth), which may indicate certain imbalances between defensive and offensive performance.

TACTICS – DEFENCE

DEFENCE SYSTEMS



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- The champions, the Netherlands, used a zonal 6-0 defensive system with a reactive approach, with limited anticipatory work but very solid defensive contacts. This allowed them to achieve the best defensive performance both in absolute terms (147 goals conceded) and in defensive efficiency (58 per cent).
- The second-best defensive performance came from Kosovo (156 goals conceded and 55 per cent defensive efficiency). They applied a more proactive approach within the 6-0 defensive system, with defenders applying greater pressure to both direct and indirect opponents in order to force offensive errors.
- The most open defence in this tournament was implemented by Montenegro, who used a highly aggressive 3-2-1 defensive system.
- Against seven-on-six offensive situations, Estonia used a 5-1 defensive system, with the advanced defender looking to disrupt the attacking team's ball circulation and rhythm.



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Finland were crowned champions of this tournament thanks to a very solid 6-0 defence in one-on-one situations, in which they applied defensive pressure to attacking players to disrupt the build-up of the attacking play.
- Finland showed defensive variety whenever the match situation required it and had the necessary skills to open their defensive structure and apply pressure to the attacking play.
- Two of the teams that used more open defensive systems based on anticipating the attacking play were Luxembourg and Great Britain. The two teams topped the steals ranking, with nine and 10, respectively.
- When defending against a seven-on-six attack, Bulgaria used different defensive systems, on some occasions opting for one-to-one defence, leaving five defenders to defend against six attackers. On other occasions, they used a 3-2-1 or 5-1 defence, looking to create defensive depth, while in other situations they defended the seven-on-six system with a 6-0 defence and limited defensive depth.
- It is important to offer different defensive alternatives so that the opposing team cannot adapt in advance.



TACTICS – DEFENCE



GOALKEEPER PERFORMANCE

CHAMPIONSHIP I

- The Netherlands' dominance across all game statistics extended to goalkeeping. Both of their goalkeepers ranked among the top five in terms of saves made and save percentage, with an efficiency almost 10 percentage points higher than that of the second-ranked team. There is no doubt that these figures were aided by the fact that the Netherlands' defence was the best both in absolute terms and in defensive efficiency. Among their two goalkeepers, Mirdдын Tol stood out, finishing the tournament with a 44.4 per cent save efficiency and an S-xS difference of +10 (he saved 10 more shots than expected based on the shooting situations he faced). That efficiency increased to 48.3 per cent when referring only to shots taken from positional play.

CHAMPIONSHIP II

- The best-performing goalkeeper in this tournament was Finland's Viljo Ukkonen. He had an excellent 38.8 per cent save efficiency. In addition, he recorded an S-xS difference of +25.
- At the team level, Finland's goalkeeping unit was one of the most reliable in most game situations, leading the save efficiency rankings in positional play (42.3 per cent – more than 12 percentage points higher than the second-ranked team), fast break situations (62.5 per cent save efficiency – almost 30 percentage points higher than the second-best performance), and on 7-metre throws (20.0 per cent).
- Belgium's goalkeeping performance in fast-break situations is also noteworthy, as they recorded a 40 per cent save efficiency.



TACTICS – OFFENCE



GENERAL OFFENCE ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP I

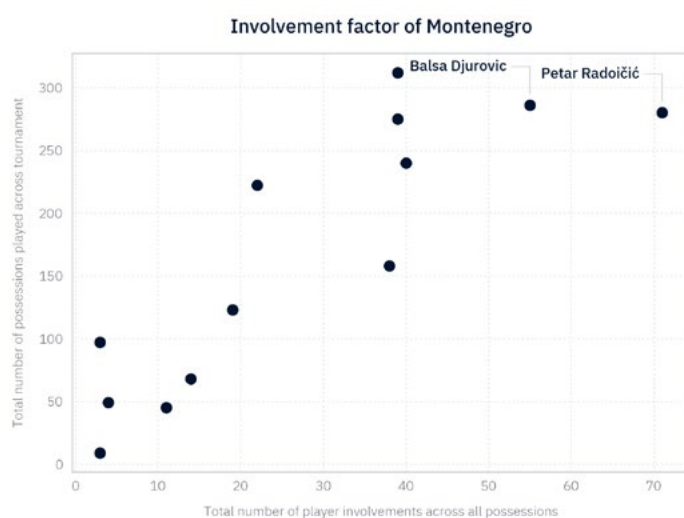
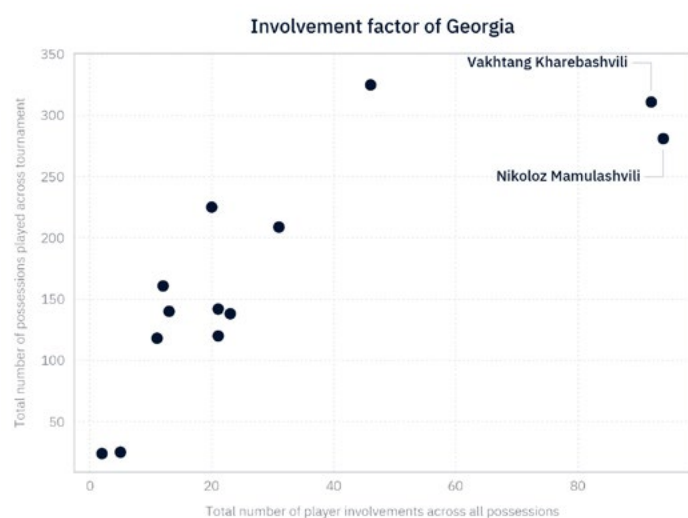
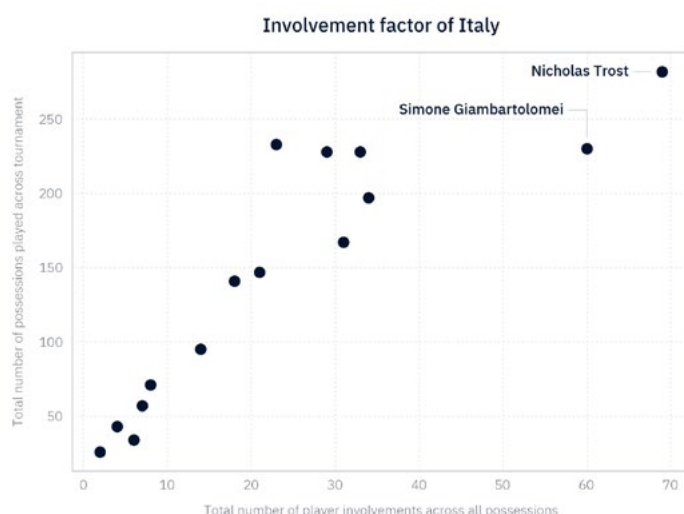
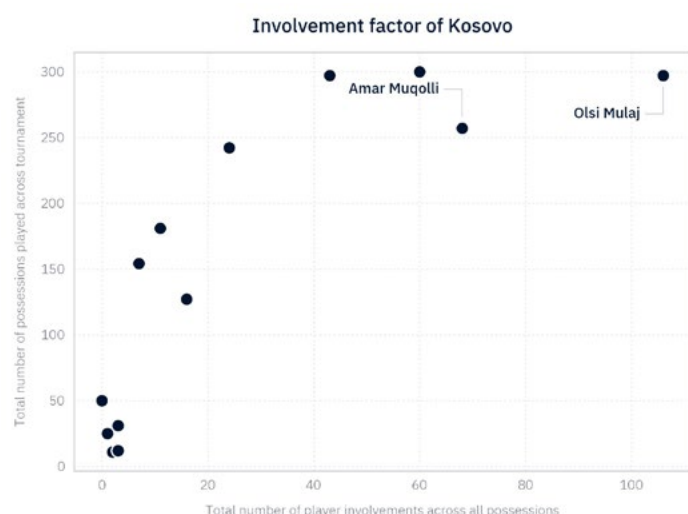
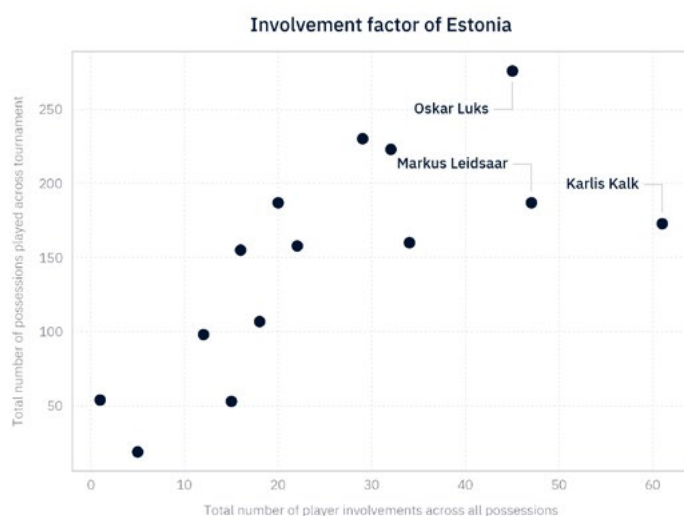
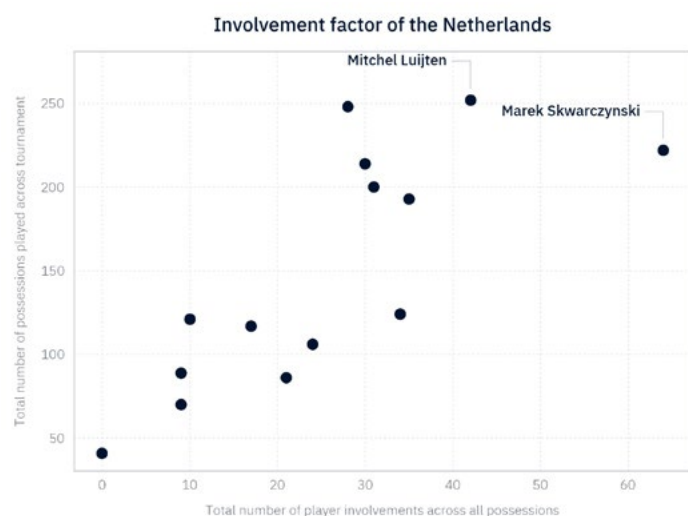
- A total of 1,008 goals were scored in this tournament, averaging 56 goals per match, with an overall shooting efficiency of 60.8 per cent.
- The best offensive performance came from the Netherlands, who scored 199 goals throughout the tournament, an average of 33.2 per match, and had the best G-xG differential (+5).
- The Netherlands' success was also underpinned by their security in possession. They had the lowest turnover rate, at 13.7 per cent. At the other end of the spectrum were Kosovo, with a 29.1 per cent turnover rate, meaning almost one in every three possessions ended in a turnover. This negatively affected Kosovo's final ranking; reducing their number of turnovers could potentially have allowed them to finish higher in the standings.
- The Netherlands made the greatest use of the fast-break phase, with nine per cent fewer positional-play possessions than fast-transition possessions (fast breaks and counterattack). This was one of the key factors behind their final ranking.
- The Netherlands' performance in numerical superiority situations was particularly noteworthy, as they achieved a 70 per cent efficiency.
- Kosovo were the team most dependent on goals scored by their top scorer: Olsi Mulaj accounted for 26.5 per cent of the team's total goals.
- The distribution chart of attacks played and attacks completed by each player highlights the dependence on certain players in some teams. Kosovo and Georgia had a small group of players who were on court for almost every possession, with only a few of them taking responsibility for finishing the attacks. For Kosovo, Olsi Mulaj was clearly the player with the greatest influence on the team's collective play, as he finished the most attacks (196). In Georgia, two players took on the main responsibility for finishing attacks: Vakhtang Kharebashvili (92) and Nikoloz Mamulashvili (94).



TACTICS – OFFENCE

GENERAL OFFENCE ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP I



Involvement factor: Analysis looks at how much the player was involved in the final phase of a possession, including shots, goals, assists and similar actions. Involvement can be positive or negative, such as a missed shot. The chart shows how responsibility is distributed within each team. The furthest players in the top-right corner are the most involved and can therefore be seen as the most “trusted” players.

TACTICS – OFFENCE



GENERAL OFFENCE ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP II

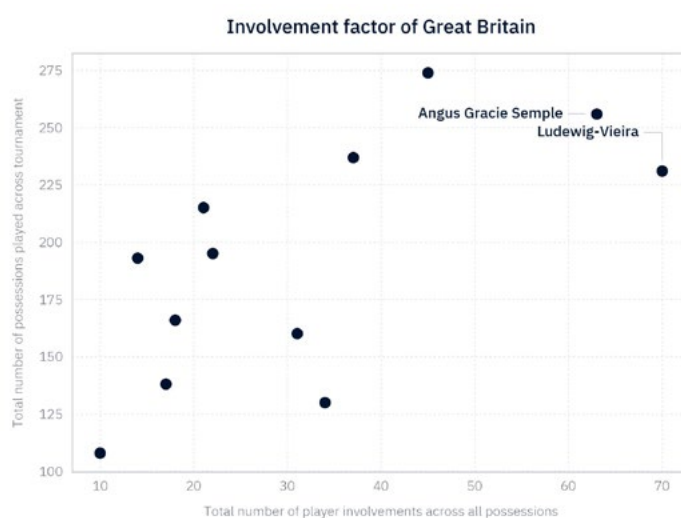
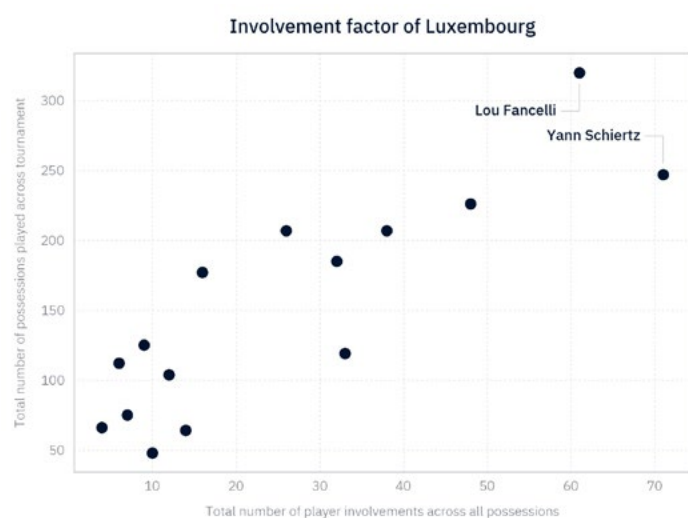
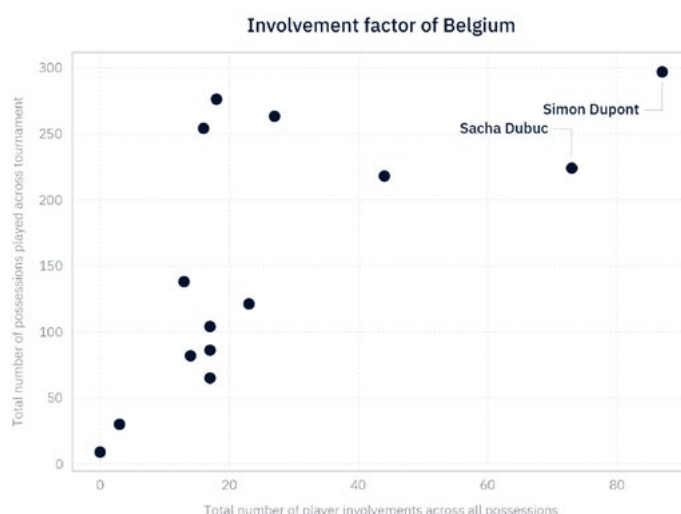
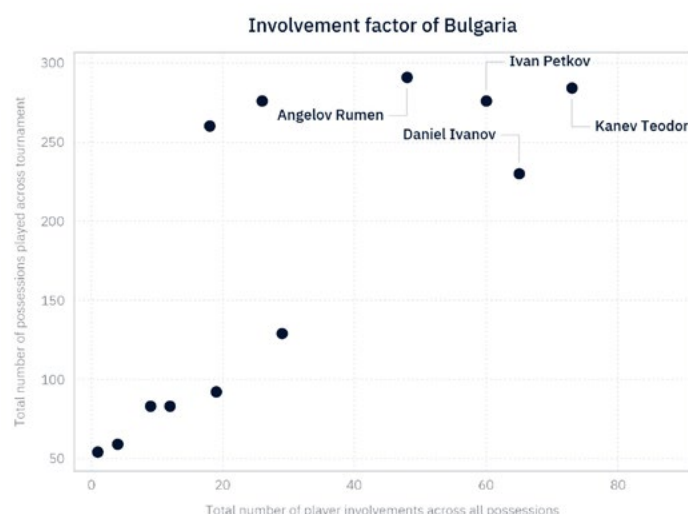
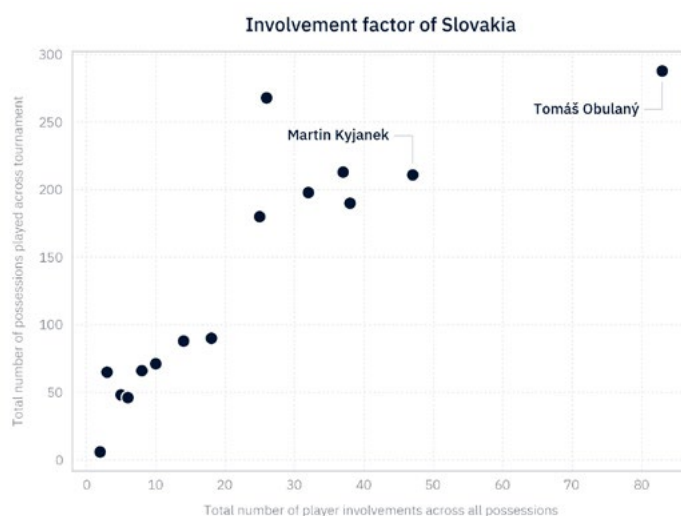
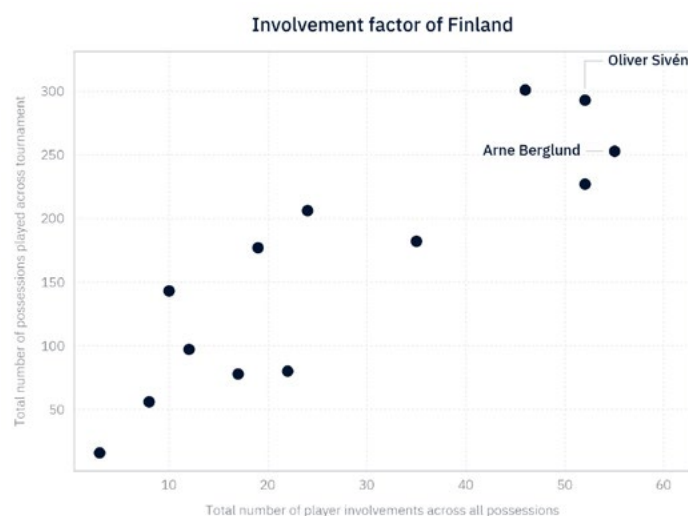
- A total of 1,053 goals were scored in this tournament, averaging 58.5 per match, with an average shooting efficiency of 62.5 per cent.
- Belgium were the top-scoring team in the tournament, with 191 goals, an average of 31.8 per match, thanks to a high shooting efficiency of 73.7 per cent. They were the only team in the group to record a positive G-xG differential, at +8.
- Despite Belgium having the best shooting performance, their final ranking (fourth) was negatively affected by having the highest turnover rate, at 31.4 per cent. They lost almost twice as many possessions as the champions: 41, compared with Finland's 23.
- Bulgaria clearly opted for a more positional style of play, being the team that scored the fewest goals from transition phases, fast breaks and quick throw-offs combined, with a total of eight goals scored via those methods throughout the tournament.
- Belgium made the most of fast transitions, scoring 30 goals that way.
- Belgium scored the most goals in the tournament, but they also concentrated this output more heavily among a small number of players. 45.5 per cent of Belgium's goals were scored by just two players: Sacha Dubuc (44 goals) and Simon Dupont (43 goals).
- The distribution of attacks played and attacks completed in tournament II reveals different patterns. Finland had a very even distribution of offensive finishing, with no excessive reliance on any individual player. Belgium and Bulgaria clearly had six players who were on court for most of the time, while Belgium had two players who assumed greater responsibility for finishing attacks: Simon Dupont (87) and Sacha Dubuc (73). For Slovakia, one player most clearly accounted for a high proportion of the final actions: Tomas Obulany finished 83 attacks.



TACTICS – OFFENCE

GENERAL OFFENCE ASPECTS

CHAMPIONSHIP II



Involvement factor: Analysis looks at how much the player was involved in the final phase of a possession, including shots, goals, assists and similar actions. Involvement can be positive or negative, such as a missed shot. The chart shows how responsibility is distributed within each team. The furthest players in the top-right corner are the most involved and can therefore be seen as the most “trusted” players.

TACTICS – OFFENCE

TACTICAL ASPECT



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- One of the trends becoming increasingly established in modern handball is the search for situations that create favourable opportunities for one-versus-one actions. The Netherlands applied this philosophy both against 6-0 and 5-1 defensive systems. One frequently used option was a late movement by the pivot to fix the defender as close as possible to the goal-area line.
- Most teams looked for more or less direct offensive solutions. The chosen movement was executed with the aim of finding a quick solution. Kosovo frequently showed a more elaborate attacking game, linking several offensive actions to create the final defensive imbalance.
- Estonia were the only team to use an offensive structure with four back players against a 6-0 defence, and only in the match against the Netherlands. It was not particularly successful, as they scored just one goal from the 12 attacks they played in this situation.
- Italy and Montenegro were the two teams that made the greatest use of seven-versus-six attacks, while the other teams either did not use it or did so only sporadically. Italy and Montenegro used different approaches, though both played with two pivots.
- Italy started their seven-versus-six attacking sequences with the pivots already positioned in their designated areas from the outset, whereas Montenegro often began with a movement (generally a centre back-pivot cross) before positioning the pivots in their designated areas.



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Belgium's strong offensive performance was the result of their effective use of the fundamental principles of attacking play: fast ball circulation combined with dynamic player movement, using movements without the ball to create defensive imbalances, effective combination of one-versus-one play and long-range shooting.
- When attacking the 5-1 defensive system, Bulgaria started their attack with a transition by a wing player, who left their position to move into the centre back position.
- Only two teams used seven-versus-six attacks in their offensive play, and both opted to position the two pivots in their designated positions before initiating the attacking sequence. However, differences could be observed in the movement of the back-court players.
- Slovakia normally positioned the two pivots between defenders one and two and between defenders two and three, while the back-court players attacked in a more static way.
- Great Britain positioned their pivots between defenders one and two and between the two central defenders, while the back players' movement was much more dynamic, making extensive use of crossing movements.



TACTICS – OFFENCE

TRANSITION



CHAMPIONSHIP I

- The team that relied most heavily on fast transition play was the Netherlands, undoubtedly supported by having the best defence, but not only because of this, as they were also one of the teams that made the greatest use of fast transitions after conceding a goal. Their fast-transition possessions accounted for 46 per cent of their total possessions, the highest proportion of any team. Likewise, after conceding a goal, the Netherlands completed 11 per cent more actions of this type than the next-ranked team. Combined with the high efficiency they achieved in both situations, these fast-transition actions made a significant contribution to the Netherlands' final result.



CHAMPIONSHIP II

- Luxembourg worked on fast transitions by introducing the seventh player once the attacking phase had already started, looking to create a defensive imbalance and generate offensive numerical superiority situations.



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!



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In modern handball, one-versus-one situations are becoming increasingly important as a means of creating and exploiting an offensive advantage. Consequently, it is essential that players develop a high level of technical proficiency in the execution of feints, together with the physical capacity required to effectively compete in these individual duels.

In addition to efficient and well-coordinated footwork, there is one key technical detail that can significantly influence the outcome of the one-versus-one situation. When the attacker engages the defender in preparation for the feint, the ball-carrying arm must be protected from the defender's control. This allows the attacker to maintain continuity in the attacking action and increases the possibilities of finishing with a shot — even when the attacker has not completely beaten the defender after the change of direction — or playing a pass to a teammate after creating a sufficient defensive imbalance to attract or force defensive assistance.

Regardless of whether the attacker performs a left-right feint or right-left feint, the ball-carrying arm should be moved over the defender's arms. This ensures that, even if the defender succeeds in establishing body contact and controlling the attacker's movement, the arm controlling the ball remains free. The attacker can therefore maintain ball possession and continue the attacking sequence with either a shot or a pass. At the beginning of the feint, the ball can be controlled low and close to the body (photos 1 and 3). During the change of direction, the ball-carrying arm is then brought over the defender's arms (photos 2 and 4). This movement protects the ball from defensive contact while allowing the attacker to maintain continuity and exploit the advantage created by the one-versus-one action.



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



The technical aspects of feints outlined above can be effectively developed through targeted training exercises. The following exercise, provided by Learn Handball, an EHF cooperation partner, offers a practical approach to integrating these elements into training and supporting players in developing their feinting skills.

Feints: left-right feint



Left-right feint: Emily Bölk



PLAYERS TO WATCH



CHAMPIONSHIP I

Marek Skwarczynski

Position: Right back

Year of birth: 2006

Club: ATSV Habenhausen (GER)

Goals: 42 (average seven per game)

Shooting efficiency: 78 per cent

Assists: Nine



- The right back played all six matches, averaging seven goals per match with an excellent 78 per cent shooting efficiency, in addition to providing nine assists. His +12 G-xG differential is also worth highlighting, indicating a high level of offensive performance. He was involved in a total of 64 attacks, taking the final action in 28.3 per cent of them.

CHAMPIONSHIP II

Sacha Dubuc

Position: Centre back

Year of birth: 2006

Club: HC Sprimont (BEL)

Goals: 43 (average seven per game)

Shooting efficiency: 75 per cent

Assists: 15



- His 43 goals across the six matches (7.17 per match), combined with a 75 per cent shooting efficiency and 15 assists, demonstrate an excellent offensive performance, further supported by his positive G-xG differential of +10 goals. 73 times, he was involved in the final action of the attack (with either a positive or negative outcome), accounting for 32.6 per cent of all attacks he played.

Viljo Ukkonen

Position: Goalkeeper

Year of birth: 2006

Club: IFK Handball Helsinki (FIN)

Saves: 66 (average of 11 per match)

Goals: Two

Saving efficiency: 39 per cent



- The goalkeeper made an excellent contribution to his team's overall success, averaging 11 saves per match with a 42.7 per cent save efficiency — outstanding figures to maintain across six matches. His S-xS differential was the highest in the championship, at +13. His 50 per cent save efficiency on 7-metre throws is also worth highlighting.





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