

## ROMANIA'S HANDBALL TEAM OFFENCE PLAY AT THE EHF EURO 2018

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**Abstract.** *The aim of the present research is to give details about the offence play of the Romanian Women's Handball Team participating in the EHF Euro 2018 held in France. This study focuses on the opening systems played by the mentioned team in the tournament for normal 6:6 situations, but also for special situations such as numerical superiority and inferiority. A wide variety of 7 opening systems was almost equally used during the competition. From different kinds of crosses (simple, double or long crosses) between the 9-m players, or a cross between playmaker and line player to transitions of a wing with or without the ball, or playmaker transition, the main purpose of these systems played as single or in combinations was to bring players back in the middle and create the possibility to decide whether to shoot from a distance, play 1:1 situations with the direct defender, or play 2:2 situations while working together with a line player. A total number of 432 attacks were counted in the 8 matches played, out of which 381 ended with a shot, and 213 goals were scored. Romania finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of the most goals scored at the EHF Euro 2018.*

**Keywords:** *handball, women, offence, EHF Euro.*

### Introduction

Between 29 November and 16 December 2018, the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the European Women's Handball Championship was organized. Fifteen teams managed to qualify for the tournament, besides France, which hosted the event. The finals in Paris were watched by more than 15,000 spectators.

The national team of Romania qualified for a European Championship for the 12<sup>th</sup> time, after having passed the qualification games against the team of Austria. After 4 wins and 4 defeats, Romania finished the tournament in 4<sup>th</sup> place, after France, Russia and Holland.

Going through all possible situations, Romania showed the ability to play top-level handball based on highly structured offence, pressing defence and two goalkeepers (GK) who were in very good shape, although very young.

The team was managed by Martin Ambros, the Spanish coach of the Romanian Women's Team since October 2016. His technical staff also included the assistant coach Horațiu Pașca, the goalkeepers' coach Jaume Fort Mauri and the video analyst Radu Cheregi.

The success of an offensive action during a handball match depends not only on the mechanical or physical aspects of the player, but also on the ability of teams and individuals to adjust their behaviours to the changes that occur over time in the offensive context of the handball game (Constantini, 2002, p. 46).

Because the coach-player interaction always reflects a particular teaching behaviour, a particular learning behaviour and particular sets of objectives that should be reached (Tuma, 2016, p. 84), the Spanish "touch" could be easily detected in the strategy of the team for both offence and defence sectors.

Romania's offence showed improvement in the past. Elaborated and trained opening systems were constantly used in order to bring the players in the positions where they could use their best abilities and knowledge.

The present research has a theme already debated by the field specialists (Baur, 2017; Vărzaru, 2015), the papers found in this regard addressing both national team competitions and European club competitions.

All data collected through game analysis prove to be important, as many different specialists conclude. Pollany (2006) says that post-game analyses aim to assess performance of a team in that game, while mass analyses following a specific season, tournament or championship present the success or failure of the teams, while König (2010) states that analyses are the key factors of general audit and periodisation assessment, which could shape the scope of training programmes.

### *Purpose of the study*

The main purpose of the present paper is to analyse the offence play of the Romanian Women's Handball Team during the EHF Euro 2018, highlighting details about:

- the opening systems used – description and purpose;

- the frequency of using the opening systems;
- scoring efficiency;
- special situations of inferiority and superiority.

**Material and Methods**

The subjects of the present research are the female handball players of the Romanian national team participating in the EHF Euro 2018.

Romania was present at the tournament with 17 players. Of these, 3 were at their first final tournament for seniors. Because Cristina Neagu was injured, the young Bianca Bazaliu joined the team for the semi-finals and finals of the event.

In order to collect the data needed for the research, we used video analysis. All 8 games played were recorded and watched, with a focus on the offensive phase.

We also used the official website of the EHF Euro 2018 in order to collect statistical data about the same phase of the games played by Romanian team.

For the analysis of the collected data, mathematical indicators such as sum and average were used, and graphical representation helped us to present a much clearer picture of the results.

**Results**

Table 1. *Number of offence actions and goals by phase and special situations*

	Goals/Shots	%	6:6	%	5:6	%	6:5	%	FB	%
1st round	81/138	58%	65/130	50%	7/14	50%	8/10	80%	10/17	58%
2nd round	70/148	47%	57/118	48%	5/14	36%	7/10	70%	9/18	50%
Final round	42/95	44%	35/72	50%	5/16	32%	1/4	25%	5/8	63%
Total	213/381	56%	157/320	49%	17/44	39%	16/24	67%	24/43	59%

\*For the 6:6, 5:6, 6:5 and FB, all attacks were counted, whether they ended with a shooting situation, a penalty, or a mistake.

A total number of 432 attacks were counted for Romania in a tournament where the team succeeded to go all the way to the finals and played 8 games. Of these offences, 381 ended with a shooting situation, and 213 goals were scored, positioning Romania 4<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of the most goals scored in the competition, after Norway, Russia and France.

Table 1 shows the number of offences played in the 4<sup>th</sup> offence phase and fast phases, but also the number of goals and actions counted for special situations of inferiority and superiority.

320 offence actions were played in the usual 4<sup>th</sup> offence phase, meaning 75% of all attacks. Fast phases, such as contra or the second phase, were counted for Romania 43 times, during which 24 goals were scored (59% scoring percentage).

In the tournament, Romania got 25 suspensions and, in this period, 44 attacks were played. Poor efficiency was recorded, as only 17 goals were scored in this special situation. When being in inferiority, Romania decided to take the GK out and played with an equal number of players in offence for every situation of this kind. Long attacks were always played, all the inferiority offence starting with crossing between back and wing on both sides and only after Romania started to play an opening system. When talking about superiority, Romania found itself 24 times in this situation. 16 goals were scored from 24 actions, with an efficiency of 67%.

The team of Romania had a highly elaborated offence at the EHF Euro 2018 held in France.

Table 2 shows the frequency of using the opening systems during the competition.

Table 2. *Counting of Romania's opening systems*

Name of actions	6:6 play	5:6 play	6:5 play	Total
A: Cross between playmaker and line player	53	11	15	79
B: Back in the middle	53	8	4	65
C: Transition of a wing with the ball	48	1	3	52
D: Different crosses between 9-m players	46	1	3	50
E: Transition of a wing without the ball	58	2	2	62
F: PM (second line player) transition	21	3	8	32

G: press play	42	5	3	50
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A number of 7 opening systems were played almost equally in the tournament, as single openings or combined. Though, the most used opening system was the cross between playmaker and line player. The “A” combination was used 79 times, filling 20% of Romania’s attacks. Back in the middle and transition of the wing without the ball were the next two most used opening systems (65 and 63 times, respectively). The percentage of each opening system used in the Romanian offence is presented in Figure 1.

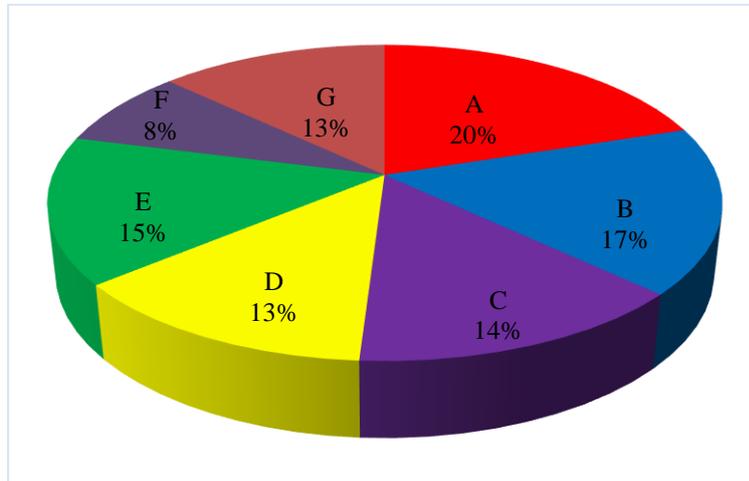


Figure 1. Use of the opening systems

The explanation and the strategy behind each opening system used in the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the offence will be presented below (Figure 2).

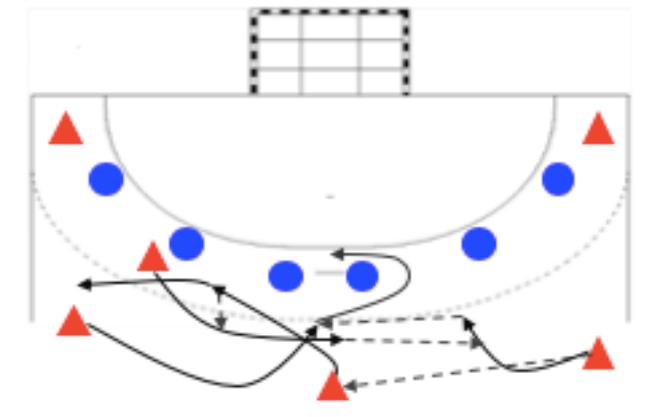


Figure 2. “A” opening system

The “A” opening system is a cross between playmaker and line player. The succession of passes and players’ movement is as follows:

- line player positioned on defender no. 2;
- cross between playmaker and line player;
- line player passes to the opposite back (right back) and runs between defenders no. 2 and 3 on the opposite side;
- right back passes the ball to the left back who comes to the middle of the field.

The strategy behind the “A” opening system is to bring a back player in the middle, where a split defence can be played out by a 1:1 situation, where a strong back player can overcome the direct defence player, or a 2:2 situation, where the back player positioned in the middle of the field works together with the line player.



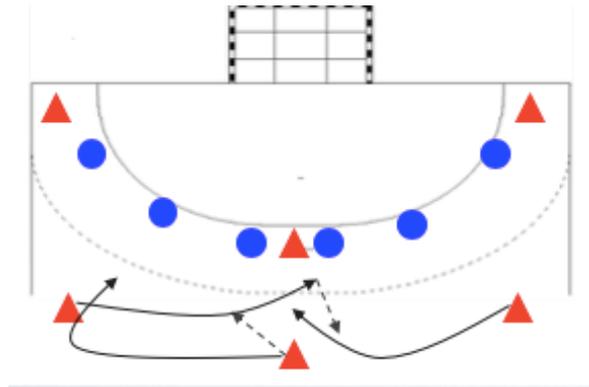


Figure 5. "D" opening system

All kinds of crosses were used by the Romanian team in their offence, as simple cross between playmaker and back, double cross (as shown in Figure 5) or long cross between the two backs. This opening system was also used many times as a continuation of the "A", "B" or "E" opening systems.

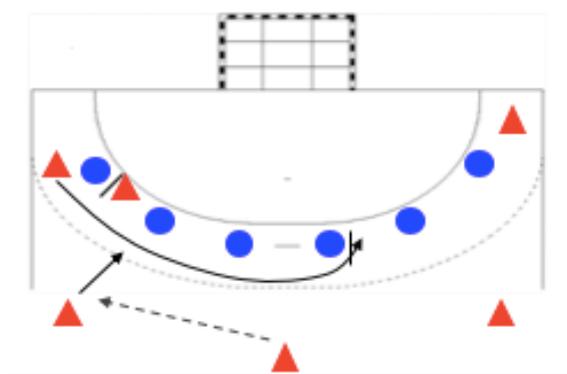


Figure 6. "E" opening system

The "E" opening system shown in Figure 6 is about a wing transition without the ball. The succession of passes and player movement is as follows:

- line player positioned on defender no. 1, on the side from where the wing will run;
- in the same time with the pass from playmaker to left back, left wing runs in front of the defence and positions herself between defenders no. 2 and 3 on the opposite side of the field.

The most used opening system in the 6:6 play was the transition of a wing without the ball, as described in Figure 6. The purpose of this move is first to get a 2:2 situation with the back and line player, who is positioned on the first defender. Because a wing player usually occupies position no. 1 in defence, a strong line player, such as Crina Pintea, could win the 1 against 1 battle many times. She was well served by Cristina Neagu from the left back position, and many Romanian goals were scored in this situation.

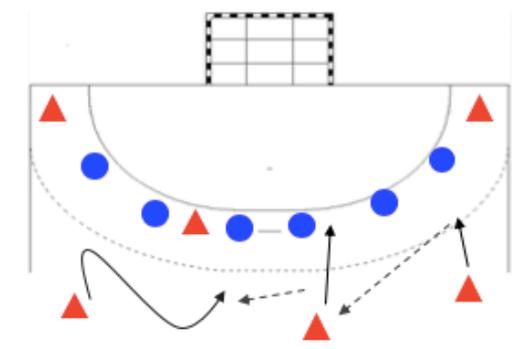


Figure 7. "F" opening system

Figure 7 shows the “F” opening system and is about the playmaker transition as the second line player. The succession of passes and player movement is as follows:

- line player positioned between defenders no. 2 and 3 on the right side of the defence;
- right back passes the ball to playmaker after attacking wide;
- playmaker passes the ball to the left back and runs at the 6-m line as a second line player, between no. 2 and 3, on the left side of the defence;
- left back attacks the right defender no. 3.

The desirable situation, in the case of the playmaker transition showed and explained above, is to have one of the backs attacking the middle defender who is isolated on a very large zone, because of the position of the two line players.

## Conclusion

A total number of 432 attacks were counted in the 8 matches played, out of which 381 ended with a shot and 213 goals were scored. Romania finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of the most goals scored in the competition.

During these attack actions, 7 different opening systems were tried alone or in a combination: transition of a wing with the ball, transition of a wing without the ball, transition of the playmaker, cross between playmaker and line player, simple or double crosses between 9-m line players, back player in the middle, or press play. The main purpose of almost all these actions was to bring a back player, especially Cristina Neagu, in the middle of the field, because of her ability in making the right decision: to shoot from a distance, play 1:1 with the direct defender, or play 2:2 situations while working together with the line player, mostly Crina Pintea.

When playing special situations of numerical superiority and inferiority, Romania decided to use one of the mentioned opening systems. Though, the efficiency of this playing situation was not at the highest level possible. Only 39% efficiency was recorded for the actions played in inferiority, and 67%, for superiority.

Playmaker Eliza Buceschi and back player Cristina Neagu finished second and third in the top scorer ranking, with 45 and 44 goals scored, while line player Crina Pintea was awarded the trophy for the best line player of the competition. Moreover, Cristina Neagu became the best scorer ever at a European Championship, surpassing the Hungarian Agnes Farkas.

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