

Women's Handball WCh (III)

Definitive Quantum Leap to Become a Global Sport

The 1990 title contests were organised in South Korea – for the first time women staged their championship in a non-European country. Novelty let its mark on that championship, as the world experienced a period of political changes. Germany had been officially reunified on 3 October 1990 – yet there were two German teams to participate in the tournament two months later, since both the GDR and the FRG had qualified. Host South Korea, which had caused a sensation two years before to win Olympic gold, was considered the favourite but had to be content with 11th place in the end. The final saw the USSR meet Yugoslavia (a fixture which should never happen again). The title defender won by 24:22 to grab its third consecutive WCh victory but the first one without Sinaida Turtschina. And the match for the bronze saw a juicy duel between the East German team and the West German one where the team from the Eastern part prevailed.

Norway hosted the next title contests in 1993. On home soil, the handball-crazed Scandinavians were eager to finally win the title for their home country of the fjords. The favourites that were the host team, Denmark and somewhat surprisingly the joint team of Czechoslovakia, which made its last appearance, set trends to make a clean sweep and thus to qualify for the main round. Russia's women – successors of multiple title winner USSR - struggled throughout the tournament, however, proved the tip of the scale, as they managed a 19:14 main round victory over the host team. That defeat kissed away the host's dream of winning the title. In fact, it overcame Denmark but the team headed by Anja Andersen, the new star, provided a better goal difference to secure a spot in the final. The second main round group provided high tension too. Due to its preliminary round defeat to Romania Germany ranked third to qualify for the main round then outclassed Czechoslovakia, the USA and Austria. So the DHB squad guided by coach Lothar Doering, Olympic champion himself in 1980, advanced to the final. Norway claimed a 20:19 victory over Romania to win the bronze. The Oslo final had been the most exciting one of all women's WCh finals so far. 60 minutes of regular playing time were not enough to establish the new World Champion. Denmark's women indeed were predominant but the Germans did not allow the Danes to break away. During overtime Doering put in Karen Heinrich, whose performance had not been that remarkable in the course of the tournament so far but whose goals finally decided the match. Germany won by 22:21 after overtime. It was the fourth title for a German team that could call itself sole record World Champion again.

Novelties set the trend at the next title contests two years later, which had been awarded to Austria and Hungary. 20 teams instead of 16, which had previously been admitted, participated in the final tournament. Four groups of five national teams each competed in the preliminary round. The three top teams qualified for the eighth-finals; so-called "cross matches" were staged to establish the remaining four eighth-finalists. The favourites finally prevailed. In the quarter-finals, European teams were again on their own, except for South Korea. While, as part of the placement matches, the teams defeated in the eighth-finals competed for the best place in order to gain a ticket for the 1996 Olympic Games to be staged in Atlanta, the tournament approached its climax during the semi-finals. Denmark and Norway were the renowned favourites but the team from South Korea, which had already excelled in the preliminaries and the quarter-finals where it had secured two victories over title defender Germany, beat Denmark by 33:31 in a high-speed game you had never witnessed before in women's handball. Co-host Hungary earned a close 22:21 win over

Norway. As previously fixed by the hosts the final was staged in Vienna New Town. Bereft of their home advantage, the Hungarians conceded a clear 20:25 defeat against South Korea, as they had no means to unsettle the top-speed whirl of the Asian side. So the Koreans provided another milestone in the history of women's handball: After its Olympic victories in 1988 and 1992 the team was the first non-European one to be recorded in the list of World Champions.

Yet, the 1995 title contests could be named a transitional WCh, as, two years later in Germany, 24 teams participated in the title contests. The number of participants has been valid to date and is identical to that of the men's title contests.

Four preliminary round groups of six teams each competed to establish the four top teams of each group which qualified for the eighth-finals. Some favourites like Romania, Austria and Hungary dropped out of the competition at that stage. The quarter-finals in Germany proved to be the hangmen of the tournament, since title defender South Korea and Croatia alike had to give in. The semi-finals and finals were staged in Berlin, the German capital. The so far unbeaten host team headed by coach Ekke Hoffmann lost 23:25 to Norway. Then something inconceivable happened: A drunken spectator stabbed two Danish fans to death. The host and the organiser were on the verge of abandoning the WCh but then mutually agreed to continue the title contests. Denmark made through to the final where it claimed a surprisingly clear 33:20 victory over Norway in a pure Scandinavian final while Germany won by 27:25 against Russia to gain the bronze.

The finalists of the 1997 WCh couldn't have done any better for the promotion of the coming title contests in their home countries. Denmark and Norway invited the world of handball to Northern Europe for the last WCh of the 20th century. The tournament format remained unchanged: four preliminary round groups of six teams each in order to have a first range of selection. Czech Republic was eliminated, however, Belarus advanced to the eighth-finals. The round of the top eight was disillusioning for co-host Denmark. The Danes lost to France. Germany, Macedonia and Hungary alike dropped out of the struggle for medals. The host outclassed Germany-conqueror Austria, the sporting upset of the tournament, by 30:18. France closely overcame Romania by 18:17 and thus had saved at least the silver medal already. And it finally gained silver but two overtime periods were necessary to know this. France had taken a 10:8 lead after 30 minutes. The score was 18:18 after 60 minutes of the regular playing time and 21:21 after the first overtime period. With the 7m shoot-out looming Norway finally completed the match successfully to win by 25:24.