

Women's Handball WCh (II)

GDR and USSR predominant sides in the 1970s and 80s

Two teams dominated women's handball in the 70s and 80s: the GDR and the USSR. The Eastern German women started their sweep at the 1971 tournament staged in the Netherlands, representing a turning point in women's handball. The number of participating teams had again increased compared to the tournament held six years before in Western Germany. The format changed so that the nine participants competed in three preliminary round groups consisting of three teams each. The two top teams of each group made through to the two main round groups followed by the finals and placement matches. The GDR secured an 11:8 victory over strong Yugoslavia; Hungary won bronze. Two years later the Eastern Germans were one of those deeply disappointed at the tournament in Yugoslavia, as the title defenders conceded a defeat against the emerging handball nation, the USSR, and drew with Poland to miss the qualification to the main round short by one goal as for the goal difference to come in 9th in the final ranking. Host Yugoslavia managed to gain the WCh title on home soil. A brilliant feat because Yugoslavia lost its main round match to Poland but succeeded in overcoming the Soviet Union 7:5. The team of coach Igor Turtschin drew 10:10 with Denmark to stumble but was rewarded by bronze in the very end. Yugoslavia prevailed 16:11 against Romania in the final to reproduce their finalists' 1962 feat in winning the WCh title on home soil. For the first time 12 participants competed in the tournament. The upswing of women's handball was obvious.

This was valid for the 1975 WCh too. Many people expected the Soviet Union to gain the title at the tournament which was organised in the USSR for the first time. Yet, the GDR proved to be stronger in the end. The fact that the World Champion was unable to beat the later Vice-World Champion did leave its mark on the 1975 title contests and those in 1978 and 1982. It was due to the tournament format that provided for a preliminary round including 12 participants and a final round including the six top teams. The host drew with the GDR 10:10 in the USSR but lost to Hungary. Apart from that the Eastern Germans swept the final round to celebrate their second title after 1971. A similar situation occurred three years later at the title contests in Czechoslovakia. The title defenders coming from Berlin, Leipzig and Magdeburg in fact lost 12:14 to the Soviet women headed by Sinaida Turtschina but those had messed up their preliminary round match against CSSR – so that the team led by coach Pit Kretzschmar won its third title in the 70s to underline its predominance. Two women let their marks on the tournament: Waltraud Kretzschmar from Leipzig, team captain and wife of the GDR coach, and Sinaida Turtschina from Kiev, who was married to head coach Igor Turtschin. Both women not only added distinction to their national teams but also made valuable contribution to their club teams in Leipzig and Kiev. The period between 1975 and 1978 marked another turning point of women's handball, as female handball players debuted at the Montreal Olympic Games. The USSR team proved predominant there similar to its performance at the Games on home soil four years ahead. In 1982, another two years ahead, the Soviet selection team finally managed to win the WCh title. Although the USSR lost 12:14 to host Hungary in the final round, in which the six top teams competed, it was already clear at that point that Turtschina & Co. became the new World Champions. Yugoslavia won the bronze medal. Title defender GDR had to be content with fourth place and without a medal. Another team made its WCh debut – the national team of South Korea. Following appearance of Tunisia and the USA in 1975 the Asian side and Congo proved that women's handball had become a worldwide sport beyond Europe for quite a while in the 1970s and 80s.

This might be the reason why the number of participants was increased from 12 teams to 16 at the 1986 WCh. Some teams walked a rocky road. Caused by their boycott at the Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games, some of those formerly best teams had to undergo the qualification. Yet, the team of the USSR climbed on the winner's rostrum again in the very end. The team headed by Sinaida Turtschina clearly won by 30:22 against the CSSR in a classic final. The ambitious Norwegian team secured bronze. Turtschina thus gained her second WCh gold medal; the USSR defended its title – a feat sole the GDR had already achieved.