

History of Men's Handball World Championships

Part II 1961 – 1970

The sixties brought the final breakthrough for indoor handball – whereas outdoor handball became more and more unimportant, so that the end of outdoor handball on world championship level happened just in this decade.

After 1958, the teams participating in the WCh travelled to Germany again, but this time to the Federal Republic. 12 teams had qualified for the tournament. From a historical point of view, it is worth mentioning that the USSR (and its successor states CIS and Russia) didn't qualify in 1961 (afterwards they always took part until the WCh in Sweden) and that in 1990, Germany participated with an all-German team for the last time before German reunification. The host achieved a rather disappointing result, only placing 4th. After two victories in the preliminary round, they were defeated by Romania 9:12 in the second of four main round matches. Although the Southeast Europeans, who were knocked out in the preliminary round three years before, were beaten by CSSR, they finished second in the preliminary round group and reached the main round, in which they became stronger. In addition to the victory over the host, they also won the matches against Denmark and Norway and thus reached the final. Czechoslovakia tied with Iceland, but beat Sweden and France in the main round – they were the second finalist. Sweden prevailed against Germany in the small final and took bronze. The title of the 4th indoor handball world championship went to the Romanians, who defeated CSSR in a dramatic final 9:8 after two extra time periods.

Two years later, the outdoor handball players wanted to show in Switzerland that their handball version also proved popular beyond Central Europe and Scandinavia. Eight teams participated, including for the first (and only) time two non-European teams (USA and Israel). They played in two groups of four in the round-robin system, followed by the placement matches. It was therefore no surprise that GDR and FRG met in the final, but rather the logical consequence of the continuing popularity of outdoor handball in both German states. GDR clearly defeated FRG in the final 14:7; host Switzerland took bronze.

In 1964, CSSR organized the 5th handball WCh. After two silver medals at the world championships in 1958 and 1961, the hosts hoped to win the WCh in their own country. In preliminary round group C, everything went according to plan for CSSR, as they won their three matches. The matches of the other preliminary round groups were all the more interesting. In group A, Yugoslavia tied with both FRG and GDR 14:14, but defeated the USA, whereas FRG beat GDR in the "brother duel", who were therefore knocked out in the preliminary round. In group B, Sweden, Hungary and Iceland all had 4:2 points, so that Iceland had to be eliminated due to a worse goal difference. In contrast, only two points were enough in group D to reach the main round. The USSR seized the opportunity, whereas Japan and Norway were eliminated with 2:4 preliminary round points. All three teams were defeated by title holder Romania, who also blasted the hopes of host CSSR in the main round, narrowly winning the rematch of the 1961 final 16:15. Their opponents in the final were the Swedes, who lost against Germany, but finally were in luck, as the team of the German Handball Federation failed against Hungary and the preliminary round

tie with Yugoslavia was also included in the score. CSSR prevailed over FRG (22:15) in the small final, whereas Romania won the final (25:22) and thus defended the title.

In 1966, Austria hosted the next outdoor handball world championship – it became the last one. Indoor handball had prevailed, benefiting from the independence of weather conditions, the better floor and the higher speed of the game. Only six national teams took part in the event in the Alpine republic, so that the tournament mode was changed. The teams played in one group in the round-robin system. Three matches each were played on the first four match days, followed by two matches on the fifth match day. On the last match day of the WCh, the tournament favourites FRG and GDR met. They tied 15:15, so that the title, due to the better goal difference, was awarded to the Federal Republic, who scored 105:53 goals, whereas GDR scored 90:49 goals. Host Austria took the bronze medal. This tournament marked the end of outdoor handball world championships, which were largely dominated by the Germans. Only at the first WCh after World War II, when the Germans were excluded from the tournament, Sweden benefitted from the situation and could secure the title.

The Swedes were also the ones who hosted the 6th handball WCh in 1967. As in 1964, 16 teams participated and the tournament mode was changed again. The beginning remained the same: four preliminary round groups had four teams each. The best two teams of each group qualified for the next round, which was no longer the main round, but the quarter-final. This is how it came that two group winners (Yugoslavia and FRG) were eliminated after the quarter-finals. The same happened to host Sweden, after the clear 11:18 defeat against CSSR. In the semi-finals, Czechoslovakia finally celebrated a 19:17 victory against bogey team and title holder Romania, and reached the final, in which they met Denmark, who had won against Yugoslavia in the quarter-finals and afterwards defeated the Soviet Union 17:12. Romania won the third-place play-off against USSR 21:19 after extra time and took the bronze medal, whereas Czechoslovakia succeeded in winning their first title in their third final, beating Denmark 14:11.

At the next world championship, which took place in France three years later, the tournament mode remained basically unchanged, but the IHF decided to include a round for those teams which were ranked third after the preliminary round, to play for the places 9 to 12. In the quarter-finals, Denmark took revenge on CSSR for the loss suffered in the 1967 final and knocked out the title holder. In the German duel, GDR defeated FRG 18:17 after extra time. Romania and Yugoslavia also reached the semi-final, in which GDR eliminated Yugoslavia 17:13, whereas Romania beat Denmark 18:12. Yugoslavia once again showed a great performance in the small final and outclassed the Danes (29:12). In Paris, Romania and GDR played a thrilling final, in which the fans had to show a lot of patience. It was not until the second extra time period that the Romanians won the rather low-scoring match (13:12) and thus the title.