

# Allez les bleus - European champions



France has written a little bit of handball history in Vienna - Les bleus are the first team ever to hold the world, Olympic and now the European title at the same time. In the EURO final in a packed-out Wiener Stadthalle, France beat Croatia 25:21 in a very close match played at the very highest level. This is France's second EURO title after winning in Switzerland in 2006. The Croats have lost their fourth consecutive final (EURO and World Championship) since 2004 – and still have to wait for their first EURO title.

## Red & white in Vienna

The atmosphere in the Stadthalle was brilliant and vibrant. Thousands of Croatian fans in their traditional red and white, singing and shouting for their team.

The French supporters may have been outnumbered but they pushed their team throughout the match.

The first half was equal, with some advantages for Croatia. They avoided the furious French counter attacks through their very fast “reverse gear”. And they played much more constructively than France.

The current Olympics champions were very slow in attack at the beginning, but could rely on the individual class of players like Nikola Karabatic, who hit the back of the net three times in the first 30 minutes. Both goalkeepers, Mirko Allilovic and Thierry Omeyer, were superb between the posts.

When the Croatians extended their lead to 12:9, the arena went crazy – but France kept calm and cool and equalised through three consecutive goals before the break, and after several individual mistakes in offense.

## France take lead

As expected, it was the defensive performances of both sides that dominated the game.

But it was the “French wall” that stood strong in the first period of the second half. The Croats could not find a way through and were unlucky with their shots.

Thanks to this, France turned the match within eight minutes, scored four goals with just one reply and took the score to 17:13.

The French then fell back on their experience and slowed down the game and waited for their chances to come, taking full advantage of two penalty saves from Omeyer.

## Karabatic finds his form

The two sides kept the 10,000 spectators on the edge of their seats. The Croats fought hard and France received several suspensions (including the second against Karabatic) and penalties against them.

In the 49th minute, the game was completely open again, as Balic reduced the gap to 18:19 after some great saves from Allilovic.

Right at this crucial moment, when the Croats were close to turning the match again, Vedran Mataija received a red card after a foul against Karabatic.

With one player more on court, France scored three times in a row and sealed the Croats' fate. An outstanding Karabatic decided the game with his sixth goal and the score at 24:20.

## France do the 'triple'

It was the French dancing on the court at the end of the match as the Croats left with their heads hanging low.

France defeated Croatia in the final of the EHF EURO 2010 and took their third major title. France are now European, Olympic and world champions.