

29.01.2017 09:00 Uhr - Weltmeisterschaft - Finale - PR France 2017

France ready to defend world title on home soil, but Norway want to crush the party

Just as at the 2015 IHF World Championship in Qatar, two teams with very different histories will meet to contest the title in the ultimate match at France 2017. The final will, therefore, be a question of experience versus hunger to record a first big success, but considering that both teams have shown excellent form, it is impossible to predict whether Norway's motivation will be enough to topple the hosts in front of a sell-out crowd supporting Les Experts.

France are one of the most successful national teams in the history of handball, with five IHF World Championship trophies (1995, 2001, 2009, 2011 and 2015), two consecutive Olympic titles won in 2008 and 2012, and three gold medals at European championships (2006, 2010 and 2014). Aside from their numerous gold medals France have made regular appearances in other positions on the podium in the last 15 years in particular - while Norway have yet to claim any medal at a major international championship.

Prior to 2016, Norway had never finished higher than sixth at any international championship, but at the EHF EURO in January of that year, they made history with a fourth-place finish. On the way to the EURO medal round, Norway were responsible for ending France's dream of defending their 2014 title. The young Scandinavian side beat the then Olympic, world and EURO champions 29:24 in the final match of the main round, leaving France to hope for a certain goal difference in the last Group I match between Croatia and Poland - which did not end the way the 25th IHF World Championship hosts hoped.

Before the EHF EURO 2016, Norway had not ranked above France at any championship since the 1964 World Championship - and had not beaten Les Experts in a head-to-head match at an official tournament since 1961. The overall balance at official competitions stands at five wins for France and three for Norway, with one victory each inside the last 12 months.

Most recently France defeated Norway 31:28 in preliminary round Group A, and coach Didier Dinart thinks his players are now feeling less pressure than they did earlier in the tournament. Speaking after their semi-final win before their opponent for the trophy match was known Dinart stated: 'That pressure is gone. We have met the expectations for this World Championship - we had to make the final. We suffered a lot in the quarter-finals, I think that was tougher than the semi-final. Now we will play one of two teams: one of them beat us in the Olympic Games and the other knocked us out at the EURO 2016. Norway played a very tough match against us in the preliminary round in Nantes.'

Four-time world champion with France, Jerome Fernandez, gives his thoughts on the final: 'Norway already did the job by reaching the final, they will enter the court with absolutely no pressure because their World Championship has already been a success. Of course, they're not the favourites, but pressure is more on the French side. The Norwegians know the French players well; they played each other several times over the last years, so I think it will be an even game. Furthermore, I think the atmosphere will matter, just like it has since the beginning of the tournament. In the difficult times, the crowd helped the French players to push themselves to escape some sticky situations. I think the crowd will have a huge role to play during this final.'

Two players to watch:

Norway – Sander Sagosen (21):

Though only 21, Sagosen is making a name for himself as one of the best centre backs in the world. Playing his club handball for Aalborg and set to join PSG for the 2017/18 Champions League season, the youngster is a fast-rising star and is one of the two top scorers for Norway at France 2017, tallying 40 goals right behind right wing Kristian Bjornsen with 41.

France – Thierry Omeyer (40):

2008 World Handball Player of the Year, Omeyer, has a deserved reputation as one of the best goalkeepers of all time, having won four World Championship titles, two Olympic gold medals, and three European trophies. He has also been crowned winner of the EHF Champions League four times – once with Montpellier in 2003, and three times with THW Kiel in 2007, 2010 and 2012. The keeper has made 55 saves off 160 shots at France 2017, and ranks 11th for his position overall in the competition. Omeyer has pulled

off huge performances at major finals right throughout his career, and with Dinart hinting he will start the final - ahead of Gerard - it will be interesting to if the PSG star can do it all again when it counts.

```
googletag.cmd.push(function() { googletag.display('div-gpt-ad-1380148910362-0'); });
```