

Minutes to the 15th Meeting of the Professional Handball Board

Date/Time: Tuesday, 8 March 2016 / 08:30 – 12:30

Venue: Vienna, EHF Office – Conference Room

Participants:	Arne Elovsson	EXEC Representative
	Ralf Dejaco	EXEC Representative
	Morten Stig Christensen	NB Representative
	Philippe Bana	NB Representative
	Joan Marin	MFCH Representative/Chairman
	Gerd Butzeck	MFCH Representative
	Frank Bohmann	EPHLA Representative
	Peter Gentzel	EPHLA Representative
	Marcus Rominger	EHPU Representative/Deputy Chairman
	Emeric Paillason	EHPU Representative
	Jean Brihault	EHF President
	Michael Wiederer	EHF Secretary General

1. Welcome and Introduction

After welcoming the members to the 15th meeting of the Professional Handball Board, Chairman Marin moved straight into the second agenda point.

2. PHB Meeting 10/2015 – Minutes/Follow-up Report

The minutes were adopted following a brief comment of Butzeck to an originally envisaged national team week.

3. Reports EXEC/NB/FCH/EPHLA/EHPU

EXEC: EHF Vice President, Arne Elovsson reported on the activities of the EHF Executive Committee over the past months. With the minutes at hand, he mentioned that the persons present at the meetings remained at the disposal of the PHB for any questions.

NB: A short report was given by NB Chairman Christensen, as the NB/PHB agenda points concur on many points. He mentioned that the NB welcomed Aleksandar Blagojevic (SRB), who replaced H. Brand (GER), to the group. He reiterated the praise of the EHF EURO 2016 POL and noted that the different items discussed in relation to event, such as equipment (player kits) and head protection, would be treated later as the PHB meeting progressed.

FCH: With the report at hand, FCH MD Butzeck reported on changes within other sport disciplines using the example of ice hockey that had recently introduced its own Forum Club Ice Hockey (FCIH) and a champions' league; he also mentioned the structural issues within ice hockey, sport turnover comparison (basketball, ice hockey), and underlined that there were options for which to improve these areas in handball. He also informed the PHB that basketball probably would run with two parallel leagues as of next season due to the conflict between EURO League and FIBA. With reference to the rumoured private league, Butzeck mentioned that the official contact with the initiator of an optional league was rejected by Forum Club Handball. Closing

his report, he underlined that FCH is confronted with club representatives who continue to have a problem with officiating (referees) and the open issues of the automatic qualification of the host team to the EHF Cup Final.

EPHLA: Taking reference to the last meeting of the group in Zürich, EPHLA President Bohmann highlighted a few key points which included the introduction of new members representing the Danish and the Spanish Handball Leagues, the positive cooperation with the BENE (BEL/NED) cross border league which EPHLA deemed a good development for European handball. To the rumoured private league, EPHLA stressed that many questions remained unanswered, especially the reliability of the playing schedule as TV demands a stable playing system. The current Champions League system is not regarded as suitable by some EPHLA members as well as the burden on the teams' remains unacceptable. Referring to AP6 from the last PHB meeting, EPHLA reiterated that undertaking an element of market research in terms of improving the media situation was a good idea and a collective action from the PHB would be a positive step.

EHPU: Giving a brief report on behalf of EHPU, Vice President Paillason informed the PHB that the last meeting in Gdansk took place with two new members (CRO & ROU), and also of his decision to step down as EHPU Vice President due to a change in professional circumstance. Michael Sahl Hansen was elected to succeed Paillason and will attend the next PHB meeting (10/2016). EHPU also informed on its first official meeting with the International Handball Federation, a step forward following years of written communication. Speaking of the IHF Athletes Commission, it was noted that the EHPU will continue to work with the IHF on this matter by raising awareness among the players' community.

4. Further Information

◆ **2016 Events/Meeting CAL**

The PHB members were provided copies of the 2016 meeting calendar that indicated only minor changes and a 2016/17 wall calendar; the EHF Congress will take place on 17/18.11.2016, followed by the EHF 25th Anniversary gala event on the evening of 18.11.2016.

◆ **2017/18 International CAL**

Generated in collaboration with the Competitions Commissions, and following consultation with the stakeholders, the 2017/18 international calendar was approved by the Executive Committee and subsequently distributed. It was mentioned that the EHF was pleased on the development of the calendar work on an IHF/EHF level, which has seen other continents adapting to the system. Upon question concerning the placement of youth championships in the calendar and an increase in injuries among young players, the EHF responded that based on an earlier request of the National Federations, there has been a succession of adaptations to the scheduling of YAC events; the EHF no longer scheduled YAC events during the period March to June, junior events are scheduled in July and youth events are played in August; a step that was taken also for the protection of the players education. In the ensuing discussion, the EHF stated that it continues to concern itself with the question of burden on the players, and acknowledged that a discussion to the matter should commence; it was noted that the regulations could be re-examined. It was underlined that any discussion should commence with the welfare of the players at the fore. Points for the intended discussion included, but were not limited to:

- Data collection on the issue to be initiated; improving dialogue between club and federation; examine the density of the training regime and not only the

structure of the competition; player release – obligation of clubs to release player for one tournament.

The PHB agreed that a situation analysis including statistics on players in various age group competitions over a 3-4 seasons would be undertaken and the result would be tabled at the next PHB meeting (10/2016). Depending on the outcome of the analysis, the matter may be dealt with on the level of the regulations or via the competition system.

5. Men's National Team Competitions – Report/Open issues

5.1. EHF EURO 2016 POL

EHF EURO 2016 Chairman Elovsson informed the PHB on the final tournament and underlined that it was a very good tournament that was well organised and received positive reaction from the participating federations (hotel, transport, etc.). Elovsson touched upon the issues in the area of sponsor VIP/Hospitality services, which were handled during the event. On a technical level, the legal cases (15) that mostly concerned equipment (player kits) and conduct, were mentioned; it was a common misconception that the regulations had been changed, the PHB was informed that was not the case, the task distribution has been modified prior to the event to improve the quality of the competition, which resulted in more cases. However, the average penalty was EUR 500. Elovsson also commented on the change in the main round that had both advantages and disadvantages including finding a sufficient rest period between the second and third round. It was acknowledged that there remain items that need to be discussed. The PHB was informed that the EHF EURO 2016 POL analysis is ongoing.

EHF Secretary General Michael Wiederer added information to the noteworthy reach of the EHF EURO in terms of spectators (third-party matches), record TV transmission figures, and record surge in social media usage (ehfTV, YouTube, etc.); the complete media analysis is expected soon. Wiederer also informed the PHB that in accordance with the regulations, the financial accounting to the event (players/clubs/participating teams) has been settled. It was noted that the number of injury cases was lower in comparison to other championships; with reference to an open injury case, it was mentioned that national delegations have a responsibility to the EHF to immediately report injury cases in order to secure a transparent procedure in all directions. Independent of the outcome of the case, an adaptation of the procedures will follow.

5.2. EHF EURO 2018 CRO

No specific report to organisational matter was given; the PHB were reminded of the dates for the EHF EURO 2018 Qualification Draw (14.04.2016).

5.3. EHF EURO 2020 SWE/AUT/NOR and Qualifications

No special report was given in terms of the organisation of the event though it is progressing accordingly. The EHF spoke of the EHF EURO 2020 Qualification Conference that took place on 7 March 2016 with representatives from the nations ranked 25 to 50 in attendance. The attention of the PHB was drawn to the representation of the system that will be submitted to the Executive Committee for approval where it was mentioned that the system will not change anything in regard to the national team weeks.

The PHB was reminded of the original idea to involve more nations in the qualification to justify the 24 participants, as for an event with 24 teams; a qualification registration of 38 teams was insufficient. So the task was to integrate more nations in qualification process.

The system presents an opportunity for those nations that wish to continue with home and away matches, and also the chance for other team to enter Qualification Phase 1. Returning to the conference, the PHB was informed on the overall positive feedback of the attendees to which, with the exception of Liechtenstein and Monaco who currently have no senior national team, it was the wish of the nations to be involved in the qualification process for the 2020

event. It was deemed that this could raise the value of the competition if the target of 48 out of 50 nations could be attained. Brihault noted that Qualification Phase 1 allowed for some financial support and the monies previously used for the Challenge Trophy can be used for the qualification.

5.4. International Competitions

◆ Olympic Qualifications

The decision taken by the International Handball Federation to host the Olympic Qualification Tournaments in Europe was welcomed that the EHF and the PHB. FCH questioned the awarding procedure with the example of SWE. In response it was stated that the decision is based on other criteria (not only technical considerations), and the final decision is taken by the IHF Executive Committee (without involvement of the EHF representatives to the IHF Council). Based on the original comment discussion ensued and the question of costs paid by organisers was raised – it was pointed out that transparency was needed to avoid such questions in the future.

On that occasion, Butzeck mentioned that according to his understanding the new IHF rule for release means that the clubs must release a player to one major tournament per season. If a player goes to a second tournament, he needs the approval of his club; this was confirmed. It was also mentioned that the IHF will pay compensation for the release of players to the OG Qualification to clubs.

◆ Players Eligibility – Status

Brihault expressed his disappointment at the failure of the EHF motion submitted to the IHF Congress (Sochi 11/2015) that was against introducing limitation on eligibility. Despite the European representatives in attendance being made aware of the situation at the continental meeting the evening before the Congress, no support via a statement was given to the motion on a European level.

◆ IHF Rules of the Game

To the IHF Rules of the Game to be implemented as of 1 July 2016, a detailed discussion ensued to the content and possible consequences of the new rules. The PHB raised the following points: if an injury is sustained where there is corresponding progressive punishment, then the rule does not apply; the 'blue card' scenario signifies a referee observation, and cannot result in a protest from a team; EHF competition regulations have to be adapted for the start of the coming season. A short debate took place where concern was voiced to the 'power' given to referees through changes in the rules; this was refuted with the claim that there continued to be a reasonable rundown and there are no major issues with the referees in major competitions.

6. Other Competition Issues

6.1. Referees/Delegates Compensation

The PHB was informed by Dejacó on the Referees/Delegates Compensation Working Group that convened on the fringes of EHF EURO 2016 in Krakow. At the meeting, an analysis of the situation was undertaken, it was noted that in the period from 2001 to 2015, the consumer price index had risen by 35%; the compensation for referees was last time increased in 2004. The PHB was informed that compensation for referees and delegates costs around EUR 650k for competitions and EUR 550k for EHF EURO Championship events; officiating costs (referees/delegates incl. travel) amounts to EUR 3000 per top level match. An initial analysis of cost distribution was undertaken and the taxation element is currently being examined. However, information was distributed to the stakeholders and feedback is awaited. The discussions will continue at the next meeting of the working group which will be scheduled for April/May 2016. Following the conclusion of the second meeting, a recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Committee for a decision (06/2016). In accordance with

the decision taken at the EHF Congress (Nicosia 2004), the Executive Committee can make the final decision in this matter.

6.2. Referee Nomination

To this point, there was not much to add as no input had been received from the parties. The EHF did collate pertinent information from the minutes of various meetings, in order for them not to be ‘forgotten’. However, since these points are issues coming from different parties, it does not mean that these points are favoured by the EHF. Brihault mentioned the spirit of the topic which was to try and create a movement towards a less personal responsibility and also not to take any action without convincing people of the necessity, for if a decision is made without understanding, it will not work. Brihault also hoped that this matter could proceed at a reasonable speed, and further information will be provided.

6.3. Injury Compensation

Introducing the agenda point, Wiederer reiterated the unfortunate case concerning a Norwegian national team player (contracted to a Danish club). It was underlined that national team delegations are instructed to report all injuries immediately. To the case, the PHB was informed that the Norwegian delegation failed to inform the EHF EURO Tournament Management and the Norwegian Handball Federation of an injury that occurred at the end of the main round; it was stated that the player continued to play at his own request. The EHF has been informed of the feedback from the club involved. Due to the circumstances of the case, disciplinary action is being considered. It was stated that National Federations must take responsibility for their officials; information on protocol for injuries is given prior to the event during the Head of Delegation Conference, Technical Meeting, and in the regulations – and in certain situations, delegations still fail to act accordingly, but request EHF assistance in resolving issues; it was also noted that the players also have a measure of responsibility in such situations. It was agreed that there is to be an improvement in the communication procedures; the EHF will revise the regulations prior to the next edition of the event in Croatia in 2018 and once again define the responsibilities of the national federations towards the clubs.

6.4. Technical Issues

The PHB was informed on unsolicited contact from various external sources in the area of technical development (buzzers, line technologies, etc.). It was agreed that there is a need to modernise the sport, but it can be a long, complex, and sometimes expensive process. Technology issues on the level of the final tournament (EURO/F4/club) need to be dealt with; it is possible to have modern means, however the EHF must be sure that it works on that level. The PHB was informed that the situation will be analysed and a proposal illuminating the next steps will be prepared. In the discussion that followed Brihault mentioned that he also has received such contact via his personal email and informed the PHB that such contact is always redirected to the EHF Office, and stressed that it goes through official channels. FCH representative Butzeck stated that there should be a common line in such matters, unification in the interpretation of the rules as interpretation can differ. He went on to suggest sharing information (i.e. video clips of decisions) with moderation from experts via the EHF social media channels. In response, Brihault stated that he was not in favour of a permanent forum; Wiederer added that an education channel for coaches does exist and it may be possible to strengthen this element; the EHF will contact the relevant department.

6.5. Performance Related Issues

Opening the agenda point, Brihault explained the initiative to organise a global assessment of the player workload. In the past, this topic has started from the point of exhaustion and other stress factors; however, it is stated that the quantitative, qualitative, structural aspects also need to be considered. To this in part, it is

meant the intensity and density of training sessions and matches. Brihault noted that the information from the Scientific Conference (11/2015) can help stakeholders understand the genesis of injuries, and makes steps in the areas of prevention and rehabilitation. Having acknowledged that the structure of competitions also impact this topic, the EHF introduced more rest days into the competition structure, and conceded that problems do remain, but are being worked on. As work progresses in this area, the PHB was informed that stress related factors are being taken into account. Information is currently being collected and organised with the objective of being used as a basis as the stakeholders work together for new ideas and new approaches.

To the comments that there has been some negative feedback from players and that the Champions League final was on a different level to the semi-final because of insufficient rest for the players, it was noted that the satisfaction on that level could not be given due to the financial and spectator elements, and that players must expect competition. Using a recent example from skiing, where 3 out of 4 top contenders from four nations were out due to injury, despite development in this area handball was not the only sport taking such matters into account; he stated the fact that in comparison, a handball player (playing a EURO) is 3.5 years older than their counterparts in 1994. It was agreed that a structure (number of matches, structure, etc.) for the analysis will be created.

7. Club Competitions

7.1. VELUX EHF Champions League

The PHB was informed that overall the new system has been accepted by the teams and it was also stated that the decision on the delegation of the teams worked and the first phase of the competition is over. Concerning the FINAL4, in terms of supply and demand, ticketing remains a major issue. To deal with the matter for future events, and internal EHF working group convened; to increase the ticket income in the period 2017 to 2020 adaptations will be necessary. The discussion will continue at the next meeting of the EHF Marketing Advisory Board. The FINAL4 will remain in Cologne until 2020; a brief discussion on European arenas took place. It was agreed that a bigger arena is needed in central Europe is needed in order for ticket prices to remain reasonable. With reference to the playing system, no changes are foreseen for the next season. In response to the question, FCH representative Butzeck informed the PHB that the main reaction of the clubs is positive, though the workload remains a question for some of the clubs.

7.2. Men's EHF Cup/other competitions

Men's EHF Cup: no specific report to the competition was given; the PHB was informed that the situation regarding the organiser of the final tournament was not ideal, and underlined that it would be good to have a neutral organiser and the EHF encourages applications. The discussion on how to attract a neutral organiser will continue. **Challenge Cup:** To the comment that the fees for the Challenge Cup were too expensive for clubs, it was noted that the competition averages EUR 1000 per round.

7.3. Private Leagues

As the PHB was already aware of the current situation of a proposed private league, a brief reiteration of the situation was given. It was again underlined that no definitive information on a supposed project is available, though it was surmised that top clubs would be involved. The actions of the EHF have been and will continue to be with the aim of developing and protecting the future of the sport on all levels. Such actions to create private leagues are not unique and have become a widespread problem within Europe as the same thing is happening in most sports; an exchange of information on the level of the authorities and the EOC has already taken place. The EHF informed the PHB that it would continue to proceed with traditional competitions including the development thereof. In the discussion that followed, the general consensus of the PHB was that a private handball league was not in the interest of European handball.

8. Marketing situation EHF and EHF

Taking reference to the presentation at the 12th Conference of Presidents on how to generate more income, the EHF informed the PHB on the status of the marketing situation and stated that in 2017 negotiations for both EHF regarding EUROS and EHF with their partners for the period after 2020 would begin; interest in a long-term cooperation was shown by Infront (Wanda Sport Holdings Co.) and MP & Silva. In the period where marketing agreements are still in place, the EHF will define a future marketing strategy before reaching out to market both on a club and national team level. The PHB suggested elements to be taken under consideration (value of the sport vs. TV value; public vs. private transmissions; in-house marketing; pay TV not providing figures; news rights; strategic planning – more money can equate to fewer viewers). To this topic, a PHB workshop will be arranged in order to contribute to the overall strategy.

9. Various

◆ *Decision Making Process/Representation National Federations*

FCH representative Butzeck introduced the topic based on web article (08/02/2016 – playthegame.org) concerning the number of ‘paper federations’ in the IHF. Presenting the argument for action, he questioned why in Europe federations with no activities had a vote within the EHF and why that vote carried the same weight as a federation that was very active in the handball community. He stated that it was not a good idea to support certain nations and questioned the return on investment. He continued by stating that a process needed to begin to change the situation and that the topic was possibly easier for the outgoing President to tackle.

In response, it was agreed that on the level of the IHF, there was an issue with ‘paper federations’; however the solution was unclear. Brihault stated that the mission of the EHF on a European level is multifaceted and not only to yield an income, but also to develop the sport and to remove support from national federations could result in handball disappearing in some regions. It was underlined that though some federations are not active on a competitive level, they are active on others (education, development). It was made clear that this matter was not a major preoccupation for the EHF. Elovsson stated that he refuted that this matter would be one for an outgoing President, rather it should start on the level of the national federations; there ought to be a dialogue between the ‘bigger’ and ‘smaller’ federations. In the ensuing discussion, comment raised included, but were not limited to: democracy remains at the core of the EHF with one nation, one vote; it was suggested that one nation/one vote be used as a basis with extra votes for activities; there must be other values in the voting process. Closing the agenda point, it was questioned whether the political value of a federation can be based on activity. Again it was mentioned that this topic was not acute within the EHF, but did need to be discussed, and any system to be proposed must be one where 2/3 of the national federations could find favour.

Chairman Marin thanked the members of the Professional Handball Board for their contributions to the topics and the open dialogues and officially closed the meeting.

For the minutes: M. Wiederer/M. Brown
11 March 2016