
MINUTES TO THE 26TH MEETING OF THE (MEN'S) PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL BOARD

(Preceded by the meetings of NB/EHLB and running parallel to the meeting of the WHB)

Date / Time: Tuesday, 13 October 2020 / 10:00 – 13:30

Venue: Microsoft Teams Video Conference

Participants PHB:

Gerd Butzeck	Chairman / MFCH / GER*
Nikolas Larsson	Vice Chairman / EHLB / SWE
Morten Stig Christensen	Member NB / DEN
Philippe Bana	Member NB / FRAU
Gregor Planteu	Member MFCH / SLO*
Frank Bohmann	Member EHLB / GER
Michael Sahl Hansen	Member EHPU / DEN
Marcus Rominger	Member EHPU / GER
Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC / MNE
Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC / SWE
Michael Wiederer	President*
Martin Hausleitner	Secretary General*

EHF Office:

Markus Glaser	Chief Sports Officer*
Marsha Brown	Corporate Liaison/Minutes

**in person, and present in Vienna*

1. Welcome and Introduction

Chairman Butzeck welcomed the participants to the meeting, and stated that despite the current circumstances, he had no problem entering Vienna; he hoped that the PHB would be able to meet in person on the next occasion.

1.1. Current Situation

The current situation as well as the EHF activities were described in the common meeting; please refer to AP 1.1. of the PHB/WHB Minutes.

1.2. Overall Picture September – December 2020

Butzeck reiterated the clear strategy to play as many matches on a club level as possible. He praised the work of CSO Glaser who continues to do a good work at handling all the matches in detail. It was noted that towards the end of the season, it could prove problematic to find dates to reschedule the small percentage of matches that were not able to be played. President Wiederer continued that it was the intention to have all originally scheduled matches (especially Champions Leagues) played by the end of the year; following the M-WCh in EGY, there will be a major calendar conflict (i.e. Leagues running parallel) in addition to the four rounds planned in February.

It could be possible that decisions might have to be taken about the matches that have not been played if they cannot be rescheduled. However, it was underlined that at this time there is no strategy i.e. no 'Plan B'. If necessary, ideas will have to be developed on how to do it understanding that the EHF is sandwiched with the matches regarding the media contracts on the one hand, and the timetable knowing that the organisation has to remain in compliance with a proper sporting rundown. Nonetheless, with approx. 90% of matches played, there are not too many 'lost' matches so far; the EHF will endeavour to bring them in, on the men's side, by the end of 2020.

Vice President Bošković highlighted the potential challenges for the upcoming part of the season, at this time the situation is not grim due to a high completion quotient. But should the Covid-19 situation worsen, then it is probable that towards the end of the season the situation could look very different. In closing, Wiederer underlined that establishing a careful balance of the situation in relation to contracts is paramount.

2. PHB Meeting 03 & 04/2020 – Minutes and Follow-up

With no additional comment or questions raised, the minutes were adopted.

3. EHF Information

3.1. EHF Executive Committee 04/2020, 06/2020, 09/2020

Wiederer stated that all topics on the PHB agenda are mirrored in the minutes; the PHB took note of the minutes.

3.2. EHF Marketing GmbH

The 2019/2020 business year concluded in a good way; in a next step the internal and external audits will commence in November to be prepared for presentation at the EHF General Assembly on 10 November. The EHF GA was brought forward to avoid a situation in Trondheim (originally planned venue of the meeting) during the Championship; also, this will enable EHF to release payments to the clubs earlier. Speaking of the expected result, if not for Covid-19, it would have been excellent. The estimated losses are still reasonable and within the scope of expectation for the company.

Looking to the specific situation of the media and marketing agreement, with a separate agreement covering club competitions and due to various reasons including Covid-19, many of the potential sales were not executed by Infront. The EHF is currently dealing with the partner exploring ways to optimise the working processes not forgetting that the market is a complex one as many similar agencies are facing challenges, but the ownership of the partner, according to the available information, is stable. Concerted efforts are being undertaken to secure the value of, as well as deliver, the product. This is a constant work in progress for a direct partner, although it is recognised that the situation is fragile.

4. General Information

4.1. 12th Conference for Secretaries General

4.2. European Handball Convention

4.3. Ordinary EHF Congress / Extraordinary EHF Congress in 2021

Comprehensive information was delivered on various topics during the Conference and Convention that took place in mid-September; this also included an overview on the upcoming Congress. A summary of both events was given during the common meeting, please see AP 3 of the PHB/WHB minutes.

5. International Handball Federation

The final preparations for the M-WCh 2021 EGY are underway. The IHF and the organiser have assured people that the event will go ahead; this is supported by the fact that the IHF will absorb all travel costs. The PHB are reminded that not all participants are defined (NACHC, SCAHC), and in case of team(s) withdrawal(s), it is possible that a European would be asked to fill the gap. Taking the pandemic into consideration, there is concern due to the number of participating (32) teams. However, it is easier to secure longer competitions by being able to create a medical ‘bubble’.

In response to the comment regarding national team competitions and, in particular the competition calendar, more coordination is needed between the IHF and the EHF, it was mentioned that the most recent IHF-EHF cooperation meeting took place only two weeks ago; the EHF remains engaged in a regular exchange of information with the IHF.

6. Other Contacts

The EHF has intensified cooperation with the European Team Sports (ETS) association; a common meeting took place that resulted in a joint statement targeted at strengthening the respective sports and getting the business back to the arenas. The EHF is now collaborating with Infront on the #sport4recovery project – a lobbying initiative pushing the sport forward on a different level. Furthermore, the EHF is investigating possibilities to gain short-term (48hrs) travel permits. This also targets coordinated testing regimes e.g. antigen testing.

7. Stakeholder Reports: NB/MFCH/EHLB/EHPU

NB: noting the parallel between the NB agenda and the PHB agenda, NB Chairman stated that input resulting from the meeting the day before would be provided at the relevant agenda points.

MFCH: Butzeck opened by highlighting the major impact that Covid-19 is having on clubs; it is a situation that is getting worse on a monthly basis and is affecting liquidity bearing in mind that the situation varies from country to country. The spectator situation also widely varies; this has also impacted the budget of the clubs. Salaries of players have been reduced, though

the average is 20-30%, this could change to 40-50% should the situation worsen, and players' agents accepted zero reduction in commission fees.

Neither the meetings of the FCH nor the FCH General Assembly took place as scheduled. Contact was upheld via conference calls, the FCH Board meeting will take place next week via zoom. The next FCH General Assembly will take place in December in Cologne if possible, as this meeting is needed in order to prepare for the elections in June 2021 (full board elections for the next 4-year period).

Butzeck spoke of a 'gentlemen's agreement' between the clubs to not take advantage of other clubs in worse positions by 'stealing' players though players in the normal transfer window had the option to leave. Transfers on the European level remain fair and there is good communication between the clubs; it is hoped that the situation will return to normal next year. The clubs continue to express concern about the release of players to the upcoming national team activities; the FCH recommended that the clubs release the players and to ask the clubs and players for measures. The clubs also want assurances on the safety of players i.e. regarding quarantine, as clubs do not want to release players if they cannot be used upon their return. Butzeck highlighted the good cooperation between the FCH and EHF and reiterated his praise for the CSO and the competitions department. In addition to what was mentioned earlier under AP 1.2., he mentioned the successful implementation of approx. 80-90 charter flights; thus, reducing risk to the players.

Following the decision to play the Men's Champions League Final4 in Cologne in December, it was mentioned that approx. one-third of spectators would need to be present in the LANXESS arena for the event to be economically reasonable; all other 2020 Final4 events were cancelled. Concerning the sale of marketing rights, FCH deemed the performance of the agency to be unsatisfactory as 90% of the rights were sold by EHFM and the value from the solitary partner sourced by them was comparatively low.

Turning to the topic of players' agents Butzeck reiterated the key points mentioned in the joint PHB/WHB meeting; the topic will be presented by the working group to the FCH Board.

FCH President Planteu added that the CHN project had ended due to a lack of the communication; GBR submitted a request to replace CHN in the project. The USA project will continue as it is working well with 6 players supported in the 2019/20 season and 8 players being currently supported in the 2020/21 season to which the feedback has been positive. Ultimately it is the decision of the IHF if the USA will take part in any IHF competition.

Bringing the report to a close, it was commented by Wiederer that it makes sense to develop a traditional sports market to bring it to a European level. The BHA has invited the FCH to England for a conference to explore the topic further.

EHLB: Chairman Larsson informed on the recent league survey undertaken. Taking a step forward in shaping common ground, fifteen leagues provided information to their current status; it was highlighted that the survey now provided a better structure for the coordination of topics. The next EHLB General Assembly is scheduled for June 2021 on the fringes of the MCL Final4, and in order to have a better coordination between the leagues, the EHLB will also host a workshop.

The commonalities among the leagues at this time are the limited resources and the financial strain on leagues that increased due to Covid-19. Other impacts of the pandemic have been the abrupt end to many leagues (i.e. play-offs not carried out), renegotiation of sponsorship agreements due to non-fulfilment of contractual obligations; at this time, liquidity is a difficult issue and the leagues continue to deal with the consequences due to the spectator situation.

Turning to the matter of upcoming national team weeks, the EHLB views the guidelines created by the EHF to be of the highest standard – the hygiene concept is very good; the difficulty remains how the situation is handled in the different countries as federal regulations supersede the EHF guidelines. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the system will be handled correctly and by the same token, the Qualifiers will be handled smoothly.

Closing his report, Larsson stated that the information flow between the EHLB and the EHF continues to work, especially in the current situation that has resulted in very serious and big economic problems, which if it gets worse or does not improve will be especially detrimental to the leagues.

In the brief discussion that followed, the PHB members gave concrete examples faced by the stakeholders; Wiederer underlined that there are no more ideal situations and it is to be expected that national teams will not have their optimal squad nor all the players, but solutions will have to be found to deal with the challenges. Moreover, there will be no identical treatment of the cases due to their different nature, and regulations, where implemented, must be followed.

EHPU: President Sahl Hansen paid tribute to Claudio Gómez Navarro, Manager of the Spanish Association of Handball Players (AJBM) and Director at the Royal Spanish Handball Federation (RFEBM) who sadly passed away on 16 July 2020.

The report opened with how current situation has impacted the players; Sahl Hansen reiterated the cut in salary and despite the players acting responsibly in this situation, there is a difference in how players are being treated. Contrary to the claim of the FCH, though the situation from nation to nation is different, it has been reported that some salary cuts range between 50% and 70%.

Sahl Hansen expressed his disagreement towards the ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’ currently fostered by the FCH giving the example that if Club A, with a solid economy during the pandemic, can pay the full price for a player, then why should they not approach Club B that is experiencing financial distress? It is not fair to either club, and this sentiment was communicated directly to FCH.

To the release of national team players, he stated that some clubs were putting pressure on their players, regarding participation in the qualification tournaments; this was reflected in a contact with the EHF on 25.09.2020. EHFU expressed understanding for the different interests of the stakeholders but appealed for cooperation that was not based on individual interests. In response CSO Glaser underlined that if a club team match resulted in players being quarantined, then the match would not go ahead, at these times it would be postponed. He conceded that it was more difficult for national team players, as the EHF was not able to make any guarantees that if one person tested positive then the entire team should not play. Concerning guidelines specific to this instance, it was stressed that many decisions can only be taken in the moment that they occur and the EHF must rely on the expertise as regulations for every eventuality are not possible. Reasonable solutions would be sought.

Concerning having the stakeholder groups to engage with local authorities in respect to the sport i.e. spectators, Sahl Hansen praised the efforts of FRA for their achievement in this area. Emphasising the involvement of the players’ union in such topics and how it varies between countries, he mentioned his experience in DEN advocating to have more spectators in the arenas and underlined that the clubs, federations, and players all have a common goal. Nonetheless, he stated that the decisions taken by the authorities seem to be gut reactions.

Turning to the matter of injuries, concern was raised about the potential number of injuries in light of the number of injuries seen during lockdown and at the beginning of the season but noted that it was too early to draw conclusions.

At the request of the players, he raised the question of protocol and how they will be handled during the M-WCh 2021 EGY; it was hoped that the information would be shortly forthcoming.

Additionally, due to the strictness of the anti-doping regulations, he mentioned the frustration of the players concerning the ‘Whereabouts’ system, and the pressure it is putting on

European handball players from every nation. Hausleitner reminded the group that the 'Whereabouts Form' is a long-standing system that was previously handled at a team level and not on an individual level. The changes came from WADA wanting to align procedures Europe-wide.

Concerning the hygiene concept for the World Championship, it is (in part) an expanded version of the EHF concept that includes protocols for accommodation, transport, and testing regimes. It is guaranteed that the respective embassies of all participating teams are in support of the teams at the event. The IHF has done its utmost to ensure a safe environment. The concept has already been made available to the National Federations of the participating teams.

8. Men's National Team Competitions

8.1. EHF EURO 2022 HUN/SVK – Status Update (Qualifications / Final Tournaments)

The EHF continues to work in close cooperation with the organisers; the event just passed a major milestone that was the draw event and workshop; the Qualifiers are prepared and the contract negotiations were especially intensive due to the new environment. There will be a joint ticketing system, and the new arena in Budapest is being constructed according to schedule. Currently, there is a good promotion concept for the framework events. The handball community can look forward to a well-organised event, which will be the first following the Covid-19 pandemic.

8.2. 2020 YAC Events – Status Update

8.3. Men's IHF World Handball Championships 2021 (EGY) – Status Update

Between 15 March and 28 August 2020, the EHF had to cancel 180 matches; this incorporated the W16 European Open, the Women's EHF EURO Qualifiers rounds 3 to 6, as well as the Men's IHF World Championship Qualification Europe Phase 2. Seven EHF YAC events (211 matches) were postponed, and at the IHF level over 300 matches were postponed or cancelled (W-ENCh, OG-QT, OG, WU18, WU20). Currently, the YAC events remain under evaluation despite the organisers preparing the events having provided confirmation of their capacity to host. On the other hand, the situation is changeable; additional expenses and measures cannot be fully defined at this time.

A discussion on the necessity of organising and participating was opened, and though no definitive statement came from the nations, it was clear that the focus was elsewhere. It was underlined that some nations need the YAC event more than others. On this matter, the EHF must take a decision in the coming weeks.

Member Bana mentioned that there was a tough discussion in the Nations Board regarding national team competitions; it was noted that the PHB and the NB had the same duty to

discharge concerning the Qualifiers and how to deal with any postponement or cancellation. Furthermore, there has to be a decision by the end of October regarding the YAC events (EUROs and Championships) in January and whether they are to be played or not; so on a national team level, this matter also needs to be dealt with.

9. Club Competitions

9.1. Season 2019/2020 – Review

With the season over, no additional information or comments were given.

9.2. Season 2020/2021 – Status Update

As mentioned at the start of the common meeting, all issues are being tackled on a situational level and case-by-case basis.

10. Media and Marketing Agreement 2020+ - Status Report

Following the 2-year preparation, the cooperation successfully began on 1 July. The PHB were informed on issues where processes are to be defined, as well as open questions to cost and investments. The area of digital is a success model for digital content. In the area of media sales, all the major markets are covered and negotiations are ongoing to find solutions for the BEL, GRE, TUR, and ESP (EURO Cup) regions. In the area of marketing sales, the outlook for EURO events is positive, conversely sales directed at club competitions have mainly been solicited from the EHF network; the discussion on how to deal with these rights is ongoing.

11. Follow-up to the Common Meeting

Players’ Agents & Education Compensation: it was reiterated that the stakeholders would discuss and define their respective positions internally in order to find a common position and understanding as to what can be undertaken on a general level. Concerning the FCH initiative on players’ agents, Butzeck mentioned that the relevant documentation on the matter would be provided to the stakeholders in the following week. Furthermore, it was clarified that although no mandate could be given at this level, it was important that no more time is lost on these two subjects.

12. Miscellaneous

No additional topics were raised.

Chairman Butzeck concluded the meeting by thanking the PHB members for their contribution.

Vienna, 16 October 2020

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