
MINUTES TO THE 30TH MEETING OF THE (MEN'S) PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL BOARD

(Parallel to the meeting of the WHB)

Date:	Tuesday, 18 October 2022	
Time:	10:30 – 12:30	
Venue:	Courtyard by Marriot Wien Messe Prater 4	
Participants:		
PHB:	Mark Schober	Member NB GER
	Morten S. Christensen	Member NB DEN
	Xavier O'Callaghan	Member MFCH ESP
	Gregor Planteu	Member MFCH SLO
	Nikolas Larsson	Member EHLB SWE
	Frank Bohmann	Member EHLB GER
	Marcus Rominger	Member EHPU GER
	Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC MNE
	Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC SWE
	Michael Wiederer	President
<i>In Part</i>	Martin Hausleitner	Secretary General
EHF Office:	Markus Glaser	Chief Sports Officer
	Marsha Brown	Corporate Liaison Minutes
Excused:	Michael Sahl Hansen	Member EHPU DEN

Prior to the individual session, the common meeting of the PHB/WHB took place with the content laid down in the respective minutes providing information to all stakeholders.

1. Welcome and Introduction

Chairman O'Callaghan welcomed the members to the meeting that serves as the forum to discuss topics of common interest from a different point of view in detail where necessary.

2. PHB Meeting 03/2022 – Minutes and Follow-up

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

3. Stakeholder Reports

3.1. EHF Nations Committee Men/Nations Board

A main area of discussion at the NB meeting was the matter of the 'resin-free ball'. From the discussion with the Board, it was apparent that no official analysis of the trials has been received by any stakeholder. Feedback from persons who participated in the trials are scattered and unsubstantiated. Therefore, the NB requested in the meeting that a survey be undertaken to establish information directly from those persons involved in the trials, and that

a common position between the stakeholders (incl. EHF) be defined. It was believed that such a step would help to avoid being faced with an unwanted situation (mandatory implementation, restrictions, partner/sponsor, as well as production/distribution conflicts).

The Nations Board agreed that a resin-free ball has no place in professional handball at this time; this is not to say that the NB is against a resin-free ball, but practically, it would be better suited to children and amateur players.

In the ensuing and in-depth discussion that followed, the members of the PHB agreed with the position coming from the NB. Points raised included, but were not limited to, being observant of possible rule changes in the future and the involvement of the stakeholders thereof. As well as the situation within some ball producing companies. The matter of ball size, materials, practical long-term usage, traditional resin alternatives, advantages and disadvantages, the objectives of the resin-free ball provider, intelligent balls, research, future technologies were also conferred.

As a result of the discussion, the PHB agreed to the following:

- PHB mandate the EHF to send a letter to the IHF addressing the topic of the resin-free ball and establish further contact.
- PHB mandate to address the National Handball Federations of Europe to deliver a statement.
- The individual stakeholder will address their respective groups in order to collate information that would in turn assist with the formulation of a common position
- Implement a survey at the National Team level and include tailored criteria such as bounce, grip, etc.
- Upon receipt and summation of the information gathered, the information from all stakeholder groups is to be transmitted to Martin Hausleitner, EHF Secretary General, by 19 November.
- The matter is to be submitted to the Executive Committee for further treatment.

The topic of the current status surrounding Players' Agent and the implementation of the ruling by the International Handball Federation was discussed by the NB. The question was raised in the NB to see what other National Federations thought of the ruling and if the ruling should be implemented.

It became apparent that some National Federations are not forcing the implementation of the ruling; the line of the stakeholders remains that the party engaging the service of an agent is obligated to pay for that service. In response, an in-depth discussion was held to the topic where it was agreed by all parties that Players Agents are service providers and not stakeholders.

Other topics discussed within the Nations Board included but were not limited to: the current energy crisis and the impact already being felt in the handball community, the EURO 2022 Hygiene Concept and the true functionality of a testing regime without a ‘bubble’.

3.2. Men’s Forum Club Handball

The recent activities within FCH were delivered by President O’Callaghan. The FCH was close to signing a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ with the IHF; at the time, due to the no common agreement be found as to the matter of compensation for player release, the agreement was not signed in Cologne as originally planned. The signing will now take place in Stockholm in January, as the matter of compensation was resolved in August. The FCH entered into a cooperation agreement (signed in Cologne) with Japan; the USA project is ongoing and proceeding accordingly with Jean Brihault overseeing the project on the side of the IHF.

O’Callaghan acknowledged discussions around the CL playing system and dates that will remain unchanged for the next cycle but noted that a preference to play on the weekend was raised; to this, the respective clubs remain dissatisfied, but understand that the decision was taken to protect the handball eco-system as a whole. The topic of throw-off times is an ongoing discussion within the FCH and on an EHF level. Continuing, he briefly touched upon the amendment to the EHF media and marketing agreement that will see EHF handle the sale of rights and sponsorships. For this, a specialised department is being created. It was emphasised that the situation is resolved, and the Clubs have been informed accordingly.

The FCH also recently discussed minimum hall capacity in the future in view of new constructs; it was stated the focus should be placed on attendance rather than capacity (small, but full arena vs. large, but half empty arena). There is a ‘fight’ to bring spectators back to the halls following the pandemic, and another element to gaining attendees is the quality of the product. Thus, in the second half of the 2024 – 2026 media and marketing cycle, the competition system will be reanalysed. Wiederer supported his statement by giving the example of a recent visit to a small (3500 capacity) venue in Graz and reiterated the adage of ‘quality over quantity’.

To the prevalent topic of the professionalisation of referees, O’Callaghan added that all efforts must be undertaken to support referees officiating at the top-level (technologies, etc.); it is not just about professionalisation, it is also about seeing an improvement in the officiating. It was also noted that the IHF Superglobe will also serve as a referee evaluation platform regarding the use of three referees in individual matches.

3.3. European Handball League Board

Reporting on the activities of the EHLB, Chairman Larsson spoke of the League Summit that was successfully carried out in June and allowed for positive networking and interactions with the attendees. Further in-person meetings are being evaluated on a cost basis. The EHLB plans to connect with those representatives unable to be present in Cologne to review and improve the programme for next season; this will be a virtual meeting to be held in November.

Turning to spectatorship in the arenas, based on the information available, it was mentioned that on a league level, the numbers in France have returned to pre-Covid levels, but numbers are still down in Germany and Denmark. The situation remains mixed, but there are no testing regimes in place across the leagues.

Larsson underlined the need for the involvement of the leagues when changes of significance are being considered for implementation as it affects the leagues; the EHLB wants to be involved in the processes and to be able to deliver input on such matters. Also, to have the decisions sent directly to them, and not have to find out via the National Federation(s). The EHF President agreed with the statement and explained the MEL situation and its rundown, in particular, regarding the timetable.

Concerning the ranking system, with one club per nation recognised, it was questioned whether it would be possible to have the results of other clubs (per nation) also recognised as the system has advantages and disadvantages when wanting to get into competitions. Here, the 'Upgrade' system of the club competitions was reiterated.

3.4. European Handball Players' Union

EHPU Vice President, Marcus Rominger reported that the last in-person meeting took place in Cologne and mentioned the effort to connect personally as many organisations are struggling with various issues. Rominger also mentioned an upcoming change in the EHPU leadership in January, as Michael Sahl Hansen will leave the organisation due to a change in his professional circumstances; information on the new EHPU President will be transmitted accordingly.

Turning to the topic of membership, the Union is currently navigating a legal process that will enable individuals to become members of the EHPU without being affiliated to a 'home' organisation; this is because in some countries, such organisations do not exist. The fundamental work of the EHPU is to represent players. Upon input of the EHF, it was clarified that the outcome of the process will result in the reorganisation of the EHPU Statutes to explain, among other things, the voting procedure(s) e.g., to determine the value (vote wise) of the member.

The EHPU are in favour of the EHF Players' of the Year' initiative and emphasised the importance of the having the players involved. To the initiative, Wiederer added that though the project is still to be fine-tuned, the main target is to involve players and make them understand that they are part of the system. Highlighting the principle around the term 'Alumni', the integration of players is desired as to strengthen the EHF system. As the vote of the players count for 25% of the total vote of the four groups (including fans, media, and coaches) within the 'Players of the Year' initiative, it is imperative that the players are 'activated'. It was suggested by Rominger that the EHPU coordinate a common approach with the FCH to this end.

4. National Team Competitions

4.1. Qualifiers Men's EHF EURO 2024/2026

4.2. EHF EURO 2024 GER – Organisation Status Update

4.3. Other EHF EURO Events

4.4. YAC Events

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting for additional information concerning sub-points 4.1. to 4.4.

4.5. IHF Competitions

It was mentioned that the scheduling of the IHF Superglobe event has proved challenging being directly after the European club competitions; the PHB agreed that there should be coordination to ensure that it does not happen again. The information pertaining to the scheduling was received late and a calendar conference, where this scheduling could have been possibly circumvented, did not actually take place.

5. Club Competitions

Please refer to the protocol of the Common Meeting of the EHF Stakeholder Groups for additional details.

5.1. Season 2021/2022 – Conclusions

EHF experienced its best financial year, this was due to positive revenues as well as being cost driven i.e. full Final4 venues due to a hard sell, resulting in a good external image; increased monies and/or cost compensation were also distributed to the clubs. No additional comments or questions were raised.

5.2. Season 2022/2023 – Status

The pre-release tickets (8000) for the 2023 Men's Champions League Final4 are all sold; the sales process is ongoing, and possibly sales have returned to normal pre-Covid levels.

5.3. Season 2023/2024 – Preview

To the question as to what the procedure is if a champion of a country is unable to take part, it was stated that there are no automatic substitutions. The EHF has the right, but not the duty, to name a reserve club. The replacing of a club is situation dependent.

6. Calendar/Meetings

6.1. Competitions Calendar 2022/23 & 2023/24

6.2. Meeting Calendar 2023

In addition to the information imparted at the common meeting, it was stated that the 2024/25 calendar is in the final stages of completion and will be coordinated with the IHF to be confirmed at the EXEC meeting in Stockholm in January 2023 at the latest.

7. Follow-up to the Common Meeting – Other Topics

From the ensuing discussion, the following points were mentioned that the EHLB Chairman will present at the upcoming Women’s Handball Conference and will open with the question of how can leagues support the interests of women’s handball. It was commented that the event is a “great platform to launch the movement” and good for networking with an estimated 130 registered participants.

Concern was voiced that the gap between men’s and women’s handball continues to increase, this is evidenced by the difficulty in filling halls for women’s events. It will be very important that all stakeholders contribute to finding solutions on how to make the product more interesting to the public, as well as bringing children to the sport. Handball must find its own niches and not copy elements from other team sports. It was also mentioned that it would be a positive step if more football clubs introduced handball sections, as seen in France and Spain; such a move could improve the standing and economic situation of the sport. Another useful option could be for the top men’s teams to produce a sister club, which would give a boost to women’s handball.

8. Miscellaneous

8.1. Officiating

In this area there are two topics concerning officiating currently under discussion within the EHF; Wiederer reminded the PHB of a motion targeting the structure of the EHF submitted by the Hungarian Handball Federation. However, and upon the proposal of the EHF, the motion did not result in a decision as it was postponed for further discussion. Following the communication with Hungary, the EHF is trying to find out what can be done within the EHF structure as a next step to improve officiating.

Therefore, looking to the position within the Competitions Commission of the Member Refereeing (elected by Congress) it is to be determined, ultimately by the Congress, if the position is to be unaffected, re-envisioned, or discontinued. The evaluation of the matter continues, and will proceed to the Executive Committee, and beyond resulting in a motion or a full report to the Ordinary EHF Congress in 2023. The second topic concerns the issues during weekday matches and the difficulties faced by referees.

The professionalisation of the referees resp. the area of officiating is a complex issue; however, this cannot be undertaken by targeting only “one piece of the puzzle” as it has to be seen as a full package referring to the field of officiating.

Amid the ensuing discussion, the EHF reiterated how the system on an internal level changed in terms of how nominations are performed, and how referee performance is evaluated despite the pandemic taking the practice off course.

The PHB agreed that the professionalisation of the referees is paramount at this time. Currently, there are two (differing) trials ongoing in France and Denmark.

8.2. IHF Rules of the Game

Please refer to feedback given by PHB Members during agenda point 3 ‘Stakeholder Reports’ and to the protocol of the Common Meeting of the EHF Stakeholder Groups.

8.3. Definition Stakeholders

Please see agenda point 2 for the discussion concerning ‘Players’ Agents’.

With no additional comments or questions raised, Chairman O’Callaghan thanked the participants for their contribution to the topics and closed the meeting.

Vienna, 24 October 2022