
MINUTES TO THE 32nd MEETING OF THE (MEN'S) PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL BOARD

(Parallel to the meeting of the WHB)

Date: Tuesday, 17 October 2023

Time: 08:30 – 13:30

Venue: Renaissance Wien Hotel

Participants:

PHB:	Mark Schober	Member NB GER
	Xavier O'Callaghan	Member MFCH ESP Chairman
	Gregor Planteu	Member MFCH SLO
	Nikolas Larsson	Member EHLB SWE Vice Chairman
	Frank Bohmann	Member EHLB GER
	Torben Vinther	Member EHPU DEN
	Marcus Rominger	Member EHPU GER
	Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC MNE
	Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC SWE

EHF Office:	Martin Hausleitner	Secretary General
	Markus Glaser	Chief Sports Officer
	Max Riede	National Team Competitions
	Marsha Brown	Corporate Liaison Minutes

Excused:	Michael Wiederer	President
	Morten S. Christensen	Member NB DEN

1. Welcome and Introduction

Welcoming the PHB members to the meeting, Chairman O'Callaghan opened the agenda by stating that it was the right platform to discuss all the issues that affect all the stakeholders – the Federations, the Clubs, the Leagues, the Players, and the EHF.

2. PHB Meeting 03/2023 – Minutes and Follow-up

With no additional comment or question, the minutes of the spring session of the Professional Handball Board in March 2023 were adopted.

3. Stakeholder Reports

3.1. EHF Nations Committee Men/Nations Board

NB Chairman Schober spoke of the wish to have the competition schedule earlier than the 2-years in advance and noted that though this could prove “tricky” for the Clubs, it would be beneficial for the National Federations; the main reason for this was to assist with hall availability and the booking of venues. The advantages and disadvantages were discussed, and a compromise could be found to the question of which period would make sense. The NB noted that a fixed calendar, and not a draft, is preferred; the calendar for 2025/26 is available, but the calendar for 2026/27 is requested.

CSO Glaser stated that different aspects of the calendar have a different importance for the Stakeholders e.g., the EHF EURO dates are known, but they could possibly influence when the Clubs restart. For the clubs, the (years) early distribution of the calendar has a limited value as some clubs know if they are part of the CL (Wed./Thu.) or not. From the ensuing discussion around changes to the CL playing schedule, it was underlined that it cannot be changed before 2026/2027, and at such a time, the Stakeholders would be involved.

Another primary topic of the NCM/NB was that of ‘Administrative Sanctions’; the NB agree that in the future such decisions are to be made at the administrative (office) level; such cases create an unnecessarily large workload for the legal bodies. The NB must work together with the EHF in order to help get the motion passed next time. Finally, the NCM/NB would like to see beach handball integrated into the calendar. In closing, it was noted that these topics and others would be on the agenda at the next Conference for Secretaries General.

3.2. Men’s Forum Club Handball

President O’Callaghan briefly described the main topics currently on the MFCH agenda. The Club stakeholder is close to reaching an agreement with the European Handball Agents Association (EHAA); the Players (EHPU) and the Leagues (EHLB) were also involved in the discussions. The idea is to present the concept in December; to summarise, the Agents are to be paid by the party requesting the service (Player or Club). O’Callaghan stated that the Agents have their demands but, with compromise, the MFCH looks forward to a good solution.

Turning to the regulations, the MFCH received a communication from the International Handball Federation concerning a new amendment to the Regulations. It will no longer be possible to sign a player if there are more than 12 months remaining on the existing contract. The MFCH notified their members accordingly.

O’Callaghan informed the PHB on a discussion taking place; a vast majority of clubs are speaking of an expansion to the Men’s Champions League to 24 teams. An enlargement of the competition would mean an adaptation of the playing system and would launch a whole new level of topics. Though the discussion is open, nothing is defined, and O’Callaghan also mentioned that there were also some clubs that wanted to reduce the number of clubs in the competition. The next step is to organise a thinktank.

In the ensuing discussion, Secretary General Hausleitner underlined that the EHF has to work within the given framework, and the organisation is aware of what is working and what is not. It was underlined that the discussion process has to be structured in order to make decisions for the future. In response to the question raised as to what kind of competition does the organisation want to sell, it was stated that it is the clubs that are between the Men’s European Handball League (MEL) and the Champions League (MCL) are pushing for an expansion of the competition.

On the one hand, the TV partners are happy with the product, the match dates are fixed with defined time slots, the competition format is ‘exciting’, the starting phase is appreciated by the clubs, and the presentation of the product is good. On the other hand, a minor remark from the

partner was that more ‘storytelling’ was wanted. Regarding the TV sales process, Hausleitner gave a quick overview of the markets - the product is experiencing difficulties in the Scandinavian market, BEIN stepped out of the market. In the future, and as a next step, the organisation wants to integrate new, and more, markets. Enlarging the number of games increases the costs; but i.e., expanding the EHF EURO from 16 to 24 teams increased the value by 15 %. New markets equate to new revenues; potential markets of TUR and ITA were mentioned. For the record, O’Callaghan underlined that this push is not coming from the partner, Infront, but from specific clubs instead.

Another point was the financial ‘control’ of the clubs. Briefly reiterating the situations surrounding Kolstad (NOR) and Kielce (POL) and the action taken by the EHF, it was discussed whether the finances of the clubs had been considered in order to protect the competitions. It was recommended that such situations should be covered in the regulations to secure the Clubs, the Competitions, and the Players.

Adding to the discussion, EHLB Vice Chairman Frank Bohmann Member noted that such situations relate to points of governance, which connect to the matter of sustainability. Continuing, O’Callaghan said that for healthy competitions, the basis has to be the same. Pointing out that such situations were not only limited to top clubs, EHPU President Torben Vinther mentioned that normally all of the money made by a club is used to acquire new players; Vinther also floated the possibility of working on a system where information provided by Clubs can be vetted to ensure that Clubs only compete at the level where they can financially survive. Vinther responded positively to the idea of adding more clubs to the CL but stressed that the current level is not supporting the idea.

Closing the report and turning back to the matter of the playing system, O’Callaghan also mentioned that within the conversation, the suggestion to return the CL playing day back to the weekend has resurfaced.

3.3. European Handball League Board

Presenting the main topics of discussion from the standpoint of the Leagues, EHLB Chairman Nikolas Larsson opened by reflecting on the 2nd EHLB Summit (June 2023) and working on the follow-up to the meeting and spreading information to those contacts outside of the structure. The 3rd EHLB Summit is scheduled for June 2024; the opportunity to reach out and extend into the areas that are hard to reach. The summit has proven valuable for networking, and another possibility to expand could be via the National Federations during the next Conference for Secretaries General.

The integration of a women’s league is a primary topic, and the EHLB continues to take steps to reach out to the protagonists. These efforts are to share, contribute, and support the foundations of a Women’s Handball League Board (WHLB).

Turning to the matter of Player Agents, Larsson mentioned the draft cooperation agreement produced by the EHAA; the EHLB concluded that the documentation is extremely detailed and there are elements where the EHLB cannot take a standpoint. Nonetheless, the EHLB will

submit its feedback to the MFCH with the objective of not making the topic too confusing. The decision to enter into an agreement EHA is with the Clubs.

Following the input of the EHLB, a brief discussion opened among the Stakeholders. It was noted that in general, the document is logical and there is a process to be undertaken; care also has been taken to avoid monopolist regulations, and that contract between parties cannot be unduly influenced; balance is needed. Praising the process, EHPU Vice President Markus Rominger added that having the Stakeholders involved is positive. EHPU President Torben Vinther emphasised the importance of transparency in that the players know what they are paying for and that agents know that they are competing for the contract. Again, it was underlined that the current document is a concept paper and not a contract, and there are many issues where there is no agreement yet; from this it is possible to create the baseline.

3.4. European Handball Players' Union

Reporting on the recent activities of the EHPU, President Vinther also noted that the matter of Player Agents remains a topic. The EHPU continues to be concerned about the calendar, and specifically how it affects the top players, the top profile is still too demanding with 90+ matches per season.

In the conversation that followed various points were raised from the concern that it was now hard to provide a product for the sponsors, and that it is within the national leagues where the quality players are built. Nonetheless, if the environment is reduced too much, it could be very damaging to the sport, but the number of matches needs to be reviewed at the champions league and national team level. The solution is not more matches (i.e., expansion of the competition) as there are already too many matches. O'Callaghan, adding to the examples given, noted that there is discussion about using the week after Christmas as a national team week, as well as the pressure faced by the (top) players to refuse the calls of their teams; it is almost impossible for the players to say no, and this pressure is worse after the Olympic year. Though the points raised, Schober emphasised that improvements within the calendar have been achieved already and that the period of rests were clearly laid out.

Another topic discussed within the EHPU platform was that of the resin-free ball; the EHPU was invited to participate in the (former) working group, one meeting was held and since then there has been no further information. There has been a renewed invitation with the intent to test the resin-free ball anew. The EHPU will participate in the dialogue, but its position on the ball is clear, and do not agree to its use where handball is established (in professional top-level handball) as it is not workable. It was noted that there are areas where the ball could make sense. It was also mentioned that the equipment provider 'Select' has closed its resin-free ball project.

4. National Team Competitions

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting for additional information.

- Men's EHF EURO 2026 Qualifiers: the situation concerning the teams of RUS/BLR was reiterated, and it was noted that the last point for a decision to be taken was December

2023 if the teams are to be integrated into the qualification in January 2024. The EHF continues to act with caution in this regard.

- World Championship Qualification Europe – Phase 1: there will be home and away matches for the first time at this stage of the competition, and more support (TV production, etc.) will be given to the lower-ranked teams. This has been decided with the objective to raise the profile and properly present the sport in the countries of emerging nation teams.
- World Championship Qualification Europe Phase 2: the organisation of the event is stable, and the draw event will take place in March 2024.
- 2024 Olympic Games | Qualification Europe: the EURO in Germany offers many chances to qualify for places in the next EHF EURO, World Championship, and a spot in OG Qualification Tournaments; thus the 2024 EURO will be a tough competition where every goal will count. The places for the OG Qualification will not be decided in direct games; the result of other continental championships will also factor into the number of places. It was noted that the system is complex, but it will make for an extremely exciting tournament.
- EHF EURO 2026/2028: the events are led by good, experienced organisers, and high-quality venues have been selected.
- YAC Events: following the presentation of the information an in-depth discussion followed. The playing system was elaborated, and the YAC EUROS are one day longer and will serve as a qualification to other events as of 2024; for this it is necessary to have the best 24 teams (at the request of the National Federations). Prior to the change in the system, entry into the YAC was generational; the new format is aimed at adding value to the competitions and, consequently, offering it to the market. The development of the YAC events will also encompass the ‘Respect Your Talent’ programme.

5. Club Competitions

5.1. Season 2023/2024 – Status

5.2. Season 2024/2025 – Preview

General information was provided during the common meeting; refer to the minutes. Overall, the competitions are running well and CSO Glaser added the following:

- An important topic within the club competitions is the recent political unrest in the Middle East, currently, no teams from ISR are active. The EHF remains in close contact with the National Federation and the respective Clubs.
- The EHF has intervened in a situation where difficulties arose due to playing hall availability; this will mean that a club will have three consecutive home matches in the Champions League; the EHF is working to balance the playing hall situation between the clubs, and if no venue is available, the schedule will be amended. He noted that this could prove detrimental to the club that has fulfilled all the requirements. The current approach of the EHF was explained to the Stakeholders, nonetheless, the matter of playing hall

availability is to be seen as a general topic and discussed within the clubs and give feedback to the EHF as to what the solution should look like.

O'Callaghan complimented the systems in place that protect the product also taking fairness and fair play into consideration; it is a business, and if certain steps are not taken, it can be detrimental to the whole. However, it must also allow a level of flexibility that allows for the matches to be played.

- The EHF club place distribution lists will be published in the coming weeks; the slight delay was due to waiting to see if discussions at the level of the Club stakeholder would impact the document; this was not the case.

6. Other Competition Related Topics

6.1. EHF Officiating System

Reacting to the information imparted during the common meeting, O'Callaghan stated that the EHF were on the right track bringing more professionalism into the area of officiating; the implementation of the new system (incl. referee mentorship) has been a good step. It was important to know that it was not only about the nominations of referees, but also how the organisation works with the referees, and the environment around them must also be professional. The area of Officiating is an important part of the EHF ecosystem, and it needs to be supported. Noting the introduction of the VRR (instant video replay) much effort was undertaken on the side of the EHF, the VOGO system is an element that brings handball in line with top sports. Member Planteu underlined that additionally it is very important that handball is seen as fair sport.

6.2. Technical Services | Coaches Challenge

Refer to the minutes of the common meeting.

7. Calendar | Meetings | Activities

7.1. Competitions Calendar

To the international competitions calendar, the group spoke about the scheduling of the IHF Superglobe and the of the Pan American World Championship Qualifiers.

7.2. Meeting Calendar 2024

The calendar has been confirmed; it will be distributed to the stakeholders accordingly.

7.3. XXXIX Ordinary IHF Congress

The stakeholders were made aware of the details of the upcoming (online) Congress and the Continental sessions, as well as the (in-person) IHF Council Meeting in Basel taking place prior to the main event. The motions have been received and they consist of administrative topics. It was noted that the programme till 2025 is interesting, and the EHF is eagerly anticipating the presentation of IHF Projects.

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

No additional comments.

9. Miscellaneous

O'Callaghan noted in advance that he would not be able to attend the next session of the PHB (03/2024) due to another immovable commitment.

Thanking the participants for their contribution to the discussions, Chairman O'Callaghan closed the meeting.

Vienna, 30 October 2023

\\professional handball board\phb°32_102023\minutes_phb°32_231030e