
MINUTES TO THE 34TH MEETING OF THE PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL BOARD

Date: Tuesday, 15 October 2024
Time: 08:30 – 13:00
Venue: Renaissance Wien Hotel

Participants PHB:

X. O’Callaghan	Member MFCH ESP Chair
Nikolas Larsson	Member EHLB SWE Vice Chair
Mark Schober	Member NB GER
Gregor Planteu	Member MFCH SLO
M. S. Christensen	Member NB DEN
Frank Bohmann	Member EHLB GER
Torben Vinther	Member EHPU DEN
Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC MNE
Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC SWE

Participants EHF:

Michael Wiederer	President (<i>partly</i>)
Martin Hausleitner	Secretary General
Markus Glaser	Chief Sports Officer
Marsha Brown	Corporate Liaison Minutes

Excused: Marcus Rominger Member EHPU | GER

1. Welcome and Introduction

PHB Chair, Xavier O’Callaghan opened the meeting and moved straight into the agenda.

2. PHB Meeting 04/2024 – Minutes and Follow-up

The minutes were adopted without additional comment or question.

3. Stakeholder Reports

3.1. EHF Nations Committee Men/Nations Board

Representatives Christensen and Schober presented the matters raised within the framework of the NCM/NB meetings which led to group discussions with the PHB members; these discussions are summarised for brevity.

National Team Weeks | the NCM/NB representatives made clear that there are both advantages and disadvantages to moving the M-NTW from spring to autumn; for the clubs, it would be better if the later part of the season were free of NT activities. An alternative placement of the M-NTW every other year (even years when a EURO Qualifier is to be played) would mean two systems fixed in place that could be disadvantageous. It also has drawbacks for national teams. CSO Glaser proposed to send two versions of the calendar to the stakeholders that would allow for a side-by-side comparison of the alternatives and options so that the adaptation (season 2026/2027) is not only theoretical, but also visual. A response is needed until the end of November for developing the final version and enabling the Executive to approve in December.

Due to the approval of the draft planned for December, the representatives will only have the possibility of the next stakeholders meeting (03/2025) to discuss the matter again and, later, have the talks within the framework of the Men's Competitions Conference. However, should the 2027/2028 draft calendar be distributed to the stakeholders, it will allow for discussions in the 10/2025 session as well, which would give the Clubs, Leagues, and Players more time to plan and have a clear process. Again, it is reiterated that the stakeholders prefer the calendars two years in advance, especially if any adaptation touches upon the playing dates. At the same time, the International Calendar has a worldwide basis and, therefore, the coordination with the IHF regarding national team weeks and IHF events is essential.

In acknowledgment, it was emphasised that it is not possible to enlarge the playing periods as in accordance with agreements made with the stakeholders, the number of match days in both NT and club competitions are fixed, so no additional burden on the players is to be expected. In conclusion, it is seen as beneficial that the discussion takes place and is concluded prior to speaking on the matter at the level of the Infront; the stakeholders must balance the chances and risks to enter the Infront talks in alignment with the Clubs. Nonetheless, time is needed for all the groups to provide input.

Personality Rights | since the last discussions, no action has been taken on the side of the EHF; but EURO partners have been appraised of the current parameters. Regarding the sweeping document presented by the IHF at World Championship events, it was made clear that some European Federations refuse to sign the document due to the clear ramifications thereof. Moreover, the approaches towards the IHF on this matter are finding no reception when seeking clarification on who gets promoted and in which context.

Beach Handball Summit | in view of the upcoming meeting in January, the NCM/NB deliberated on the question from the strategic viewpoint, as a new way forward is to be sought to position the sport. When seeking new concepts, the discussion needs to be data driven as the actual status of the sport is unclear to many in terms of information on BH clubs, leagues, and players in Europe. There is agreement that endeavours to bring BH to the Olympics must continue, indoor handball must keep its Olympic status; any future strategies must be in alignment.

3.2. Men's Forum Club Handball

FCH Organisation | reporting on the activities of the Club stakeholders, O'Callaghan informed the PHB that FCH Vice President Gregor Planteu would assume the role of Managing Director in June 2025 based on the intent of FCH Managing Director incumbent, Gerd Butzeck to retire at the end of that year. O'Callaghan explained the comprehensive recruitment process, which included a stringent interview procedure with twelve candidates, reduced to three, and the final selection by the M/WFCH Board. The transition period, 06/2025 – 05 2026, would allow for Butzeck and Planteu to work together for a year. Butzeck would act in a consultative capacity after his retirement. The PHB congratulated Planteu on his coming new role.

30th FCH General Assembly | the meeting took place on the fringes of the men's Final4; the enlargement of the FCH was a focus point for the group. Currently, the members span five continents with teams from USA, Australia, and Africa. However, the FCH continues to garner more interest from stakeholders outside of Europe. The USA project has been working in close cooperation with the US management for 2 years but will be on hold due to the USATH CEO replacement; nonetheless, there remain US players in European teams receiving a salary of EUR 2k monthly.

Player Agents | the current MoU with the FCH is valid until June 2026, and the agreement with the IHF is active until 2027.

Market Fitness | in preparation for the review of the media and marketing agreement (Infront) for the 2026/2027 season, decisions must be made as to the next steps concerning the rights.

Emerging Markets and Clubs | in this area, there are more calls for a resin-free ball as the clubs are not allowed to play in some venues with resin; it was noted that this refers to the amateur level.

Following the FCH report, and as the discussion became more general around overall development, it was mentioned that the EHF must remain focused on the protagonists when considering the future. The cooperation between the men's and women's handball in areas of common interest i.e. finances, marketing, etc. is more necessary than before when looking to keep the positioning of the indoor sport. More information is much needed as the Federations work within different systems, and core questions such as the number of stakeholders working with sustainability, and how. The sport must develop, but in the clearest way; the topics, such as sustainability, grassroots, etc. are moving forward as part of the ongoing business, but based on the topics of the stakeholder meetings, it will be a struggle to "make everyone happy."

3.3. European Handball League Board

Nikolas Larsson, EHLB Chair, reflected on the 3rd EHLB Summit that took place on the fringes of the Maschineseeker Final4. On this occasion, the event affiliated with the 'Handball Talks' business programme; the next edition of the summit is planned for 2025. As the activities continue, the EHLB gives focus many topics including the international calendar, especially the matter of how to reach the (new) audience as media solutions for all levels of handball need to be envisaged, expanded, as well as interacted by taking AI into consideration.

Bohmann also drew the attention of the PHB to changing situations within the individual leagues giving examples of previously strong leagues losing their positioning within Europe due to various reasons; he underlined that champions from these countries are needed. It was acknowledged that the media world has changed, and despite in the given example of a league having TV agreements in more than sixty countries, the international audience reach is only at 20% of the national reach in Germany. The influence for example in Spain of the reach of Asobal is negligible.

Referring to the information provided around the Beach Handball Summit and data driven discussions, the EHLB took note of the intent behind the suggestion and agreed that a clear picture is needed across the board including the leagues; Larsson spoke on how, and what kind of, data can be collected.

Bringing the report to a close, and in consideration of the newly installed Women's European Handball League Board, Larsson briefly mentioned the matter of cooperation, as well as the short EHLB/WEHLB common meeting that looked to the cooperation of the platforms. The discussion on how to engage and align with stakeholders revealed similar challenges among the leagues. With a view to the future, and the next edition of the EHLB Summit planned for late spring 2025, the EHLB hoped to progress the idea of a common EHLB/WEHLB summit.

3.4. European Handball Players' Union

With apologies and regards from EHPU Vice President, Marcus Rominger who was unable to attend the meeting, EHPU President, Torben Vinther delivered the brief report and opened with the ECJ ruling on 4 October in the Diarra case and the consequences of the decision which could be quite far reaching. Thus, stakeholders must be mindful in this respect.

The concern about the density of the international calendar was reiterated and specifically mentioned the top-percentage of players (club/NT) where in an Olympic cycle, as seen in 2024, the number of matches can exceed ninety. Consequently, the impact on the mental and physical health of players and the difficulty in maintaining the work-life balance continues to be a recurring issue. In a brief response, O'Callaghan underlined differences between players i.e. the top earners, as well as the choice of some players not to make use of the rest opportunities afforded to them. Nonetheless, the issue of finding balance needs to be addressed.

In closing, Vinther remarked on the expansion of the EHPU following the acceptance of the women's players union of Spain at the General Assembly held last week, with Nerea Pena representing the body within the EHPU; due to the changes within the EHPU, the union will now be considering the matter of representation within the Women's Handball Board.

Though not on the agenda, the EHF imparted information that had recently come to its attention concerning player eligibility conditions. The IHF has amended the conditions, thus, the three-year residency rule will not apply in circumstances where the player under 21 years of age and citizenship and did not play for another country. Formal information from the IHF will follow to implement the regulations.

4. National Team Competitions

With the EHF EURO Qualifiers commencing in November, it was reiterated that matches with geopolitical challenges will be managed accordingly, as such difficulties have been faced and dealt with in the past. No additional report was given and the PHB was referred to the minutes of the common meeting.

5. Club Competitions

5.1. Season 2024/2025 | Status

In addition to the information received at the common meeting, a suggestion was raised by O’Callaghan concerning the European teams taking part in the IHF ‘Superglobe’ on the need for teams/players to fulfil their obligations by playing the matches of the Champions League before travelling to the IHF competition; a home match for the teams concerned will ease the logistic challenges respectively.

5.2. Season 2025/2026 | Preview & Focus Points

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting.

6. Other Competition Related Topics

6.1. EHF Officiating System

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting.

6.2. Technical Services

In addition to the information imparted at the common meeting, CSO Glaser made mention of feedback received to referee performance concerning a perceived reluctance to use the VR system. With the system been used across all the top-tier competitions, it must be used to the fullest to validate the efforts connected with the implementation; nonetheless, the decision to use VR lays in the handball of the referee in both use and handling. At EURO events, the activation of an AV-Referee allows for video cueing of match segments to enable an expedited process, limiting the amount of that the game is interrupted.

While noted that the system was a positive step for the game development, it does need to be used more as reflects the fairness of the game. Also, it was suggested that more information on game technologies needs to be dispersed to the handball community on when/how the technology is to be implemented; in response it was noted that the EHF has produced a short video to be promoted in all the venues of the Women’s EHF EURO 2024 which can be played on all mediums in the venues.

7. Calendar | Meetings | Activities

7.1. Competitions Calendars 2025/2026

7.2. Meeting Calendar 2025 | Preliminary Preview

7.3. Men’s Competitions Conference

To the agenda point, the PHB raised no additional comment or question, having taken note of the information provided during the common meeting.

With no additional points raised, O’Callaghan thanked the members for their participation and closed the meeting.

For the Minutes: M. Brown