



Competitions Conference

18–20th April 2008 • Vienna, Austria

Summary by Jean Brihault / EHF Vice-President

This EHF conference on men's competitions has managed to bring together all the protagonists and stakeholders of European handball:

- players,
- coaches,
- clubs,
- leagues,
- IHF-EHF,
- Experts.

All have shown a remarkably constructive approach and desire to take others into account.

This solidarity in the reflection conducted corresponds to the main concept introduced by the branding and media experts: that of global interdependence inside European handball.

The conference has managed to reach a clear enough definition of the main issues confronting European handball.

No final answers have been offered but clear trends.

The main focus has been the player and his workload inside a complex system of competitions involving clubs, national federations and leagues, the EHF, the IHF.

MAIN TRENDS:

- Trend N°1:
 - o Inside the existing European system there are margins for improvement concerning the players' workload. This can be achieved through work on the format of the national competitions, training strategies, coaching strategies, players' involvement in the decision making processes at all levels.
- Trend N°2:
 - o The Four year Olympic cycle is considered as too dense and there is a common agreement that the global number of competitions should be reduced by one. It is also agreed that in this process those nations and continents whose schedule is not so heavily loaded must be taken into



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account. Suggestions are made concerning a broader qualification system and an intercontinental cup for non-Europeans.

- Trend N° 3:
 - The playing period for the European championships leads to the following statements:
 - January is the best period as far as exposure and marketing are concerned (see experts' presentations) and the European championship is the competition attracting the greatest interest among spectators and TV viewers. January, therefore, remains the most interesting option knowing this to be a period the clubs and national leagues would also like to be able to take advantage of.
 - June is clearly shown to be the worst possibility.
 - September is considered as the best by the medical experts based on the player's training and competition yearly cycle. It also offers the interest of liberating the most interesting period (January) for club competitions (national and European).
 - There is an agreement that any change must be based on research and not on opinion.
- Trend N°4:
 - Clubs as employers want to clarify their articulation to national federations, EHF and IHF concerning periods when their international players are playing for the national team (preparation and competition phases). The insurance system now implemented by the EHF is seen as a major step in the right direction.
- Trend N°5:
 - The format of both club and national team competitions is considered as too demanding.
 - Concerning club competitions the top clubs and top players wish to reduce the number of playing dates.
 - Concerning European championships, there is a wish to increase the number of rest days (rest days cannot be confused with travelling days). There is also a suggestion to increase the number of players participating in each team though the current squad system is far from being taken full advantage of by most delegations.





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- Trend N°6:
 - The articulation between club activities and national team activities is often considered as uncomfortable.
 - Clubs express the difficulties they experience because of their best players' involvement with national teams. They request a global reflection on the periods of preparation for the national teams (volume, calendar, articulation between continents).
 - One suggestion is made to set up a “strategy council” based on the UEFA model. (EHF is to meet UEFA and assess the situation in this regard). Another proposes a fixed number of national team games per season.
 - In spite of the difficulties observed, there is a common agreement that the national team activities constitute the flagship of European handball: they are clearly the most popular according to all media and marketing analyses.

Globally this conference is considered as extremely rich and useful. Concerning most issues the views of the handball leaders in Europe at all levels and the views of the experts were in accordance. This also applies when experts do not agree among themselves (Cf. differing opinions concerning the European championship dates).

The tolerance, mutual understanding and desire for solidarity that have characterised this conference must be preserved and this is likely to be achieved through a permanent dialogue between all stakeholders, paying special attention to players. This can only be based on a global vision and a global flow of information.

This conference and its intermediate level of conclusions now constitute a working basis for the EHF and its executive committee.

