

I will use this opportunity to exchange some practices about how the Belgian handball federation tries to attract spectators to national team games or major events (Cup finals, Benelux Final 4).

Handball (10.000 members/10M – 0.1%) is a pretty unknown sport in Belgium, in the shadow of football, cycling (cyclo cross in winter) and tennis, and the third indoor sport after Basketball (90.000) and volleyball (60.000).

## Major deficiencies

- Poor results (1 official win in 6 years) which is a major threat to media attention, public support and public and private funding. After the (for Belgium very poor) London Olympics, public funding for handball as a top sport was stopped.
- Lack of attractive players (stars) known by the average sports fan (national and international)
- Lack of national feeling and complicated sports-political situation (*identification crisis*)
- Lack of connections in a politically driven sports-financing

## Possibilities

- National team will always have an inside-crowd support
- Variety and geographical spread in the event locations
- Attract people thanks to the quality of adverse teams – we inform about the foreign stars (necessary as major handball competition like EC, WC or CL are not broadcasted in Belgium)

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- Raise interest by youtube fragments of those players on social media (Facebook page of national team, Friend page of our Mascot, Event page of the game) and press information for game previews, and the Federation's magazine Handbal X-tra.
- Highlight local (in connection to the playing area) national team players on beforehand as it is more important to hit the media before the game (otherwise people see the TV fragments of the game and say 'if I would have known there was a game...')
- Play preparatory games in the venue and invite the press and give them opportunities to talk to the players and staff in advance. The usual press conference does not raise interest any more.







## Tricks

- Use stars (from other sports) to get attention – former Anderlecht football player Pär Zetterberg from Sweden attracted more media attention to Belgium - Sweden by accepting our invitation than the actual game.

- Jackson Richardson was the major highlight of the Benelux League Final 4 in Antwerp

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MveuwQtBys0>

- Focus on atmosphere and family friendly character (live music during the game, handball related children entertainment before and after, good players info hand out,...), whatever the result of the game is.

- Teasers – we made pictures of international stars with tickets for Benelux Final4 2013 and had a concours around this.

## Question for discussion

How far can you go in free tickets – without undermining your ticket income/devaluing the future of your product

- Free ticket for a child brings parents

- Give a ticket rather than say that the income is free

- Distribute free tickets through sponsors rather than directly to your potential buyers, going for free tickets

- Presale at diminished prices to ensure basic attendance and avoid no show due to sudden circumstances (ex weather conditions)

- Give tickets away to people who otherwise would not come or important target groups (sports teachers)

Where is the critical frontier? On the one hand you need basic attendance On the other hand you cannot always give away everything.

Pressure to play in big venues – no financial return: big Lotto Arena in Antwerp, but no possibility to earn any money (catering, tickets, every breath you take is invoiced etc, but it is posh to play there and Basket and volley sell it out/fill it up –since some years). Primary investment is out of reach at the moment. This seems a growing problem: enormous calendar (50 games/year and more) but a lot of games are played in prestigious venues with poor attendances.



The quality of the game is of minor(/no) influence to the attendance. Big crowds have no clue about what is “good” handball. They come (back) for the atmosphere, the side events,...

A Belgian club played last year in the second division of Belgian handball for 700 spectators on average, while clubs in the highest division had only half of this. This season they played in the highest division on average for 1.000 spectators. But they work hard to bring the spectators to the hall

Our club directors mainly have the tendency to spend 90% of their time running behind sponsors, and end up playing in rather poorly filled halls (especially in the regular competition). But in the long run, it is more difficult to sell your product if your attendances are poor. The Benelux League will be another challenge in this respect: clubs will be obliged to fill their halls by themselves, the visitors will bring little spectators.



