

I'd like to thank everyone for attending today. I appreciate you taking the time to attend and help us to mark another year in the life of Olympic Handball in Ireland. As President of the IOHA it's my task to discuss the high points of the year and to set out a vision for the next year and the coming years in the sport in Ireland.

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to all the volunteers in our sport. The IOHA would not be here without the efforts and belief of many people. People who coach teams, referee and score-keep matches, carry out the unglamorous back room jobs of fixtures and organisation. The Association relies on volunteers to carry out most of our tasks at present, this is a strength and a weakness in the modern world. A strength in that you can contribute at almost any level, working in cooperation to achieve satisfying and tangible improvements in the real world. A weakness in that many of our tasks now require to be delivered by professionals who have achieved standards in training and so can be multipliers in terms of voluntary work.

I would like to continue by saying that competitive sport does not exist without our officials. We should I think dedicate 2018 to the year of the unsung hero's of our sport and indeed all sports. Excellent officials are vital to the success of our sport, in the coming year lets all strive to improve our attitude and support for our officials, we need to look after them and they in turn will look after us. Excellence in officiating will create a safe environment for our players and enable them to be more adventurous, push the envelope and increase competitiveness. However, the flip side of that statement could also be a real problem for our sport, an Achilles heel which could hinder our development and make the sport less attractive both to play and to watch.

For our officials this is the work on the ground, belief in yourself is important, but its also important to know that we also believe in you and I on behalf of all your friends and colleagues across handball salute you and want you to know we appreciate your efforts. They do not go unrecognised, they are at the heart of the project.

I think its important to mention also the really unglamorous work of my colleagues on the board. Our board members include:

- Michael Moloney - Hon Secretary
- Andrea Ongaro – Board Member Head of Coaching
- Darren Connolly – Treasurer, Darren is Managing Partner of BCK, who graciously host many of our meetings including this one. Special thanks Darren.
- Eoin Gallagher – Board Member, Barrister who now sits on the EHF Court of Arbitration
- Peter Caulfield – Board Member & EHF Delegate
- Orla Griffen – Women's representative had to step down for family reasons and we were sorry to lose her.

A cold and wet Monday night is the perfect time to discuss the regulations regarding transfers, anti-doping policy, how to balance the budget and the efforts to promote and develop our sport. Please accept my thanks for your efforts which enable us to liaise with and fulfil our obligations to our members in the first instance and our partners in Sports Ireland, the OCI, EHF, IHF and other national and international bodies.

I would also like to recognise the hard work that Susan puts in for the Office to maintain the schools competitions and offer more general support to the members of the Association. Susan provides support for the day to day business across all aspects of the IOHA. She also organises and runs the school tournaments at primary and secondary level.

We are hopeful that she may be joined in due course by at least one development officer to work at grass roots level. A critical component of any such initiative is consistency, projects that start and stop just generate frustration, so we need to select our projects carefully to ensure long term sustainable development.

Our National Men's team has in turn a good team to support and develop the squad and the Irelands Call initiative has yielded some new players for consideration. I would like to thank the team behind the team:

- Roman Abramenko (Coach) who also brings funding to the squad through his company Kama Games where Roman is Managing Partner.
- Julian Ebrele (Temp Team Manager due to knee injury)
- Alex Kulesh (Team Captain)
- Paddy McAuley (Fitness Coach)

Our Men's 18 team was an initiative from Hartmut Krahn who serves as the Team Manager and Hartmut has brought a team in to support the boys including:

- Hartmut Krahn (Team Manager)
- Alex Markovic (Coach)
- Michal Hradil (Coach)
- Paddy McAuley (Fitness Coach)

The squad are heading for European Competition in Austria this August, best of luck to the guys. I hope you do well, its important to enjoy your first International, hopefully it will lead to a longer engagement in International competition.

I think it's a very important step in the development of Handball in Ireland to have an intermediate junior stage up and running. Not only does it allow scope for the development of the junior players themselves but it opens out the possibilities for the development of initiatives and talent in all aspects of International sport. It is another brick in the wall which is enabling more people to experience our sport and look forward to competing at the highest level.

Domestic competitions

I would like to mention Omar Alsaffer of Astra HC and Andrew Maher of Dublin City Club. Omar and Andrew between them organise the Men's and Women's competitions. I know they are going to present to us later. Gosia Jankowska and Ixabre Aragon who organise our referees for the matches. I know that they both put in a huge amount of work to ensure our matches are refereed as fairly and professionally as possible. Thank you guys for all the hard work its is much appreciated.

Congratulations to Monika Partyka on being chosen by the EHF to be a Delegate at the M18 Championships this summer in Croatia.

Ensuring our competitions are as competitive as possible will ensure the sport is attractive to experienced players coming to live in Ireland – now a major cohort in our population and will also contribute to a bigger playing pool for national team selection.

There are many related issues that need to be considered in relation to domestic competition, not least the number of teams participating and the potential for a successful British Irish Competition.

On the EHF front the EHF has negotiated a big deal for TV income with Infront and other leading agencies. This will lead to significant increases in revenue for the organisation. We must try and ensure that at least some of this income is utilised to promote and develop the sport in the Emerging Nations.

The Irish initiative to include a provision for Protected Disclosure (Whistle blowing) was accepted at the recent EHF Congress in Glasgow. This will ensure the EHF and officials will be accountable in years to come.

Initiatives

Development of handball continues and we have engaged with Maeve Buckley of Leading Sport Marketing to look at the IOHA and work with us to generate new initiatives to develop Handball in Ireland. Maeve has many years experience working with governing bodies of Irish sport and is initially gathering information for

a report on the IOHA which can be used to determine the next steps. In this regard Maeve may well be in touch with some of you in the next few weeks to get your observations and comments.

A Regional Conference for Ireland and Britain took a step closer when Jean Brihault, former President of the EHF has accepted an invitation to attend and deliver a key note speech. Jean is working on the development of the sport in the USA for the IHF at present and is in a position to deliver some interesting insights into the development of the sport in the English speaking world.

The development of the Isle of Man Olympic Handball Association will add impetus to this and we may try and get representation from Wales where there is no Association at present.

We are looking forward to welcoming a new Womens representative onto the board to focus on the development of the women's game. This will grow quickly once the focus is in place.

Overall I'm please to say that the IOHA is in very good place to build on. We have a great sport, supportive partners and better facilities. I'm looking forward to working with you all in the next few years to continue with progress and improve the profile and resources for our sport in Ireland.

Best of luck in 2018/19

Fintan J Lyons
President IOHA