



ANNUAL REPORT 2026

Building Momentum.
Expanding Reach.
Creating the Future of Handball in Ireland.

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COMPANY INFORMATION



Company Name: Olympic Handball Ireland

Company Number: 454641

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COMPANY OVERVIEW

OUR VISION

To make Olympic Handball Ireland's fastest-growing indoor team sport with clear pathways from first participation to lifelong involvement and high performance.

OUR MISSION

To create accessible, inclusive, and ambitious opportunities for players, coaches, referees, volunteers, and clubs across Ireland.



Chairperson's Statement

Fintan Lyons



Hi everyone, and welcome to a special edition of our Annual Report for 2026. As is the nature of these reports I will be reflecting on the previous year. 2025 was a big year for handball in Ireland, a year that will come to be seen as transformative in years to come. It wasn't intentional that the year of our biggest step forward in organisational development also happened to be the year we hit 50, but there you have it, serendipity or slow learners, take your pick.

I refer mainly to our decision to move decisively to a professional model of organisation, lead by our new CEO, Elaine Grant. An aspiration for many years has now been achieved and is a significant statement of intent. Under Elaine's very competent and professional direction I'm very confident we will achieve our ambition for Handball in this country in the months and years to come.

Elaine's appointment in November topped a busy year where we had the appointment of three new Board members/Directors, Christina Barbosa-Gress, Coralie Picault and Monika Vigh, all successful career professionals and handball players with a shared passion for their sport and a shared vision of success for the OHI and our mission to make Olympic Handball the fastest growing indoor team sport in Ireland.

I'd like to record my thanks and gratitude to all of my board colleagues who continue to work in support of this organisation and the sport. Staff, volunteers, club-members alike have put in a lot of hard work, much of it unseen in the engine-room, helping to build organisational infrastructure to ensure we can support the growth and development of the sport in Ireland.

Thanks are due to Sport Ireland, this year in particular their support for our initiatives and work on the Governance code really enabled us to take that big step forward.

In 2025 we signed a project agreement with our key international partner, the European Handball Federation (EHF). The Masterplan provides €150,000 in direct funding for a 3-year development programme to link clubs and schools through sustainable junior club structures. This provides for a significant step change to link players from primary and secondary schools through universities and the club game - enabling young players to stay in the sport and develop the skills and competitive experience they need to flourish in the game. I'd like to thank our colleagues in the EHF for their unstinting support over many years and their tangible and welcome investment in the sport in Ireland.

Two new clubs have started in in the last few months in Swords and Tipperary, this followed the establishment of a new club in Cork a year ago. These are very encouraging pointers to the future that volunteers are stepping up to work with OHI and Local Sports Partnerships and others to develop clubs in their local towns – well done to all involved and we hope to see a lot more of this in the years to come.



50 years ago in 1975, Lindsay Pennycook, a PE teacher from Scotland who was teaching at Tallaght Community School approached Con Haugh, then Secretary General of Cospoir (SI predecessor) about setting up a new sports association. After some discussion about the name, there was already a Handball in Ireland Con agreed to officially support the Irish Olympic Handball Association (IOHA) and so began the journey that gathered so many of us up in its wake and continues to inspire us to the present day.

In the months ahead, I'm really looking forward to sharing stories and recollections from our archives and from members and others to celebrate our remarkable shared history up to the present day. I hope you will all find something of interest and to enjoy.

Understanding our history is crucial to understanding and appreciating our future direction. Together we will celebrate our shared passion for our sport and our friendship and camaraderie through Handball.

Is mise, le meas

Fintan J Lyons
President OHI



CEO's Statement

Elaine Grant



Welcome to my first Annual Report since becoming CEO of OHI. I'd like to start by thanking each and every member of the Handball Community who have welcomed me into the sport over the last 8 months. Joining OHI as CEO has been a truly joyful experience for me and that is down to the beauty of the Handball Community who I find to be so passionate, open and have a clear willingness to share and collaborate to make the future of handball in Ireland brighter.

In this report you will find lots to celebrate alongside us, the sport is in rude good health with lots of examples of growth and development. My appointment as the first CEO for the sport in Ireland is a tribute to the vision of the Board who have focussed on creating the organisational infrastructure to enable the sport to achieve development targets.

I am delighted to be part of such a wonderful community and to lead a great team in a sport that has such untapped potential here in Ireland. Through combining our joint passion and leadership, I believe we can make Olympic Handball the fastest growing indoor team sport in Ireland.

To achieve this, we must work as a community to take advantage of our uniqueness and grow our membership universally. A bigger playing base across all age groups and demographics is achievable if we work together utilising enhanced data to identify new opportunities for growth and development. This combination of accurate and timely information and inspirational teamwork will enable us to unlock future investment, increased revenue and attract new sponsors.

Last year we marked 50 years since the foundation of the sport in Ireland and its thanks to our predecessors and champions, some of whom are still driving the sport forward with a life-long involvement in the sport today. We are very proud to be celebrating our 50th Anniversary this year and we want to build a tidal wave of support and love for the sport and reach our true potential in the coming years. I want the Irish people to fall in love with Handball, as I have over the past 8 months.

The 50th will be an opportunity to celebrate our volunteers who make the sport happen through their tireless efforts. I want to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers from Board Members, Committee Members, Coaches, Referees, Club Officers, Parents and Teachers. The sport cannot function without your hard work.

We are all setting out on the next stage of a journey together and my role is to guide us all on the same path to achieve the ambitions of the sport as whole. To enable us to do this I will be working hard alongside the staff team to embed a New Strategic Framework for the sport that sets the direction and key areas of focus for the job ahead. I look forward to you all joining us on that journey and I hope you feel supported by OHI along the way.

The road ahead will have challenges as we strive to achieve our aims and ambitions together but through a shared understanding of where we are trying to go, collaboration and good communication we will overcome these challenges and most importantly enjoy the journey together. We are incredibly fortunate to have the support of some fantastic partners who understand what we are aiming to achieve. It is our job to continue to deepen our relationships with Sport Ireland, Sport NI, the European Handball Federation and the Department of Culture, Communications & Sports and impress upon them our true potential to be Ireland's Fastest Growing Indoor Team Sport. Thank you to all our current funders and partners and we look forward to working closely with you over the coming years.

One of our biggest ambitions at OHI is to have a "Home of Handball", a Top-Class facility that will allow us to play and develop the Game. With thanks to Trinity Comprehensive School, Ballymun and Department funding through the Community Sport Facility Fund we are getting closer to realising that ambition. Watch this space!

We are also delighted to launch "Learn Handball" as our New Official Digital Coaching Partner. This exciting partnership will accelerate the sports growth in Ireland and is a key part of our long-term strategy.

Thank you to my Team at OHI, who have welcomed me with open arms. I am looking forward to putting in the hard yards alongside you all. The future of Olympic Handball is bright. Come on the journey with us, to make Ireland fall in love with Handball. Let's make Handball Happen! #lovehandball #gráhandball

Yours in handball,

Elaine Grant
CEO



MESSAGE FROM THE OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Joao Ferreira

Turning Ambition into Delivery, and Delivery into Momentum

The 2025–2026 season has demonstrated what is possible when ambition is consistently matched by delivery. Across every area of Olympic Handball Ireland's operations from participation and schools programmes to competitions, partnerships, governance, research, and workforce development, the organisation has continued to strengthen its national presence and build meaningful momentum.

This year, our focus remained both simple and ambitious: to create more opportunities for people to experience handball, improve the quality and consistency of delivery, strengthen the systems that support the sport, and build sustainable pathways for future generations of players, coaches, referees, volunteers, and clubs.

In practical terms, this meant expanding schools activity to record levels, increasing the number of young people engaging with the sport, supporting clubs and competitions more effectively, and developing clearer pathways for long-term participation and performance.

The year also saw continued progress in Women in Sport initiatives, stronger governance structures, expanded partnerships nationally and internationally, and the launch of innovative projects in areas such as sports science, injury prevention, and athlete monitoring.



Behind every outcome sits the dedication of staff, volunteers, teachers, coaches, referees, club leaders, researchers, and partners who continue to invest time, expertise, and belief into the development of handball in Ireland.

There is still significant work ahead, but there is no doubt that Olympic Handball Ireland is now operating with stronger systems, greater confidence, and clearer strategic direction than at any point in recent years.

The foundations being built today are creating the conditions for a more ambitious and sustainable future for handball in Ireland.

Yours in handball,

Joao Ferreira
Operations Director



Year at a Glance

Measuring a Year of Growth, Reach and Impact

The 2025–2026 season delivered significant progress across all key areas of Olympic Handball Ireland's work.

KPI	2024/25	2025/26	Growth (%)
Schools Engaged	145	157	8.28%
Teams Participating	450	506	12.44%
Young Participants	5,400+	6,000+	11.11%
Teachers & Coaches Reached	900+	1,000+	11.11%

These outcomes reflect more than activity alone. They represent meaningful engagement, increased awareness, stronger structures, and growing national recognition of the sport.

The growth in schools engagement and team participation demonstrates the effectiveness of the national development strategy, while increased coach and teacher engagement supports the long-term sustainability of delivery nationwide.

The expansion of Women in Sport initiatives, strategic partnerships, and research activity further demonstrates the increasing maturity and ambition of the organisation.





Strategic Highlights

A Defining Year of Progress, Momentum and Opportunity

The 2025–2026 season will be remembered as one of the most progressive years in the recent history of Olympic Handball Ireland.

Key strategic highlights included:

- Record participation growth in schools nationwide
- Expansion of secondary school competition structures
- Continued strengthening of the National League and Celtic Cup competitions
- Growth in Women in Sport programmes and leadership initiative
- Launch of the OHI Research Working Group
- Introduction of injury surveillance and athlete monitoring initiatives
- Development of new regional participation pathways in Ulster
- Increased international engagement and conference representation
- Strengthened governance, reporting, and operational systems
- Continued development of Beach Handball opportunities
- Enhanced digital visibility, communications, and storytelling
- Team expansion to include recruitment of the first CEO

Perhaps most importantly, this year demonstrated a clear shift in mindset across the organisation. Olympic Handball Ireland is increasingly focused not simply on managing immediate challenges, but on building long-term systems, structures, and opportunities that can support sustainable national growth.

Participation Report

Growing the Game, Opening Doors and Building Lifelong Involvement

Participation remained central to Olympic Handball Ireland's strategy throughout the 2025–2026 season.

Programmes were delivered across schools, community settings, Local Sports Partnership initiatives, festivals, introductory camps, and beginner-friendly club environments nationwide.

The sport's accessibility, adaptability, and fast-paced nature continue to make handball highly attractive to first-time participants. Thousands of children and young people experienced handball for the first time through fun, inclusive, and engaging sessions delivered across Ireland.

Participation growth was supported by:

01.

Expanded schools programmes

02.

Local Sports Partnership collaborations

03.

Community outreach initiatives

04.

School competitions and blitz days

05.

Introductory club pathways

06.

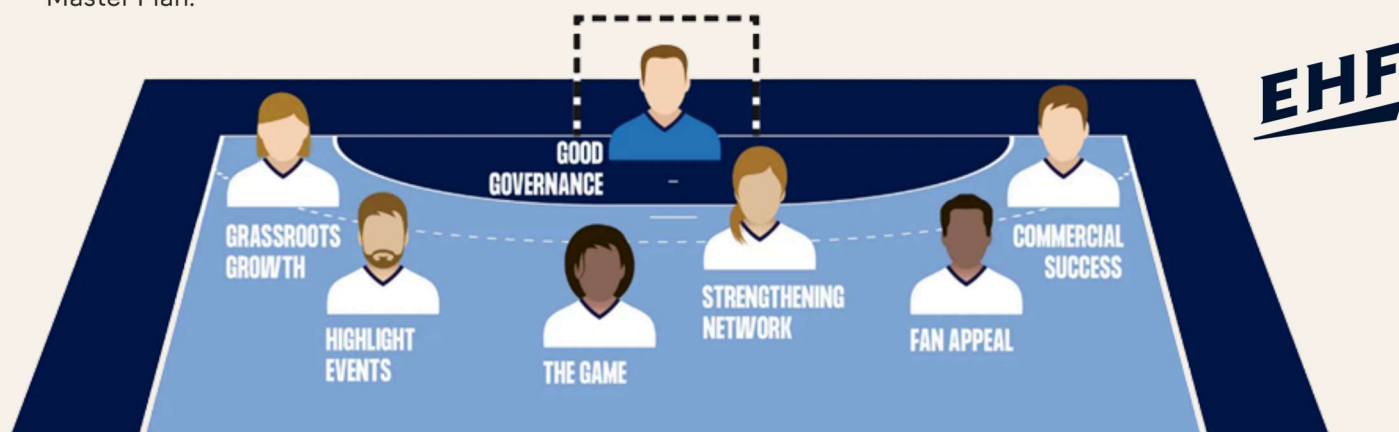
Teacher support and education

07.

Inclusive participation initiatives

Demand for handball sessions continued to increase steadily throughout the year, particularly within schools and youth settings.

Importantly, OHI also continued to strengthen transition opportunities from participation into clubs and competitions, helping create clearer long-term pathways for sustained involvement in the sport. This area of work was significantly enhanced through support from the European Handball Federation and our joint Master Plan.





Schools & Education Report

Inspiring the Next Generation and Powering National Growth

The schools system remains the single most important participation pathway for Olympic Handball Ireland and continues to be the foundation of national growth.

During the 2025–2026 season, OHI delivered the largest schools program in its history through close collaboration with teachers, schools, Local Sports Partnerships, and educational stakeholders nationwide.

Delivery included:

- Curriculum sessions
- Extracurricular programmes
- Introductory workshops
- Regional blitz events
- County competitions
- Provincial qualifiers
- National finals

A total of 157 schools and 506 teams participated in handball activities and competitions during the year.

Teachers continued to play a central role in the sport's growth. OHI supported educators through resources, coaching workshops, equipment guidance, and delivery support, helping create sustainable local capacity within schools.

Schools handball also plays an essential strategic role in:

- Raising national awareness of the sport
- Supporting future club recruitment
- Developing future players and volunteers
- Strengthening community connections
- Supporting long-term participation pathways

The continued success of schools handball confirms its status as the engine room of national growth for Olympic Handball Ireland.

Primary & Secondary School Competitions

Handball continued to thrive within schools across Ireland during the 2025–2026 season, with strong growth recorded in both primary and secondary school competitions.

Schools Participation Overview

Category	2024/25	2025/26	Growth (%)
Primary Schools	128	132	3.13%
Secondary Schools	17	25	47.06%
Total Schools	145	157	8.28%
Primary Teams	402	438	8.96%
Secondary Teams	48	68	41.67%
Total Teams	450	506	12.44%

These figures represent the highest number of schools and teams ever recorded in Olympic Handball Ireland competitions.

Secondary school participation experienced particularly strong growth compared to the previous year, with a 47% increase in participating schools and a 42% increase in teams.

This growth is strategically significant because the transition between primary and secondary participation has historically been one of the sport's biggest retention challenges. The increase in secondary participation demonstrates that player pathway initiatives are beginning to deliver measurable outcomes.

At primary level, continued growth reinforces handball's position as one of the fastest-growing school sports in Ireland.

School tournaments throughout the season provided young players with opportunities to compete in fun, inclusive, and positive environments while strengthening links between schools, clubs, and local communities.

Club Development Report

Strengthening Local Clubs, Building Sustainable Futures, the Master Plan

Club development remained a major strategic priority throughout the 2025–2026 season.

While participation programmes introduce people to handball, clubs provide a long-term environment where players can continue developing, competing, and building community connections.

Throughout the year, OHI supported clubs through:

- Competition scheduling and fixture planning
- Governance and operational guidance
- Volunteer support initiatives
- Communications and promotional assistance
- Membership and registration support
- Pathway discussions for junior development
- EHF funded Master Plan



A particularly important strategic focus was improving transition pathways between schools participation and club involvement.

As school engagement continues to expand nationally, creating sustainable junior club structures will become increasingly important in supporting long-term player retention and development.

Key future priorities include:

- Expanding junior sections within clubs
- Improving volunteer recruitment and retention
- Increasing coaching capacity
- Strengthening school-to-club pathways
- Improving access to facilities

Strong clubs remain essential to the long-term sustainability and success of handball in Ireland.

Competitions Report

Creating Meaningful Competition, Raising Standards and Building Excitement

National League

The National League remained the premier domestic competition in Ireland and continued to provide meaningful competition for experienced and developing players alike.

The league also plays an important role in:

- Retaining experienced players
- Supporting emerging athletes
- Raising playing standards
- Providing aspirational pathways
- Creating structure within the domestic game



Celtic Cup Competition

The Celtic Cup is an annual international club handball competition between teams from Ireland and Scotland, designed to enhance competition and player development.

The Celtic Cup once again brought excitement, intensity, and prestige to the domestic calendar.

The competition provided:

- Additional meaningful fixtures
- Opportunities for silverware
- High-pressure match environments
- Increased player development opportunities
- Enhanced club engagement and identity

Schools Competitions

Regional and national schools competitions remained one of the strongest annual assets within the OHI calendar.

For many students, these competitions represented their first experience of organised team sport and school representation.

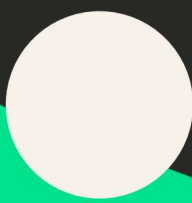
National finals events once again showcased the enthusiasm, scale, and growth of handball within Irish schools.

Beach Handball

Beach Handball continued to develop as an exciting complementary discipline with strong future potential

The format offers opportunities to:

- Diversify participation
- Expand summer activity
- Reduce reliance on indoor facilities
- Increase public visibility
- Attract new audiences to the sport



WOMEN IN SPORT REPORT

Creating Opportunity, Visibility and Lasting Change





Women in Sport remained one of the organisation's most important strategic priorities throughout the 2025–2026 season.

OHI continued to invest in:

- Girls participation programmes
- Female coaching pathways
- Referee recruitment and development
- Leadership opportunities for women
- Visibility and storytelling initiatives

Targeted efforts were made to create welcoming and inclusive entry points for girls and women across schools, clubs, coaching, officiating, governance, and administration.

The organisation also placed strong emphasis on increasing female visibility through communications, events, and leadership opportunities.

While progress has been encouraging, OHI recognises that long-term cultural change requires sustained investment, consistency, and strategic commitment.

Olympic Handball Ireland remains fully committed to building a more balanced, representative, and inclusive sporting environment for women and girls across all areas of the sport.

Marketing & Communications Report

Building Visibility, Strengthening Identity and Connecting the Sport Nationally

Throughout the season, Olympic Handball Ireland continued to strengthen its marketing and communications strategy.

The organisation placed increased emphasis on:

- Storytelling
- Digital visibility
- Consistent communications
- Promotion of participation and competitions
- Women in Sport visibility
- Partnership promotion
- National event coverage

74,690

People reached
across social media

▲ +23.7%

41,827

Website users

▲ +132.3%

117,572

YouTube channel
views

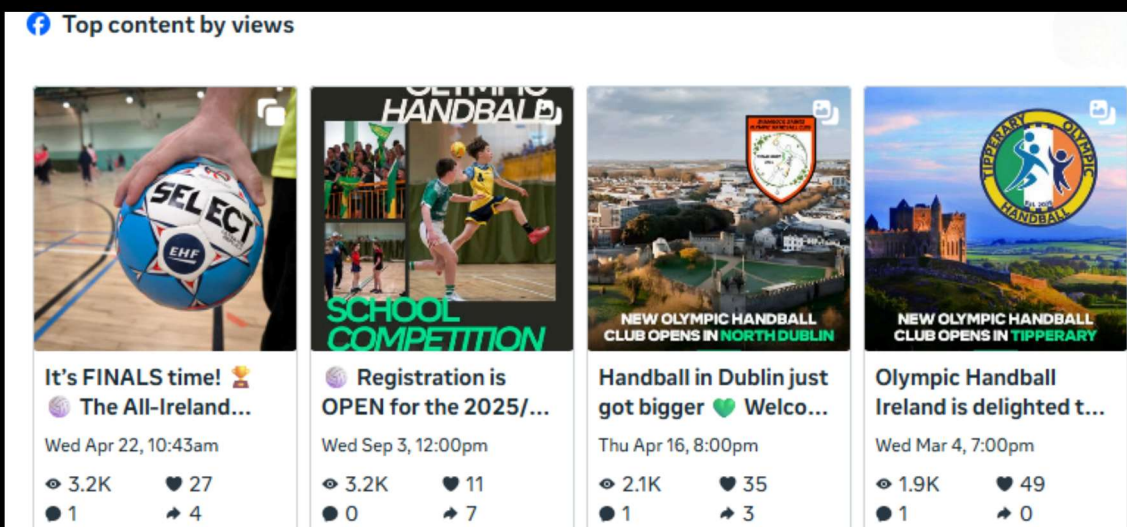
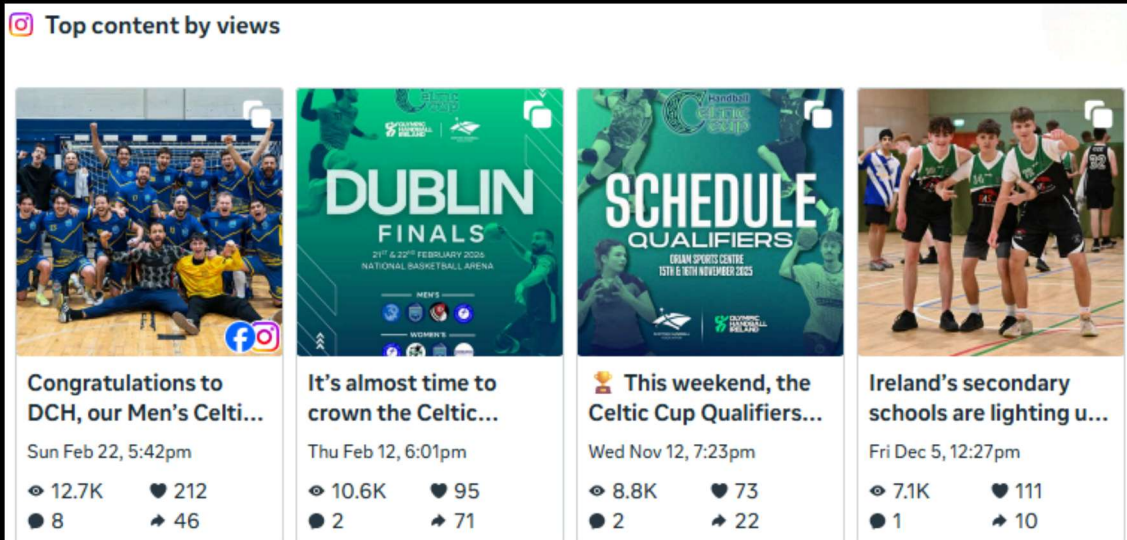
CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

Competition and event-led content continued to perform strongest across our social channels.

On Instagram, Celtic Cup coverage dominated, with the Men's Celtic Cup champions post reaching over 12.7K views, while tournament announcements and qualifier updates also achieved strong engagement.

On Facebook, school competition content and All-Ireland Finals promotions were among the top performers, alongside updates on new club developments and Olympic Handball Ireland initiatives.

These results highlight the continued appeal of competition success, participation opportunities, and key development milestones within the handball community.



Communications increasingly focused not only on results and fixtures, but also on the stories, people, communities, and impact behind the growth of handball in Ireland.

Digital platforms played a particularly important role in:

- Recruitment and awareness
- Stakeholder engagement
- Event promotion
- Organisational credibility
- Partnership development

The improved digital presence of OHI has also positively supported funding applications, sponsorship discussions, and broader stakeholder confidence.

Anti-doping Report

Michael Moloney, OHI Anti-Doping Officer.

Olympic Handball Ireland like all National Governing Bodies of sport in Ireland are subject to the Anti-Doping rules as laid out by Sport Ireland. Failure to achieve compliance with these rules means that OHI will not be eligible for funding from Sport Ireland or Government Departments.

- In December 2025 we were informed by Sport Ireland that OHI were exempt from having to deliver formal training in Ant-Doping for our Coaches and players.

- The International Handball Federation (IHF) and European Handball Federation (EHF) websites both now have a comprehensive Anti-Doping section.

- Our website contains the up-to-date information from the International Handball Federation and Sport Ireland.

- OHI Board Member, Monika Vigh completed the International Testing Agency's Clean Sport Education Course in April 2026.





Sport Ireland 2025 Anti-Doping Report

On April 29th Sport Ireland published the 2025 report on Anti-Doping.

- In 2025 Sport Ireland collected 1827 samples. The anti-doping program encompassed 31 sports, with a strategic balance of testing: 26% of samples were collected during competitions, while the majority (74%) were obtained out-of-competition.
- The samples are comprised of urine, blood serum, blood Athlete Biological Passport (ABP) and dried blood spot (DBS), reflecting the comprehensive nature of the testing carried out.
- The Sport Ireland Anti-Doping Programme helps to ensure that sport is drug free. It does this through three key elements; testing, research, and education.
- Sport Ireland's commitment to clean sport hinges on a proactive 'education first' approach, and vital resources are delivered through webinars, in-person workshops, and their comprehensive e-learning portal. In 2025, they delivered 60 education sessions that reached 1,697 stakeholders.
- In addition to this there were 27 sessions delivered by National Governing Bodies and 4,945 people completed either Sport Ireland or World Anti-Doping Agency online Anti-Doping Education and Learning courses. This approach further fosters an environment that allows athletes to focus on becoming the best they can be.
- Sport Ireland has launched Real Response, an anonymous direct messaging service to allow athletes, sport participants, and members of the public share concerns over WhatsApp about doping in sport.

[Doping can be reported through the Sport Ireland website.](#)

Safeguarding Report

Ensuring Safe, Inclusive and Positive Experiences for All Participants

Safeguarding remained a non-negotiable priority throughout the 2025–2026 season.

Olympic Handball Ireland continued to maintain strong safeguarding structures through:

- Vetting procedures
- Child welfare systems
- Clear reporting mechanisms
- Policy compliance
- Education and awareness initiatives
- Safe participation standards

Safeguarding responsibilities remain embedded across all programmes, competitions, clubs, and events.

As participation continues to grow nationally, maintaining safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments remains essential to the organisation's values and long-term development.



Coach & Referee Development

Building the Workforce That Powers the Game

Education and workforce development remained central priorities throughout the year.

Key activity areas included:

- Introductory coaching courses
- Referee education and upskilling
- Teacher support workshops
- Workforce development initiatives
- Continuous professional development opportunities
- EHF expert-led referee observation and mentoring

A growing participation base requires a larger and better-supported workforce of coaches, referees, volunteers, and teachers.

OHI continued to focus on:

- Lowering barriers to coaching entry
- Supporting referee recruitment
- Improving confidence among teachers delivering handball
- Increasing long-term workforce sustainability

The expansion of education pathways remains critical to supporting the next phase of national growth.



Coaching Report

L0 Courses: Since the last AGM the OHI delivered 2 L0 course in Northern Ireland qualifying 34 Coaches.

L1 Courses: In line with the Coaching deliverable agreed with Sport Ireland Coaching (SIC) next activity is the collection of expression of interest. To deliver the course we need a minimum of 10 candidates.

EHF Scientific Conference (Zagreb – CRO). Following on the injuries data collection and analysis that started a couple of years ago, four people represented the OHI at the Conference. Benedetta Coco, Peter Higgins, and Domenico Crognale from UCD Institute of Sport and Health delivered three oral presentations which were well received by the audience.

The article “HANDBALL INJURIES AND ILLNESS SURVEILLANCE (IIS): A STEP TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS” has been submitted to the Frontiers in Sports and Active Living journal and is currently under review.

Injuries data collection according to the new proposed format was performed during the 25/26 Senior League and partial results summarized.



Refereeing

The OHI Referee Committee joined the SIC Technical Officials Network. This network connects referees and official across multiple sport in Ireland, share issue, methodologies and knowledge.

Since last AGM we delivered one referee course, four table official courses, one Club-Referee meeting, and we moved successfully to the digital scoresheet. Despite minor technical issue the upgrade was successful.

This Season Senior league ad 40 games in total. Of these 4 were refereed by one referee only, which is a small but constant improvement from the past years showing that despite the small number of referees available they show great commitment.

The focus to recruit more referees needs to be maintained, especially in Cork and generally outside Dublin. Of the six active referees for season 25/26 two have dropped out for personal reasons, one from Dublin and one from Cork.

International activity: two new referees joined the EHF young referee program. They were called to officiate at the EHF event in Portugal over Christmas.

The OHI referee support, observation and development program was approved by the EHF. An EHF expert was nominated during the Celtic Cup, observing and delivering feedback to 3 couples of referees. This program will continue with the Celtic Cup 26/27 in November.

Competition

The Senior Leagues were completed in April.

24 games were played in Phibblestown (Dublin), 8 in UCD (Dublin) and 8 in UCC (Cork).

The Women league and 4 forfeits; The Men league had 3 forfeits.

Result distribution: 12 games resulted with a score difference of more than 15 goals with two games with a difference of 23 goad and one of 25 goals, 18 Games with a score difference of less than 10 goals.

Goal Difference Group	Men	Women	Grand Total
0	1		1
5	4	7	11
10	4	2	6
15		3	3
20	4	4	8
25	4		4
Grand Total	17	16	33

Facilities & Infrastructure

Creating the Spaces Needed for a Growing Sport

Facility access remains one of the most significant structural challenges for many sports in Ireland, including Olympic Handball Ireland.

Throughout the year, OHI worked to improve:

- Venue partnerships
- Scheduling reliability
- Access to suitable indoor spaces
- Infrastructure planning

Facility limitations continue to affect:

- Club training capacity
- Competition scheduling
- Programme expansion
- Long-term development planning

Despite these challenges, the organisation continued to maximise existing opportunities and explore longer-term infrastructure solutions.

Following some legal snags being ironed out with the support of Sports Minister Charlie McConalogue, the Trinity Comprehensive School “Arena” Re-development project aims to secure a “Home of Handball” for the future of OHI. This significant project gathered pace in 2025 with almost €500,000 of Department Funding secured and ready to draw down to begin the redevelopment. The project working group is currently seeking tenders for work to begin imminently. Further investment is required to ensure the site is of international standard for hosting future International Games, and we will require the support of our Handball Community to secure these funds. Please keep your eyes on our social media for future opportunities to support this important project.





OHI Research & Innovation

OHI Research Working Group

Embedding Evidence-Based Practice into Irish Handball

In 2025, Olympic Handball Ireland launched a Sport Ireland-funded research programme to better understand and prevent injuries in Irish handball — the first initiative of its kind within the sport nationally.

The OHI Research Working Group brings together sport scientists, physiotherapists, researchers, and coaches to embed evidence-based practice directly into the Irish handball environment.

Research Working Group Members

- Peter Higgins — Sport Scientist & Project Lead
- Domenico Crognale — Performance Specialist, UCD
- Benedetta Coco — Physiotherapist & Researcher
- Andrea Ongaro — Coach Educator & Development Lead

Supported through a Sport Ireland Research Grant and delivered in partnership with the Institute for Sport & Health at University College Dublin, the project aims to create the first national injury surveillance programme in Irish handball.

The research methodology aligns with IOC and EHF international standards, ensuring findings can be meaningfully compared with other European handball federations and leagues.

The ambition of the project extends beyond data collection. The initiative is designed to produce practical resources that coaches, players, and clubs can apply directly to improve athlete welfare, injury prevention, and long-term performance.



Research & Innovation Initiatives


Developing a Scientific and Evidence-Based Future for Irish Handball

One of the most significant strategic developments during the 2025–2026 season was the continued advancement of Olympic Handball Ireland’s commitment to research, innovation, athlete welfare, and evidence-based sporting practice.

Historically, handball within Ireland has operated with limited access to sport-specific research, injury surveillance systems, or structured athlete monitoring processes. Recognising the increasing importance of sports science and athlete support within modern sporting environments, Olympic Handball Ireland took important steps during this season to begin establishing long-term research and innovation structures capable of supporting both participation and performance development in Irish handball.

This work was led through the establishment of the OHI Research Working Group, supported by a Sport Ireland Research Grant and delivered in partnership with the Institute for Sport & Health at University College Dublin.

The research initiative brought together a multidisciplinary team consisting of researchers, sport scientists, physiotherapists, coaches, and performance specialists, all working collaboratively to improve understanding of injury patterns, athlete preparation, player welfare, and performance development within the Irish handball environment.



The project represented the first structured injury surveillance and athlete monitoring initiative ever undertaken within Olympic Handball Ireland.

Importantly, the methodology and reporting structures were developed in alignment with International Olympic Committee (IOC) and European Handball Federation (EHF) research standards, ensuring that the data collected within Ireland could be compared meaningfully with international research environments and elite handball settings across Europe.

Injury Reporting Framework

A major component of the project involved the implementation of a structured injury reporting framework within the OHI Senior League.

The framework was designed to collect consistent and scientifically valuable injury data across training and competition environments.

The reporting process enabled the collection and analysis of:

- Injury mechanisms
- Injury location and anatomical region
- Time-loss injuries
- Match versus training injury occurrence
- Acute versus chronic injury trends
- New versus recurring injuries
- Exposure-related injury patterns

The introduction of this system marked a major step forward for Irish handball from both an athlete welfare and sports science perspective.

Until now, no centralised injury surveillance system had existed within the Irish handball environment. As a result, there was limited understanding of injury prevalence, risk factors, or rehabilitation trends among players competing within Ireland.

The creation of this framework therefore represents not simply a reporting exercise, but the beginning of a long-term evidence base that can support:

- Injury prevention strategies
- Safer training methodologies
- Coach education
- Athlete monitoring systems
- Return-to-play protocols
- Long-term player welfare planning

The scientific integrity of the project remained a key priority throughout development, with a strong emphasis placed on data quality, reporting consistency, confidentiality, and practical application.

National League Survey & Injury Research Findings

During January and February 2026, the Research Working Group conducted a comprehensive national survey involving athletes across all five Senior League clubs.

The survey represented the first attempt to build a detailed demographic, behavioural, and injury-related profile of players competing within the Irish handball system.

The findings provided several important insights into the current structure and characteristics of the player population within Ireland.

Key findings included:

- Players represented more than 15 nationalities
- Only 17% of players first began playing handball in Ireland
- The average player age was 29.4 years
- 58% of players had previously competed above OHI Senior League level
- 72% of players engaged independently in gym or resistance training
- 27% of respondents reported injuries during the season
- 47% of injuries were self-managed without professional medical support

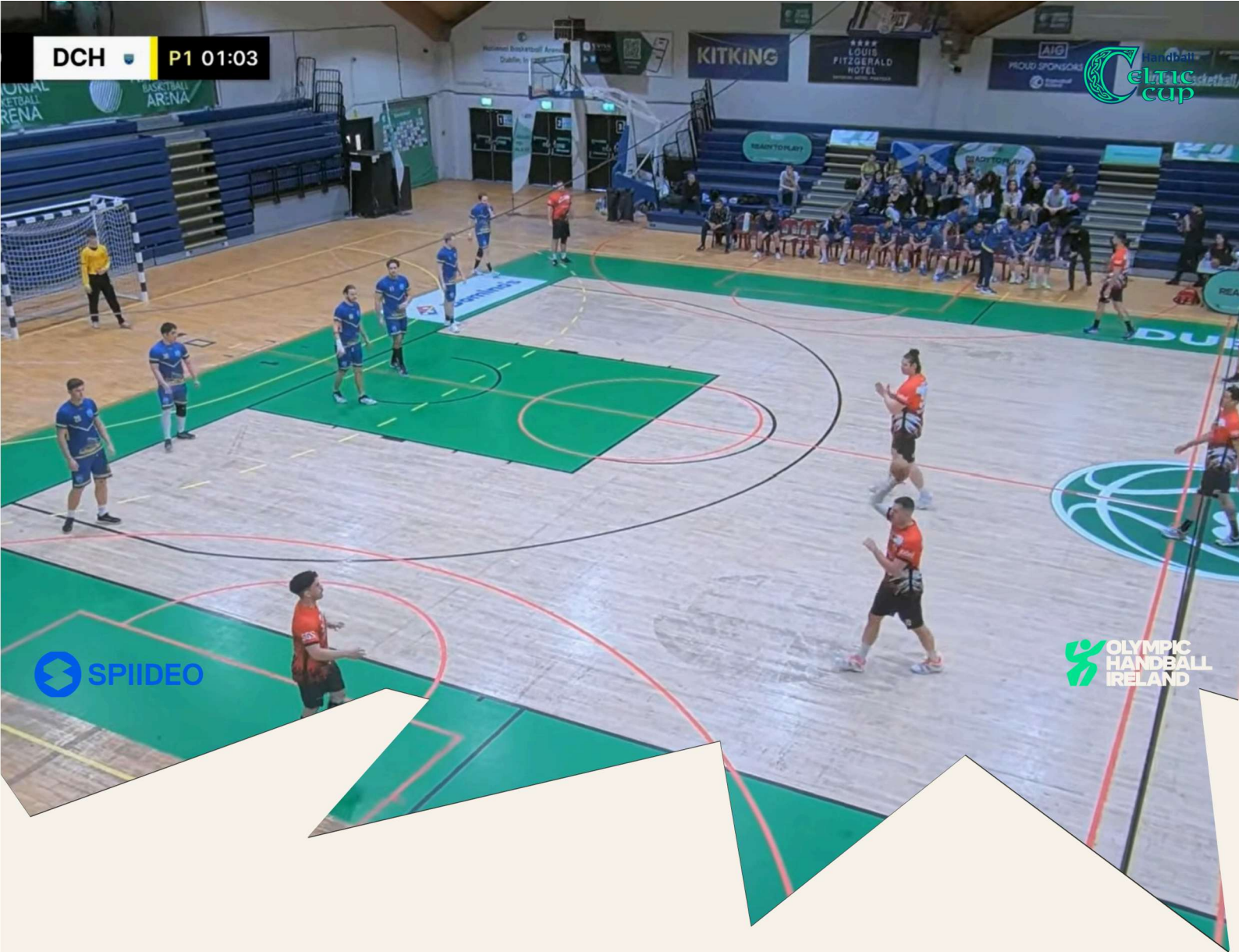
These findings were particularly important because they highlighted several structural characteristics of the Irish handball landscape.

Firstly, the data confirmed the highly international nature of the Senior League player base, with many athletes originating from countries where handball has significantly stronger historical and developmental foundations.

Secondly, the findings demonstrated the strong level of athletic experience and sporting background present within the league environment.

At the same time, the data also revealed important gaps in athlete support structures, particularly regarding access to professional injury management, structured physical preparation, and handball-specific strength and conditioning guidance.

The research therefore not only provided descriptive information but also highlighted clear future areas for strategic intervention and development.



Spiideo Automated Camera System Trial

As part of the organisation's growing commitment to innovation and technology integration, Olympic Handball Ireland trialled the Spiideo automated camera system during the 2026 Celtic Cup Finals in Dublin.

The technology enabled fully automated AI-assisted filming and live streaming of matches directly to YouTube.

Beyond broadcasting and event visibility, the trial also demonstrated important practical applications within:

- Tactical match analysis
- Coach education
- Referee review and learning
- Player feedback processe
- Competition archiving
- Performance analysis workflows

The successful implementation of the system highlighted the increasing role that accessible technology can play within developing sporting organisations.

Importantly, the trial demonstrated that modern analysis and broadcasting tools are becoming increasingly viable even within smaller sporting environments, creating opportunities to improve learning, engagement, visibility, and performance development simultaneously.

Output Sports Athlete Monitoring Demonstration

Olympic Handball Ireland also partnered with Output Sports to deliver an athlete monitoring and performance testing demonstration with Astra Handball Club.

The session introduced players and coaches to several accessible athlete testing methodologies commonly used within high-performance sport environments.

Testing protocols included:

- Countermovement jump assessments
- Reactive strength index testing
- Shoulder mobility screening
- Medicine ball throw power assessments
- General neuromuscular profiling

The initiative highlighted how practical sports science tools can be integrated into handball environments in ways that are both accessible and educational.



The demonstration also provided coaches and players with valuable insight into:

- Athlete readiness monitoring
- Movement quality assessment
- Injury risk awareness
- Neuromuscular fatigue considerations
- Individualised physical development

While the project was exploratory in nature, it represented another important step toward creating a more informed and scientifically supported athlete development culture within Irish handball.



Strength & Conditioning Resource Development

Recognising the growing interest among players in physical preparation and gym-based training, Peter Higgins and Benedetta Coco also began development of Olympic Handball Ireland's first dedicated strength and conditioning educational resource library.

The initiative was developed directly in response to survey findings showing that most athletes already participate independently in gym and resistance training, but often lack structured handball-specific guidance.

The resource project includes:

- Exercise demonstration videos
- Handball-specific movement preparation guidance
- Injury prevention exercises
- Lower limb strengthening protocols
- Shoulder stability exercises
- Jumping and landing mechanics guidance
- Practical resistance training recommendations

The intention behind the project is not only to improve physical performance, but also to support safer long-term participation by increasing awareness of effective physical preparation strategies.

International Conference Recognition

One of the most encouraging outcomes of the research program was the level of international recognition received during its first year of operation.

Members of the Research Working Group were accepted to present research findings at:

- The Women in Sport & Exercise (WISE) Conference in Loughborough
- The European College of Sport Science Congress in Lausanne

These invitations represented important recognition of the credibility and quality of the work being conducted within Olympic Handball Ireland.

They also demonstrated that the organisation is increasingly engaging with broader international conversations surrounding athlete welfare, sports science, injury prevention, participation development, and evidence-based sporting practice.

Long-Term Strategic Importance

The importance of the research and innovation work undertaken during the 2025–2026 season extends far beyond individual projects or datasets.

Collectively, these initiatives represent the beginning of a cultural and strategic shift within Olympic Handball Ireland toward more informed, evidence-based, athlete-centred approaches to development.

The organisation increasingly recognises that sustainable growth within modern sport requires more than participation numbers alone. It also requires:

- Strong athlete welfare systems
- Reliable evidence and data
- Modern educational resources
- Performance-informed coaching
- Injury prevention strategies
- Accessible innovation pathways

The work initiated during this season has laid the foundation for future developments in sports science, athlete support, research collaboration, and performance education within Irish handball.

As these systems continue to evolve, Olympic Handball Ireland aims to position itself as an organisation that values not only participation growth, but also the quality, safety, sustainability, and professionalism of the environments being created for players, coaches, and clubs nationwide.



Regional Development

Expanding Handball Across Northern Ireland /Ulster

Nicola Clements - Development Officer Ulster

In August 2025, Olympic Handball Ireland expanded regional development activity within Ulster through a dedicated development officer role focused on increasing awareness, participation, and sustainable growth across Northern Ireland.

Schools & Participation Programmes

Through Good Relations Funding Scheme support, large-scale programmes were delivered across 27 schools in the Belfast area.

More than 1,600 children were introduced to handball through structured coaching sessions focused on:

- Fundamental handball skills
- Teamwork and cooperation
- Inclusion and positive participation
- Cross-community engagement

An additional 15 schools were independently engaged beyond the funded programme.

Festivals, Blitz Days & Camps

Major participation events included:

- Belfast Primary School Blitz Day
- Omagh regional school programmes
- Omagh Primary School Handball Blitz Day
- Queen's Sport Centre Handball Camp

These initiatives significantly strengthened visibility and participation opportunities across Ulster.

Club Pathways

One of the most encouraging outcomes was the successful transition of school participants into club pathways.

As a direct result of delivery activity, new players joined Belfast Handball Junior Club, demonstrating growing sustainability within regional player development structures.

Future Strategic Priorities

Future development priorities in Ulster include:

- Regional school pathway development
- Northern Ireland finals structures
- Teacher coaching workshops
- New community club development
- Strengthening governance structures

The progress achieved during the year demonstrates the strong long-term growth potential for Olympic Handball within Northern Ireland.



Community Engagement & Inclusion

Building Inclusive Participation Opportunities

Throughout the season, Olympic Handball Ireland continued to support participation initiatives designed to increase inclusion, accessibility, and lifelong engagement in physical activity.

Walking Handball

In partnership with Age & Opportunity, OHI continued to deliver Walking Handball sessions for older adults.

These sessions promoted:

- Active ageing
- Social inclusion
- Mobility and wellbeing
- Community participation
- Lifelong physical activity

Inspiring Girls Initiative

OHI also participated in initiatives such as the Inspiring Girls event in Gormanstown, helping encourage greater confidence and participation among young girls in sport and physical activity.



PE Expo Engagement

Participation in the PE Expo provided opportunities to engage with teachers and educators while promoting handball within the Irish physical education environment.

Community engagement and inclusion initiatives continue to play an important role in broadening the reach and social impact of handball across Ireland.

Staff & Workforce Contributions

Supporting Delivery Through Education, Coaching and Leadership

The progress achieved throughout the season reflects the collective effort of staff, volunteers, coaches, referees, teachers, and development personnel across the organisation.

OHI would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our staff and volunteers for their exceptional efforts throughout a very successful year for the organisation.



Elaine Grant
CEO



Joao Ferreira
Operations Director



Caroline Nerbas
Sports Development
Officer & WIS Lead



Nicola Clements
Sports Development
Officer - Northern



Luminita Dulau
Sports Development
Coach & Engagement



Peter Higgins
Sport Scientist



Melinda Szijarto
Executive Support
Officer

Challenges & Priorities

Managing Growth in a Developing Sporting Environment

While the 2025–2026 season delivered significant progress, it also highlighted several ongoing challenges.

Key challenges include:

- Limited staffing capacity
- Facility access constraints
- Volunteer dependency
- Increasing participation demand
- Long-term funding sustainability

These challenges reflect the realities of a growing sport operating within an evolving development environment.

Importantly, they also demonstrate increasing demand, visibility, and relevance for handball nationally.

Addressing these challenges will require:

- Strategic investment
- Improved systems and infrastructure
- Stronger workforce capacity
- Sustainable funding models
- Long-term planning and collaboration

The organisation remains focused on ensuring that current momentum can be converted into long-term stability and sustainable growth.



Looking Ahead to 2026–2027

Building on Momentum and Entering a New Phase of Growth

Olympic Handball Ireland enters the 2026–2027 season with growing momentum, stronger foundations, and a clear strategic direction.

Priority objectives include:

01.

Increase school participation numbers

02.

Improve Junior transition routes into clubs

03.

Strengthen junior player pathway

04.

Expand Women in Sport outcomes

05.

Improve membership systems

06.

Develop commercial partnerships

07.

Support club sustainability

08.

Build long-term national team structures

The organisation is increasingly focused not only on growth, but on building sustainable systems and structures capable of supporting long-term success.

With stronger governance, expanding participation, growing partnerships, and increasing national visibility, Olympic Handball Ireland is well positioned to enter the next phase of development with confidence and ambition.

We are a step closer to becoming....

...The fastest growing indoor team sport in Ireland

Thank You & Closing Statement

A Shared Journey of Growth, Commitment and Belief

As the 2025–2026 season concludes, Olympic Handball Ireland extends sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the continued growth and development of the sport nationwide.

To every player, coach, referee, volunteer, teacher, parent, club leader, partner, researcher, and supporter - thank you for your dedication, belief, and contribution.

Every school session delivered, every competition organised, every volunteer hour given, every partnership formed, and every challenge overcome has contributed to the continued growth of handball in Ireland.

The organisation concludes the season stronger, more visible, and better positioned than at any point in its recent history.

The foundations are becoming stronger. The reach is expanding. The ambition is growing.

Together, we are not simply growing a sport - we are building a lasting sporting movement for the future of handball in Ireland.



YOU'RE INVITED
**JOIN US TO
CELEBRATE**



SATURDAY 17TH OCTOBER • 6PM

THE GIBSON HOTEL,
POINT SQUARE, DUBLIN 1

[CLICK FOR TICKETS & EVENT INFORMATION](#)

A SHARED HISTORY, A BRIGHT FUTURE. TOGETHER.

HOSTED BY HANDBALL COMMENTATOR,
SPORTS JOURNALIST & EX-IRELAND
INTERNATIONAL,
CHRIS O'REILLY

Welcome Drinks
3-Course Dining
Wine, Tea & Coffee
Stories & Memories from the Archives
Special Recognition Awards
A Look to the Future

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