

School District 83

2006 European Handball Federation Top Coaches' Seminar

February 1-5, 2006 (Zurich, Switzerland)

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations for future handball's growth in the USA

Prepared by

Mariusz Wartalowicz

Mannheim Middle School, Melrose Park, Illinois

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
Seminar's Purpose and Significance.....	3
Seminar's Program.....	3
2. SUMMARY OF MAIN PRESENTATIONS.....	4
Fast-break - innovative strategies (B. Pokrajac from SCG).....	4
Fast throw-off - implications for the game (B. Pokrajac from SCG).....	5
High Speed Handball - the future of modern handball (Z. Serdarusic from GER).....	5
New trends based on the analysis of the Euro' 06 matches (W. Pollany from AUT).....	6
Efficiency of goalkeepers - the new global approach (M. Barda from CZE).....	7
Attractiveness of the game - panel comments (all participants).....	8
3. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HANDBALL'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE USA.....	10
Highlights from semi and final games of the Euro 06 as indicators of future trends.....	10
Discussion.....	11
Recommendations.....	13
4. APPENDIX 1	

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today, handball belongs to the most popular sports in Europe side by side with soccer and basketball. The European Handball Federation, established in 1991, has been very instrumental in its rapid growth for more than the last decade. The EHF's role is multidimensional, encompassing wide range of endeavors including but not limited to: a dissemination of information about handball, marketing and advertising efforts, promotion and public relations activities, cooperation tasks among its member federations, organizing and running various competitive events, education of players, referees, and coaches. The Methods and Competition Commission of the EHF focuses on preparation of highly educated coaches, teachers, and trainers, ready to meet the challenges of constantly evolving handball game due to its nature, advances in theory and practice, rules' changes. Since its inception, the Method Commission adapted the model of arranging systematic coaching conferences, in conjunction with high level competitive events allowing the participants to observe number of quality matches, analyze the new individual as well as collective defensive-offensive trends, and compare those to their own teams' respective paradigms. The conferences are recognized by most European Handball Federations as the official educational coaching courses and play also an important role in the certification process for trainers. Ultimately, it impacts the coaches' employment opportunities and salaries.

Seminar's Purpose and Significance

The 2006 European Handball Federation Top Coaches Conference was held in Zurich, Switzerland, February 1-5, 2006, in conjunction with the 7th European Male Handball Championships. It was designed for the coaches working with the top teams and athletes, either on the club level or the national level. The purpose of the conference was to increase the participants' knowledge about newest trends in the game including: an offensive speed play, fast throw-off consequences, and game's efficiency in top level handball. The seminar was recognized by the Switzerland Handball Federation and German Handball Federation as an official course towards the Master Coaching Certification.

Seminar's Program

The seminar program consisted of three integral parts: two daily theoretical sessions, two practical demonstrations, and analysis of the newest trend through the observation of the semi- and final games of the 7th European Male Handball Championships. The main topics of the conference included: the counterattack and its innovative strategies, efficiency of goalkeepers, high speed handball - training concepts, new trends in defense and offense as demonstrated by the teams participating in the Euro' 06, attractiveness of the game - panel discussions and recommendations. Please see Appendix 1 for the day by date schedule and full details.

CHAPTER II

SUMMARY OF MAIN PRESENTATIONS

Fast-break - innovative strategies (B. Pokrajac from SCG)

The following are the most important observations and points made by Mr. Pokrajac during his theoretical and practical demonstrations:

- Thinking about fast-break has been too simplistic in relation to the game's essence and should be considered an integral part of the handball match. Therefore more time should be devoted to developing and practicing various fast-break systems and end game solutions.
- Based on the recent statistical data from Euro' 04 and 2005 World Championships, on average, the top teams attempted 6-8 fast-breaks, scored 4-7 goals, and maintain the efficiency of their counterattacks at about 80%.
- The teams playing aggressive zone systems such as 3:2:1, 3:3, 5:1 position their fastest players as the half-defenders. It allows them to have advantageous position to initiate the counterattack over the opponents' second offensive line. Also, depending on the team's tactical concepts, the counterattack's leaders (often best ball handling players) take special defensive positions as out-side defenders or point defenders.
- The top teams try to limit the number of "defensive specialists" who play only in defense as this prevents them from participation and execution of the fast-breaks.
- Most high level teams use separate 1st and 2nd wave counterattack systems based on their defensive formations but lack well designed and mastered 3rd wave combinations.
- The team fast-break practice is difficult because involve only a small number of players at the time. It should be the last phase of the fast-break training. This kind of practice requires advanced planning and motivation incentives for players to get and stay fully engaged throughout the session(s).
- Counterattack practices should become an integral part of the handball training.
- Counterattack drills and exercises must be interesting, challenging, short and of high intensity to reflect the game demands. Also, the drills should mimic the game situations and force players to make their own decisions based on the circumstances (open endings). The coaches' role should be to demonstrate/suggest 2-4 different ending possibilities and let the players make the final choices. Further, the coaches may want to occasionally force players to finish the counterattack in a predetermined way to put more pressure on them, practice specific offensive technical-tactical skills and/or to practice some special closed endings.

Fast throw-off - implications for the game (B. Pokrajac from SCG)

According to Mr. Pokrajac, the following are the most important fast throw-off (after the goal is scored) implications for the modern handball game:

- One player must be designated to run toward the center of the field to take advantage of the fast throw-off regardless whether the team decides to run it or will continue with a positional play. It puts pressure on the opponents who must run back to defense and limits their opportunities to substitute offensive players for defensive specialists.
- The fast throw-off creates completely new offensive possibilities as well as defensive challenges for the opponents. These possibilities should be explored and new offensive variants ought to be developed including open and closed endings, transition to positional play and set plays for numerical superiority. Players who are designated to initiate the offensive actions from the fast throw-off must learn new skills of reading and assessing each play to choose correct solutions.
- The drills must be executed with the top speed and limited number of passes.
- Players should not pass being air borne as this limit their choices to play the ball.
- Contrary to some theories, pivots should set picks always facing player with the ball
- The drills should often limit players' space of execution and stimulate creative solutions to typical and unusual situations.
- Presently, even the top teams do not have well designed systems to effectively prevent the counterattacks initiated from the fast throw-offs.

High Speed Handball - the future of modern handball (Z. Serdarusic from GER)

Mr. Zvonimir Serdarusic's contribution consisted of power point presentation and 90-minute practical demonstration, during which he showed a model of high speed handball training he has been using in the THW Kiel club that belongs to the top teams of the German Handball League. The following are his major theoretical premises of high speed handball:

- The high speed handball means creation of constant pressure on the opposing team by initiating counterattacks after each goal lost (fast throw-off) and after each successful defensive play. On the other hand, each technical error means another opportunity for the opponents to run fast-break and in turn many additional defensive problems/situations must be considered and prepared for.
- The high speed handball became a standard way of playing for both the top European club teams and the national teams.
- The high speed handball is highly regarded among handball fans who like short actions, increased number of shots and goals scored, constant fast counterattacks, high risk offensive and defensive strategies, the duels between the goalkeepers and shooters, etc. As professional handball clubs' revenues depend on the number of spectators attending the games, the clubs' owners demand that coaches make appropriate changes in their training structure to prepare players for creating games more interesting, exciting, and

entertaining for fans. To illustrate his position, Mr. Serdariusic cited selected data from the recent regular season game, between THW Kiel and FC Magdeburg. Table 1 presents the key statistics.

Table 1
Key high speed handball indicators from THW Kiel vs. FC Magdeburg game, December 2005

Speed Handball Indicators	Statistical Data
Final score	53:34
Number of offensive plays per team	80
Average length of each offensive play	22.5 seconds
Number of fast throw-offs	18
Number of goals scored from fast throw-off	10 (55% effectiveness)
Number of counterattacks	36
Number of goals scored from counterattacks	29 (80% effectiveness)
Number of offensive positional actions	26
Number of goals scored from positional actions	15 (57% effectiveness)
Number of spectators	10,000

As showed in Table 1, the game was very well attended with almost 90 goals scored after very short actions, most of which were counterattacks.

- Adoption and of the high speed handball concept requires change of the coaching methods and training philosophy. It also requires a number of very well trained and technically/tactically advanced players capable of maintaining the game’s demands for two 30-minute halves. Further, it has profound impact on the training of goalkeepers who must perfect the initiation phase of the counterattacks, both short and long passing in the presence of interfering defenders, if the fast-breaks are to be successful offensive tools.
- Occasional “rushing” by some teams does not equal high speed handball.
- Teams using the high speed handball tend to limit number of the defensive specialists and search for all-around players.
- The drills for developing high speed handball have to match the game’s demands (i.e., very short duration, very high intensity and speed level) and address specific game situations. Also, the exercises should be fun and enjoyable to keep players’ interest and participation high.

New trends based on the analysis of the Euro 06 matches (W. Pollany from AUT)

Mr. Wolfgang Pollany, who has a reputation of very good tactical expert, identified several new general trends in handball and numerous specific defensive and offensive new patterns by analyzing selected matches played during first two phases of the 2006 European Male Handball Championships. The following are his most important observations:

- Handball game became much faster with more goals scored after very short actions.
- Defense specialists participate in counterattacks and only after transition to an offensive positional play, they run off the court to substitute with offensive players.
- Most teams regularly run the fast throw-off after losing the point.
- Positional actions are much shorter than in the past and involve primarily 2-3 players only and 4-5 passes.
- The number of technical errors and turnovers has decreased due to players' better technical and tactical skills.
- Most teams very quickly adjust their play if the "passive play" is signaled by the refs.
- Most teams use one primary defensive system and its numerous variations depending on the circumstances.
- All teams have well developed and distinctive special plays for the numerical superiority and inferiority situations.
- Play-makers, who often in the past did not participate in defensive efforts, now play in defense as well to be in the position of initiating and leading fast-break plays.
- More than ever defense actions focus on "trapping", forcing opponents to make the technical errors, and/or "creating" predictable 2 vs. 2 situations with a limited number of endings for the offensive players.
- Back-court players shoot more often from so called "wrong or far sides" (i.e., LB shooting from a far RB position)
- Center-back players have increasing influence on the game's outcome.
- All teams use more often less complicated special plays. Instead, they apply wide range of simple open-ended actions involving 2-3 players and or special combinations including same beginnings but different final options.
- The variety of shoots is abundant with all players contributing goals for their teams.

Efficiency of goalkeepers - the new global approach (M. Barda, from CZE)

Mr. Barda's theoretical and practical contribution regarding how to improve efficiency of goalkeepers can be summarized as follows:

-) The goalkeeper should be treated as an integral element of the defense.
-) Regardless of the goalkeepers' level of sport mastery, they all have to deal with a number of factors that often are not under their control and greatly influence their effectiveness to save shots such as very short time to make decisions, opponents' technical and tactical abilities and their own team's defensive effort and performance.
-) Some of the most important factors that goalkeepers can control and improve through training include: mental preparation to deal with stress, frustration, and fatigue; tactical "reading" the game to correctly choose the kind and the timing of each movement; strategic skills of directing one's own defense to limit choices available to shooters.
-) The goalkeepers should always strive to create perception and image of being in the top shape by trying to deflect each ball.

-) Coaches and defensive players must help the goalkeepers to increase their chances of defending the goal by incorporating the coordinated block actions and tactical means of isolating potentially weakest shooters who are visibly tired and/or distressed, inexperienced, one sided, entering the game after long time on the bench, etc.
-) Coaches must train the defenders not to use the goal area for stopping offensive players, to not foul shooters who are attempting the shots from extreme angles, to not foul any shooters from behind to avoid double penalties like lost point and suspension and/or 7-meter shot and suspension, etc.

Attractiveness of the game - panel comments (all participants)

The discussion, evolving around such themes as fair-play and refereeing, tactical and technical innovations, handball as a commercial product, rules' changes, took place in four separate groups lead by the facilitators who afterwards presented their respective group's comments to all participants during the joined session.

The group discussing fair-play and refereeing proposed:

1. To tighten cooperation between coaches and referees in educating players about the importance of following rules and playing fair.
2. To continue established tradition of referees attending coaching conferences and vice versa in the effort of deepening the understanding of current issues and occurring problems.
3. To provide an advance notices of certain rules' interpretation for all delegations participating in major international competitions sanctioned by the EHF.
4. To make both coaches and referees responsible for protecting the game's positive image and protecting well being of the "star" players by strictly adhering to set rules and punishing the repeating offenders severely and instantly.
5. To introduce post-game punishments after reviewing the video tape from the game.
6. To explore the possibility of reviewing referees calls during the game upon coaches' requests, similar to American Football's call challenges.
7. To categorize faking injuries or offensive fouls as bad sportsmanship and punish those behaviors appropriately.
8. To introduce financial punishments for brutal fouls.

The group discussing technical and tactical innovations suggested:

1. To consider allowing for two "time outs" per half.
2. To revisit the concept of the "clean" playing time.
3. To keep promoting the high speed handball model among nations that still are a bit vary of it and thus slowing down the development of the game and its attractiveness.

The following ideas were presented by the group that discussed the rules' innovations:

1. Decrease number of players from 6 to 5.

2. Improve the floor mapping procedures to keep the game flowing.
3. Introduce the fast throw-off after each goal by the goalkeepers directly from the goal area.
4. Change overtime rule to automatic 7 m shootouts or 1 vs. 1 duels similar to hockey.
5. Clarify the passive play rule as presently its interpretation is very subjective.
6. Consider the effect of the last shot on the final result even if the game's time officially expired before the ball ended up in the goal or out of bounds.

The fourth discussion group talked about handball as the commercial product and different ways to position it for further development and success. They concluded that:

1. Preferably, all top competitions matches should be played in the sold out sport halls to create the impression of a big interest. Research has to be done to match the size of the hall (capacity) with projected attendance.
2. Based on the kind of matches (i.e., youth, adults, clubs, national teams) being scheduled, certain demographic groups of potential spectators should be targeted.
3. Variety of pre, during, and post special events should be planned to satisfy spectators' entertainment needs and expectations.
4. More events should be used in marketing packaging to capitalize on existing revenue opportunities.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HANDBALL'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE USA

Highlights from semi and final games of the Euro' 06 as indicators of future trends

The four top finishers of the tournament: France, Spain, Denmark, and Croatia, each presented some unique and exciting features in their offensive and defensive actions that can serve as a starting point for further analysis, explorations, adaptations, and ultimately for developing one's own genuine technical/tactical traits and innovative strategic solutions. The list of following highlights is not complete by any means but, in my opinion supplements the list of trends described by Mr. Pollany during the conference and well reflects handball's virtues of the moment. It should encourage coaches and players, after reflecting on their own level of advancement, to make the long term effort towards reaching similar level of sport mastery as showed by the elite European players.

- ! Top players demonstrate abilities of choosing correct solution to the game's situation from 2-4 available and sound options, in a split-second and under defensive pressure.
- ! Players can catch/pass the ball using one hand without adversely impacting the play's speed or rhythm. They also use the "touch" only approach to speed up the actions during the overload plays to be finished on the wing and during counterattacks to outrun opponents.
- ! Players can shoot from 9-10 meters away from the goal using variety of surprising and situational shots without practically any contact with defense.
- ! Players show very high level of ball handling during counterattacks, very often dribbling and/or passing in direct contact with a defender and without losing tempo or rhythm of their offensive actions.
- ! During "passive play" situations, the key players are able to surprise defense by a set and/or hip shot before the referees call for the turnover.
- ! In defense, players make the decisions very fast as to who is to step up from the line to mark back-court players and who is to stay low to mark pivot and/or offensive players penetrating the zone with or without the ball. It helps players to get early to their defensive positions, keep the proper count, switch opponents, and apply defensive-offensive actions (i.e., traps) geared toward forcing the error and/or intercepting the pass.
- ! Coaches change goalkeepers as often as necessary, especially when neither goalkeeper seems to save shots consistently.
- ! Most individual offensive moves are supported by excellent foot work, pass and/or shot feints making it very difficult for defenders to guard in the 1 against 1 situations.
- ! All goalkeepers and court players take high risk passes to finish counterattacks.
- ! Most top teams try to surprise their opponents with the 3rd wave of fast-break during

which the playing tempo is deliberately slowed down for a short moment, to indicate transition from counterattack to positional attack, to be suddenly increased again with a special closed or open end play. This strategy often had resulted in a good scoring opportunity for offensive team because the defensive team was caught off guard with one or two players less on the court as they falsely assumed that the fast-break has stopped and that they could safely make substitutions for defensive specialists.

! When playing in superiority or inferiority situations, most finalists continued fast throw-offs and fast-breaks. Further, they used very aggressive defensive zone systems and were able not only stop the offense but also to score 1-2 goals.

Discussion

From the conference's key speakers' presentations and matches between four top finishers of the Men's Euro' 06 it is pretty clear that considering all aspects of the game, the gap between European handball and American team handball has widen dramatically in the last Olympic cycle. The European Handball Federation established in 1991, came into the existence as direct response to raising concerns from numerous national federations as to the IHF's overpowering policies serving primarily non-European constituencies such as African and Middle East countries and their interests rather than satisfying needs of countries that for over hundred years were leaders in the sport. Since then, the EHF has been playing an enormously positive role in fostering the development of handball throughout the continent, especially in the area of coaching, refereeing, competitions, marketing and promotions, innovative business approaches and strategies. Past results from the 2005 World Championships and 2004 Olympic Games prove Europe's dominance on the top competitive level. The EHF's efforts to raise level of coaching, by conducting top notch conferences and seminars, are also paying-off handsomely. First, the conferences have been steadily turning solid profit and have enabled the EHF not only to provide coaches with the forum to acquire new knowledge and share experiences but also support financially selected under funded programs such as printing promotional materials, publishing more frequently educational coaching articles, and even subsidizing the beach handball selected events. Second, increasingly more trainers from non-European countries attend those seminars and bring back home some fresh and current ideas. Over one hundred and ten trainers from 42 nations and four continents attended the Euro' 06 conference. The national federations want their coaches to receive and bring back home most current, hot developments, ideas, and freshly emerging trends and not the old and/or already "reheated" or even obsolete concepts that can be learned during the IHF's seminars run every four years in often very exotic and expensive destinations. Further, the EHF's Method Commission takes pride in securing only the best lecturers for their seminars, evaluating individual presentations very diligently and without the bias to provide the participants with engaging, highly informative and most current research analysis available. Unfortunately, there were only a few coaches from the North and South America, namely three coaches from Brazil and Argentina, two coaches from Mexico, and only one representative from Canada and the USA, respectively, who paid their own way as their national federations did not send any delegates. Third, the highly educated coaches produce better technically and tactically equipped players and those, in turn, create much more interesting and exciting sport spectacles for new generations of spectators and dedicated TV fans.

Consequently, more entertaining and better attended events produce even more revenue and entice more media interest, corporate business investments, promoters, sponsors, all of which want to associate themselves with the sport and its properties.

Although handball is only fairly popular in Switzerland, the country with a population 7 million people and 25,000 active handball players, the 2006 Men's Handball Championships were very well attended and run smoothly by the small but effective and efficient organizing committee. Semi and final matches were played in almost sold out arena seating 12,000. The hosts were able to successfully advertise the event in all media, secure an attractive deal with a national rail system company providing deeply discounted train tickets for patrons, sell in advance a lot of tickets through local travel agencies and private businesses, streamline the merchandise outlets and concession operations within the arena so that there was virtually no waiting for event related goods or food and refreshments, deliver some added value entertainment events before, during, and between matches to increase the sense of enjoyment for the audience, and put on very exciting closing ceremony with a laser show and spectacular fireworks. For each game to be televised, certain advertising properties like electronic banners, scoreboard space, and court's floor labels had been changed to fulfill contractual obligations and satisfy the needs of business partners. There were also the VIP's sky boxes, special entrances, seating sectors, separate restrooms, the cocktail lounges for privileged patrons who paid extra for those amenities. It felt, from a marketing point of view, as if one attended the NBA's Finals or any other Major League's Championship event.

The technical-tactical difference between the top European players and their counterpart American handball athletes has increased from the gap to the abyss during just one Olympic cycle and unless some radical and revolutionary changes will take place soon, this abyss may become too big to get out from by several generations to come. It sounds very pessimistic but it is more reality and cold assessment than an attempt to present the truth in an overly negative tone. What should be even more alarming for the Pan American handball nations is the fact that countries such as Greece, Italy, Finland, Switzerland, and others, which in the past were labeled as "total losers and outsiders", are all making rapid progress in developing the players' of the future.. Probably sooner than later they will not only challenge the handball power houses of France, Sweden, and Spain or Russia but also more importantly make extremely difficult for considerably internationally competitive in recent years nations of Cuba, Brazil or Argentina to win any games during either the Olympic Games, the World Championships or even friendly continental tournaments. The "old" continent has built very solid developmental and competitive structure. It relentlessly strives to reinvent itself, adopts the best and proven professional sport business models and pursues all available routes to excellence that will surely guarantee its future supremacy in handball for many years to come.

With most national teams meeting together for only several days prior to major competitions due to players' very busy year around clubs' game schedules, the coaches focus almost exclusively on polishing tactical concepts and psychological readiness for the event. They rely on clubs to prepare players physically and technically and on players themselves to maintain high level of conditioning and overall preparedness.

One visit to the EHF's web site at www.eurohandball.com, proves another great advantage that the Europeans have over the Americans, this time in the area of applied technology and electronic media. Their interactive site should be an envy of all serious handball enthusiasts. In

addition to some standard options like the calendar of events, the photo gallery or who is who, this excellent site is very user friendly and features such tools as the most extensive list of links for all member federations and most active handball clubs, updated daily press releases and results from all sanctioned championship events, a full coaching library with research papers, coaching manuals, promotional materials, rules of the game, summaries of all to date coaching conferences, available for download or printing, live weekly broadcasts of several top national or club level matches that can be viewed on any PC's screen with built-in Macromedia Flash Player. There are also special sections for the young handball players, referees, and business partners or private sector parties interested in becoming official partners.

Recommendations

From the presented summaries of the Euro' 06 keynote speakers' presentations, analysis of semi and final matches of the 2006 Men's Handball European Championships, author's informal and formal additional discussions with the conference's participants, several plausible recommendations can be offered for players, coaches, and the sport's administrators responsible for future development of team handball in the USA:

1. Aspiring players should seek international training and competition opportunities through private contacts and/or a few existing sport agencies. It is possible to sign short term contracts with many European handball clubs. If the player's level of mastery is not high enough to sign with a professional club, there are numerous semi professional clubs that still might be interested in one's services and usually offer a stipend or a work-play arrangements. In the worst case scenario, most clubs will offer the promising candidates the opportunity to either practice with a team for predetermined number of weeks during the season with an option to sign the agreement at the later time or practice with the team during regularly scheduled summer training camps and pre season games. Either way, practicing and competing abroad for any period of time will greatly benefit individuals seeking rapid skill advancement and improving one's own marketability in the future.
2. Players residing in states which do not provide adequate training and playing environment should consider relocating to those which are better organized and active in strengthening their respective handball programs. It is especially valid for players entering colleges as presently only colleges and their conferences provide young athletes with regularly scheduled practices and games commencing with the Collegiate Championships.
3. If neither traveling abroad nor relocation seems to be an option, an ambitious athlete still has several options to his disposal in the pursuit of excellence. First, the player should contact and secure a coaching mentor who would be willing to design and monitor an individual training program focused on conditioning and technical aspects of preparation. Second, with help of just single practice buddy it is possible to train regularly and make significant improvements. Of course, it is up to the individual athlete to do the work. Even the best plan will fail if the athlete is not up to the task of daily self-improvement efforts. Third, players of all ages and abilities should constantly look for and experiment

with new technical and tactical ideas through currently available written and audiovisual materials. Watching and analyzing selected high level games can be a source of inspiration for the individual, group, and/or team practice for several weeks or months. It does not mean to merely copy the pre-observed skills or strategic solutions. To the contrary, it simply means to be aware, learn from, adapt, and transform the best and already proven modalities so serve one's own personal characteristics, predispositions, and talents. Nevertheless, there is no excuse for lack of constant self-improvement.

4. All active handball coaches working in the USA, including volunteer parents, teachers, instructors, should be registered with either the NGB's or an independent coaching support group serving not only their own interests but even more importantly serving their clubs, teams, and athletes. A coaching support group, similar to the widely existing "booster clubs" that parents often create for their kids' clubs or athletic departments, should apply for the charity status to take full advantage of the state and federal tax exemptions and substantial benefits of tax deductible contributions. Such a body can fulfill number of critical roles including: provide coaches with an active networking system; find and keep all members informed about employment and educational opportunities, support each other efforts by sharing past and current accomplishments, initiatives, and experiences regarding coaching issues, disseminating current knowledge in the area of sport science and coaching, publish its own educational materials via electronic media (i.e., internet based E-Coaching Magazine) and assist in publishing professional papers in various appropriate periodicals, search for public speaking opportunities for coaches to present their applied research projects during domestic and international conferences and conventions, foster coaching and research collaboration between trainers in the neighboring cities/states, write and apply for grants to further coaching projects, etc. If only 12 coaches would assume responsibility of writing one article/paper a year, it is possible to publish and share with the membership a respectable volume of theoretical and applied knowledge.
5. Coaches working in close proximity of each other (city, state, and region) and in similar environments (i.e., demographics, ability level, age groups, etc) should attempt unifying often very different and opposing instructional modalities onto well defined training model. The model, based on the current and future extrapolated game's tendencies/trends, should include corresponding, clearly defined subject matter appropriate for various age/level groups, short, intermediate, long term skill and competition benchmarks, and evaluation and feedback tools. Creation of such paradigm would allow for more effective and efficient use of scarce training time and "production" of players equipped with a set of rudimental but essential core knowledge, behaviors, and skills that can in turn become a solid base for further development of high level and world class athletes.
6. Coaches should plan to attend the seminars regularly scheduled throughout Europe despite current lack of support from the handball's NGB. Next such opportunity will be in January of 2007 during the Men's World Championships (Germany) and during 2008 European Championships in Norway. Concurrently with those events, there will be similar symposiums run during women's championship events. Upon returning from such conferences, coaches should prepare and publish the short post event reports to be shared with other members of coaching community.

7. Coaches must assume more active role in recruiting athletes from different sports to supplement their existing rosters and create teams that would fill the gaps in the chain of age group categories. For example, if there are one or more active junior high teams in the area but there is no high school team or program, most likely majority of athletes entering freshmen year will stop playing handball entirely. In effect, often several years of very hard work done by many people, and players themselves becomes wasted. By creating a new high school group, however, it is possible to “retain” those players, continue the training process, and establish a transition between the teen and college group age category. The longer the players stay involved in the sport, especially as young athletes, the better the chance that they will remain loyal to the sport and keep practicing and playing. We all should take example from Mr. Laszlo Jurak who relentlessly for over 35 years has been recruiting players for his “Garden City” team. Many of his so called “converts” became the USA Club Champions, National Players, and Olympians. Coaches from several countries in which handball is very strong admitted to aggressively searching for players fitting their “champion model” from other team and individual sports.
8. As the EHF serves all membership federations and works extremely hard to secure a top place for handball within the family of team sports, similarly the Pan American Handball Federation needs to take a leadership role in our region and beyond. Presently, the PATHF has no impact on handball’ day to day existence in our hemisphere, neither on its survival or extinction. Uniformly, it does not have any lobbying power within the International Handball Federation. The PATHF along with our NGB are long overdue for the “extreme makeover”. Two examples should be sufficient to illustrate the point. For instance, the European Handball Federation functions as a business enterprise with a higher mission of achieving public interests objectives, employs 15 full time professionals responsible for running its departments and daily operations, and generates hundreds of thousands of Euro annually from its business ventures, marketing efforts, membership fees, TV broadcast rights, merchandise licensing agreements etc. Exclusive reliance on volunteers in accomplishing business goals and objectives belongs to the archaic past. The modern world of sports, either labeled amateur or professional, are too complicated, sophisticated, and competitive to be managed by coincidentally assembled volunteers, regardless of their good intentions, passionate sacrifices of time and energy. Further, an annual self-generated budget of the Switzerland Handball Federation, which has close to 25,000 members, is over 2,000,000 Euro. In comparison, the late USA Team Handball Federation, which recently has lost its charter as the NGB, had barely 800 members and its budget, including mostly the USOC’s funding, was about \$ 900,000. However, with the decertification process completed, the USOC has now a unique chance to provide handball with a fresh start. Yet, with this extraordinary opportunity there is an extraordinary challenge of doing it right the first time around, or second time should I say? Personally, I strongly believe that whatever the USOC’ s plan of action will be, it needs to be revolutionary and not just reformatory as most past half-solutions attempted since 1959 had failed. Also, the ultimate success or dereliction of the plan will depend on whom the USOC designate to implement it. Ideally, those individuals will be passionate about the sport, have enough knowledge, experience, vision, talents, courage,

resolve, and dedication to not only put handball's future above their individual private agendas and goals but also to set higher than ever before professional standards for themselves and for all others involved in the process, with no room for compromising the mission. Further, the key strategic positions within new NGB ought to be full time contractual engagements with attached evaluation markers to foster accountability. Furthermore, the new leadership needs to be furnished with some initial assistance such as a guaranteed seed budget to implement pre-approved strategic actions based on the pre-approved strategic plan. One of the most important elements of such plan should be creation of the Marketing Department prepared to implement wide range of efforts in the areas of grant writing, promotions, public relations, fundraising, sponsorships, licensing and merchandising, endorsements, advertising, etc. Of course, among the NGB's primary goals is the task of supporting the National Teams. And, this task by itself presents additional challenges for the new and vulnerable NGB. Still, to effectively satisfy the needs of elite athletes in the long run, the NGB must first, or concurrently, achieve solid level of financial independence and stability. It would be desirable and very considerate on the USOC's part to temporary take the burden of supporting the National Teams on itself or at least subsidize them until the new NGB secures regular sources of income.

9. The new NGB should make the development of women's handball as their priority as this is probably the biggest untapped "gold mine" and in relatively short time, coupled with a few strategic changes within the WNT, could deliver long awaited performance markers.
10. Lastly, despite some verbal courtesies, promises of assistance, and anticipation for handball's fast development in the USA expressed by many members of the European Handball Federation during the seminar, we should not wait or count on any substantial real help from their governing body. From mostly informal conversations appears that they can't fully comprehend why handball struggles so much to become main stream sport and are busy achieving their own goals. And...rightly so. The future of handball depends entirely on all of us involved in nurturing its livelihood. I strongly believe that we as Americans have enough intellectual, financial, technological resources ourselves to turn things around and bring handball to the level of excellence that it undoubtedly deserves.