

## **2019 IMHA European Championships**

### **Trialling split age groups for 2019**

The IMHA has been monitoring the increasing number of teams taking part in IMHA tournaments and regularly evaluating the potential impact of these on future tournaments, based on what has been learned from previous tournaments.

#### **Big Tournaments**

##### **The Pros:**

Socially, it's wonderful to see players from all corners of the globe enjoying our sport. The varieties of cultures and attitudes help us all enjoy being part of a fully inclusive hockey family. Watching the joy on the faces of the first time participants makes all the work, sweat and tears, worth the effort. It feels really good to be part of something that reminds us of Olympic tournaments, or other large sporting events. In play we see styles of play and stick/ball skills we may never see in our own countries. As players, we can learn from these and take these skills home and pass them on, improving the standard of hockey generally.

Raising the profile of the Masters Hockey Brand – not just in the short term for the IMHA or WGMA, but with a view to what WMH may be able to achieve in attracting future commercial funding. Such may help reduce tournament costs or help countries in the developing world participate in the years to come.

Supporting all the teams from your country helps create an exciting atmosphere and tends to raise the standard of hockey as it lifts the players who not only want to win, but impress the audience at the same time. How often do we experience large crowds of supporters in our domestic hockey.

Umpires can learn from the experiences gained, improve their skills by observing their colleagues from other countries and help reduce the differences in interpretations of the rules between the different continents and countries. Again such experiences can help develop the sport globally.

I am sure that there are many more positives I have missed, but the reasons for the trialling of a split in the 2019 Europeans is largely due to the logistical negatives that such large tournaments generate and these are detailed below. These are not exaggerated; they simply describe the growing problems the IMHA has found increasingly difficult to manage – the same problems that WGMA have progressively faced, although not to quite the same extent to date.

##### **The Cons:**

Available locations for large tournaments are few and far between. The only country with has sufficient pitches in a small area, or in one club, is the Netherlands. Returning to the Netherlands each year would not necessarily encourage the spread of Masters Hockey to other countries.

Smaller countries with good facilities would like the chance to showcase Masters Hockey, but cannot offer what is required for tournaments of 60+ teams. If we are to encourage more countries to get involved with masters Hockey, we have to 'sell' the package around our membership. What better way to keep more players in the game than to let them see the quality and experience the excitement of the sport on their own doorstep. Most of them will not travel to Master's tournaments abroad unless they are selected to play for their country.

Accommodation is a real issue for the large tournaments. 60 teams of 20-22 people per team, family and friends plus 50 officials requires rooms for 1500+ people. Double that for the World Cup in Terrassa. How big a clubhouse is needed for the social events that everyone tends to expect to find at these tournaments? At Tilburg, a number of teams found accommodation within an hour's travelling of the club and only appeared when they were playing. As it was the Club struggled to cope in serving food and drink to those teams in attendance. In Terrassa, attendance at the tournament dinner and BBQ had to be limited due to the sheer numbers of potential attendees. Health and safety laws apply and must be followed. Due to the popularity of Barcelona, accommodation was expensive and many teams were accommodated some distance away with additional travel costs included.

Sufficient Technical Officials of the required quality are difficult to find at the best of times, but large tournaments put so much pressure on the officials that it becomes really hard work, instead of an enjoyment. Umpires cannot relax during a game at any point, whereas players have moments of non-engagement when they can draw breath. IMHA umpires have, at times been working one game on and one game off. Players complain about a game every day and not having enough recovery time, but some umpires officiated in 4 or 5 matches per day which is just too much. It is not good for their physical or mental well-being and the IMHA Board were seriously concerned about some of the umpires in Terrassa who were clearly suffering from heat and exhaustion. Some were on duty from 08:00 to 23:45. They had to write up reports after games, attend de-briefs with the TOs and some had to give evidence for disciplinary hearings. Yet they are not paid and often contribute to their travel and accommodation. In some matches, they experience serious intimidation and

verbal abuse from a few individuals or groups of players (thankfully a small minority) and get little thanks in return. We may disagree with their decisions, but we need them if we are to have proper tournaments.

### **Smaller Tournaments**

#### **The Pros:**

More countries can host these helping to spread the word to those not already seriously involved in Masters Hockey. Players can visit a wider variety of countries during their hockey careers and enjoy the taste of a wider range of cultures. Two or more different countries can host in one year widening the appeal of the brand more quickly and, if the tournaments are organised at different times, without the same technical officials and accommodation pressures.

Socially, it should be easier to hold events which everyone can attend and therefore an atmosphere, roughly equivalent to that of the larger tournaments, can be created. These events would be more inclusive and the only thing which lacking would be the size of the opening, closing and medal ceremonies.

Match scheduling would be easier and more thought can be given to the health and safety of the players with regard to rest time between matches and actual time on the pitch. It should be remembered that some of the players in 55+ teams are over 60.

There would be time also to stop play for injuries and discipline. If teams know that the clock will be stopped for non-serious injuries and goalkeepers straps becoming mysteriously loose when their team is under pressure, they are less likely to try and bend the rules in that regard. The 4 x 15 minute matches with stoppages, as per FIH requirements, will be easier to manage and fairer for all.

Countries which struggle to provide managers and medical/physiotherapists for all their teams at the big tournaments might be able to support the smaller number at these tournaments, especially given the less pressured match schedules.

Costs of tournaments may be lower and accommodation prices near the venues should be under less pressure, hopefully reducing overall costs and travel time to and from the venue. The tournaments will be more like the early IMHA tournaments in scale.

The likely numbers of European teams for 2019 will be around **42 teams** for the 35+, 40+ & 45+ age groups and **32 teams** for the 50+ and 55+ age groups. The total of 74 puts a combined tournament out of the reach of most potential hosts. Some new countries have applied to join and these teams have not been counted at this stage. IMHA are also required to offer non-elite tournaments alongside elite tournaments in preparation for the WMH, so that number is likely to grow. To keep this in perspective, 74 is the same number as attended the 2014 World Cup in Rotterdam and included the Women's 60+. It seems unlikely that IMHA will have 60+ women attending the 2019 IMHA Europeans.

#### **The Cons:**

The age group split means that teams might not be able to support their colleagues in the other split section and it may create issues for some countries who need to double up on managerial and medical / physiotherapy support if these individuals are not able to attend two different tournaments. Smaller tournaments may feel less exciting than larger tournaments and the atmosphere may be quieter.

#### **Alternative Thinking:**

The WMH Events Working Party made a number of proposals to encourage alternative thinking. The details of these can be found on the WMH page on this website. Some of the ideas were too revolutionary for the 2018 Congress, but some aspects of the proposals could be tweaked, leading to set ups which might be more appealing than the present approach. Have a look at these and give them some serious consideration.

We could look at having qualifying tournaments for both Continental & World Championships, but that could lead to some countries and players never enjoying the experience of playing in a Continental or World Championships. However, it would avoid the need to split age groups or genders.

There will be a number of other ideas which have not occurred to the Board or Working Parties yet, but that doesn't mean that doors are closed on change. If you have good suggestions to make, put them forward to the Board or comment on this website, but please let's leave the Facebook site for sharing the enjoyable and light-hearted aspects of our sport. Let's leave that one area free of hockey politics. My thanks to everyone who makes valuable contributions to our hockey family.



**GD Paton President**