

Steady under pressure, USHA strives, thrives

The 59th annual National Four-Wall Championships took place in June at Los Caballeros, with plenty of great action on the courts and outstanding progress made by the USHA board of directors in its regular summer session after the tournament.

If you follow handball closely, you surely know of events that have bothered folks for some time. The USHA chose not to engage the issues in a public forum, such as a Web site's message board. That is clearly not the place to conduct important, factual, thoughtful planning. Instead, we chose to work quietly to move forward in the best interests of handball.

Meeting without distractions, not amid volatile rhetoric, the board generated an impressive array of initiatives that will lead directly to improved services to our members and a fortified, more professional approach to promoting handball.

In the weeks before the meeting, I had been in Japan teaching a class. My university has a strong relationship with Panasonic, and I had a private working lunch with a senior Panasonic project manager at company headquarters in Osaka.

The "tour of the future" I was given was eye-popping. Motivated and charged up, I arrived late to the nationals but driven to share my thoughts based on that working lunch.

After hearing me out and discussing a wide variety of topics, the board is tackling no fewer than 13 different issues, including the crucial matter of how best to use technology to advance our game.

Earlier, a group of college students working on a project had teamed up to assess our Web site presence, making excellent suggestions that will be implemented as soon as possible. We also seek to bring on a marketing firm that specializes in sports to help us improve our outreach and services to wider audiences.

In addition, we are in advanced planning for the 2010 collegiate tournament, one that promises to have the best support for teams and coaches, as well as continued improvements in the players' seeding pro-



Steele speaks at the nationals banquet.

cess and a streamlined coaches' governance system in which all coaches will have a say. I am equally pleased to report that the board is fully supportive of looking for venues and significant purses for two major pro tournaments and two qualifiers in addition to our national tournament schedule that promises to be the best in years.

These are just a few of the task force initiatives that board members and volunteers are undertaking this summer. I fully expect that we will have a set of recommendations that will chart an exciting, innovative, state-of-the-art handball future while also moving vigorously on several fronts. In most cases, reports will be completed in time to implement recommendations as the competitive handball year starts.

The USHA board members are fully committed to setting an agenda that will ensure the vitality of the game, grow membership, enhance communications with our constituency, attract a younger demographic, provide sufficient funding for player and program development, identify and reach out to new partners (such as our successful outreach to the Clinton Foundation) and once again identify and select the most appropriate and professional technological means of bringing the game to its fans.

This is a total, top-to-bottom approach to improving what the USHA does for its valued members. We are taking nothing for granted in this effort.

We are not interested in unsubstantiated claims and anecdotes. In the educational world, it is common to ask: "What are

the best practices? What does the research say?"

We will find, keep and use the best practices. We will seek out the best in research in all phases of the services we offer and, when necessary, add new services. To bring the game to the larger world, we are seeking the best technology and the best providers — in whatever medium.

We want to hear from you. To that end, we will be conducting surveys, and we will pay close attention to the results.

Handball has survived difficult times before. It will survive once again — thanks to wise, experienced leadership, prudent decision-making, a willingness to try new ideas, a commitment to the highest standards of professional integrity and an undying commitment to promote the game to all elements of the handball population.

But more than that latter point, we seek to expand that population and augment it with supporters who recognize what handball offers the American people.

The USHA is constantly seeking outreach opportunities. Of necessity, these efforts are not done in public view. For instance, with capital campaigns, the target goal is typically not even announced until at least half the sum has been pledged. A tremendous amount of work takes place out of sight, off the record, quietly ... with committed volunteers and staff fully engaged in the various phases.

The USHA often has several initiatives under way at a given time. We must do the homework, cultivate the prospects, make the case statement and design program initiatives in house, with the insights and expertise of those best qualified to make significant contributions. Such work is almost never done in the public arena. As your president, I can tell you, based on a career working for non-profit organizations, that this is absolutely the norm.

Let me close by asking once again for your good suggestions and ideas. We will be glad to consider the merits of each and move forward on those that have the most promise. We look forward to hearing from you!

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