

How playing the USHA ball helps you — and all of us

Any ball, any wall. You all know this handball refrain. It's short, snappy, powerful. It says much, in its pithy way, about this great game and the people who play it.

It is true in many respects, yes. Children will create a handball game in a nanosecond using "found" objects — an old ball, a playground wall or the back of a building. When we teach handball in schools, one of the major lessons for instructors is "the smaller the child, the bigger the ball."

It's my understanding that there are no less than five types of handballs in use in Ireland. We don't have that many, but we do have the Red Ace, the White Ace and a couple of big balls being used in that rapidly growing portion of the game.

But we also want to have some uniformity. To that end, the ball specs for the Red Ace are clearly stated in the official USHA rules. We developed the White Ace so more youths and females could have an entrée point into the game. We will also help anyone who seeks information regarding court specs and construction, whether indoor or outdoors.

So, to be perfectly honest, there are certain understandable preferences for balls and walls. And to keep the game up and running, the USHA years ago chose to make arrangements under its official umbrella that guaranteed a supply of balls at all times for our devoted players and members.

We had learned from bitter experience that for-profit ball-making companies had zero interest in the good of the game, so the USHA took a proactive stance by taking charge of ball production.

Indeed, since that decision, ball sales historically have constituted about 25 percent of the total annual revenue stream. With USHA board approval, 30 percent of ball sales have been devoted to supporting prize money for the top levels of the game



Just as some popular USHA merchandise advertises: Any ball, any wall.

at USHA national events in one-wall, three-wall and four-wall.

As with all other aspects of the total USHA revenue stream, virtually all proceeds from sales of memberships, equipment and supplies are returned to the game. These funds go to maintain the Hall of Fame, record tournament winners, publish Handball magazine, maintain the website, compensate employees who staff the organization and keep it running on a daily basis, publish the official rules of the game — anything that governs, promotes and fosters the game comes from this revenue stream (including donations to the First Ace fund).

All of this is crucial to support tournaments, research, prizes, publications, the website and all the myriad details of a competitive handball year.

As your president, I am keenly aware of the need to keep our institutional memory alive while we also look to the future to find and capture a larger audience. We have called on a marketing consultant to help us analyze ourselves from his professional perspective, and we seek other ways of making sure that we maintain a progressive profile when it comes to thinking about promoting handball, finding new partners and increasing membership as well as the audience.

This brings me back to the ball. It would be a real boon to the game if we were to have available one ball that could be used for the whole adult playing population.

In my dream world, it would be a ball that would have the bouncing characteristics of the current Red Ace but the user-friendliness of the current White Ace. It would not be quite as heavy as the Red Ace nor quite as light as the White Ace. The production mode might even be different.

Surely, a wish list would itemize other factors.

We know from experience that our loyal members are devoted to the current ball. So we tinker with that with a certain amount of trepidation. I am not an engineer, but I do think we can find the right formula for a so-called uniball.

We'll still need other balls for children and for those committed to big-ball play. But it would be great to have a uniform product that any adult could use that first day (properly coached, of course) when giving our sport a try.

This would be a ball that would be fast out of the can, with a good shelf life, with uniform bouncing and rolling characteristics, a ball that would minimize or eliminate the kinds of problems we often hear about from those who have tried the game but did not stick with it.

The USHA will continue to produce and sell balls that have met our needs for many years. We will also work hard to see if there is a better way. And be assured that no change would be made without full input from our members. You have my word on that.

We hear tall tales of a supposedly "better" ball being marketed by a for-profit company. For full details, see the USHA white paper on the ball issue — but keep in mind that the USHA ball and the competitor's ball are made in the same location by the same overseas company using the same process, the same specs, the same molds and the same rubber stock, with identical wall thickness and identical performance standards, as stated in the USHA rules.

So when you hear claims about the comparative "differences" between the two balls, use a healthy pinch of salt.

In conclusion, I can't emphasize enough the importance of having the USHA control the supply of balls. Not only does this guarantee the availability of this crucial component of the game, it also helps support all handball initiatives and endeavors.