

## 2021 USHA Summer Board Meeting Minutes

President LeaAnn Martin called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. EDT, Thursday, September 2, 2021 at the Hampton Inn, 1409 Reynolds Road in Maumee, Ohio (held concurrently with the 70<sup>th</sup> USHA Three-Wall Nationals).

Attending were: President LeaAnn Martin, Vice President Denis Hogan, Secretary Tom Sove, Treasurer Steve Birrell, Bob DeVleming, Tracy Eubanks, Ralph Fregoso, Matt Jorgensen, Kyle Kloss, Terry Nett, Rob Nichols, Jared Vale, Ben Van Arsdale, and USHA Staff Matthew Krueger and Sam Esser. Quinn Foley, Alethia Mendez-Caba and Carl Porter attended remotely via Zoom.

Martin began the meeting by asking each attendee to share, *"What they have done to grow handball and/or the USHA,"* in the past year. Each member, including Krueger and Esser shared a brief discussion of their activities since the last board meeting.

The 2021 January Minutes were reviewed.

**Motion to approve the January, 2021, winter board meeting minutes was made by Hogan, and seconded by Jorgensen. No further discussion ensued. Motion passed 15-0-0. \*NOTE: Porter joined the meeting via Zoom at 10:35 a.m. Eastern.**

Martin reviewed the **Board/Executive Committee Decisions** since Jan. 2021 board meeting

- The Board approved the Investment Committee's recommendation to move funds (poor performing) and excess cash to high yielding dividend funds. (June 2021)
- The Board approved the Membership Committee's recommendation for the USHA Summer to Re-Member Drive. (June 2021)
- The Board approved the Promotion Committee's recommendation to award the 4-wall national tournament for 2021 in a split format, awarding the singles to Nashville and the doubles to Chicago (Schaumburg). Also approved was the 2022 Collegiate National Tournament to be held at Missouri State, Feb. 23-27. (June 2021)
- The Board approved the One-Wall Committee's recommendation to offer prize money (not from the Promotions Budget) to skill divisions and Masters divisions for the Wallball Nationals (July 2021)
- The Executive Committee approved the National Four-Wall Singles for Nashville, Dec. 9-12.
- The Board approved the Collegiate Committee's new Eligibility Proposal. (July 2021)
- The Board approved President Martin's travel expense to attend the National Singles, Doubles and Junior Nationals in Chicago. (August 2021)
- The Executive Committee approved the First Ace and Collegiate Committee's recommendation to offer Collegiate Recruitment Grants to as a one-time grant (up to \$500) to assist existing U.S. collegiate handball programs rebuild following the lapse/disruption in play over the past year. The grant is to be used for any expenses related to recruitment and growth of the collegiate program within the 2021-2022 academic year.

**President's Report:** Martin expressed her joy that we were able to meet in person for a meeting and host a national tournament one again. Martin acknowledged that we all have suffered losses, personal, as an organization and as a handball community. She reminded the board to be safe and spread out or do what is needed if anyone is uncomfortable at this meeting. Martin thanked the office staff for doing all they could to keep the organization running. Martin thanked the board for attending tournaments when they were able to travel to them and applauded the efforts of numerous committees that have made progress showing activity during the year. The USHA is still connecting with USA Racquetball every month via Zoom. The USHA and USA Racquetball co-authored multiple articles for Club Insider Magazine regarding keeping courts, offering ways to use the court space, and most recently, encouraging clubs to help keep college graduates engaged by reducing membership costs.

They are also discussing future conferences in which both organizations can attend together. Along with USHA staff, Martin has met with the office of the NAIA regarding our college tournament to determine if partnering with them would give the tournament more visibility and credibility, while understanding in doing so we might lose control of the tournament. The NAIA has 240+ schools they administer and they will survey their schools to find where courts are present. This is purely exploratory, and it should be noted there are no NCAA schools involved.

Martin noted the at-large election and who would be running. LeaAnn Martin, Alethia Mendez-Caba, Juan Flores and Max Langmack are running for two spots currently held by Martin and Mendez-Caba. Sove confirmed that Martin was still running for the board and would not be seeking re-election for President in January 2022.

**Treasurer's Report:** Birrell noted memberships and ball sales were on pace with the projected budget. Birrell also described some of the supply issues with handballs and other products from overseas. Krueger confirmed the challenges and delays with shipments at the time, and vendors are also experiencing supply issues and some COVID shutdown issues in their factories. Further, 117 cases of 21 balls were just received, and after filling back orders we have 40 cases through October. The goal is to get inventory back up to pre-pandemic levels and to prioritize balls for tournaments. There will be limited number of balls available to individuals. ONE Balls are due to arrive at now, totally dependent on shipping status. Birrell presented the annual audit for 2020 and noted the smooth process with the CPA firm. Birrell also noted that the USHA has a second round PPP loan, and that the bank has yet to finalize forgiveness procedures. USHA Staff has prepared forgiveness forms and will be ready to apply once available.

**Meeting was adjourned for a 15-minute break at 10:00 a.m. and resumed at 10:15 a.m.**

**New Business / Planning:** Martin mentioned that she spoke with Dr. Raquel Barnes, president of the World Handball Council. Martin noted that it was important that the USHA work closely with the WHC and the World Wall Ball Council in order to promote handball/wallball around the world. The WHC has asked us for input regarding supporting international competition. They would like a united front regarding Wallball internationally, noting the international Wallball organization is formally adopting the USHA rules for international play, including our emphasis on proper eye protection.

Martin shared that the 2021 World Championships were canceled. There is no known movement to alter the current rotation of hosts and it is hoped Ireland will be the host in 2024.

Jorgensen discussed the name of one-wall big ball handball, asking which is proper, "wallball" or handball? It was confirmed 1-wall big ball is now called Wallball to be aligned with the international game. More discussion ensued, including the usurpation of the title "handball" by the Olympic Team Handball game, and segued to the possibility of copyrighting or trademarking various names. Krueger will take on this task.

Martin indicated that the Presidents Club would be meeting virtually within the next month.

**Game Committee Report:** Sove indicated that there were no infractions to report. Vale shared a report from the Wallball Nationals and One-Wall National events. There were no rule updates at this time, however, Sove indicated that the definition of the Chief of Referees in the rule book will be addressed for the Winter board meeting. Sove then reviewed the Game Committee's three goals: 1. finalize the adoption process of the One Ball; 2. update the Referee Guide (to be completed by the Winter board meeting); and 3. provide more education about eye protection.

Discussion turned to the ONE ball. The USHA is looking forward to receiving the reformed "W" prototype, but COVID problems prevented the manufacturer from providing acceptable samples. This was a great disappointment considering private funds were provided. Sove expressed frustrations with the delays. Krueger acknowledged the delays and obstacles and indicated that ACE LLC had also shared frustration with

the process, and that they too were vested in the process. COVID had hit the factory in the late spring, thus they could not deliver the number of sample balls to test. Krueger pointed out that ACE LLC has remained diligent and in-step with the USHA objective as well.

Martin stated that the USHA's goal has always been to get a user-friendly ball that can be universally used for all players. Our goal is to promote a "user-friendly" ball. Martin and Krueger reviewed the history of where and why the USHA has pursued handballs through various suppliers.

More discussion ensued about the One Ball and 21 handballs. The USHA's goal remains to offer the best handballs for handball players and how this can best grow handball. Birrell noted he was satisfied with the manufacturing integrity of the ONE ball. It was asked what the USHA goal is regarding the One Ball. The answer is a consistent ball in liveliness as well as other universal expectations, especially being hand-friendly. The 21 white label ball was as close as we have come to a universal ball until the ONE ball, which is closer yet. Offering choices in the ball is not a bad thing, noting that tennis offers different balls in each tournament. Having a choice of balls may keep players, as well as keeping inventory of balls stable. The quality control of the manufacturer was questioned. The answer is that they have a variety of detailed tests, including but not limited to a cold drop, weight and size measurements and density measurements. It was noted the ONE Ball may be performing differently indoors vs. outdoors, and in some areas the 21 is preferred indoors while the ONE is preferred outdoors. It was noted quality control tests on how a ball performs on different surfaces may not be viable; and we may evolve to having an indoor ball and an outdoor ball, whatever is best for growing handball and is best for handball. Economics is also a factor with which the USHA will have to deal.

Vale offered to add something to the Game Committee's agenda moving forward. There was some conflict about a player yelling "out" or any another word that is reserved for a referee's call. If this happens, this is considered an appeal. Vale and Sove discussed the nature of the rule and communication between doubles players. Sove mentioned that the same concerns applied to both 1-wall and 3-wall doubles play. Mendez-Caba confirmed that there still was some confusion as to players making the calls which were confirmed by the referee, or if the referee only makes the calls. Foley confirmed that for their one-wall big ball games players were allowed to make the call, however, in their small ball 1-wall competition referees made all the calls. Discussion ensued about referees calling blocks as opposed to players.

**One-Wall Committee Report:** Mendez-Caba reported that both Wallball and small ball Nationals were a success. The Wallball Nationals were the second largest in the event's 14-year history. Women's events were well-attended. There has been an emphasis on developing Women's Handball in Wallball and 1-Wall. The 1-Wall Nationals grew as well, with 153 entrants, including a Men's Open Singles division of 27 players. The 50's singles and doubles also grew, and next year they look forward to reinvigorating the 60's. The USHA office is looking forward to receiving tournament writeups and accounting records.

There has been a noted problem with garnering memberships in that there was a perception there are not enough 1-wall tournaments to make the cost reasonable. That is no longer the case as there are more events just outside of New York as well as in the city. Perhaps membership will increase. In this endeavor they will focus on staying engaged with local centers of influence, have fireside chats in New Jersey, and perhaps extending this to New England. Vale continues to promote one-wall handball and increase participants, offering more events like the Player's Championships in Coney Island. The committee continues to pursue tournament sanctioning to more events.

The One-Wall Committee's goal has been to better educate and train referees. A strategic goal has been to provide more virtual referee clinics to players throughout the year. Vale expressed interest in achieving Level 5 status in order to provide more clinics.

Vale also discussed that a group has shown interest in co-hosting or bidding on the One-Wall Junior Nationals in 2022. Vale shared that a regional big ball event is being talked about, coordinating with other groups to offer something more than one tournament, our Nationals, each year. Vale spoke about getting more people

involved on the One-Wall Committee, and that the current members have been amazing providing volunteer help and desk coverage. They are looking forward to a USHA ranking system as this is viewed as a good asset for 1-wall.

**The meeting was adjourned at 11:37 a.m. for lunch and reconvened at 12:40 p.m.**

Upon resumption Martin recalled the Game Committee to consider a time sensitive matter regarding the age limitations in our 4-wall junior national tournament. Because of COVID the 2020 junior national tournament was not held, thus depriving the then-19-year-olds their last opportunity to participate in that tournament. It was requested that we alter the age limitation to allow those players their final year by extending the 19 and under event to be 20 and under.

**Sove moved that only for the year 2021, the USHA will offer a 21-Under division for the Junior National Four-Wall Tournament. Birrell seconded. No further discussion ensued. Motion passed 15-0-1.**

**Promotions Committee Report:** Sove started the report with a review of the committee goals: 1. Work on the split Nationals, 2. Enhance our prize money, 3. Enhance our relationship with the WPH, 4. Have a pro host a clinic at our Nationals.

The national tournament schedule for 2022 was then reviewed, with emphasis on the junior 3-wall, Hall of Fame, Women's Classic, Master Singles and Doubles and the national 4-wall, all of which are not confirmed at this point. The Junior 3-Wall Nationals may return to Venice Beach in 2022. The courts are cleaned up, and they are looking at constructing a fence to keep people out during the night.

The schedule for the rest of 2021 was then brought up, noting the 4-wall singles was good to go at Nashville in December, but the 4-wall doubles in Chicago is under COVID pressure with the State of Illinois implementing certain health protocols, the most potentially unappealing for players being the requirement of face masks indoors. Discussion ensued on what our protocol should be in such situations, including choosing venues that offer choices on masks, whether requiring masks is enforceable, requiring vaccinations cards or proof of a positive Covid test in the past 72 hours, the effectiveness of a waiver, prohibiting outside spectators, and the possibility of conducting a survey in the next few months. Sove and the majority of the board concurred that all this would have an effect upon participation. Sove indicated the USHA would reach out to the Chicago host to see if they still wanted to host under the new conditions. It was agreed that the issue would be tabled until the USHA learns the desire of the current hosts and the availability of a backup location.

Sove then brought up the fact that, insofar as a joint 4-wall national tournament will always be the prime goal, it is possible a split 4-wall nationals could happen again in the next three to five years. As a consequence, there could be a log jam of tournaments in the spring calendar if the USHA is not proactive in scheduling tournaments. He indicated the 4-wall open national tournament(s) should always have precedence over the two Master Invitational tournaments.

**Mendez-Caba motioned to establish that USHA protocol be the open 4-wall national tournament(s) shall always be scheduled before either Master Invitational tournament. Nichols seconded. No further discussion ensued. Motion passed 16-0-0.**

**Collegiate Committee Report:** Martin shared that the Collegiate Committee, in response to COVID and university shutdowns, introduced recruitment grants to assist programs in restarting and re-engaging students to join clubs and sign up for classes. New Eligibility Rules for the Collegiate National tournament were established to provide students another year of eligibility that they lost in 2021 due to Covid. Still to be worked out is whether they can represent their schools and score points. The Collegiate National Championships tournament will be hosted by Missouri State University in Springfield, Mo., Feb. 23-27, 2022. The committee continues to reach out to programs and contacts to get an updated status of their programs,

what their needs are how, and if the USHA can help them grow handball on their respective campuses. Van Arsdale added that he's reached out to those who can return to campus and shared USHA First Ace assistance that is available.

**First Ace Report:** Hogan and Krueger provided an update for all the First Ace Grant recipients. While many have gone through challenges, they maintain they're able to achieve their objectives. Krueger also reviewed equipment grants and the relationship with Simple Green to provide Wall Ball handballs to programs and schools. The USHA did test the Challenger 1 balls as low-bounce balls; however, they proved to be too dead for instructional use.

Foley inquired about pursuing Penn to make a big ball exclusively for handball since the New York area uses that ball almost exclusively. Krueger replied we can always ask, and he will do so. There was also discussion about which color was best to use.

**Membership Services Report:** Kloss provided an update for the USHA Summer to Re-Member program. Foley had garnered the most new memberships through grass roots efforts; however, Vale signed up the most new members prior to the Wallball and One-Wall Nationals. Kloss reviewed the survey remarks people made regarding USHA Membership. Kloss wanted to review how successful this promotion was as well as pursuing retention of the players who signed up for the promotion. Aside from New York, Minnesota and Michigan were the top states garnering promotional members.

Foley asked if there is an itemized list, or an "elevator speech" to discuss the benefits of USHA Membership. Kloss indicated we should review the benefits and consider adding benefits to the membership experience—noting the new website should more prominently feature the USHA Members Only areas of ushandball.org.

Kloss discussed USHA reach-out to members, providing them knowledge of their benefits and making sure the USHA shows gratification to members renewing or joining. Kloss also encouraged board involvement in contacting new members, providing more outreach that players know they have a place to play and are part of a larger group of players.

Kloss discussed the player rankings/ratings system, noting this has been put on hold during the pandemic. Kloss also discussed including the USHA member list on ushandball.org. Some expressed concern about violating a privacy issue. Kloss discussed only including names and states or regions, with no other sensitive information. Discussion ensued about having players opt-out of having their names listed, noting the USHA would most likely only provide name and region.

Members were featured in Court Shorts and there were monthly drawings. Kloss also reviewed that the office has begun to track "start date" of membership in order to acknowledge milestones.

Kloss reviewed improving the website, improving outreach, and improving tournament sanctioning. The committee would like to determine to what degree USHA membership caters to tournament players and/or non-tournament players. The committee wanted to expand auto-renewals, making it easier for people to sign up and the USHA to administer them. Foley inquired about making the three-year membership incentive "a little more aggressive" to entice people to join for three years.

Kloss discussed offering different levels of membership, including an option to just receiving the magazine online. DeVleming inquired as to how many current members were on auto-renew. Krueger indicated just over 5% of USHA members are on auto renewal at this point.

**Funding and Revenue report:** Foley detailed how he was able to acquire local, small businesses as sponsors for a recent 1-wall tournament. All the sponsors came to view the tournament, and now they are all prospective players. It is also good promotion for each of the sponsors. Discussion ensued on the subject of marketing our sport.

- Use the USHA logo; try to get at least one logo in all LA Fitness, Lifetime, and YMCAs.
- Develop USHA versions of tournament SWAG: socks, sunglasses, hats.
- Merging with racquetball is very good in keeping courts.
- Owen Gloves recently provided custom gloves for entrants in a local tournament. Another board member echoed this form of SWAG.
- There is a YouTube video on erecting a portable 1-wall court. This could be shared.
- The USHA glove brand is being pushed in Queens. It is noted the USHA has the ability to do custom gloves and next year for the 1-wall tournament we should make those available.
- Reaching out to local small businesses as a sponsor for local tournament is a potential idea.
- The USHA should organize a pilot program for others to use in this endeavor, noting that the USHA does target business owners for the 4-wall nationals program ads.

**Player Recruitment Update:** Jorgensen indicated that the most growth potential for handball is at college campuses and through former athletes. Jorgensen also shared that reaching out to school and having access to starter kits and equipment available was helpful to getting new players involved. A starter kit could be as simple as a handball bag with equipment so a new player just needs to pick one up and go play. An obvious place to showcase the sport would be outdoor courts where the game is more likely to be viewed versus an indoor court. Players should be encouraged to be on the lookout, promote the game and solicit new players. Other areas of strategy include approaching fire stations and first responders. Foley shared that an easy way to recruit new players is to have visible outdoor courts with an ambassador present whenever possible in order to educate anyone who stops by to watch (or try) handball.

**Personnel Report:** Nett began by giving a summary of the Board Self Evaluation survey. He then reported on other committee goals. The Employee Policy Manual revision has been sent to the committee and our Executive Director for review. First round of corrections will be made and the final version will be ready for submission to the board for approval at the next Winter meeting. Guidelines for the use of emergency health funds for employees has been anonymously provided to the committee. Right now, there is no time line for formal creation. A professional who provides evaluation of organizations has offered his services gratis. This has been turned over to our Executive Director to pursue.

**Technology Committee report:** Van Arsdale provided an update on the court map on the web site. It will be available to members and non-members, where only members will be allowed to edit information via a special link. He provided a brief description of how updates are handled/approved on the web site. Bracket Ace is still being fine-tuned, noting more feedback is needed for this purpose. Van Arsdale reviewed the committee's goals. Specifically, in 2021 the court data base has first priority; in 2022 they will work on the player ranking system, for each variation of handball; and in 2023 they hope to have Bracket Ace universally useable.

At this time Martin paused the agenda to provide an update on the Promotion Committee item of the 4-wall Doubles National tournament in Chicago. Krueger reported he contacted the host and they have the same concerns about their COVID restrictions and the impact on the tournament. The host will do more research and confer with the host venue as well as the Illinois Handball Association board and advise the USHA of their plan of action within the week.

**Investment Committee and Budget Committee reports:** Birrell combined these reports. The goal for 2021 was to build the Endowment Fund, and do an internal review of the investments. This has been done. The next step is to acquire more professional advice and he is searching for an acceptable provider. He is defining the goals, risk acceptance parameters, and a set of questions for prospects. However, he wishes for board support and approval of his actions. His intent is to have this search completed in the next few months and report for the board at the next Winter meeting.

**Birrell motioned that the USHA board approves and directs Treasurer Birrell to pursue and employ an outside investment expert. Nett seconded. No further discussion ensued. Motion passed 16-0-0.**

Martin opened discussion of the At-Large board member election by noting there are four candidates running for two positions this year. Time was allowed for a brief review of the candidate statements. The election was held via private vote in which each board member voted for two candidates. Sove and Birrell were tasked with counting the votes. The result was Martin and Mendez-Caba each received at least nine votes (a required majority) and were reelected on the first ballot. All candidates received votes. Krueger shall advise the other candidates of the outcome and thank them for their effort.

At this time Martin asked each board member advise the board what they plan to do to grow the game of handball and/or the USHA in the next months leading up to the Winter meeting. At the end she reminded the board the Winter meeting will be held January 22-23, 2022 in Tucson, AZ.

Martin adjourned the meeting at 4:31 pm EDT.

Submitted by  
Tom Sove  
Secretary

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "T. Sove", written in black ink.