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Annexation or Fertile Inclusion? The Origins of Handball’s International Organizational Structures

Sport scholars have increasingly explored the institutional history of international governing bodies of sport in recent years. Some sports, however, have received little attention. Handball is one of them. Despite handball’s modern impact and its global governing body, relatively little is known about the history of its governing body, the International Handball Federation (IHF) and the attempts to govern handball internationally. The following article traces the history of the first governing body of handball, the International Amateur Handball Federation (IAHF). Dissolved following the Second World War, the story of the IAHF has previously received scant attention from international scholars. By tracing the history of the IAHF, this article argues that sport administrators, including those within Nazi Germany, manipulated the IAHF to support their personal goals.

Keywords: Handball; Sport Governance; International Sport Federations; Nazi Olympics

In August 2020, the International Handball Federation (IHF) made global headlines as the first international sport federation to turn down the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) coronavirus support funding.¹ The organization therewith made clear that it had developed a strong base of financial assets in recent years. And indeed, even though the sport of handball is little popular on the North American continent, where large television corporations and corporate sponsors are usually willing to invest in individual sports, handball has developed into a sport of economic and sporting significance in countries around the globe. The IHF cites roughly twenty-seven million players worldwide and claims the 2019 Men’s World Championships created over two hundred million dollars in media value.² In May of 2018, the European Handball Federation signed a ten-year media and marketing deal worth over 500 million euros.³
Despite the sport’s modern impact and its global governing body, relatively little is known about the history of the IHF and the attempts to govern handball internationally. Literature on the history of handball exists primarily in the German and Scandinavian languages, predominantly due to the popularity of the sport in those regions and the importance Germany and Scandinavian countries played in the early development of different versions of handball. The IHF has published a pictorial book on its past but an academic discussion on the power and politics involved in the running of international handball is missing. This is despite a recent rise in scholarship on the histories of international governing bodies of sport.4

This paper attempts to close this research gap and explore the early power plays within international sport politics to decide on how handball should be governed on the international level. Our focus lies on the time period between the end of the First World War, when handball rapidly gained popularity in national contexts, and the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games that saw a form of handball, ‘field handball’, make its first Olympic appearance. At that time, handball was governed by the International Amateur Handball Federation (IAHF), which preceded the IHF. After the Second World War, handball officials dissolved the IAHF and founded the IHF in 1946, making the IHF a relatively young international governing body of an individual sport.5 Importantly, the handball form under the auspices of the IAHF was what is today known as ‘field handball’, practiced outdoors. As the legitimate pre-form of today’s handball sport that is mainly played indoors, we will refer to the sport as ‘handball’ throughout the paper.

Our findings are based on archival sources collected from the World Athletics, formerly the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), Archive in Monaco, the Carl and Liselott Diem-Archive in Cologne, the Archive of the IOC’s
Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, the Riksarkivet in Stockholm and the Avery Brundage Digital Collection.

The following article argues that, rather than the development of the sport, the early stakeholders in handball instrumentalized the sport as a means of reaching their own individual goals. German sport officials were often the driving force behind such instrumentalization. As a result of this cycle of self-interest, the sport had few defined structures, which was a key reason that the sport required a redevelopment following the Second World War. In addition, some of the key individuals involved in sport governance during the twentieth century, Avery Brundage, Karl Ritter von Halt, and Sigfrid Edström, had significant involvement with the sport of handball, which has not been explored to date.

**Early Forms of Handball: Also A Game for Women**

Forms of handball developed in different national and cultural contexts at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, there is even evidence that the sport was first played in Denmark as early as the last decade of the previous century. The Danish gymnast Holger Nielsen formalized ‘Haandbold’ rules in 1906, and a game with rules that players could only use their hands was played in Danish schools throughout the first two decades of the 20th century. The Danes also played 7-a-side handball forms indoors, which most closely resembles today’s handball rules. Thus, Danish historians have claimed that Denmark is the motherland of handball. Forms of handball can also be found in Swedish school curricula around the same time period. In Eastern Europe, handball games were played in Czechoslovakia and in the Ukraine. In Ireland, a game called ‘court ball’ with handball-like rules was widespread. Finally, in the United States, a handball sport existed as well but the American version differed considerably from its European counterparts as the American form was an individual sport, which involved
hitting a ball against a wall.\textsuperscript{10} Considering the background and the number of diverse forms of handball prior to the First World War, it is pointless to debate about the genuine roots of the sport. However, as the focus of this paper is on the international level, we must take a closer look at the developments in Germany as those proved to be by far the most significant for the establishment of a global governing body of handball.

In Germany, various forms of handball were modified over almost three decades until the sport received the desired acceptance by national sport organisations in the 1920s. The different types of handball had one common ideology: they were purposefully invented as a counterpart to football, the British sport that gained rapid popularity from the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century onwards. Opponents of football were often driven by anti-British sentiments and did not want to see the spread of a British ‘invention’ within German lands. This was particularly the case amongst the nationally oriented German gymnasts, who were organized in the German Gymnastics Federation (\textit{Deutsche Turnerschaft}, DT). It was here that early forms of handball received the most attention in the first two decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and consequently German gymnastics instructors were influential in the early rationalization processes of the sport and those rules later were adopted at the international level.

In stark contrast to the majority of today’s most popular ball sports, handball in Germany was first a sport mainly practiced by women.\textsuperscript{11} During the First World War, gymnasts in Berlin developed a form of handball called ‘Torball’, with which they hoped to increase the health of women while men were fighting in the War. A mixture of various known handball forms, ‘Torball’ included many of the features later included in field handball. It was played by eleven players on a rectangular field, with two goals and a throwing circle in which attackers could not step. Significantly, the rules,
officially introduced in 1917, did not allow for physical contact. The officials instead characterised ‘Torball’ as a ‘funny catch game’ in line with the contemporary image of women. Thus, whilst not an invention by women, ‘Torball’ was unquestionably a game intended for women.

However, when the men returned from the War, German sport officials saw the need to amend the ‘Torball’ rules and made the game ‘adequate’ for male sportsmen. Influential gymnasts from Berlin thought that the veterans should not participate in the monotone calisthenics of German gymnastics. Rather, they hoped, a ball game would be useful to raise their spirits. With football out of the question, they opted for a handball version and also used the term ‘handball’ for the first time. However, the women’s game was deemed not physical enough. The German Carl Diem, who had been a founding member of the IAAF, ordered that the rules be changed to make the game more ‘manly’. This task fell to German sport official Karl Schelenz. He modified the rules to include an increase of the pitch size, a three-step rule that made the game more dynamic and allowing hitting and striking the ball out of the hand of a player. Diem (as vice-president) and Schelenz (as secretary) occupied leadership positions at the Deutsche Hochschule für Leibesübungen (DHfL), a higher-education institution dedicated to the education of P.E. teachers, which allowed them to institutionalize the new rules very quickly.

Women were not allowed to continue with the handball rules that had proven popular during the War. Instead, the women’s game was also changed. Paradoxically, this triggered discussions amongst the male-led gymnastics and sport organizations whether women should play handball at all. The new rules were perceived as allowing for too aggressive and physical play that did not conform with the men’s understanding of the ‘weak’ female physical body. However, faced with the threat that the women
would leave the DT entirely, the men decided it was strategically better to maintain control over women’s handball for the time being. That said, the rule change had a positive overall effect on participation numbers due to the rising interest of men in the sport. Between 1921 and 1927, the number of teams participating in the German handball championships rose from 82 to 1036. As the German rules during this time increased in popularity as they spread across national borders, international matches started appearing. On September 13, 1925, the first international handball game between Austria and Germany took place in Halle an der Saale, Germany.

An inner-German ideological conflict between gymnastics and sports eventually provided the trigger for discussions on how to govern handball on the international level. As mentioned above, the nationally-driven German gymnasts organised within the DT required that all games under its umbrella should foster feelings of national belonging. Thus, handball was purposefully placed as the German game with the ambitious objective to become the most popular German ball game, and therewith reducing the popularity of the ‘British’ football. With this ideology, the DT was in stark contrast to the Deutscher Reichsausschuss für Leibesübungen (DRA) that promoted and represented international Olympic sport, including athletics through the Deutsche Sportbehörde für Leichtathletik (DSB), with a focus on the spirit of achievement and competition. Significantly, Diem and Schelenz, who had initiated the transformation of the handball rules to make them fit for male players, were influential figures in both the DSB and DRA. Diem was the DRA’s General Secretary and had already addressed athletics clubs in 1920 in Berlin to organize handball matches in direct opposition to the handball competitions of the DT. Diem and other athletics leaders considered that handball was the ideal game for athletics competitors to practice in the winter. Consequently, handball in Germany was essentially organized under two
different umbrellas. In 1923, the dispute between DT and DRA escalated and individual sports were asked to decide whether they wanted to belong to the gymnastics or sport movement. Handball, however, continued to be organized by both governing bodies, and eventually caused German athletics officials to reach out to the IAAF to claim the international governance of the sport in an attempt to triumph over the DT in their ideological fight.

In summary, handball in Germany did not develop organically. Rather, the growth of the sport came as sport leaders tinkered with rules, discussed potentially limiting participation, before eventually finding a compromise that fuelled the growth of the game. One also must remember that handball developed within the political and global context of the early 20th century as the Germans sought to differentiate themselves from the British and the nationalist-driven DT seized tried to seize control of the sport. This aim put the gymnastics and athletics federations at loggerheads as each tried to claim power over the sport of handball. We will see that the fights between gymnastics and athletics, the role of women in sports, and the influence of individual German sport administrators reappear at the beginning of discussion on the international governance of handball. In short, the governance of early forms of handball became instrumentalized from the very beginning.

The Question of International Affiliation

As international competitions and the popularity of many sports increased at the end of the 19th century, sport officials saw the need to establish universal sets of rules to be governed by international sport federations. The first international sport federation (IF) was the European Federation of Gymnastics (today: International Gymnastics Federation, IGF) that was established in 1881. Those organisations were very much ‘a European creation’, with early memberships often reduced to European and North
American countries. By the mid-1920s, many sports had international governing bodies in the form of international federations and those bodies began to challenge the authority of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as the sole institutional authority over international sport. The IFs successfully claimed the right to determine all technical regulations for their respective sport. Naturally, the prerequisite for an IF was the international spread of a sport and this explains why football’s governing body, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), was founded in 1904 whilst other less-widespread ball sports such as basketball, handball or volleyball did not have an IF yet. In contrast to football, those three sports were, with very few exceptions, not practiced internationally at the time.

For the core sport of the Olympic Games, athletics, the pathway to an international governing body proved to be more difficult than for other sports. The founder of the modern Olympic Games, French Baron Pierre de Coubertin, opposed such an organisation as he considered it a potential threat to the authority of the IOC and feared that nationalistic sentiments would drive the decision-making within the IFs. Thus, Coubertin fought early efforts by American athletics administrator John Sullivan, who attempted to establish an international athletics federation three times during the first decade of the 20th century. It took the diplomatic initiative by Swedish sport officials around the first IAAF President, Sigfrid Edström, to convince Coubertin about the necessity of harmonising the athletics rules on the international level. During the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games, athletics officials gathered to decide on the foundation of the IAAF, which was formalized a year later. Significantly, Carl Diem represented Germany at the meetings and became a member of the initial IAAF
Council, the organisation’s executive body. Diem was influential in the formulation of the IAAF’s technical rules and hosted the second IAAF Congress in Berlin in 1913.

The First World War brought a halt to most of the IAAF business but Edström, who became the IAAF’s first President, pushed for an expansion of the IAAF’s monopoly immediately after the War stopped. The IAAF President became an IOC Executive Board Member, allowing him to carefully control other IFs’ interests for the benefit of the IAAF. For example, he prevented the foundation of a powerful umbrella organizations of all IFs in the early 1920s. Edström also maintained close contact with Diem and other German athletics officials in the post-War years. Edström convinced the IAAF Council not to ban any of the Central Powers from the IAAF but instead postpone any decision until those nations, including Germany, had been admitted to the League of Nations. The IAAF President wanted to prevent the influence of politics from stopping the IAAF business as a conflict on the question of Germany would have led to the departure of powerful member federations from France or Great Britain.

Finally, the IAAF Council under Edström’s leadership attempted to gain control over women’s sport and its organizing body, the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI). Driven by a desire to consolidate authority over all athletics activities rather than the intention to promote women’s athletics, Edström embarked on a process of assimilation that restricted the development of women’s athletics considerably. As we have demonstrated above, the IAAF’s actions were not unique at the time but other sports such as women’s handball were also subject to modifications so they became mainly suitable for men.
The context on the IAAF’s foundation and main policies at the beginning of the 1920s is crucial to understand when focusing on the initial attempts to create an international governing body for various forms of handball because handball’s international governance was first discussed within the IAAF. Austrian representatives raised the possibility to include handball into the IAAF for the first time at the 1924 IAAF Congress. On that occasion, Edström, though well-informed due to the popularity of the sport in Sweden, seemed concerned about the different forms of the sport and unsure whether the IAAF was the right body to oversee such activities. The present IAAF representatives thus recommended that the Austrians initiate the establishment of an independent international handball federation. It appears that the Austrians did not have an important voice within the IAAF and furthermore simply accepted the fact that the IAAF did not want to look further into the issue. Moreover, there is no evidence that the Austrians followed-up the initiative.

The momentum changed when the Germans returned to the meeting tables in the mid-1920s after their ban from international sport due to Germany’s role in the First World War. The 1926 IAAF Congress in Amsterdam was the first time that representatives of the Deutschen Sportbehörde für Leichtathletik (DSBfL), the German athletics federation that had been founded in 1898, participated after the First World War. Their main speaker was the Bavarian Franz-Paul Lang, DSBfL chairman from 1921 until 1931. The other emerging personality within German athletics, Karl Ritter von Halt, who became the DSBfL’s athletics director in 1925, did not participate in the IAAF Congress but was to emerge as the closest German affiliate to Edström, joining the IAAF Council in 1932. Lang and Von Halt hailed from Munich and were bankers in powerful positions. They had fought together against allegations from the gymnasts that those participating in sports lacked patriotic sentiments, leading to a hard
split of Munich’s largest gymnastic club. In an effort to demonstrate their patriotism, they left the final meeting with the gymnasts singing the German national anthem.\textsuperscript{33} They took with them the handball section of the gymnastics club and incorporated the sport into the new \textit{Deutsche Sportverein München} (DSV).\textsuperscript{34}

The importance of the question on handball’s governance for the Germans becomes very obvious at the 1926 IAAF Congress, where Lang immediately put the topic on the agenda.\textsuperscript{35} In fact, handball’s inclusion into the IAAF was the first motion the German federation put forward following their re-admission. The topic was debated at length, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, representatives from Great Britain and France, where handball was not played, voiced opposition against the proposal. Their approaches differed. Whereas the French proposed the formation of a committee to study the different handball forms in more detail, the British favoured that handball be governed outside the IAAF. It appears that Edström favoured inclusion over handball’s independence in an attempt to gain further control over all aspects of athletics. The IAAF President had also been informed that handball was a popular game amongst women, and considering his ongoing battle with the FSFI saw the need to keep handball close to the IAAF.\textsuperscript{36} The topic was put for a vote and the French proposal to form a Handball Special Commission to study the possibility of inclusion of various forms of handball received the majority of the votes.\textsuperscript{37}

Edström appointed Lang as chair of the commission.\textsuperscript{38} Within hours, the new commission submitted a report, arguing that it should have jurisdiction over the three most popular handball forms until the next Congress when a final decision could be made.\textsuperscript{39} These sports were German field handball, Irish court ball and American basketball. IAAF delegates again voiced strong opposition against this proposal, arguing that by appointing a commission to govern specific sports, the body became far
too powerful. However, the majority of the IAAF Congress attendees disagreed and accepted the proposal with a 13 to 6 vote. Clearly, this was a masterstroke by the Germans as the IAAF – via its Handball Special Commission – therewith technically became the international governing body for handball, as well as courtball and basketball. In 1927, it was briefly discussed to include baseball into the sports to be studied but the European-dominant Committee overruled the American proposal. In any case, the German-driven first step towards handball’s international recognition as a ‘sport’ had been made.

The German athletics officials had a second strategy to outmanoeuvre the gymnasts in their fight for handball’s governance. At the following meetings of the Special Commission, they moved to propose field handball as a discipline for the 1928 Olympic Games. In reality, the Committee proposed two sports as they wanted Irish handball and German field handball included. The IAAF backed the proposal and on the suggestion of Joseph Genet, president of the Fédération Française d’Athlétisme, voted to request a demonstration of basketball as well. The IOC rejected the application, arguing that there were only two spots for demonstration sports and that lacrosse and korfbal would serve that purpose in Amsterdam. At one of these meetings, von Halt stepped in for Lang - who was absent through illness -, making his first appearance on the international sport political scene. Edström strongly supported handball’s application and when the Organising Committee picked the sport of lacrosse instead, the IAAF President sent a letter of protest to the IOC. Clearly, by making handball ‘fashionable’ as a sport through the Olympic Games would have made it unacceptable for gymnasts to promote the activity as one of their own due to their rejection of the Olympic Movement. Unmoved by the rejection, the Commission under the German
leadership developed international rules, processes to appoint international judges and began to ratify the staging of international matches.43

The Handball Special Commission met again during an IAAF Council meeting in Amsterdam in 1927.44 As in most significant IAAF bodies, Edström assumed the role of presiding chair which allowed him to influence the debates. He supported his German friends in their quest. The Commission made important decisions that outlined its continued desire to establish the IAAF as the leading organization for various forms of handballs. As with women’s athletics, the IAAF ‘invited’ its national federations to cooperate closely with specific national handball federations in an attempt to bring them under the IAAF’s control. This, however, caused problems in some countries where separate handball federations had already been founded and did not want to associate themselves with an athletics organisation. Austria and Argentina were amongst those nations first to establish independent federations.45 In the case of Ireland, the IAAF demanded that the national courtball federation be associated with the Irish athletics federation in order to participate in international matches.46 Such examples show the top-down process that was initially installed for the governance of handball as a result of the IAAF becoming a pawn in the hands of the Germans.

While Edström expressed initial doubts over the IAAF’s ability to govern handball, once the Germans made this a priority, he sought to ensure the IAAF had total control. Convinced by Lang and von Halt that ball games played with the hand that could be played on the athletics field was an ideal exercise for athletics competitors in the winter, Edström lent them his full support.47 This was a case where two groups sought the same resolution for differing reasons. Edström saw the chance for the inclusion of handball under the IAAF to strengthen him in his battle with the FSFI while Lang and von Halt could use the same initiative in their fight against the
gymnasts. Equally important in this episode is the introduction of von Halt into international sport politics where he would play an important role in the decade prior to the Second World War.

**An Independent Handball Federation and the Split (period 1928-1934)**

In the time between the 1926 and the 1928 IAAF Congresses, in which the IAAF Special Commission on Handball was responsible for seeking solutions for a permanent governance of international handball, the group met three times. The discussions were mainly of a technical nature and focused on the creation of rules for the three handball forms. This period also falls into a phase in which Germany and German sport officials increasingly gained influence within the Olympic Movement and culminated in the staging of the IOC Congress in Berlin in 1930 and the award of the 1936 Olympic Games.

Despite IAAF President Edström’s early ambition to integrate handball into the IAAF, he did not push as much as he desperately tried to govern women’s athletics. At the beginning of August 1928, the IAAF Council decided that handball would be omitted from the work of the IAAF with the aim of establishing a separate federation for handball. The reasons appear to be twofold. First, after having successfully marked handball as a sport rather than a game for gymnasts, the Germans were convinced that they could govern the sport independently. Second, through the personal contacts to Edström, the new body was assured to be strongly supported by the IAAF. With the blessing of the IAAF, Lang went to work and called a meeting a week later. Edstrom chaired the meeting and Lang later acknowledged him as the ‘father of the new federation’. On 4 August 1928, the International Amateur Handball Federation (IAHF) was founded. Edström again chaired the meeting and was later acknowledged
as ‘the father of the new federation’. Therewith handball remained in the hands of athletics officials, yet outside the IAAF governance structures.

However, some national athletics federations now became members of both the IAAF and the IAHF as they had been pushed to deal with both sports. In some countries like the Netherlands, this led to controversy in the years to come as the national athletics federation was IAHF-affiliated but had in fact no handball players, whereas the national handball federation organized all players but did not have international recognition. Curiously, this reversed the previous policy of the earlier Special Commission. During the inaugural meeting, Lang suggested that if a nation had different associations governing the three sports (handball, court handball, and basketball) then each association should affiliate separately to the IAHF. The Czech sport administrator Josef Rößler-Ořovský cautioned against moving too quickly. ‘First of all, we must acquire and then only we may govern!’ he argued. Rößler-Ořovský went even further, arguing that gymnastic societies also played handball and encouraged the IAHF to reach out and establish contact. Edström ignored the request and plainly stated he agreed with Lang’s proposal and that he ‘look[ed] at the question as settled.’

The continuing dominance of German sport administrators is reflected in the set-up of the new federation. First of all, the IAHF’s name only included the sport handball but not the other ball sports over which it governed. This issue would cause considerable debates in the years to come. Moreover, Lang became the IAHF’s first president and continued to steer German interests within the federation. He decided that the IAHF’s headquarters should be in Munich, attached to the offices of the DSBfL. The strong German influence necessitated that German became one of the three official languages of the new federation, besides English and French. Finally, the IAHF staged its second Congress in Berlin in May 1930.
The IAAF’s continuing influence over the IAHF is further reflected in the handball federation’s rejection of the Permanent Bureau of International Sport Federations. An initiative by French sport administrator Paul Rousseau, the Permanent Bureau had been established in the early 1920s in an attempt to put the IFs in a stronger position in their negotiations with the IOC. The IAAF under Edström, however, rejected the initiative as the IAAF President considered the Permanent Bureau a threat to the interests of the IAAF. After all, Edström represented the IAAF within the IOC Executive Board and did thus not require additional support. Consequently, it is not surprising that the IAHF under Edström’s close friend von Halt did not seek membership within the Permanent Bureau.

A significant sub-plot in the international handball governance also underscored the discussions on a potential affiliation with the Permanent Bureau. As outlined, the IAAF decision to ‘allow’ for the foundation of the IAHF entailed the crucial subtext that the IAHF had the – IAAF awarded – authority to govern not only over German handball, but also basketball and court-ball, for which technical subcommissions were installed. This resolution set the context for a dispute between handball and basketball officials with the involvement of the IAAF in the 1930s. Even though the IAHF had successfully applied for official IOC recognition of handball and basketball in 1930, the main focus of the organization under the German leadership remained on handball. The IAHF’s technical commission for basketball remained restricted to deal with basketball rules and the official recognition of international basketball matches. In contrast, the IAHF moved to have a handball competition at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. However, the American organisers had little enthusiasm for the game and in light of the global economic crisis, even the Germans would have struggled to
send a team. Thus, it was decided to put the focus on an introduction of handball into the Olympic programme for the 1936 Olympic Games (see below).\textsuperscript{62}

Von Halt, who aimed to become Lang’s successor as IAHF President in 1933, emerged as a central power broker in the increasing dispute between the two ball sports, attempting to instrumentalize Edström once more. Not recognising the IAHF authority over basketball, sport officials had come together in Geneva to establish an International Basketball Federation (FIBB, \textit{Fédération Internationale de Basket Ball}) in 1932 and began to claim sole control over the sport.\textsuperscript{63} In contrast to the IAHF, the FIBB sought to join the Permanent Bureau, much to Von Halt’s disgust.\textsuperscript{64} Von Halt called on Edström in a December 29, 1932 letter in which he protested this attempt, arguing that the ‘field handball, basketball, and courtball’ were within the IAHF’s purview.

The FIBB’s attempts to gain recognition through its links with the Permanent Bureau were only the starting point for more intensive battles over the governance of international basketball, however. To von Halt’s knowledge FIBB president Leon Buffard already had Argentina, Greece, Italy, Romania, Portugal, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia on board. The German quickly dashed a letter off to Lausanne on December 22, 1932 to register his opposition, arguing that the IAHF controlled the sport and had made this fact known when the IAHF applied for recognition. Though von Halt did make sure to note his ‘regret’ that the IAHF could not recognize this new federation.\textsuperscript{65} William Jones, the general secretary of the FIBB, ignored von Halt’s protest and demanded in a letter to the IOC March 18, 1933 that the IOC recognize the FIBB as basketball’s international governing body with the right to host an Olympic basketball tournament at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.\textsuperscript{66} With the support of his friend Edström, von Halt arranged for the organization of the 1934 IAHF Congress within the framework of the IAAF Congress in the same
The German also successfully acquired Edström’s support for his presidential campaign. Edström’s frequent aid to von Halt came from a strong friendship developed over the course of many private visits between their two families during the course of the 1930s. Moreover, von Halt attempted to gain the IAAF’s official blessing that basketball should remain under the auspices of his federation, the IAHF. Edström appeared to be caught in two minds at first, placing von Halt’s concerns with IOC President Henri Baillot-Latour, in office 1925 until 1942, who had pushed the IHAF and FIBB to form an agreement (‘unrest’). Eventually, however, Edström did take a side – rejecting von Halt’s proposal for an IAAF involvement. Edström wrote to the German: ‘Please do not make this proposal as the IAAF has put the handball question entirely to the side’.

However, he supported von Halt’s personal quest to become president – this happened with the Nazi’s already in power and is in line with the general policy of the Nazis to take over leadership positions within international sport organizations. Instead, Edström pushed to include the Americans in basketball governance, arguing: ‘the Americans need to be consulted’. This was not least due to the increasing influence of the young American sport administrator Avery Brundage, with whom Edström started to correspond extensively about IAAF and IOC matters from 1930 onwards. The American had also been on the IAHF’s initial executive committee. Edström rated Brundage’s opinion highly and pushed the AAU’s Secretary-Treasurer Daniel J. Ferris to include him in the American delegation for the 1930 IAAF Congress. Only a few months later, in January 1931, Edström offered Brundage the position of the chair of the IAAF’s Rules and Records Committee. He also proposed Brundage as a future IOC member to Baillot-Latour, regretting that he had not been
selected already: ‘it is really so bad that this intelligent man is not a member of the I.O.C., particularly as he wants to be and is so Olympic in his mind.” 76

The involvement in the IAAF through handball paved the way for Brundage’s involvement in international sport politics and marks the beginning of a powerful duo in sport’s highest leadership circles that was to have long-lasting influence on the global sport system. Like Edström, Brundage was a successful businessman and a staunch defender of Olympic principles, most notably amateurism and neutrality in international politics. Brundage joined the core of a group that Edström named the ‘Beer Drinking Society’, that was to discuss and decide on international sport politics over cold drinks prior to and after official IOC and IAAF gatherings. 77

The conclusion to the fight between the FIBB and IAHF came in 1934 during the IAHF Congress in Stockholm. Representatives of the FIBB attended, even though they had not been officially invited, and von Halt proposed that the IAHF maintain control over basketball while adding FIBB members to the basketball commission, which the FIBB rejected. In a last-ditch effort, the Germans argued that some countries such as France opposed the FIBB, ignoring that the French basketball federation had joined the FIBB in early 1934. 78 A joint commission with representatives from both sides hammered out an agreement on the second day of the Congress where the IAHF relinquished control of the sport to the FIBB. 79 Given all the debate that occurred on this topic previously, it is interesting to note that the proposal passed unanimously with minimal debate. 80 It was agreed on the ‘strictest collaboration’ between the two federations but such joint efforts never materialised. 81 While von Halt lost control of the sport of basketball, the IAHF had new challenges upcoming as handball was set to make its first appearance at the Olympic Games in Berlin.
Handball’s First Olympic Appearance

With the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games looming, von Halt had to put any concerns he had over the loss of control of basketball to one side. Handball’s Olympic appearance in Berlin would mark the culmination of nearly a decade of effort to include the sport on the Olympic program. Initial efforts to include handball in Berlin began on May 26, 1930, when Avery Brundage wrote to the IOC from his role on the Administrative Council of the IAHF, requesting that ‘Field Handball, Courtball, and Basketball’ be added to the Olympic program. His efforts succeeded as the 1930 IOC General Session in Berlin voted to include handball on the official Olympic Program. In part due to the global depression and the lack of interest from American fans, the organisers of the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles decided against an inclusion of handball. Thus, it took five years before the IOC Executive Committee confirmed on February 25, 1935 that handball would make its first Olympic appearance in 1936. The following section displays how officials within Germany instrumentalized handball in order to promote the Nazi regime. Carl Diem, the general secretary for the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, ensured that handball would take place. The version of the sport played in Berlin, called field handball with eleven players a side playing on a grass field, scarcely resembled that of the modern game. Historian Richard Mandell described the version of handball played in Berlin as ‘closer to rugby football.’ One journalist explained field handball to New York Times readers as having, ‘the best features of basketball, soccer, football, and rugby football.’

During the early years of the Nazi era, fights continued within Germany over who controlled handball. In March 1933, Adolf Hitler announced full support for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin and propaganda minister Josef Goebbels saw in the Olympic Games an opportunity to present a more-sanitized version of Nazi Germany to
the world. In the summer of 1933, *Reichssportführer* Hans von Tschammer und Osten declared a reorganization of sport in Nazi Germany. This plan created sixteen different regions (*Gaue*) within the country and banned any sport organizations not linked to the Nazi party. As part of this reorganization, von Tschammer und Osten declared that handball fell under the responsibility of the athletics federation. The *DT* immediately protested the decision, arguing they founded the sport and had more participants than athletics. Franz Breithaupt, a deputy of von Tschammer und Osten, wrote a letter on September 7, 1933 transferring handball to the *DT*. This transfer is not surprising because, as noted by one scholar, ‘[t]he Nazis were ideologically closer to the [*DT*].’

Even so, the Berlin Olympics faced the very real threat of a boycott due to Nazi Germany’s treatment of the country’s Jewish population. ‘Beer Drinking Society’ member Brundage went to Germany to investigate where Diem and von Halt informed him no discrimination occurred. This should not come as a surprise. Von Halt was part of the Nazi regime and close to some of the party leaders. As early as 1922 he had hoped for the development of a “healthy German race”. As historian Allen Guttmann notes, ‘[h]aving been assured by his German friends that their government accepted the Olympic rules . . . [Brundage] was unable to imagine honest opposition.’ Edström also rejected a boycott or a cancellation of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games despite increasing knowledge about the Nazis brutal regime and the discrimination of Jewish athletes.

Regardless of Brundage’s role in toeing the Nazi Germany party line, German sport officials worried that this negative publicity prior to the Games may lead to a decrease in foreign visitors. A further worry was how to ensure the maximum performance of the German team. Hitler spoke of ‘schooling and hardening’ athletes so
that Nazi Germany would ‘perform honorably’ in Berlin. Handball was one of the sports identified to help ensure an ‘honourable’ performance by the German team.

In January 1934, von Tschammer und Osten created the *Deutscher Reichsbund für Leibesübungen* (German Community for Physical Exercise and Sports, DRL) with political appointees leading sport federations. For handball, this meant the installation of Richard Herrmann, a highly ranked *Sturmabteilung* (SA) officer. According to German historian Erik Eggers, his appointment signaled to both DT and athletics that it was time for their fight to end. Nicknamed the ‘Handball-Dictator’, Hermann considered the handball athletes under his command ‘at the service of propaganda.’ Part of that propaganda entailed a positive performance during the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. The Nazi effort to succeed in this sport included paying five coaches to spot and train talent. The effort paid off. Otto Kaundinya, coach of the German national handball team, predicted ‘the arrival of a great future’ for the sport in 1934, given the resources provided. The next decade proved Kaundinya, killed during the war in 1940, correct. Germany only lost one match in field handball from 1934-1945, in 1941 against Hungary by a score of 11-8.

On August 8, 1936, the United States’ (US) field handball team played the German team at the Police Stadium in Berlin. The US was one of six teams that sent a team to Berlin to play in this inaugural, and as it would turn out only, field handball tournament. The Official Report of the 1936 Berlin Olympics noted pleasant temperatures, dry ground, and little wind that would influence the play. A halftime lead of 17-0 for Germany displayed the immense gulf between the Germans and Americans. The German team went on to win 29-1 and finished their qualifying rounds with an astounding total of 51 goals scored and 1 conceded. Germany went unbeaten during the tournament, defeating the Austrians in the final 10-6. If there was any remaining
doubt, the caption of the victorious German team in the Organizing Committee’s Final report reads, ‘The Native Land of Handball wins the first Olympic tournament.’ A link between the German field handball team and the German army appeared within weeks of the Closing Ceremonies as the German Minister of War Werner von Blomberg announced promotions for soldiers who medaled in Berlin. Ten of those promotions went to members of the handball team, nearly half of the squad.99

Following the Berlin Games, the Nazi regime continued its efforts to expand its influence within the IAHF and replaced experienced handball administrators with their own men, who shared their political views. In 1938, Von Halt stepped down from the IAHF presidency and Hermann was unanimously voted as his successor with strong support from the regime.100 Even though Von Halt officially resigned because he had too much work, the Nazis regarded him suspiciously because of his rise through the ranks in the Weimar Republic.101 Moreover, Herrmann, who had risen politically to brigadier general of the SS and major general of the Waffen-SS, installed a new general secretary named Adam Nothelfer, who was equally close to the regime. Under Herrmann’s leadership, Edström was also degraded to an honorary member without any voting rights.102 Within the IAHF, the Nazis had therewith successfully achieved the gleichschaltung of national and international sport that they also sought in other international federations.103 Thus, it is little surprising that after the end of the Second World War, in which Hermann died at the front in the Soviet Union in 1942, international handball officials decided to dissolve the IAHF entirely. In 1946, a new International Handball Federation was founded under the initiative of Scandinavian handball officials. The establishment of a new organization allowed the new leadership to disassociate itself from handball’s past and to focus on the development of the sport internationally.
Conclusion

From the time of handball’s official recognition as a sport to the creation of the IHF, handball served more as a ball tossed between different external interests than as a serious sport. Early stakeholders, from the early German athletics and gymnastics officials, to Sigfrid Edström to Karl Ritter von Halt, sought to use the sport as a means of satisfying personal goals or agendas. This finding is key to understanding the history of the sport of handball and perhaps suggests why there is so little research on the founding era of this increasingly popular sport. There are two different yet related reasons that allowed this to transpire.

The first is the relative lack of global participation in handball, as shown it took until the mid-1920’s for there to be any serious consideration in creating or joining an international federation. As late as the early 1930s, German handball officials tried to promote “their” sport internationally by staging exhibition games at much more popular athletics competitions. Included within this were the many differing forms of the sport, which meant that an international federation was required in order to standardize rules and set up international competitions. This leads to the second but interrelated point, handball existed under the aegis of the IAAF and only in the mid-1920’s. This comes nearly a decade after the establishment of the IAAF and over two full decades after the founding of FIFA. That handball even had the opportunity to join an international federation occurred because of self-interest. Edström wanted to protect the IAAF while von Halt and Lang fought to control handball against the German gymnasts and each side saw utility in handball existing within the IAAF. That handball joined the IAAF in order to satisfy the whims of two separate interests fostered a culture where German sport officials could so easily instrumentalize the sport during the Nazi years. This differs considerably from the development of other international sport organisations,
which either enjoyed more global popularity or the opportunity to develop without such
direct interference. The integration of handball within the IAAF simultaneously also
played into the hands of the men within the federation that restricted the independent
development of women’s sport.

Finally, we would like to highlight a methodological challenge in our research.
As the IAHF was dissolved after the Second World War, an archival collection from the
investigated time period does not exist. The IHF, handball’s current governing body,
does not have a designed archive either. However, despite this challenge we were able
to reproduce the IAHF’s history due to access to historical files in archival collections
that are linked to handball’s early history. Thus, we want to encourage sport historians
to continuously look beyond the obvious archival locations in their investigations.

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sources on the IAHF-FIBB dispute.

1 Owen, David. ‘Exclusive: Strength of IHF finances enables it to tell IOC to direct COVID-19-
related support elsewhere.’ insidethegames.biz.

   (accessed December 12, 2020).


3 ‘Landmark half-billion-euro deal ushers in new era for European handball,’ ehfoffice.at.

See, for example, Erik Eggers, *Handball: Geschichte Eines Deutschen Sports* (Göttingen: Verlag Die Werkstatt, 2014), 42


This was not the case in all national context. As Gerd von der Lippe argues, in Norway the sport had always been a men’s sport. See: Von der Lippe, ‘Handball, Gender and Sportification.’


Ibid., 186.

Ibid.


17 Eggers, *Handball*, 42.


24 Minutes of the Second Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, August 20–23, 1913, IAAF Congress and Council Minutes Collection (ICCMC), International Amateur Athletic Federation Archive (hereafter: IAAFA).

25 See for example his invitations to Diem to attend the IAAF Congress in 1921: Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Carl Diem, March 8, 1921, Correspondence 1921, J. Sigfrid Edström Collection (hereafter SEC), Riksarkivet Stockholm (hereafter RAS).

26 Minutes, IAAF Council Meeting, August 12, 1920, ICCMC, IAAFA, 3.

28 Minutes of the Seventh Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, July 1 and 15-16, 1924, ICCMC, IAAFA.

29 Minutes of the Seventh Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, July 1 and 15-16.


32 Lang was the co-owner of the private bank *Ruederer & Lang* and Von Halt was chief representative of *Hauck & Aufhäuser*.


34 Markwart Herzog, ””Die Gleichschaltung” Der Turn- Und Sportvereine in Kaiserslautern Und Der Pfalz in Den Jahren 1933 Bis 1939. Erfolge Und Grenzen Der Politischen Unterwerfung, Administrativen Zentralisierung Kulturellen Homogenisierung Und Gesellschaftlichen Nivellierung Des Fußballsports,’ in *Die “Gleichschaltung” Des Fußballsports Im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 68.

35 Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, August 5-8, 1926, ICCMC, IAAFA, 84.

36 Letter, Karl Ritter von Halt to Sigfrid Edström, September 23, 1927, Folder Member Correspondence 1926-1928 (hereafter MC1926), IAAFA.

37 Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, 85.

38 Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, 94.

39 Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, 99.

40 Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, 99.

41 Minutes of IAAF Council Meeting, August 13-14, 1927, ICCMC, IAAFA, 84. Also see: Drafts of Minutes of IAAF Council Meeting, August 13-14, 1927, CMC1926, IAAFA.
42 Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Henri Baillot-Latour, March 2, 1927, Folder Correspondence 1927, SEC, RAS.

43 Minutes of the Meeting of the International Amateur Athletic Federation Handball Commission, August 12, 1927, CMC1926, IAAFA.

44 Minutes of IAAF Council Meeting, August 13-14, 1927, 13.

45 Eggers, *Handball*.

46 Minutes of the Meeting of the International Amateur Athletic Federation Handball Commission, August 12, 1927.

47 Letter from Sigfrid Edström to Karl Ritter von Halt, December 6, 1932, Folder Member Correspondence 1931-1932 (hereafter MC1931), IAAFA.

48 Minutes of the Ninth Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, August 6 and 7, 1928, ICCMC, IAAFA.

49 Minutes, Foundation Meeting of the International Amateur Handball Federation, August 4, 1928, Folder ‘PV de la Session de foundation de la International Amateur Handball Federation,’ IOCA.

50 Minutes, Foundation Meeting of the International Amateur Handball Federation, August 4, 1928.

51 Letter, Dutch Athletics Federation to Avery Brundage, Film 25, Folder 4, Avery Brundage Digital Collection (hereafter ABDC), IOCA.

52 Minutes, Foundation Meeting of the International Amateur Handball Federation, August 4, 1928.

53 Minutes, Foundation Meeting of the International Amateur Handball Federation, August 4, 1928.


57 See for example: Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Frantz Reichel, December 2, 1920, Folder Correspondence 1920, JSEC, RAS.

58 Letter, Karl Ritter von Halt to Sigfrid Edström, December 29, 1932, MC1931, IAAFA.

59 Letter, Avery Brundage and Franz-Paul Lang to the IOC, May 26, 1930, Folder ‘PV de la Session de foundation de la International Amateur Handball Federation,’ IOCA.


62 Eggers, *Handball*, 76.

63 The name was changed to Federation Internationale de Basketball Amateur (FIBA) in 1935. Krebs, ‘Basketball’s Long Journey.’

64 Letter from Karl Ritter von Halt to Sigfrid Edström, December, 29, 1932, MC1931, IAAFA.

65 Letter from Karl Ritter von Halt to the International Olympic Committee General Secretary, December 22, 1932, IOCA.

66 Letter from R. William Jones and Monsieur le Comte Giorgio Asinari di San Marzano to the International Olympic Committee, March 18, 1933, IOCA.

67 Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Avery Brundage, September 27, 1933, Folder Correspondence 1933, JSEC, RAS.

68 Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Karl Ritter von Halt, February 23, 1934, Folder Correspondence 1934, JSEC, RAS.

69 Letter, Bo Ekelund to Sigfrid Edström, April 6, 1934, Folder Correspondence 1934, JSEC, RAS.
Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Avery Brundage, October 2, 1933, Folder Correspondence 1933, JSEC, RAS. Also see: Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Henri Baillet-Latour, May 5, 1933, Folder Correspondence 1933, JSEC, RAS.

Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Karl Ritter von Halt, April 11, 1934, Folder Correspondence 1934, JSEC, RAS.

Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Karl Ritter von Halt, February 23, 1934, Folder Correspondence 1934, JSEC, RAS.

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Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Daniel J. Ferris, April 26, 1930, Folder Correspondence 1930, JSEC, RAS.

Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Avery Brundage, January 31, 1931, Folder Correspondence 1931, JSEC, RAS.

Letter, Sigfrid Edström to Henri Baillet-Latour, August 10, 1934, Folder Correspondence 1934, JSEC, RAS.


Letter from R. William Jones to the International Olympic Committee, September 14, 1934, IOCA.

Krebs, ‘Basketball’s Long Journey.’

Letter from Avery Brundage to the International Olympic Committee, May 26, 1930, Folder ‘PV de la Session de foundation de la International Amateur Handball Federation,’ IOCA.

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Minutes of the IOC Executive Board, Oslo, February 25, 1935, IOCA.


Eggers, *Handball*, 67


99 ‘Reich’s Soldiers Gave Strong Aid,’ *New York Times*, August 18, 1936, 23.

100 Bernett book chapter, p. 36

