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HISTORY

The Urania game of the ancient Greeks was a ball-game played with the hands, without goals, and using a ball about the size of an apple. Homer describes the game in the *Odyssey* in the following words :

And Alkinoos called upon bold Halios alone / To dance with Laodamas, for none dare venture with them. / They took at once in their hands the lovely ball / Which Polybos, with cunning art, had wove from purple wool. / One cast this up to heaven to reach the sparkling clouds, / Bent hard back ; the other then sprang high up in the air / And caught it nimbly, ere his foot touched ground again. / And after they had tried to toss the ball on high, / Danced light as air upon the all-nourishing earth, / In position often changed.

A scene from this aerial episode is depicted in a tombstone carving found in the town wall of Athens in 1926.

During the Middle Ages ball-games were indulged in by the knights and maids-of-honour ; the rules called for the ball — often adorned with ribbons and tiny bells — to be tossed from one to another. The troubadours referred to ball sports as the first games of Summer.

The game of handball which is played today was introduced around 1890 by a German gymnastics master, Konrad Koch, but it did not catch on. After the First World War Hirschmann and, in particular, the German sports instructor Dr. Carl Schelenz were successful in reviving interest in handball played to Football Association rules, and in making it a popular gymnastic sport.

(From F. K. Mathys, Curator of the Swiss Museum of Gymnastics and Sport in Basle.)

Greek handball relief from about 600 BC.

The beginning

Handball, a truly amateur sport, is often considered as a late descendant of football and, furthermore, as an artificially constructed game.

Handball in its present form is in fact one of the youngest ball games, and when it was developed in Europe between 1904 and 1920, its rules were based upon the rules of association football.

On reading Carl Diem's « Weltgeschichte des Sports » (Universal History of Sport) however we learn that handball and handball-like games have been played all over the world ever since antiquity. The game seems to have been rather popular at times, and clear rules governed it.

But its development was not continuous ; there were periods when handball was altogether forgotten. Well-known historians even maintain — and they may be right ! — that handball is to be looked upon as an ancestor of football, the rules of the two games influencing each other reciprocally.

Handball was at first not recognized as a separate sport, nor was there an international handball organization until 1928. Before that date the national athletics and gymnastics associations were responsible for handball, together with basket-ball, volley-ball and fistball. On the international level the International Amateur Athletic Federation (I.A.A.F.) represented the interests of handball until 1928.

As handball was developing steadily and as more and more international matches were arranged, the VIIIth congress of the I.A.A.F. in The Hague in 1926 appointed a special committee that was to unite the countries where handball was played and to examine the problem of standardized rules for handball. This commission worked out the internationally valid rules of handball, thus

substantially promoting handball in many countries. The I.A.A.F. then paved the way for the foundation of an independent international handball federation.

The International Amateur Handball Federation (I.A.H.F.) was founded by a congress in Amsterdam on 4th August, 1928. Eleven nations were affiliated. President Avery Brundage was a member of the first committee ; a member of the Council of the new federation until 1938, Mr. Brundage rendered handball many good and most valuable services.

Already in 1928, a demonstration match was played on the occasion of the Amsterdam Olympic Games, and in 1931 the I.O.C. decided to include handball in the Olympic programme.

After 1928 handball developed steadily and in 1934 twenty-five nations were affiliated to the I.A.H.F. Handball had become a universal sport.

The first widely international handball competition was held on the occasion of the 1936 Games in Berlin. The first handball world championship was organized two years later for the 10th anniversary of the I.A.H.F.

After the Second World War international matches could be played again. In 1946 the present International Handball Federation (I.H.F.) was founded in Copenhagen to replace the I.A.H.F.

Today handball is being played in forty affiliated nations on four continents. Nineteen other nations are seeking admission to the I.H.F. These facts clearly prove the popularity of handball.

The sport, however, is undergoing a certain change. Until 1952 outdoor handball played by teams of eleven players on large fields such as football fields prevailed ; indoor handball played on smaller courts by teams of seven was almost exclusively played in Northern Europe. Since 1952 indoor handball has been gaining more and more ground, thus helping to make handball popular the world over. The causes of the rapid development of indoor handball are evident : indoor handball may be played irrespective of the climate, nor large playing-fields are needed and it is the fastest team-sport next to ice hockey. Yet, outdoor handball is still being played, in Central Europe particularly, and is considered a fine open-air sport whose fans enjoy the synthesis of the three athletic disciplines of running, jumping and throwing.

The I.H.F. organizes indoor and outdoor handball world championships for men and women. There is an annual European cup for the national men and women champions. The I.H.F. also generously supports all the handball tournaments that are organized on the occasion of regional games

on the different continents. It is the endeavour of the I.H.F. to thus stimulate the development of handball.

All those who like a fast and technically interesting game that demands flexibility, skill, courage and strength enjoy playing and watching handball.

The fine qualities of handball will be demonstrated further at the Olympic Games.

Nature and purpose of handball

Handball is an ideal synthesis of the three fundamental athletic disciplines of running, jumping and throwing. Therefore it is not only a purely competitive sport but also a fine sport to be taken up with advantage by many for purposes of training and health.

The player must be able to start quickly, he must be a persevering runner, he must be able to skilfully deceive his opponent, he must be able to swiftly pick up the ball or catch it in the air, he must pass the ball with precision to his teammates and he must be able to execute all sorts of throws ; in short, his body, his arms and his legs will have to be harmoniously trained.

As the name of the game suggests, hands play the most important role ; hands being naturally the deftest members of the body, the growing popularity of handball is easily explained. Many kinds of throws to score a goal are possible ; the

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player is inspired to use his hands as a means of carrying out his ideas.

The game is, of course, also faster than other ball-games. It demands a never failing concentration and the capability of adapting oneself again and again to continuously changing situations, so that a team could not play an indoor handball match without substitutes.

Unlike the other ball-games where the ball is played by using one's hands, handball is a hard game : personal contact is not avoided, throws are not soft and supple, but extremely fast and rough — it is a hard but a fair game.

Technique and elegance combine with courage and physical strength ; the dynamic nature of this manly sport makes it exciting to watch.

Handball can be played by everybody and everywhere, nothing more being needed than a ball, a playing-field and two goals. Handball is not an expensive sport ; playing-fields or gymnasiums may be used, there is a comparatively small number of players (eleven or only seven) and a simple outfit will do.

The idea of the game is clear, the game itself is elegant and varied. Handball combines all the advantages of a team-sport. Its fundamentals are : skilful handling of the ball, swift physical reactions, mental flexibility, team-work and, above all, fair play.

The rules of the game are easy to understand. After a period of remodelling the rules have now been completed. They allow imaginative players to employ all their talents and open a wide field for tactical moves.

There are two kinds of handball : handball played on a large playing-field (the dimensions of which are those of a football field) with eleven players and handball played on a small playing-field

in the open or in a gymnasium (the dimensions of the « court » being approximately 140 feet in length and 70 feet in width) with seven players and four substitutes. The game is conducted by a referee, assisted by two goal-linesmen who signal the goals, the corner-throw, the throw-off, if a player of the attacking team enters the goal-area, etc.

Training is based upon the modern training methods of the three athletic disciplines of running, jumping and throwing, and necessitates a complete and harmonious physical education.

The game consists of two halves of 30 minutes each ; substitutes may join play at any time during an indoor handball match. In outdoor handball with teams of eleven players no substitutes are allowed. The main purpose of handball is to develop the personal qualities of each player ; the physical fitness of a player will not suffice. His self-control, his fairness, his courage and his considerateness are constantly put to test. A match will certainly form the character of the player. Trying to do his best for his team and depending at the same time on the possibilities of his team-mates, a player will come to know his limitations. He learns to use his physical and mental abilities — he learns to win and to lose. Handball can be played by men and women of every age. It has become a favourite sport in universities, schools and armies, just because of its outstanding physical influence, and in many schools it is a compulsory sport.

In spite of the virile character of handball the risks of getting hurt are small ; its many advantages, however, are evident.

May the popularity and the reputation of handball grow steadily, may it rouse enthusiasm and may it be a worthy Olympic sport !

I.H.F.