

CAS decision on Handball controversy highlights top-level failings at IHF and AHF

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The Court of Arbitration for Sport's ruling on the dispute between the International Handball Federation and the Asian Handball Federation over Asian qualification tournaments for the Beijing Olympics highlights a catalogue of failings by both organisations.

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The results of the men's and women's Olympic handball qualification tournaments for Asia, held in autumn 2007, caused a deep rift in Asian Handball, with Kuwait and Kazakhstan's qualification from the men's and women's competitions respectively deeply disputed by South Korea and Japan.

The match was officiated by two Jordanians instead of two Germans, who had been selected by the IHF to counter accusations of biased refereeing by Middle Eastern referees in favour of other Middle Eastern teams particularly Kuwait.

While CAS ruled in favour of the IHF in the men's tournament, annulling the result of the tournament and approving an IHF replay tournament held in early 2008 that was won by South Korea, the result of the original women's tournament was upheld.

The ruling has been analysed in full by John Ryan, editor of the handball website teamhandballnews.com, who has kindly agreed to have his analysis republished by Play the Game.

"The IHF and AHF leadership have been exposed as ineffective at best, corrupt at worst. It's hard to fully assess the overall damage that this has done to Handball. One can hope that a well run and compelling Olympic tournament will make this tawdry escapade fade into memory," says Ryan.

IHF President Hassan Moustafa, who failed to turn up as a witness at the CAS hearing, comes out unfavourably in the report believes Ryan.

“Moustafa appears to have circumnavigated the IHF administrative staff and the Playing Rules and Referees Commission (PRC) attempts to appoint the German referee pair via personal conversations with the AHF President, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad of Kuwait,” writes Ryan.

The responsibility The ruling also categorically states that the men’s qualification match between Kuwait and South Korea, the result of which sparked the dispute between the IHF and the AHF, was fixed as a result of biased refereeing, a damning indictment against the AHF and the Kuwaiti Handball Association.

“The performance of the [Jordanian] referees, however, was of a totally different nature. The mistakes were excessive and one-sided but, more remarkable, the majority of them were impossible to understand or explain,” states the ruling. “In other words, it is clear the issue was not incompetence but bias and specific intention (instructions).”

by **John Ryan**, www.teamhandballnews.com

Last March, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) held a hearing to resolve which nations would represent Asia at the 2008 Olympics. The case was brought to the CAS since the International Handball Federation (IHF) and the Asian Handball Federation (AHF) had reached an impasse as to which nations would represent Asia at the Olympic Games and in Olympic Qualifying Tournaments.

In December, 2007, the IHF had ruled that the AHF organized tournaments for the Women in Kazakhstan (August, 2007) and the Men in Japan (September, 2007) had been improperly influenced by biased officiating and therefore needed to be replayed. Replay tournaments were then conducted by the IHF in January 2008 but the results of those tournaments were not recognized by the AHF. To resolve the disagreement in a timely manner the IHF and AHF agreed to let the CAS decide on the case and a hearing was conducted in Switzerland on March 19.

The CAS ruling was a split decision with the AHF tournament being ruled valid for the Women, but invalid for the Men. As a result, the Kazakhstan Women’s Team qualified automatically for the Olympics while the South Korea Women were required to qualify via an Olympic Qualification Tournament (which they did successfully). On the Men’s side, South Korea received the automatic bid which had originally been awarded to Kuwait.

The results of this hearing were released in March, but details concerning the rationale for the ruling were not provided at that time. The official report now painstakingly makes clear why these decisions were made as well as the missteps the IHF took in addressing this controversy.

Full Report: [Court of Arbitration for Sport ruling](#)

Here are some notable findings from the 41 page report:

1) The extent of officiating bias (at least determined by the IHF) for the Kuwait – South Korea match was extensive and unprecedented. The report, written by the IHF Playing Rules and Referees Commission (FR) members Christer Ahl, Manfred Prause and Ramon Gallego, is very candid and critical and essentially states that it is absolutely impossible for anyone who knows anything about handball to think that the Kuwait – South Korea match was fairly called. Here is an extract of the report:

“2.19The performance of the JOR referees, however, was of a totally different nature. The mistakes were excessive and one-sided but, more remarkable, the majority of them were impossible to understand or explain. Inexperienced referees may have difficulties in maintain consistency in punishment or in 7-meter decisions, they may have problems in judging correctly the balance between offensive or defensive fouls, but these were not the issues here. Instead, the referees saw fouls or infringements that obviously did not happen, essentially

'inventing' decisions. The chronology accompanying this text give a long list of such decisions. In other words it is clear the issue was not incompetence but bias and specific intention (or instructions).

It is regrettably possible for highly experience referees who want to use bias in a match to do so without detection other than by alert experts. In the KUW-KOR match, however, the referees made their mistakes in such ways, and in such situations, that is understandable that the general public who watched the match 'live' or later on in video excerpts, could not avoid noticing the unmistakable bias and the excess of clear mistakes.

It is also revealing that the first half of the match had more than 20 wrong or strange decisions and that all of them were against Korea. This situation continued for the first part of the second half, until finally there was a tendency to more unbiased refereeing, which included some correct punishments against Kuwait. In fact, the referees showed in this way that they were capable of reasonable refereeing when they wanted to!"

Impact of the referee performance on the match result. The text above, and the chronology, should make it extremely clear that the referee performance had an enormous influence on the result of the match. Again, the many mistakes were *essentially in one direction and they were often major in nature: disallowing correct goals, giving the ball to the opponents without justification, punishing players in a totally erratic and inconsistent manner. In such a situation it is not meaningful and realistic to speculate in what would have been the result of the match if there had been neutral referees. The match would have had a different character. However, one could note that the number of serious mistakes by a larger margin exceeds the difference in goals in the final result of the match. And one must also take into account the demoralizing impact on a team which sees itself being treated in this way. Clearly, it is difficult to accept the validity of the outcome of the match."*

2) Alexander Kozhukhov, President of the IHF Commission of Organising and Competition (COC), failed to properly perform his duties as the IHF Technical Delegate at the Men's AHF Tournament. The AHF and IHF responses give conflicting accounts of Mr Kozhukhov's role in the whole affair. It's fairly clear, however, that at best, he was a weak/"powerless" representative; at worst he was a duplicitous representative who only spoke out once the rest of the Handball World had found out what happened.

- Mr Kozhukhov's participation in the appointment/selection of the Jordanian officials.

According to the AHF:

"3.24 ... Mr Kozhukhov was present at the meeting of the Technical Committee prior to the Kuwait – Korea match and was therefore a party to that decision. He raised no objection to this appointment, neither at the pre-match meeting nor in his Tournament Report to the IHF following the Men's Tournament."

According to the IHF:

"4.21 .. He (Kozhukhov) already had objected to the choice of the referees from Jordan, but he was only one of the nine members during the technical meeting. All of the others were from the First Claimant."

- Mr Kozhukhov objections to the official's performance during the match and after the match both written and oral.

According to the AHF:

"3.12 At the daily meetings of the Men's Tournament Technical Committee during the competition, both Kozhukhov and Mr. Khalf Al-Enezi monitored and evaluated the performances of the referees in the previous matches. No protests were raised and no irregularities were discussed."

"3.11 Indeed, the IHF's technical delegate, Mr. Kozhukhov stated in his report "on or around 10 September 2007" that "the standard of officiating at all of the matches was to be commended."

According to the IHF:

“4.21 Mr. Kozhukov, the nominated supervisor, even felt forced to go three times (!) to the bench of the referees trying to advise the referees. But as he declared later, he had never ‘had the power in his hand’.”

“4.26 At the Council meeting [December 08, in Paris], the members engaged under Pt. 5.1 in an ‘intensive discussion’ regarding the Tournaments. Mr. Kozhukhov ‘explained the situation during the first match KOR - KUW.’ The IHF Response describes the meeting as follows:

‘He [Kozhukhov] stressed that following his opinion the referees almost destroyed the Korean team in the first half. He mentioned that he felt as a ‘supervisor without power’ even when he tried to advise the referees to ‘good refereeing’.”

“4.32 Mr Kozhukhov, as supervisor, made a very ‘diplomatic’ report. His oral statements during the council and his behavior during the match in question show a very different point of view.”

Kozhukhov’s brief report following the tournament:

“3.11 (also in sections 7.44 and 7.45 of the report)... ‘It might also be commended rather good officiating of the matches (except the first match KOR-KUW, of which the referees were from JOR, and whom, to my opinion the first half of the match had given priority to the KUW team. After the talk with the referees during the interval between the halves where I was assisted by Mr. K. Al Enezi, the referees were rather proper with officiating the second half of the match, but the team of KOR nevertheless could not beat the result in their own favour. They could manage to win only one goal back. Further on the referees from JOR had not been used for officiating.” (But according to the AHF, this report was not received by the AHF until almost 4 months later on January 2008)

It’s difficult to fully sort out what objections were raised and when those objections were made, but one can certainly infer that Mr. Kozhukhov could have and should have spoken more forcefully at the Technical Committee Meetings. Something along the lines of, “Hey, were videotaping these matches; If you think that IHF is going to stand idly by and accept this you’re wrong,” might have been particularly effective. Additionally setting aside the debate as to when the AHF received the “brief report” after the tournament, it clearly could have and should have been more explicit concerning what had happened. Finally, having witnessed such a travesty, Mr. Kozhukhov should have been the one to raise the issue to the IHF and the one seeking a just resolution. Instead it appears that he was a reluctant participant in this controversy.

3) The IHF President, Dr Hassan Moustafa, appears to have circumnavigated the IHF administrative and the Playing Rules and Referees Commission (PRC) attempts to appoint the German referee pair through personal conversations with the AHF President, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad of Kuwait.

According to the AHF, Dr Moustafa told the AHF president that they could select their own officials:

“3.1 The AHF submitted in its brief dated 18 February 2008 that the IHF had never previously sought to appoint referees to AHF organized tournaments. To the contrary, at the AHF’s 16th Ordinary Congress on 18 April 2007 the President of the IHF, Dr. Hassan Moustafa, had given the AHF’s President Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad, an ‘express and clear assurance’ that the IHF had no right (or would not be exercising any right) to appoint referees or technical delegates (only supervisors) to the Men’s and Women’s Tournaments and that the Tournaments ‘remained the responsibility’ of the AHF”

Then, the AHF notes that the IHF sent a letter contradicting Dr Moustafa’s personal assurances by stating that the German referees would officiate the Kuwait – Korea match:

“3.3 The AHF further submits that on 20 August 2007, the IHF again requested the names of the referees for the Tournaments, but also announced to the AHF, contrary to Dr Moustafa’s assurances at the 16th Ordinary Congress, that it had ‘concluded’ that two German referees, Messrs. Lemme and Ullrich, would officiate at the opening match between Kuwait and South Korea..”

Then, according to the IHF's strangely worded response submitted for arbitration, Dr Moustafa withdrew the IHF's appointment of the German officials:

"4.15 In describing its delegation of organizational authority to the AHF, however, the IHF concedes that, following its 'nominations and appointments' of representatives and referees, 'a huge discussion about the validity of these nominations and appointments' ensued. IHF submits in its Response:

'... During these discussions the President of the Respondent (Dr Moustafa) admitted himself that the early appointment of the referees (Mr Lemme and Ulrich for the first match in the men's tournament) was a step too far. For this reason he withdrew this appointment regarding the first match. For the women's tournament he also accepted a change of the representatives: Instead of the first nominated Mrs. Nilsson he agreed – after discussion with the President of the First Claimant (Shiekh Ahmad Al-Fahd) – to a delegation with Mr Bader Theyab.'

Although, it's not explicitly stated these "discussions" likely took place on 20 August, after the IHF had requested the referee appointments for the 2nd time. Apparently, these "discussions" also took place without the knowledge of Mr Christer Ahl, the Chair of the PRC. The AHF indicates that he was aware and part of the decision to nominate the Jordanian referees:

"3.4 The AHF responded on the same day, 20 August 2007, to the IHF letter. It apologized for not having previously named the Asian referees and stated that the referees for the tournaments had been "decided" by Mr. Tawakoli, President of the AHF's PRC and Mr. Ahl, President of the IHF PRC."

This claim is vehemently denied by Mr. Ahl:

"7.57 ...Mr Ahl vehemently refuted the allegation before the Panel that he was told on the telephone by Mr Tawakoli on or about 20 August 2007 that the Jordanians had been nominated to officiate."

In totality, it's fairly clear that Dr Moustafa engineered the decision to remove any mandate from the IHF to hire a neutral and experienced officiating crew for the pivotal Korea – Kuwait match. It's also pretty clear that he didn't bother to consult with the IHF's Playing Rules and Referees Commission on this decision. And finally, pretty hard to come up with any justifiable reason for this course of action.

4) Since there was no overwhelming statistical evidence or video with supporting critical commentary of the Women's Tournament in Kazakhstan it was difficult to make a solid case that the tournament unfairly officiated. From the CAS report:

"7.63 Not only is the analysis of the Women's Tournament between 25-29 August 2007, similar to the "Conclusions of Analysis" submitted for the Men's Tournament missing in the submissions of IHF, but the statistical evidence regarding the referee's calls and the results of the matches themselves do not speak overwhelmingly (as is the case in the Men's Tournament) for the presence of manipulation and/or bias. If a conscious or unconscious manipulation of the results took place in Almaty, it requires a stretch of the imagination to perceive how this could have taken place when the determination of the qualifying team was based upon only a marginal goal difference."

5) The IHF's choice of technical delegate for the Women's Tournament was of questionable neutrality and weakened their position.

"7.12 ... With regards to the Women's Tournament, the IHF originally named Ms. Nilsson as supervisor, but for reasons which remain unknown to the Panel, agreed to replace her with Mr Al-Theyab, a member of the IHF Council and also Treasurer of the AHF."

Not surprisingly Mr Al-Theyab's report on the tournament didn't highlight any problems:

"3.8 AHF submits that even the IHF's own technical delegate, Mr Al-Theyab, provided a written report to the

on 2 September 2007 in which he stated that 'the championship was successful on all levels', that there 'were no protests mentioned or presented during the championships' and that 'the level of referees was good during the championships'."

6) Representatives from Japan (Head Coach, Bert Bouwer, Federation Exec Director Semei Gamo and player Hitomi Sakugawa) took the highly unusual step of testifying that their victory against South Korea was tainted. The arbitration panel, however, did not buy their testimony:

"7.64 The Panel places little credence on the testimonies of the witnesses Bouwers, Gamo and Ms Sakugawa. The Panel finds it difficult to follow (and hold credible) a coordinated line of testimony of all three witnesses which states, on the one hand, yes, we were happy to have won against the Koreans, but, at the same time, sad that the better team, namely the Koreans, lost against us."

7) In its attempt to address the controversy the IHF failed to follow basic principles of due process. As detailed in the CAS report the IHF failed to properly notify the AHF that the IHF Council meeting held in December 2007 would discuss the AHF tournaments and potentially decide to rule on whether they were valid or not. And even if the AHF had shown up, they really wouldn't have had the opportunity to make their case, even if it was a weak one. As the CAS report summed up:

"7.26 ... The Council, not incorrectly, perceived its responsibility similar to that of a court. It sought to provide a forum for an open discussion and evaluation of the charges raised over the previous weeks to be followed by an appropriate decision and the resolution of appropriate measures to redress the grievance and "protect the image of the sport". However, the Council overlooked the fact that that, just as in any court of law, when sanctions are to be imposed, rules of procedure must be observed and fundamental principles of natural justice must be applied. **In this regards, the IHF Council failed and failed badly.**"

8) Two key IHF players in this controversy, The President, Dr Moustafa and Executive Committee Member Mr Kozhukov were no shows at the arbitration hearing:

"5.6 The witnesses Mr. Kozhukhov and Dr. Moustafa, although named as witness by the IHF, did not appear at the hearing and no testimony was offered."

Clearly, candid testimony from these two individuals would have cleared up a lot of conflicting information contained in the arbitration report. What else could possibly have been more important than for these two IHF leaders to represent the IHF at this hearing? A cynical observer might be inclined to conclude that Dr. Moustafa and Mr. Kozhukhov probably assessed that some pointed questions from a neutral court wouldn't be a very pleasant experience and decided to stay away.

9) Contrary to statements on the IHF website, the IOC's potential involvement was a major concern (at least to some members of the IHF Council anyway):

"4.26 ... The IHF Response describes the meeting as follow:...'After watching the video some members called it the most scandalous situation that they have ever seen, some even said it was obvious the referees were obsessed with finding ways of destroying the Korean team... But most of the Council members stressed that this matter was not between KOR and KUW on the men's side, nor between IHF and Asia, but that it was a matter of the reputation and the credibility of the handball sport around the world, especially also of the credibility towards the IOC."

Closing Commentary: In the end it appears that justice was for the most part served. Both the South Korean Men and Women will be at the Olympics this summer. They were the best teams and in a fair competition they would have both won their respective tournaments 19 times out of 20. The Kazakh women will also be in Beijing and their participation is probably not warranted. By "winning" the outright Asia bid, they forced the Korean women to win a spot via an Olympic Qualification Tournament. And if the Korean women hadn't participated it was a safe bet that a European team (perhaps Spain) would have earned that spot.

Aside from the teams and the players, the IHF and AHF leadership have been exposed as ineffective at best and corrupt at worst. It's hard to fully assess the overall damage that this has done to Handball. One can hope that a well run and compelling Olympic tournament will make this tawdry escapade fade into memory.

But let's hope that this event doesn't fade entirely from everyone's memory. In 2009, the IHF will have an election for new Board Representation.

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