

UNITED STATES HANDBALL ASSOCIATION

January 3, 2012

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At the 4-Wall Nationals in 2004, held in Portland, Oregon, I was preparing to ref the 45-plus doubles final. Two hours later, when the match was finished, the players tossed the game ball to me—the last ball out of the four cans that were given to me. They had broken the other seven balls.

I bring this up because many players have fairly short memories. We should not forget those terribly bad batches of balls being produced in Taiwan in 2004. Of course, the sport has survived its various ball crises over the years including a major US company that left us in the lurch, a disaster in Pennsylvania and then a long learning curve in Mexico...and then something like normalcy as the USHA undertook to guarantee a supply of reasonably priced balls with consistent quality.

Over the years, however, it became obvious that consistency in production quality was not something we could count on with Taiwan. . We could never guarantee uniform quality from one order to the next. This was all terribly frustrating.

A while back, the USHA Board voted to reduce the inventory on hand from one year's supply to nine months' supply. Another company began to produce the same ball in the same factory (same company, same rubber, same molds, same process, at first the same cans and lids)—although this ball, identical to the Red Ace, was marketed as improved, easier on the hands, etc. So much for truth in advertising!

The Board directed the Executive Director to explore other options. Over time, we tried various sources, a company in S. America, two in mainland China, a company in Ireland, and even an American company with numerous contacts in the field. We tested a variety of sample balls, including samples from Taiwan during this time but they were rejected for poor quality. Had Taiwan produced a playable ball we would have placed an order with them and we would have had more time to produce a playable ball from another source. A consensus quickly emerged that the best samples were coming from Ireland.

The Board was also deeply aware of the need to maintain a supply of handballs during this period as the old inventory dwindled and balls were still being tested. The balancing act was a difficult one—use up the old supply while bringing in a new ball so there would be no significant gap in the process.

We are now going through the third edition of the “Red 21” ball. This ball was largely the one used at the recent Junior Nationals with limited breakage. This is a very good sign that the many communications with the manufacturer had been successful and future order sizes can be increased to fill demand. The company is responsive and responsible. We have not enjoyed that luxury during my 10 on the USHA Board.

Handball players are a resilient lot. We have made many adjustments to changes in the game over the years. Yes, players had to adjust but the fact is that the adjustment did not take long and players adapted.

The USHA is committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure that our members and players will have a ready supply of high-quality, user-friendly, consistent handballs from a reliable, honorable, receptive manufacturer. The process that has brought us to today has been going on for several years. We are confident that the final product will meet the approval of all committed handball players. I want to thank each of you for your support, and also want to assure you that we will continue to put the well-being of the world's best game foremost in our dedicated work.

Sincerely,

