

# ECU CONGRESS 2023

## Report

**Date** 17 - 19 February 2023  
**Place** Hotel PYRAMIDA OREA, Prague, Czech Republic

### Introduction & Welcome

Aljaž Britvič

The 2023 ECU Congress was officially opened by the President of the European Cheer Union (ECU), Aljaž Britvič. He welcomed everybody and expressed particular gratitude to the Czech Federation for assisting in the administrative side of the event and all speakers for providing their expertise to the event.

### Event Registration Portal

Martina Marešová

Martina Marešová, ECU Board Member, was giving a detailed overview of the ECU registration system, which has been programmed for the use for the European Cheerleading Championships (Europeans), but which can also be provided to the ECU member federations free of charge for use on the national level.

Member federations present were also asked if they already personally had experience using the ECU registration system for registering their teams for the Europeans last year (approximately 6 people responded positively) and whether their own country had their own registration system programmed (approximately 10 federations responded positively).

During the discussion, it was explained that the system could be interacting with other existing systems via import and export of Excel spreadsheets. Tone Sparby, ECU General-Secretary, explained that the system is very easy to use and will be fully integrated with the eScoring system in the future, so data does not have to be duplicated. Austria also shared their experiences in building an athlete identity database on top of the existing registration system for an integrated solution.

A question was asked regarding the timeframe of how long the data of individual athletes would be stored. Based upon experience, there are certain tools that require statistical data and for these reasons, the data would be stored until athletes require deleting.

Another question was whether or not the database could be extended for coaches as well, which was confirmed – once an athlete identity has been set up, it can be extended to coaches.

### e-Judging System / Judges & Rules

Anne Achté & Ursula Hann

Anne Achté, Chairperson of the ECU Judges Committee, informed the congress about the ongoing selection process of scoring judges for Europeans and the criteria applicable, with an emphasis on education and experience; Ursula Hann, in her function as Chairperson of the ECU Competition Rules Committee, continued with the ongoing selection process of safety judges (note: deadlines for both have already expired).

Regarding the ECU Rulebook, member federations present were asked their opinions about the advancement rules in place and the question if the All Girl divisions and Coed divisions should be

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considered separately. The member federations present were in favor of this change with no federation opposing it.

The presentation also included initial information about the eScoring system that is currently being programmed for ECU. The system is planned to be tested in the course of the next months, so it is ready for use at the 2023 Europeans. The ECU eScoring system will be fully integrated with the ECU Registration system. After a phase of implementing improvements and lessons learnt from European, the eScoring system will also be offered to ECU member federations free of charge for use on the national level.

### European Coaches Register & Yearly Awards

Michael Pasieczny

Michael Pasieczny, Chairperson of the ECU Athletes & Coaches Committee, presented the European Coaches Register, which is set up to make access to qualified coaches easier, but also help with checking that coaches meet safeguarding standards by offering the option to upload a safeguarding / child protection document. Currently, coaches enter their data into the register. It is planned to make the register accessible to ECU member federations by the end of the month. Entries in the coach register are planned to be renewed each year.

The question was asked if there will be any kind of “approval” system by member federations. For this purpose, there is the option to have member federation endorsement. In addition to that, member federations are free to contact the country of origin member federation to verify that the person is qualified at any given time. Also, member federations could make the request to have a person removed from the list.

Regarding the qualifications of a coach, it was made clear that the ECU also does not ensure the quality of the registered coaches and level of their education, experience or knowledge.

Michael continued presenting the Yearly Awards and the selection process. Nominations are accepted until 15 May 2023. The Yearly Awards will be rewarded to Athletes of the Year and Coaches of the Year at the Europeans (costs to travel to Europeans have to be covered by the member federation).

### ICU Education System

Mike Cooper

Mike Cooper, Director of Cheerleading of the International Cheer Union (ICU), presented an overview about the ICU Global Education Program, which has a combination of online and in-person courses in five different main areas along the ICU Medallion Program (rules, coaching techniques, judges, credentialing, and management) and the ICU Education Portal:

<https://icu.member365.org/>

ICU in-person Course Schedule:

<https://www.cheerunion.org/education/course-schedule/>

Mike further informed about the current status of the sport on the international level, especially its Recognition by the International Olympic Committee. The presentation also included key considerations about the goals, structure and development of the sport.

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### Safeguarding

Katarina Eriksson & Ursula Hann

Katarina Eriksson, General-Secretary of the Swedish Federation, informed about the current safeguarding measures in place in Sweden and the steps their federation took to get there. She highlighted key recommendations – recognizing that there are issues and taking responsibility with adequate responses and preventive measures. She described the different lines of action in place in Sweden (reactive, preventive and structural) and explained about the Club Level Project, which aims at implementing the federation-level measures to the club level.

A question was asked about whether the Ethics Board was a structure within the Cheerleading Federation, or it was part of the federal-level structure. Katarina explained that each sports federation is required to have their own body, which is elected by the General Assembly, that then reports to the federal-level body. This allows to correct conduct beneath the threshold of what is being reported to the police directly.

Another question regarded the publication of decisions of the Ethical Board. The Sports Confederation in Sweden has a specific information site for cases of persons held responsible regarding anti-doping, match-fixing and also ethical misconduct.

Karl Olson added that the United States has a strong database of past offenders, and ICU can assist regarding requests about coaches with US nationality when European clubs or federations are interested to bring them in for coaching.

Ursula Hann added information from the perspective of a federation that is in the process of setting up specific safeguarding measures and compiling existing safety precautions into a more encompassing prevention concept.

The session was concluded with the outlook that ECU will compile best practices from federations and put together recommendations for safeguarding for the Sport of Cheer.

### Special Video Appearance

Jeff Webb

Jeff Webb, President of the International Cheer Union, made a special video appearance to address the congress and give additional background information on the important work of the ICU regarding the recognition of the sport on the international level. He also emphasized how widespread recognition on the national level is a key element for the sport to grow sustainably. One of the long-term goals is for the ICU World Championships to become financially independent, which includes expanding the possibilities in competing internationally. South Korea has approached the ICU with an interest to host a Cheerleading World Cup in Seoul, based upon official support of the local government. The event is planned to take place already in 2023, and is foreseen to have a very positive impact on the growth of the sport. With the exception of the USA and Canada, Cheerleading is highly developed in Europe that sends highly skilled teams to competitions world-wide. In parallel to developing high-level athletes and teams, initiatives are needed for the grass-roots level for growing the sport and opening it up to even more athletes. Jeff emphasized that he is looking forward to working with ECU as partners to strengthen the sport even further and increase the number of active athletes and teams participating competitions.

Karl Olson, Secretary-General of the ICU, added further information regarding the competition opportunities for club teams in addition to national teams. South Korea actively approached ICU with

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the intention of hosting a World Cheerleading Club in Seoul in October of 2023, with the qualification and participation under the recognition of the national member federations.

Since this is a very recent development, the already advertised ICU International Cheerleading Cup, taking place just after the ICU World Cheerleading Championships in Orlando in April, will still be offered in addition to the World Cheerleading Cup.

### Future European Championships

Aljaž Britvič

Aljaž Britvič, President of the ECU, opened this session by explaining that it will be an open discussion about possibilities for the development of the sport, regarding both club teams and national teams, while considering that Europe is embedded into the bigger picture of the dynamics on the international level. Aljaž referred to the decision made at the ECU General Assembly in Athens in 2022, whereas the format of the European Championships will remain with two club teams per country for the years 2024 and 2025.

He also pointed out that the bid process has been started for the years 2024, 2025 and 2026. This allows the federations more time to prepare a bid, but also prepare for the actual event. It was clarified that bidding for hosting Europeans in 2027 would take place in 2024.

Aljaž continued his presentation by going through a competition season by calendar months, highlighting fixed dates and how national events usually fall in place.

Ursula shared the experiences in Austria, where the switch was made to a competition season with several competitions for each team and a qualification mode for Nationals with the aim of improving the quality of the routine and a build-up phase in the fall. Currently, there are four regional competitions in the time frame of January to April, nationals taking place in June as part of the country-wide nationals sports series and a new event in March serving as qualifier for Europeans.

Michael Pasieczny, Denmark, described their system now, where the Nationals have been shifted to “Summer Cup”, which takes place in May. That was considered too close to the Europeans, and now the “Spring Cup” in March serves as qualifier for Europeans. Christmas Cup remains unchanged in its role.

Martin Tuš, President of the Slovenian Federation, added information about the competition cycle in Slovenia, where there are several competitions as part of a series. The finals of the national season takes place in April, which serves as qualification for Europeans. As Cheerleading has less numbers, Slovenia forms a national team from their clubs for Europeans. He also pointed out that there are a lot of international events taking place within the same calendar year, especially when the World Cheerleading Cup is added in the fall.

Michael Pasieczny, Denmark, added that a combination of club teams competing against national teams in and by itself would not be an issue, as every country could decide to form national teams and send a club team instead.

Aljaž pointed out that the difference between national teams or club teams ultimately comes down to the question if you offer two spots per country or one spot per country – it is not possible to control the competing athletes further than that.

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Mikael Ottesen, Denmark, pointed out that two competitions provided by ECU per calendar year would probably pose a financial problem for many countries, as they would not be able to afford covering three competitions in such a short time frame.

Michael Pasieczny, Denmark, reiterated that it is usually the same athletes competing on the highest level, making it not sustainable for athletes to have too many competitions within the same time frame.

Nikolina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggested to have both a national team and club competition on the same weekend, simply having it on different days.

Milko, Bulgaria, emphasized that there are two different aspects that need to be considered – we are a team sport, not an individual sport. Many other team sport events only allow one team per country for the highest-level competitions. In addition to that, a Cup style event can be held for club teams.

Riikka, Finland, pointed out that we should be asking ourselves what we are aiming for. Is it a best-of-the-best competition? Then it is a one team per country event. At the same time, we should be thinking about what we offer for club teams and lower levels.

When it was asked why the Europeans were originally two teams per country, Aljaž pointed out that the decision was based upon having as many participants as possible. Ursula highlighted that when this was set, the sport was not developed enough to send national teams. Federations did not have the structures required yet to put together and successfully send national teams, so having a national team format was simply out of the question.

Evangelina and Mike, Greece, stated that their country would not yet be ready to send only one national team, but instead still need time to improve within their club teams. Additionally, teams that are not yet fully developed are sad that they only get to compete once, since they cannot reach the finals.

Aljaž explained that the finals were not there originally, but were introduced at a later point of time. The purpose of the introduction of the finals was to give the top teams a chance to compete a second time and condense the best teams into a block for judging and determining the winning teams.

There was then an in-depth conversation about the motivation of athletes to try to make it to finals and whether or not the current format of Europeans fits highly skilled countries as well as it does countries that have not had Cheerleading for a long period of time.

Riikka suggested to try to hold one event that accommodates national teams while opening up more divisions for countries that would like to compete on a level that suits their skills.

Michael Pasieczny, Denmark, pointed out that changes to the competition that reduces the number of participating teams would in turn most likely result in higher participation fees for teams.

Anna, Poland, highlighted that if the system were changed to one team per country, ECL would have to be abandoned as additional qualification mode.

Aljaž continued with an online poll that had been prepared regarding the possible future formats and time slots for European Championships. This poll does not constitute any official voting, nor does it

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represent the member federation's official positions on the questions – it was merely conducted with the attendees of the congress to get a better impression of possible positions on the questions presented.

### **Do we need to keep the club Europeans?**

YES 71%

NO 4%

DON'T KNOW 25%

### **Should we introduce the national team Europeans?**

YES 68%

NO 11%

DON'T KNOW 21%

### **Should we do both - Club Europeans and National team Europeans?**

YES 67%

NO 11%

DON'T KNOW 22%

### **IF we have both events, we should ...**

have both of them every year. 18%

alternate between the events (one year club Europeans and one year national team Europeans). 82%

## **Farewell & Closing**

**Aljaž Britvič & Ursula Hann**

Aljaž Britvič and Ursula Hann thanked all the participants, speakers and ICU representatives for taking the time and coming to Prague, as well as the Czech Federation for their administrative and logistical support and closed the 2023 ECU Congress.

## **Statistical Information**

The event was attended by almost 40 persons from 16 ECU member federations (some representatives were unfortunately not able to attend due to the airport staff strikes the very weekend), as well as by representatives of the ICU. In order to allow informal networking, an informal dinner & reception was part of the schedule.