

# worldsportslawreport

**FEATURED ARTICLE**  
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# Opinion

## EHFA and IHRSA: promoting health through fitness

**T**raditionally, the health and fitness industry has looked to the United States for its leadership. Based in Boston, USA, the International Health and Racquet Sportsclub Association<sup>1</sup> (IHRSA) has led the industry for over 25 years with its programme of business education, networking and advocacy.

National associations and health clubs across the globe looked to IHRSA to set the tone, direction and pace of change in the industry.

However, leaders of the European industry have - in recent times - felt that the representation of the sector to the institutions of European governance required the need for an effective European led organisation, operating out of Brussels, and delivering its message with a European voice.

Out of this need, the European Health and Fitness Association<sup>2</sup> (EHFA) has emerged as the primary representative body of the European fitness industry.

Representing over 6,000 facilities in 22 European countries, EHFA has developed remarkably since its formation in 1996 as the European Network of Fitness Associations, and reformation as EHFA in 2001.

Its most dramatic period of development has been since 2007, when Harm Tegelaars, entrepreneur and founder of leading brand Cannons Health and Fitness (bought by Nuffield Group in 2008), assumed the position of President.

Prior to that, EHFA had focused on working with the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) to establish a European Qualifications Framework of standards for instructors working in the sector.

These standards created the possibility for a system of recognition of success and differentiation of professionalism within a market in which excellence of the majority can be tainted by the insolence of the few.

Building a strong team and relocating to Brussels, Tegelaars has helped to transform the presence of the sector in Brussels, by establishing strong links with the Commission, Directorate General for Consumer & Health (DG SANCO) and furthering developments with DG EAC in the area of instructor standards.

EHFA receives financial support from DG EAC for the execution of its work in this area and Tegelaars has managed to generate substantial support for the mission from within the sector.

The creation of the European Register of Exercise Professionals has provided a degree of momentum behind the drive to raise levels of service to users.

The rapid growth of EHFA generated substantial confusion within the sector. IHRSA had been seen as the *sacrosanct* body for the industry and some observers were unsure as to whether the success of EHFA was creating 'competition' for IHRSA.

However, as President Kennedy once wrote to Jean

Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU, 'only America and a united Europe, working in full and effective partnership, can find solutions to the problems that confront all mankind'.

It is not an overstatement to say that the world currently faces two large problems of a very different nature, both of which have combined to make cooperation between EHFA and IHRSA a blatant necessity.

First, the implosion of the global economy has had grave implications across many sectors.

The fitness industry has proven to be very resilient: early market data from Europe (the UK and Netherlands) show continued strong performance. However, it is not recession proof and cooperation is needed across the sector.

As a sector, the industry needs to become increasingly effective at what it does at the moment. In addition, it must innovate to continue to add value to its users and recruit new converts.

It must come together in pursuit of tangible goals such as the drive to get 'more people- more active- more often'.

This means that industry associations have to cooperate and align to serve the interests of the sector they represent, regardless of any potential issues between them.

Also, across the globe, a public health crisis is threatening a tidal wave of destruction on the budgets of health services.

Whether it is the socialised medical systems of Western Europe or the insurance based schemes of the United States, policy makers across the globe are grappling with the complex and interlinked problems of over consumption, obesity and the systematic eradication of physical activity from daily life. Over 20 lifestyle conditions can either be prevented or managed via adequate levels of physical activity and the health and fitness sector is well placed to administer such provision.

In such circumstances, the thought leaders of the industry need to adjoin with governments across the globe.

EHFA is the primary representative body of the European health and fitness industry and shall relay the messages and policies generated within the academic, policy and commercial arms of the sector to the European Institutions.

As the global representative body, IHRSA shall be making the case to organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the World Economic Forum and the International Olympic Committee.

Together and united, the health and fitness sector has a strong voice with much to offer.

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**European Health & Fitness Association**  
[www.ehfa.eu](http://www.ehfa.eu)

1. [www.ihrsa.org](http://www.ihrsa.org)
2. [www.ehfa.eu](http://www.ehfa.eu)



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