

HOCKEY IRELAND

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Affiliated to the International Hockey Federation and to the European Hockey Federation

Hockey Ireland Statement Regarding Decision from Sports Dispute Solutions Ireland on the EuroHockey League and Club Championship Positions 2020/21.

21 August 2020

On the 9th of April 2020, the 2019/2020 EYHL season was declared null and void by the Hockey Ireland Board due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This was based on the recommendation of a Competitions Working Group that included the Hockey Ireland Competitions Committee and representation from each of the four provinces. This group, after extensive consultation and consideration, presented a series of recommendations to the Hockey Ireland Board regarding all hockey competitions on the island of Ireland. The Competitions Committee also recommended the representatives for the 2020/2021 European Hockey competitions – the EuroHockey League and EuroHockey Club Championship. It was recommended that the four teams selected to represent Ireland in 2019/2020 season should remain the representatives for 2020/2021.

This recommendation was reviewed and subsequently approved by the Hockey Ireland Board at a meeting on 5th May, resolving that the four clubs representing Ireland in the European Hockey competitions in 2021 would remain the same as the previous year, in the same positions.

This Board decision was appealed by Lisnagarvey Hockey Club under the Hockey Ireland Bye Laws. An independent Appeal Panel met on Monday 29th June and ruled that the appeal should be upheld. This panel determined that Lisnagarvey Hockey Club should be awarded first place in the nomination for European Competitions for the 2020/2021 season, making them the representative for Ireland in the EuroHockey League.

With regard to the decision of the Appeal Panel, it was Hockey Ireland's position that the Panel focussed on Lisnagarvey Hockey Club's appeal without any, or insufficient, regard to the consequences of such a change to the broader Hockey Ireland decision. Upon receipt of the Appeal Panel decision, Hockey Ireland considered all available options open to it and decided to refer the Appeal Panel's decision to Sport Dispute Solutions Ireland as allowed for within the Hockey Ireland Bye Laws. Sport Dispute Solutions Ireland is an independent specialised dispute resolution service for Irish Sport.

As Hockey Ireland's designate appeal body, a request to Sport Dispute Solutions Ireland for mediation/arbitration is the final solution to an appeal when all processes within Hockey Ireland have been exhausted.

Hockey Ireland has fully engaged with the Sport Dispute Solutions Ireland arbitration process and would like to thank the SDSI for providing the final conclusion for a very difficult matter.

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The arbitration hearing took place on 13th August 2020 and we have now been informed that the Sole Arbitrator upholds the appeal of the Hockey Ireland Board. Consequently, the decision of the Hockey Ireland Board of 5th May 2020, so far as it relates to the Men's EFH Club Competition 2020/21 selection is reinstated.

A full reasoned decision has been communicated to all the clubs involved. In summary, in the Sole Arbitrator's view, the Board decision was made *"without any procedural infirmity, in the absence of which, there was no basis for the Hockey Ireland Appeal Panel to overturn the decision of the Hockey Ireland Board"*. The Arbitrator further stated that there is a reasonable argument to be made that an alternative decision or conclusion could have been reached by the Board, but that is entirely subjective. It was clearly open to the Board to make the decision it did.

Reinstating the 5th May Board decision means that the following club will represent Ireland at the EuroHockey League for the 2020/21 season:

- Pegasus Hockey Club Women will retain their position as the representative in the Euro Hockey League;
- Three Rock Rovers Hockey Club Men retain their position as the representative for the Euro Hockey League;
- Loreto Hockey Club Women retain their position as the representative for the EuroHockey Club Trophy;
- Lisnagarvey Hockey Club's Men retain their position for the EuroHockey Club Trophy.

The Board of Hockey Ireland fully empathise with all clubs across all our leagues and provinces that have been impacted by decisions forced upon us by COVID-19 similar to many other sports. We have endeavoured to do the right thing in the interests of our clubs and players and we regret any upset felt by the clubs.

We would also like to put on record our sincere thanks to the Appeal Panel for the time and effort they committed to this process and in general to all the club officials and volunteers who have committed endless hours dealing with the fall out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, we would just like to thank all those hockey players and officials working in the front line and remind everyone to stay safe in these ongoing difficult times.
