HSBC BWF World Tour Finals
Guangzhou

Tianhe Stadium, Guangzhou, China
11 – 15 December 2019

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Dear colleagues and friends,

I have the great fortune to travel regularly and see first-hand the amazing progress our sport is making on the international scale.

The last few months have been the strongest indication yet that fan and participation numbers are on the rise.

It’s through investment in events like the TOTAL BWF World Championships, TOTAL BWF Para Badminton World Championships, and the recent BWF World Junior Championships in Kazan, Russia, that we are able to build a sustainable future for the sport.

I must commend the organising committees in Basel and Kazan for the quality of tournaments staged.

The World Junior Championships, in particular, provided a great platform for developed and developing badminton nations to showcase their next-generation talent.

Ensuring that we continue to spread into new markets is a clear goal for the sport. This was emphasised at the latest BWF Council Session in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in October.

China and Asia do remain vital growth areas, and in places like India, the spike in the number of individuals playing badminton on a regular basis is huge.

But promisingly, we’re making strong inroads in our second biggest region Europe, as well as building a greater presence in developing centres in Pan-America, Oceania and Africa.

We see Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028 as fantastic long-term targets to broaden our development initiatives and create a strategic position for the sport around new projects and partnerships.

At the same time, we are also excited to see AirBadminton fulfil its objective of creating more opportunities for more badminton in more places. It won’t be long until the AirShuttle is on the market and people can start enjoying a better experience of badminton outdoors.

For our elite athletes, it’s nearing crunch time in their quest to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. They continue to be role models and heroes for our future stars. Their amazing feats on the court still represents the most powerful tool we have in promoting the game.

I therefore look forward to a busy end to the year, spearheaded by the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals in Guangzhou, and wish everyone a safe and happy festive season.

Poul-Erik Høyer

BWF President
HSBC Race To Guangzhou intensifies

We are just under two months away from the second staging of the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals to be held 11-15 December 2019 in Guangzhou, China.

The HSBC BWF World Tour Finals is the pinnacle of the badminton season pitting the best of the best against each other as they compete for their share of the biggest prize pool ever seen in badminton – US$1.5 million.

Ultimate glory awaits the Top 8 players and pairs who have qualified throughout the year-long HSBC Race To Guangzhou across the five badminton disciplines.

It’s been an exciting season so far with many of our athletes excelling in their endeavour to cement a Top 8 position.

A number of players and pairs have shone at the Super 1000 level, while our current world champions gain automatic entry into the Finals as a result of their superb efforts in Basel.

There’s also a handful of big names who currently find themselves outside the Top 8 and will be eyeing a strong finish to the season in the final nine tournaments including three BWF World Tour Super 100 events.

The stunning city of Guangzhou is the spiritual home of the season-ending HSBC BWF World Tour Finals and will stage the event until the end of 2021.

This high-stakes showdown appeals to fans and audiences across the globe as badminton’s revolutionary new concept promises to deliver the most electric competition of the year.

It caps off an exciting second year in the partnership between the Badminton World Federation and its Principal Global Partner and title sponsor of the World Tour, HSBC.
Following a milestone week at the TOTAL BWF Para Badminton World Championships in August, our Para badminton stars now enter the final phase of qualification for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Close to 300 Para badminton athletes took to the courts in Basel competing in 22 wheelchair and standing events. It was six days of thrilling badminton action that showcased some of the most exciting matches seen in the sport.

It was also one of the first times that a Para Sport World Championships had been integrated fully into an able-bodied World Championships.

Attention now turns to the Japan Para Badminton International which doubles as the Paralympic Games Test Event.

Excitement for the Paralympics is already in overdrive as a record 390,000 people participated in the first Paralympic ticket lottery held for residents of Japan during August and September.

This is more than three times the number of people who took part in the initial offering of tickets for the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Such level of interest has never been seen before in the history of the Paralympic Movement, with Para badminton sure to be a favourite sport among locals given the prowess of the Japanese National Para Badminton Team.

The Test Event from 11-17 November is a fantastic opportunity for Japanese athletes and local organisers to further raise the profile of the sport in the lead up to the Games starting 25 August in Tokyo.

A total of 90 players will compete in singles, doubles and mixed doubles events across six sport classes at the Paralympic Games, with the qualification period ending on 29 March, 2020.

As part of the Test Event, the BWF Integrity Unit will be delivering a comprehensive education and awareness campaign called iZone aimed at educating Para badminton athletes on what to expect in terms of testing and intelligence gathering during the Paralympics.

The iZone set up is part of a larger collaboration between the BWF Integrity Unit and the Japan Anti-Doping Agency (JADA), including the promotion of their Play True 2020 and Sport For Tomorrow initiatives created for Tokyo 2020.
Boost for Badminton Against Myopia project

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) and the National Badminton Federation of Russia (NBFR) were delighted to announce earlier this month the results of its collaborative Badminton Against Myopia Project.

Speaking at a special presentation at the BWF World Junior Championships in Kazan on 13 October, BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer and BWF Council Member and NBFR President Sergey Shakhray revealed that for the first time scientists had identified that regular badminton participation did in fact have a positive impact on the functional capacity of the visual organ.

The report also indicated that badminton could be used to not only reduce the risk of myopia in children, but treat one of the most common types of myopia – pseudo myopia or false myopia.

President Høyer told the badminton community: “The goal of the Badminton Against Myopia Project was to reduce the number of school-age children that suffer from or are at risk of myopic eye disease globally.

“These results now vindicate the view that regular badminton could reduce the risk of myopia in children.

“At the moment we have medical treatments, laser therapy and conservative treatments. Badminton is the new fourth strategy and should be included in everyday practice at all levels, from kindergarten to university.”

— BWF Council Member and NBFR President Sergey Shakhray

President Shakhray said that badminton should now become a recommended strategy for the treatment of myopia in children.

“At the moment we have medical treatments, laser therapy and conservative treatments. Badminton is the new fourth strategy and should be included in everyday practice at all levels, from kindergarten to university,” he added.

The survey observed Moscow school children aged seven to 11 years who engaged in systematic badminton activities over a period of 18 months.

Researchers reliably proved the high efficiency of playing regular badminton in treating pseudo myopia with further evidence indicating false myopia could even disappear altogether after regular badminton play.

President Høyer added: “We have seen how successful scientifically developed badminton activities have been in not only identifying the health benefits of the sport but laying the platform for increased participation.

“I hope this leads to an overall greater push of more children, playing more badminton in more places.”
World Juniors showcases growth of badminton

Since its inception in 1992, the BWF World Junior Championships has traversed more continents and a greater diversity of nations than any other major event.

Kazan in Russia hosted its latest edition, and with a level of organisation that would compare favourably with top-tier events, provided a great stage for both developed and developing badminton nations to showcase their talent.

Players from less developed badminton countries such as Tahiti, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Estonia, Uzbekistan and Mongolia competed with their peers from more mainstream powers, returning with a wealth of experience not just from the on-court competition but from activities off it.

In particular, it was a special occasion for Tahiti’s Louis Beaubois and Teiva Politi, who became the first players from the Pacific to compete at the World Junior Championships – showing how far badminton has spread.

On top of the experience of competing and watching top-level badminton, among the takeaways for the juniors were the coaching clinics conducted by former greats Lee Wan Wah (Malaysia) and Allan Budi Kusuma (Indonesia).

While Lee Wan Wah demonstrated some useful techniques and tactics in doubles, Kusuma dealt primarily with footwork and speed in singles.

Lee and Kusuma were not the only former players associated with the event. Other well-known names like Susy Susanti, Wang Wei, Rajiv Ouseph, Robert Blair and Michael Fuchs served as mentors and coaches, showing the way for the next generation.

The hosting of events such as the World Championships, the World Junior Championships and the Sudirman Cup in places such as Glasgow, Basel, Markham and Gold Coast in recent years has certainly provided a fillip to badminton in those regions.

In fact, this increasing popularity of badminton is reflected in research that shows that outside of China, badminton has experienced large-scale growth.

According to a 2018 Global Badminton Study conducted by Nielsen Sports, the global fan base is an estimated 681 million across seven regions based on sample surveys conducted in 21 badminton markets globally. This is an increase of around 37 per cent since 2015 in those same 21 markets.

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Last year, an additional 14 markets were added to the study increasing the badminton fan base by 54 million, and bringing the total number of badminton fans globally in 35 markets to an estimated 735 million.

Participation is also on the rise. There are currently 339 million active badminton participants who played the sport at least once a week in 2018, estimated across the 35 countries studied.

Apart from China and India, who are atop the list, the next five top markets with the highest levels of interest for badminton are Chinese Taipei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. Globally, the boom is even more rapid with extreme growth rates in Spain (4977%), Brazil (4300%), Russia (3376%), Germany (656%), France (417%), and Canada (321%).

There is little wonder then that the standard of badminton worldwide has also improved by leaps and bounds. Players from countries that are not traditional powers are now contemplating a career in badminton, which would never have been the case a few years ago. Just ask some of the budding superstars present in Kazan.

“To have the World Junior Championships in Markham made a big difference to me,” said Canada’s Brian Yang. “I was training there at the time, I was familiar with it, it was like my home town.

“The community got to see what I’m capable of playing, it was a big confidence booster for me. A lot of people have been recognising me and come up to me. It’s definitely given me a lot more popularity.”

Scotland’s Joshua Apiliga said of the World Championships in Glasgow: “I think it gave everyone a bout of inspiration and made everyone in training motivated to reach that level.

“I’ve gone to the All England a couple of times before that, so we knew what we were expecting but it was the fastest I’ve seen. Of course, it makes a difference having it at my doorstep, it was amazing. I wanted to reach that level ever since we watched the World Championships in Glasgow, everyone’s wanting to reach that level.”

With the BWF planning long-term development initiatives in line with the Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, we can expect this boom to continue long into the next decade.
Developing badminton’s best

The BWF staged its biennial World Coaching Conference at the TOTAL BWF World Championships in Basel in August.

The conference provided the latest information about the art of coaching young athletes, including practical sessions and formal presentations.

Headlining the list of guest speakers was legendary women’s doubles player now coach Zhao Yunlei, former Denmark head coach Lars Uhre, sports performance consultant and mindset coach Allistair McCaw, Korea’s Para badminton head coach Kim Myo Jung, and Penny Briscoe OBE, Director of Sport at British Paralympic Association.

Participants were particularly wowed by Chinese legend Zhao’s presentation on the role of the female player in mixed doubles.

Two-time Olympic gold medallist Zhao focused on some of the principles that she demonstrated on court in a stellar career.

Mixed doubles tips with Zhao Yunlei

1. Counter-attacking from defence
Zhao: “The traditional way is for the woman to force the lift. We teach the woman to rush forward and be more aggressive and try to finish the rally. The point of pressing is to put more pressure on your opponents, rather than just setting up the lift for your partner, and it’s about taking initiative from the midcourt and front court.”

2. Net skills
Zhao: “It’s a common problem for girls that the racket head is always low. The racket head should always be up. Keep the net tape as a guide. If the shuttle falls below the tape, you stay low by bending at the knees, but still keep the racket head up.”

3. Variation at net
Zhao: “We don’t need to hit hard all the time. The fact you are attacking doesn’t mean it has to be hard. Use variations, change the tempo.”

4. Speed
Zhao: “Speed has always been the priority in mixed doubles. The female role is quite essential because they are setting up points, so whether the girl can play at a high tempo is the deciding factor.”

Zhao ended her presentation by speaking of the grind that went into making her one of the greatest in the game.

“I started playing when I was eight years old, and I retired when I was 30. I didn’t get one day off in my entire career. Persistence and resilience are what kept me going,” she said.

“We don’t need to hit hard all the time. Attacking doesn’t mean it has to be hard. Use variations, change the tempo.”

— Zhao Yunlei
A classic problem that many attacking players face against purely defence-minded opponents is cutting down the length of the rally.

Former Denmark head coach Lars Uhre touched upon this subject during his presentation in Basel.

In particular, he referenced his time coaching former world No.1 Peter Gade, who was faced with such a problem during a particular phase in his career when he felt he was being bled by opponents who focused mainly on keeping the rallies going as long as possible.

Exercise 1 – Transition training
Uhre: “The first exercise helped Peter be more aware of what he should try to do and more confident when he got to these situations in matches where he felt that he was tired and it was going one way. It’s more mental training and getting used to having the right focus when you’re really tired.”

A second exercise focused on winning quick points, requiring the player to be alert from the first shot, and take some risks to cut down the length of the rally.

Exercise 2 – Short exchanges
Uhre: “If we have to work one minute for every point, it can be a tough night. If we can win some easy ones by having some different serves, different returns, doing some homework with videos of opponent’s habits, then we can get some shortcuts to winning.”

BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer reflected on this year’s conference saying it was fantastic that we had a panel of renowned badminton experts and experts from other spheres to share key issues with our coaches.

“BWF’s constant endeavour to consistently promote the exchange of knowledge and expertise worldwide.

“The ultimate aim is to provide the framework to be able to inspire our coaches to continue to develop the next badminton superstars around the world,” he said.

Missed the Coaching Conference in Basel? Don’t worry, all sessions were recorded and can be viewed on BadmintonWorld.tv and on the BWF Development website.
MARIN IS BACK

It was like she never left. Spain’s Carolina Marin delivered one of the greatest comebacks in badminton – and perhaps all sport – by defending her China Open crown in September, nearly eight months after suffering a career-threatening injury.

The Olympic champion, who suffered an ACL injury in the final of the Indonesia Masters in January, pulled off a stunning turnaround in Changzhou, defeating Tai Tzu Ying in the final.

“I cannot describe my feeling right now because I’m so happy. It’s unbelievable. I couldn’t imagine during my rehabilitation that I could win in my second tournament back.”

— Carolina Marin
Farewell to a Champion

Former Olympic champion Li Xue Rui announced her retirement from international badminton earlier this month.

Li, 28, was among the most dominant players of her time claiming the Badminton Asia Championships in 2010 at age 19 and securing ultimate glory at the London 2012 Olympic Games. She also won 14 Superseries titles.

A ruptured ACL suffered in the semifinal of the Rio 2016 Olympics against Marin derailed her career. She made a moderately successful return, winning three tournaments in a row on her return in April 2018, but struggled to reclaim the form she had enjoyed at top-tier events.

Her last event was the Korea Open in September this year.

Badminton bug

BWF had the pleasure of meeting Cologne Mayor, Hans-Werner Bartsch, and Speaker of the Cologne Mayor, Thomas Plep, last month to discuss everything badminton.

Plep is an avid player and is Chairman of the Cologne Badminton Club Blue Gold eV. Over the years he has convinced Mayor Bartsch to also get involved in the game.

Mayor Bartsch indicated it was sometimes a struggle for badminton to compete against other sports in Cologne but said he thought AirBadminton had great potential in the city.

“Badminton is a popular game for seniors and has gained significant popularity among older people here in Cologne. There’s a lot of health benefits to badminton and we feel playing badminton outdoors with an outdoor shuttlecock will lead to more participation.”

Both Bartsch and Plep also welcomed that Para badminton was now attached to badminton and congratulated Basel for hosting the TOTAL BWF Para Badminton World Championships and TOTAL BWF World Championships concurrently.

Building capacity

The BWF is implementing a pilot course for Event Management Level 2, which is part of the educational initiatives aimed at building member capacity.

The three-day course is taking place this week at YONEX French Open 2019 and is run in conjunction with the World Academy of Sport.

The initiative is aimed at event staff from Member Associations looking to make the jump from Grade 3 to Grade 2.
It’s exciting times for badminton as we continue the roll out of the new outdoor game.

With the AirShuttle nearing the final stages of pre-production, a host of AirBadminton activities are planned for the next three months.

Last weekend, the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) conducted an AirBadminton exhibition in conjunction with Malaysia’s National Sports Month.

Last weekend, the Dubai Sports Council hosted the first AirBadminton tournament in the region as part of the Dubai International Challenge 2019.

It was an opportunity for the BWF to validate equipment, regulations and tournament formats.

In November, Singapore Badminton Association will be running an AirBadminton event alongside the Singapore Youth International Series 2019.

And coming up in December, we will announce and launch the HSBC Guangzhou AirBadminton Legacy Project during the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals.

Following on from the successful launch of AirBadminton in Guangzhou in May, the BWF together with its partner HSBC, the Guangzhou Sports Bureau and the Chinese Badminton Association, plan to construct a number of AirBadminton courts for public usage around China as a legacy initiative.

As part of this project, outdoor permanent courts will be set up on various surfaces at the Tianhe Sports Complex as well as in other locations of the city during Finals week and there will be an opportunity for fans to try it out at the fan activation zone.

Currently, the AirShuttle is on its original timeline and we expect the mass production to begin at the end of 2019 with the shuttle available to the public in the first quarter of 2020.
AirBadminton is an ambitious new development project designed to create opportunities for people of all ages and ability to play badminton on hard, grass and sand surfaces in parks, gardens, streets, playgrounds and beaches around the world.

Given that most people first experience badminton in an outdoor environment, we’re now making it easier for everyone to access the sport through a new outdoor game and new shuttlecock – the AirShuttle.

In conjunction with our Global Development Partner, HSBC, our aim is to find an effective, economic and sustainable way of encouraging more people to play more badminton in more places.

Thus, we have spent the last five years working in partnership with the Institute for Sports Research (ISR) at Nanyang Technological University to develop a new outdoor shuttlecock with increased resistance to wind, to allow people to have a more positive experience of badminton outdoors.

The main considerations were that it must be played with the same rackets and have good flight performance, spin response and durability. The end goal was to create a new concept of the game, with the potential for a new, highly attractive form of competitive badminton, with a key focus on global participation.

The vision is for it be played on three dynamic surfaces; hard, grass and sand – with a mass participation project aimed at increasing access to the sport on any available surface, complimented by a competitive version on sand aimed at increasing its global appeal.

We now plan to bring AirBadminton closer to everyone through our global roll out.