On 18 July, we staged our very first BWF Virtual AGM. History was made.
Virtual vote at AGM makes history

The year 2020 was to be all about July and the Tokyo Olympic Games. A celebration of badminton and our amazing players. How things can change.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many aspects of our badminton operations, most notably the BWF Tournament Calendar as well as the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, but not least our ability to stage the 81st BWF Annual General Meeting in Aarhus, Denmark in May.

On Saturday 18 July, just a few weeks ago, we made history by staging our very first BWF Virtual AGM as part of our governance requirements to host it every year before 31 July.

The voting process was completed without a glitch. I want to thank all Member Associations, voting delegates and my colleagues on the BWF Council for being part of this journey.

When COVID-19 struck, the need to deliver our AGM differently became apparent. Gathering like we do en masse every May, welcoming 194 Member Associations from around the globe, would not be possible.

The process began on 3 April when we published the BWF Annual Report and sent out the agenda. Further to six regional video conferences to better engage members in the content of the agenda and the Council proposals, representatives of 112 members participated in this preparation process. Along with your feedback and interventions, valuable to the final outcome of staging a virtual AGM via webcast – a decision that was motioned by Council and finally ratified by the Membership on 18 July.

Most importantly, this was to be a voting AGM which would allow us to deliver some important decisions to ensure continuous improvement of our governance practices.

It was with great satisfaction then that the AGM passed all seven Council proposals related to amendments of the BWF Constitution. History was made.

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I particularly want to congratulate the Membership for passing the landmark vote to approve the constitutional change to ensure gender representation on the BWF Council, and for taking another important step to improve our governance practices by bringing in a vetting process for BWF officials.

It was great to see the ambition of the Membership and Council to continue to make improvements by passing a number of key decisions.

It’s great for the future of badminton and I thank everyone for their role in achieving these outstanding results.

Just recently, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) released its third review of International Federation (IF) governance, and BWF ranked third among 31 Summer IF’s.

This is fantastic news for badminton and our successes on 18 July only further enhance this reputation.

Poul-Erik Høyer

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July 2020
The Badminton World Federation (BWF) staged its 81st Annual General Meeting and first virtual AGM webcast from Copenhagen on Saturday 18 July.

BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer and BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund led proceedings, with delegates from Samoa and Tonga joining in at midnight their time and 5am Saturday morning for those in Guatemala, Cost Rica and other parts of Central America.

The AGM passed all seven Council proposals related to amendments of the BWF Constitution.

In a landmark result for the sport, the Membership approved the proposal to ensure geographical and gender representation on the BWF Council.

This falls in line with the recommendation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to target 30 per cent of gender representation in decision-making positions within International Federations (IFs) by 2020.

The second major step forward in BWF’s governance practices was amendments to the constitution that introduce vetting processes and minimum eligibility criteria for elected officials and hearing panel members of the BWF.

The votes took place as part of the BWF Virtual AGM – a decision that was motioned by the BWF Council in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and ratified on the day by the voting majority of the Membership.

The hotel in Copenhagen where the AGM took place had eight staff from two technology companies providing the technical set-up for the webcast and online voting system. BWF also had the meeting broadcast in four other languages – French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian.

Other proposals passed include permitting the Chair of the Para Badminton Athletes’ Commission onto Council, limiting the position of the BWF President to four terms, and approving amendments to the BWF Constitution to come in line with the 2020 Judicial Procedures which seek to reorganise and improve our judicial structure.
BWF leads the way in governance practices

The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) released its third review of International Federation (IF) governance earlier this month.

BWF again showed it leads the way in governance, ranking in the first bracket of IFs alongside FEI, FIFA, ITF, UCI and World Rugby.

BWF is third overall and first for IFs with between 20-49 staff and second for IFs with annual revenue between 20-50 million Swiss Francs.

To meet the criteria for the top bracket, BWF had to sit within a certain threshold of total ranking points (170 – 187) calculated across five key sections.

▸ Transparency
▸ Integrity
▸ Democracy
▸ Development
▸ Control Mechanism

The report indicates that BWF is at the upper limit of scores for transparency and development, showing particular progress in integrity with our revised whistle-blower procedure and evolution of the BWF Integrity Unit since the last report in 2017-2018.

BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund said this is a great achievement for the federation.

“We continue to be one of the strongest IFs for financial transparency, and have demonstrated high competence on new indicators relating to safeguarding and data protection.”

— Thomas Lund

“We continue to be one of the strongest IFs for financial transparency, and have demonstrated high competence on new indicators relating to safeguarding and data protection,” Lund said.

“There are still areas we can improve on and some of these were addressed at our recent BWF Virtual AGM on 18 July, where the Membership voted to approve a number of constitutional changes.

“This included the proposal to ensure geographical and gender representation on the BWF Council and amendments to the constitution that introduces vetting processes and minimum eligibility criteria for elected officials and hearing panel members of the BWF.

“What’s most pleasing is that this highlights the ambition of the Membership and Council to continue to seek improvement in governance practices.”

Governance innovation is an important focus in BWF’s Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 with a key goal to “provide leadership in good governance practices”.

www.bwfbadminton.com
Embracing new normal

The COVID-19-enforced lockdowns worldwide caused vast disruptions to the BWF Tournament Calendar.

Despite that, it has been business as usual for BWF staff, who adapted to working from home during the Movement Control Order period in Malaysia before returning to their Kuala Lumpur base at Naza Tower on 13 May.

Safety of the workforce had been a priority all along for Chief Operating Officer Stuart Borrie, whose administration team put several measures in place to ensure the BWF office was ready to welcome staff to a risk-free working space following a 10-week hiatus.

Throughout the lockdown, Borrie was in constant contact with the relevant authorities and provided staff with frequent updates on the latest developments.

Before the return to office, staff was reminded:

1. Of the responsibility to protect themselves, colleagues and families.
2. To practice personal hygiene at home, work and in the community – especially regular and thorough hand washing.
3. To maintain recommended social distancing; and
4. To wear a mask – considered mandatory except when at individual workstations and meeting rooms.

Each BWF department also adapted to its new working methods.

With regular conference calls, software programs such as Microsoft Teams and Blue Jeans also became prominent in use to keep up-to-date and stimulate employee engagement.

BWF Secretary General, Thomas Lund

“Flexible and remote working has become our approach, all in the name of the ‘new normal’. The health and safety of BWF staff is of the utmost importance to us. Stuart and the team have implemented several measures to ensure we all feel safe in the office. I would like to thank the BWF staff for their assistance during this unprecedented time. This new way of working has also led to chairing more virtual staff meetings and just recently we staged our first BWF Virtual AGM.”

BWF Chief Operating Officer, Stuart Borrie

“I thank the staff for adapting to the ‘new normal’ and the good cooperation around the rotation of working at home and office. These office procedures will be prevalent until Malaysia records no new cases and declares itself free from COVID-19.”

BWF Commercial and Communications Director, Owen Leed

“We immediately installed a daily team call with everyone dialling in from their respective locations. These calls proved useful to keep everyone up-to-date on a daily basis and from a team morale perspective, we were able to support each other. Honestly, I can only congratulate the team for their dedication, humour and continued productivity throughout.”

BWF Development Officer, Erica Khoo

“Our Learning Webinars have all been conducted remotely and that’s been a big change for us. Working from home has been a new experience and thanks to technology, we were still able to connect with family, friends and colleagues.”
Technology to the rescue

The concept of remotely conducting national training programmes was unheard-of in badminton.

However, the worldwide lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic forced teams to seek innovative solutions.

National teams and independent players have both taken to online platforms such as Zoom, Line or Teams to continue their training programmes while movement outside their homes was restricted. For the most part, coaches and players were happy with how effective the remedy proved.

“My team and the sport support group managed a meeting via video calls and decided on how to manage the programme,” said Rexy Mainaky, head coach of Thailand, on returning home to quarantine after the YONEX All England Open.

“I appointed one coach from each discipline to monitor the programme, every coach had to handle less than 10 players so they could monitor their training with quality.”

Mainaky conceded conducting training over online platforms was at best a temporary solution; the goal was maintenance of physical condition rather than scaling up.

Another aspect of technology that has been explored is the use of smartwatches. Among those who regularly use smartwatches to help their teams gather useful data are Thai and Dutch players.

“Most of our players are asked to wear Polar. We can compare current data with past data. The support team keeps sending me reports of their progress, and how much they are pushing themselves,” says Mainaky.

The usefulness of meeting online wasn’t only about maintaining physical training. Malaysia head coach Wong Choong Hann said it was important for the whole team to be online to stay motivated.

“We had meetings with the Strength & Conditioning trainers and psychologists and together with our coaching team, all of us threw in our ideas on how to keep players motivated, and secondly, keep themselves fit despite limited space at home,” said Wong.

“At this point, we can look into different areas in practice, like the psychological side. This is the time we can add value to our programme.”

Denmark saw an easing of the restrictions relatively early compared to Asian countries. While Danish players did attend online sessions, head coach Kenneth Jonassen was keen that they would not overdo training and become vulnerable to injury.

“Monitoring is key but we as such don’t use it that much. It will get used more but overall we do believe that having the agreement with the players it is in their best interest to work hard, so as such I don’t believe in monitoring being the answer,” said Jonassen.

Overall, most teams adapted well to the challenge and even treated it as a positive experience.

As Wong said: “We have to think positively and engage proactively to make the best out of this. The scenario is the same for everybody, but whoever can create more value out of this situation is the one who will have extra mileage once the whole thing ends.”
Online sessions a super hit in Arab world

Online development initiatives by the Arab Badminton Federation with support from BWF have been enthusiastically received by badminton communities across the Arab world.

Around 1,491 participants attended the nine online sessions, while engagement on Facebook recorded over 29,000 impressions – impressive statistics for the initiative that began in mid-May.

Among the special sessions was a seminar on organising of the Special Olympics. Held on 22 June 2020, it was a collaboration between BWF, Special Olympics UAE, Special Olympics Middle East & North Africa, and the Arab Federation Union.

BWF’s presentation, ‘Coaching Players With Intellectual Disability’ was made by Jaffer Ebrahim, BWF Dubai Badminton Development Manager. The seminar was attended by 220 coaches and received excellent media coverage, with over 230 articles in Arab media.

With restrictions on group physical activity over the last few months due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, the Arab Badminton Federation started the online sessions to spread awareness on various aspects of badminton. The first session was ‘Home Training From a Physical Perspective’ by Dr. Mohammed Thiyabat from Jordan.

Subsequent sessions dealt with other topics, such as values and ethics (Dr. Mousab Hamad), building motor programmes (Dr. Wessam Salah), athletes’ lifestyle (Dr. Osama Alalaa) and arbitration (Ahmed Azad).

Another initiative in the early weeks of the pandemic was on raising the importance of social distancing, with videos created by players.

Ebrahim, who helped coordinate the sessions, says the response surpassed expectations.

“There’s huge interest from the Arab community,” he says. “The current initiative started after the lockdown began, and we thought of delivering content to Arab countries. This was an opportunity to reach out. Now there are hundreds of people viewing our sessions online. The sessions are over Zoom and shared on Facebook. The last session had around 100 participants and a reach of over 20,000 people on Facebook.”

The Arab Badminton Federation, led by Dr. Sawsan Taqawi, was established in 1996 and has 17 Member Associations. The potential for growth of badminton in the region is thus immense, as there are 22 nations with Arabic as official language.

Ebrahim senses a new zeal for learning aspects about badminton apart from on-court drills. A significant number of participants are coaches who seek to enhance their knowledge on training students.

“The coronavirus situation created this arrangement,” he says. “Previously, many people didn’t believe in online learning. They preferred face-to-face interactions, but now everyone is moving online, and looking for course content. In many cases, clubs ask coaches to do online courses.

“So now they have discovered a new way to learn. We are one of the few Arab federations to offer online education. A majority of those who attend our sessions keep coming back. We offer a certificate of participation and it’s useful to those interested in self-development.”

Ebrahim believes badminton is an ideal sport for the Arab world, particularly among female participants, for it is played indoors, is non-contact, and can be played in relatively small spaces.

“We see people from other sports coming to our sport. Many people can play basic badminton at home. It’s safe, and you don’t break things.”
The Badminton World Federation has always been committed towards humanitarian causes, believing that the sport can serve to relieve the concerns of displaced people.

Among its many partnerships, BWF is proud of its long-standing association with the United Nations, having collaborated with the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) since 2016. BWF has also been associated with UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), having launched the BWF-UN Badminton For All Project in April 2017. In continuing its outreach, in November 2019 the BWF Shuttle Time Schools Programme delivered a course at the Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan to educate Syrian refugees as badminton teachers.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) had earlier been signed between the two bodies to promote and support humanitarian and social development initiatives around the world through sport.

The Shuttle Time activation at the Azraq Camp saw experts from Badminton Africa, the Jordan Badminton Federation and Care (an NGO based in the camp) train six male and seven female refugees. Weekly sessions are delivered by the refugee Shuttle Time teachers. BWF contributes a fee for each teacher as part of a programme to offer employment opportunities to refugees in the camp. (The sessions are suspended due to COVID-19 but will start again when it is safe to do so.)

“We are of course concerned about the humanitarian situation in places of conflict, and hope sport can play a role in resolving some of these issues and providing opportunities to affected people,” BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer said.

“Badminton is a sport for all and as such we see great opportunity in uniting with our friends at World Taekwondo to provide the children and youth at Azraq Refugee Camp avenues of sport and physical activity. Shuttle Time is the perfect vehicle to bring additional sports and fun activities to the camp’s population.”

Apart from development programmes, BWF has also looked at the competitive end of the spectrum.

Shuttler Aram Mahmoud was identified for the IOC’s Refugee Athlete Scholarship programme, which enables him to train for a place in the IOC Refugee Team at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Mahmoud relocated to train in the Netherlands in 2015 following unrest in his home country Syria.

“BWF would like to maintain badminton’s tradition of being an inclusive sport, accessible to everyone,” said Høyer.

“Sport in general is impactful in terms of creating avenues for displaced and affected people, and badminton in particular offers significant benefits considering the limited space it requires, and the fact that it is a non-contact fun sport that can be enjoyed by male and female participants, and those of all ages.

“We look forward to continuing our association with agencies working in this sphere, and are happy to continue providing our expertise through Shuttle Time and other programmes.”
There’s great news for fans and associations still waiting to get their hands on the AirShuttle.

Shipping restrictions have been lifted in a number of countries and around 60 Member Associations (MAs) will soon have large quantities of AirShuttle in stock to help them implement the project and deliver promotional activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to plan and organise such events, but there is great potential for AirBadminton to be a safe activity for people to try during this extended period of social distancing.

Already a few associations have made the most of relaxed COVID-19 restrictions in their countries, staging regional AirBadminton events.

Netherlands resumed some of their planned workshops and training sessions, and have also built a digital platform where individuals, clubs and businesses can find everything about AirBadminton.

A number of Oceania associations have integrated AirBadminton into their post-COVID-19 Shuttle Time programmes.

BWF urges MAs to follow the advice of their local authorities with regard to the safe practice of any outdoor badminton activities.

We also continue to work with several brands and retailers for the public distribution of the AirShuttle.

In particular, we are developing sustainable marketing and distribution plans to ensure the AirShuttle and associated equipment are accessible to everyone at an affordable price.

A list of confirmed distributors can be found on the AirBadminton website.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact on the HSBC BWF AirBadminton Community Project but efforts to build more AirBadminton courts in the Pearl River Delta in China have resumed.

Plans for AirBadminton competitions and community training at these courts are in the works.
Good news: AirBadminton activations resume in Netherlands and France.