WHAT A GLORIOUS SIGHT!
Badminton’s COVID-19 Blueprint

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

It has been a frustrating time for all. Not least for our athletes.

As I said during BWF’s Virtual Press Conference in late September: “There’s nothing more I want than to see badminton players back on the court. Everything that we do is for the players and we have tried our best to get badminton tournaments back safely.”

It was with great disappointment then that we had to make that very tough decision to postpone once again the TOTAL BWF Thomas and Uber Cup Finals 2020.

The stark reality was that we had to respect the decision of a number of teams and individual players who elected not to travel to Denmark for tournaments in Aarhus and Odense.

The logistical difficulties and commercial complexities that faced us, mixed with understandable personal concerns about COVID-19, placed us in a very difficult situation.

Understandably, this caused much frustration – cries for concern that we heard and shared at the BWF. At the end of the day, it is this passion from the players that drives the sport.

On a positive note, the recent staging of the DANISA Denmark Open 2020 identified that badminton tournaments can be played in safe environments during these COVID-19 times.

We thank the many of you who stuck by us and showed patience as we worked towards

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this eventual return. It has always been our priority to ensure badminton remains relevant and to protect the livelihoods of international badminton players.

Our solutions for badminton’s return included going to extreme lengths to preserve the health and safety of all participants such as implementing a bubble system to create a safe badminton ecosystem and putting in place a robust testing process onsite at venues to protect all participants from contracting COVID-19 at tournaments.

As the Denmark Open proved, these best efforts can and have created safe environments for players and key personnel to participate. Credit for this must also go to Badminton Denmark for their leadership and cooperation in making this possible.

Moving forward, we now have a clear roadmap for delivering international badminton once again and are excited to implement such thorough measures at more tournaments, starting with the three back-to-back tournaments in Bangkok, Thailand in January 2021 as part of Asian leg of the adjusted HSBC BWF World Tour.

These will be two Super 1000 tournaments plus the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals, and will form the conclusion to the new-look HSBC World Tour 2020 calendar.

I would personally like to thank my colleague BWF Deputy President, Madame Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul, for her diligence and hard-working efforts on collaborating with the Government of Thailand, BWF and other stakeholders to make this happen.

Thailand has organised major events in the past and I am confident that the Badminton Association of Thailand and the Government of Thailand will deliver a spectacular and successful cluster of badminton events.

Importantly, beyond the Asian leg in Bangkok, we are working tirelessly to establish clear solutions to deliver a full calendar for the rest of 2021. This includes our Para badminton circuit.

It’s vital that we frequently assess the landscape and start envisaging what badminton will look like in three months, six months, 12 months and even beyond that time.

As we near the end of what has been one of, if not, the most turbulent year in BWF’s history, I implore everyone in the badminton community to stick together and continue working as one team.

The relationship between the BWF, the BWF Council, our Continental Confederations, the Member Associations and all players and participants in the sport is essential. May we all come out stronger and strive towards delivering more of what we do best – badminton to the world.

Poul-Erik Høyer
The Nitty-Gritty of Badminton’s Return

When the prize ceremony concluded for the final match at the DANISA Denmark Open 2020, there was celebration, and also relief. The success of the HSBC BWF World Tour Super 750 tournament in Odense was a special accomplishment in COVID-19-affected times, and provided a pathway for the conduct of future tournaments, particularly the three-tournament Asian leg scheduled as the finale to the HSBC BWF World Tour 2020 season in January 2021.

The Asian Leg

On 25 September 2020, following a Council meeting, BWF announced that the Asian leg of the HSBC BWF World Tour, consisting of two Super 1000 tournaments and the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals, would be held in Bangkok in January 2021.

The idea behind setting up this cluster of three back-to-back tournaments in the same city was to keep all the players and key personnel in a safety bubble.

In addressing the world’s media at BWF’s first Virtual Press Conference on 29 September 2020, BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund acknowledged the support and contribution of the Badminton Association of Thailand and the Government of Thailand in committing to this important step as part of the restart of international badminton tournaments.

“A big thank you must go to the Badminton Association of Thailand and the Government of Thailand for making the Asian leg possible. We look forward to working with our hosts and all participating teams and players in making this a success.”

Badminton World Federation and Badminton Association of Thailand, in collaboration with the Government of Thailand, completed a feasibility study to ensure all parties can provide a safe COVID-19 framework to stage the three tournaments. The study concluded Thailand to be the agreed host of the three-tournament Asian leg.

TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

- **Asia Open I (Super 1000)**
  - 12-17 January 2021
- **Asia Open II (Super 1000)**
  - 19-24 January 2021
- **HSBC BWF World Tour Finals 2020**
  - 27-31 January 2021

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BWF, Badminton Association of Thailand and the Government of Thailand are currently in thorough planning discussions to ensure that the safety and logistical measures being set in place will be well-received by players, their entourage, stakeholders and all participants. More details will be revealed in due course.

**Safety-First Approach**

The DANISA Denmark Open 2020 was the first instance in badminton of the implementation of the safety bubble to shield competitors and core tournament personnel from direct contact with the outside world; and within the competition space, to minimise interaction and negate the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Before the event, BWF and Badminton Denmark published a number of key documents for all participants outlining relevant health and safety protocols. These were devised based on recommendations from the Danish government, health authorities and host organisers.

The bubble system included testing of all participants and core personnel upon arrival in Odense; separate access areas and entrance and exit points for participants away from those of spectators, VIPs and non-vital personnel; temperature checks upon arrival at venue; and QR-coded tracking at entry and exit points to monitor movement.

On court, players received shuttles from dispensers placed courtside, while service and line judges wore masks.

Social distancing was adhered to at all times – including in the interview area, which had screens between players and (pre-tested) interviewers.

Journalists who were not tested could only interact with players through a virtual station.

These measures will become a blueprint for COVID-19 best practices moving forward.

**Rankings and Qualification**

One of the complications arising out of the suspension of the circuit was the question of World Rankings and qualification for the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals. The rankings were frozen in the week after the All England.

In October, BWF announced that ranking points would be awarded for the four tournaments held during the restart of the badminton season in 2020: Denmark Open, SaarLorLux Open; Latvia International and Bulgarian International Championship. The ranking points would be applied only after unfreezing of the World Rankings, the date for which is yet to be determined.

As with the above events, the seedings and draws for the Asian leg will be based on the frozen World Rankings of 17 March 2020.

Unlike past season finales, reigning world champions will not receive an automatic invitation. Further, those who seek qualification must participate in both Asia Open I and Asia Open II.

With the experience of having conducted a successful Denmark Open, BWF is well prepared for a smooth conduct of the three events in the Asian leg.

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**BWF World Junior Championships Cancelled**

Ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and uncertainty have forced BWF, Badminton New Zealand and tournament organisers to cancel the BARFOOT & THOMPSON BWF World Junior Championships 2020.

However, Badminton New Zealand are still committed to hosting the BWF World Junior Championships and the BWF have accepted a proposal for them to stage the 2024 edition as a replacement.

BWF does appreciate that some junior players will turn 19 years old in 2021 and miss out on a BWF World Junior Championships experience. Unfortunately, it has been a difficult and extraordinary year during the pandemic, but we all look forward to a more consistent junior international badminton calendar in 2021 and the next BWF World Junior Championships in China in October 2021.
Denmark Open Passes Crucial Test With Flying Colours

From cautious optimism on the opening day, to fulfilment and triumph at the end, those closely involved with the DANISA Denmark Open 2020 were treated to a rewarding journey and learning experience.

The caution in the lead-up to the event – on the part of BWF, Badminton Denmark, players and their entourage – was understandable. All it would take was one positive COVID-19 case to throw a spanner in the works. Thus, months of preparation had gone into to ensure that the event wouldn’t be thrown off course.

A colour coded ‘bubble’ system was devised to keep the players and core personnel shielded from those who were relatively at risk. It was badminton’s first implementation of such a system. The biggest victory at the Denmark Open was the success of this system – it proved that, given meticulous preparation and constant vigil, an event of this level could be possible, without compromising on any of the key features of the HSBC BWF World Tour.

A lot is owed to the outstanding work of hosts Badminton Denmark, who along with BWF devised and put in place thorough testing measures, as well as necessary contact tracing and isolation quarantine protocols in the event of a positive test. The extent of these procedures provided a safety net of calm and reassurance for all involved.

At the outset, and despite the withdrawals of many leading teams, there were several top players who brought star power to the event – Chou Tien Chen, Anders Antonsen, Kidambi Srikanth, Nozomi Okuhara, Carolina Marin, Michelle Li, Marcus Ellis, Chris Langridge, Lauren Smith, Chris Adcock, Gabrielle Adcock, and Japanese women’s doubles players Yuki Fukushima, Sayaka Hirota, Mayu Matsumoto and Wakana Nagahara.

Quite significantly, the players knew how important it was that an event be held after months without competition – both for themselves, and for the sport.

“I thought it is important to play here,” said Chou, voicing his support for the tournament’s organisers and BWF. “Next year is the Olympics, and I want to play at a high level. I want to thank everybody involved for setting up this tournament so that we could play.”

Similarly, Okuhara – who later in the week won the title – was all praise for the officials who had worked for the event. “I appreciate that I could attend this Denmark Open and that people have worked towards making this happen. The last seven months I was confused in my daily life, how to practice and so on. But I wanted to go to a tournament as soon as possible. I feel special, and I thank every fan and supporter,” she said.

All eyes are now on the three-tournament Asia leg in Bangkok, Thailand in January. The learnings gathered from the DANISA Denmark Open 2020 will now form the blueprint for how those tournaments, and others to follow, will be held.
BWF has launched a new Statutes App which has all the rules and regulations of the BWF in one convenient location. Available for both iOS and Android platforms, the content mirrors the five chapters of the BWF statutes page of the website (link here).

Chapter 1
Governance

Chapter 2
Ethics

Chapter 3
Judicial Processes

Chapter 4
Rules of the Game

Chapter 5
Technical Regulations

As new and modifications to existing regulations are approved, these updates are posted on the BWF website and in the App. The App has a place to bookmark pages, integrated BWF social media feeds and links out to BWF websites. Technical officials, players, coaches, team managers and other members of our global badminton community will find this a convenient tool to easily access information about any of the rules and regulations affecting their role and engagement in badminton.
Continental Confederations
Welcome COVID-19 Commitment

BWF held its annual Continental Confederations (CC) Events and Development Forum virtually from 14-17 September 2020.

The delivery of the forum in a virtual format received positive feedback from the CCs, particularly as the format allowed more CC staff to be involved in the workshops.

In total, 35 CC staff members were involved in the workshops this year compared to the usual 15-20 staff members.

Key observations:

▸ Communication lines between BWF, Continental Confederations, and Member Associations were enhanced during COVID-19.
▸ A number of successful online activities were delivered, reaching a broad audience with positive case studies in Pan Am and Middle East regions.
▸ BWF Resources, particularly online courses in key languages, are even more valuable now.
▸ AirBadminton is one activity that meets COVID-19 requirements being imposed and should be promoted widely.
▸ CCs will help BWF identify potential countries for AirBadminton activities in 2021.
▸ BWF will communicate a strategy to CCs to train and develop tutors for a blended Coach Level 1 course.

In April this year, BWF also organised a series of virtual webinars to continue to engage and motivate CCs.

These sessions were delivered separately due to difference in time zones with Asia and Oceania in one group and Africa, Europe and Pan Am in another. Sessions were targeted at CC operational staff and covered the following topics:

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The feedback gathered during the CC Forum in September was that BWF should deliver more virtual webinars like these ones next year as they were highly valuable.
In October 2019, the BWF Council approved a new Membership Grants Programme for the period 2020-2024. The BWF Membership Grant Programme provides opportunities for Member Associations to access tailored support, to assist them in developing badminton in their country.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and current restrictions on international travel and activities, the BWF took the decision to adjust the Membership Grants Programme for the year 2020, in order to meet the current needs of Member Associations, particularly those impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 2020 edition of the Membership Grant Programme is therefore currently focusing on a ‘Back to Badminton’ theme, with a view to implementing the programme as intended in 2021, should circumstances allow this.

BWF Chair – Development & Sport For All Committee, David Cabello, said of the programme’s progress: “The programme is designed to support Capacity Building of Member Associations – which is one of the five strategic priorities of the BWF Strategic Plan.

“It also complements the existing grants provided by the BWF for regional development to the five Continental Confederations.

“Just last week we issued 130 Membership Grant Agreement letters to Member Associations who had completed and submitted the Activity Support Budget 2020 document.

“This letter outlines the funding and support we will provide to them. We feel this is valuable exercise for BWF to undertake and we’re exciting to see the outcomes in the next 12 months.”

Three key tools have been used to determine the support offered to each Member Association:

- Priorities highlighted by MAs through the BWF Membership Questionnaire
- Areas of development highlighted through the BWF Categorisation Tool
- Areas of development highlighted by the Continental Confederations

The online Membership Questionnaire was available in three languages – English, Spanish and French – and was completed on 31 January 2020.

It examined the following areas: Governance and Administration; Communication and Marketing; Participation; Events; High Performance; Priorities and Support.

From the questionnaire, BWF introduced a new system of Membership Categorisation, to provide an objective overview of the level of development of each Member Association.

It worked to highlight areas of strength, and further development needed within each country. The results led to a global breakdown of BWF Membership Categorisation.

The funds will be released to Member Associations in early November with support activities to be delivered across the next six months. The total value of the investment into the project is US$6 million.
In 2011, Manasi Joshi, a recent graduate, had begun her first job as a software engineer in the Indian city of Mumbai. Scarcely 10 minutes into her daily commute, disaster struck – as she took a U-turn under a flyover, a lorry travelling in the wrong direction hit her car, severely injuring her leg.

Joshi was to lose the leg in hospital, devastating her. Fast forward to 2020 and it’s a very different Manasi we see before us. She’s now a multiple Para badminton world champion and advocate of gender and disability issues worldwide.

“The turning point of my life was the accident, which led to the amputation of my leg. After the accident, I had to relearn everything – from walking to conducting daily chores and activities on my own,” she said.

Badminton helped Joshi on her road to recovery and improved her hand-eye coordination, vital to physical rehabilitation.

During her physiotherapy sessions, Joshi stayed focused on getting back. “I would keep saying to myself that I want to get back on court as soon as possible.”

It’s that same determination that sees her advocating disability rights in India.

On the podcast, Flame Bearers – The Women Athletes Carrying Tokyo’s Torch, published in August, the 31-year-old details her professional journey and the bumps she has encountered along the way.

In her eyes, those with disability are treated with pity, or with certain stereotypes in mind, and that fundamentally is an area in need of change.

“Just as we talk about women’s rights, we should also be talking about disability rights. You have to work hard to change these stereotypes,” she says.

India still stipulates a tax on disability resources such as prosthetic legs, an issue Joshi is very vocal about.

“Why should we pay taxes to walk? It is a basic birth right. I think if we can all come together, we can go back to a time where we don’t have to pay taxes on this,” she states.

As a woman, Joshi also uses her success in sport to speak out.

“Over the years, I have realised the women are sometimes reduced to gender and still we have conversation about closing the gender pay gap or giving equal prize money to women in some sports.

“I believe that it is imperative that we as a society should focus on imparting knowledge and education to young girls.

“Empowering and educating girls through sports and knowledge sharing has been really close to me as I believe, educating a girl can change opportunities for an entire generation.”

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Speaking on the same podcast as Joshi, BWF Senior Education Manager Sharon Springer said that badminton is one of the few sports that does offer a level playing field for participants irrespective of gender and abilities.

“When it comes to equality, we have to give every child a chance to play badminton for life,” said Springer.

“Badminton has a lot of equality. The courts are the same, equipment is the same and the point system is the same – whereas in other sports there may be differences.”

BWF continues to work with the International Olympic Committee to remove gender discrimination in sport.

“BWF has always been committed to the role of women in our sport, and since 2016, when we started to be more involved in the IOC’s Gender Equality initiatives, we began to increase our efforts,” says Springer.

“We discovered that with the top level of officials in badminton, it was less likely they were female, with women accounting for just 24 per cent of referees in 2016.

“As a consequence, we decided to develop a strategy including various actions such as gender equality grants and mentorship programmes.

“Thanks to the provision of scholarships enabling national female technical officials to progress to international level, that number (of women referees) is now up to 33 per cent.”

With great role models like Manasi Joshi, and the efforts of BWF, badminton is well placed to be at the forefront of gender and disability rights in sports for the foreseeable future.

A Role Model For All

Manasi Joshi continues to break new ground as she takes steps forward on the road to the Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

Over a busy couple of months, India’s current Para badminton world champion has featured on a podcast shining a light on gender and disability rights, been named as a Next Generation Leader by TIME magazine, and to top it off, she’s also become a Barbie Doll role model.

“I am feeling proud and responsible for being the voice of an under-represented community, not just in India, but across the world.

“To be the first Indian athlete and first Para athlete in the world recognised on TIME’s list as an advocate of rights of People with Disability in India is a great achievement.

“I am glad my sport is helping to amplify my voice and I will use this new found responsibility with care and use my time and energy for the betterment of self and society,” revealed Joshi, also named BBC India’s Sportswoman of the Year in 2020.

“I hope that seeing a disabled athlete on the cover of TIME will change a lot of perceptions surrounding disability and Para sports in India as well as all over the world.

“I am honoured to be called as a leader and share space with other individuals who are chosen as the best in their respective fields.

“I am feeling proud and responsible for being the voice of an under-represented community, not just in India, but across the world.”

— Manasi Joshi

“It’s also incredible to have a Barbie Doll modelled after me. I am honoured to be in this league of role models and join other empowering women who have made young girls believe that once can be anything they want to be.”

Keep up the great work Manasi!
When Adam Hall Refused to Fall

Much is spoken about the success of our players on the court, but very little about their state of mind.

To mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October, BWF spoke with Scotland’s Adam Hall about the importance of mental health awareness.

For a sustained period last year, Adam Hall was not in the best place mentally.

The struggle was real for the Scottish doubles player, who was hesitant at first about opening up. Training sessions and tournaments were not going well for the 24-year-old and after one bad outing in October, Hall “blew up”.

“I literally sat in my own pit of despair for a long time,” Hall revealed. “I wasn’t enjoying playing or anything.”

Following some self-reflection, the European Junior Championships bronze medallist coughed up the courage to tell his coaches he needed some time off to gather his thoughts.

“It was a huge weight off my shoulders to share this with my coach. I’m really lucky to have access to talks with my performance lifestyle manager and a psychologist,” he said.

“Training sessions and tournaments were not going well for Adam Hall last year, and he needed some time off to gather his thoughts.”

Asked if he would have at that point quit badminton, Hall responded: “No, I realised I did still really enjoy playing badminton and needed to almost rekindle my love for it during my break.”

Hall is grateful to his coach and support team, saying: “I can’t fault them, they were great and said I should have spoken to them a lot earlier.”

Just speaking to someone can make such a difference, but talking about mental health is a stigma in some cultures.

“I’d definitely reach out to someone if it ever happened again. If I ever feel sad, I hug my dog. If everyone can just get a dog,” joked Hall.

Physical activity from the world’s fastest racket sport is not just good for the body but it’s great for mental health, too.

The Mental Health Foundation says physical activity is good for your mental health in general – it causes the release of endorphins and other “natural feel good chemicals” that improve your mood and make you happier.

But further research suggests playing badminton can:

- Assist in the prevention of stress.
- Help with self-esteem enhancement and handling problems with weight.
- Encourage a positive attitude, self-awareness and better expression.
- Engage your brain in a positive way by having to think about what you’re doing.
- Help build confidence and positive feelings by way of social interactions.

Find out more here

Played by over 300 million people worldwide, badminton continues to be one of the most popular sports.

Just speaking to someone can make such a difference, but talking about mental health is a stigma in some cultures.

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BWF is happy to see an increased interest in the new AirBadminton game, as demonstrated by the global demand for the new AirShuttle and associated equipment.

In a year where social gathering to play badminton in indoor venues is still challenging in many countries, the AirBadminton game presents itself as an excellent and safe alternative.

The BWF has been delivering AirShuttles to the 119 BWF Member Associations that have expressed interest in the project. Many of them have already started to organise and promote AirBadminton activities.

To promote the project and educate the public on the main characteristics of the new game, the BWF has launched a new video series to help fans understand the game of AirBadminton better.

The BWF Development team has also developed an AirBadminton Guidelines manual, which aims to help Member Associations with the planning of AirBadminton activities to assist people in having fun and being physically active.

AirBadminton equipment is also confirmed and available to Member Associations and the general public, which includes:

- AirBadminton Recreational Kits
- Competition Boundary Lines
- Competition Nets.

The AirBadminton recreational Kit will allow participants to quickly set up an AirBadminton court and enjoy the game anytime and anywhere.

Heading into 2021, BWF is planning to run a series of AirBadminton Pilot Competitions.

The events will provide an excellent opportunity to pilot the proposed AirBadminton Competition Rules, as well as gain hand-on experience when running outdoor tournaments.

Find out more http://airbadminton.sport/
#iambadminton

i am clean
i am honest
i am badminton