AND THEY’RE OFF!

Ready, set, go!

The race to qualify for the badminton competition at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is on!

Today – Monday 29 April 2019 – begins a hectic year for badminton’s elite athletes vying for 172 places in next year’s Summer Games in Japan.

Across the sport’s landscape from Africa to Asia, Europe, Oceania and Pan Am, the best badminton players will be plotting their route to qualification and fulfilling their dreams of writing their names in Olympic history like esteemed predecessors, such as Indonesia’s Susi Susanti (1) (badminton’s first gold medallist in Barcelona 1992), iconic Chinese Gao Ling, Lin Dan (5) and Zhang Jun, Korea’s Kim Moon Soo and Park Joo Bong (3), Denmark’s Poul-Erik Høyer (2) and Rio 2016 trailblazers, Misaki Matsutomo/Ayaka Takahashi of Japan (7) and Carolina Marin of Spain (4), also joined the pantheon of gold medallists in Rio.

Qualification concludes on Sunday 26 April 2020 and while some will canter coolly to Tokyo 2020, others will endure a nervous finale, fighting until the last day to book their tickets to sport’s biggest and most spectacular event.

“This is what every athlete lives and trains for – the chance to go to the Olympics and to win a medal,” said BWF President Høyer, who sent Denmark to dizzying heights when he won the coveted men’s singles gold medal at Atlanta 1996.

“It’s a unique experience that stays with you forever, regardless of how you fare. If you are lucky – and despite all the talent, some luck is involved – enough to step on the podium, that is the most special moment you can ever imagine as an athlete.”

Proud hosts, Japan, will be expecting their star performers across all five disciplines to qualify and bring honour to their country on home turf. All eyes will especially be on men’s singles supremo and reigning world champion, Kento Momota, who has settled comfortably into the world No.1 ranking. His accomplished women’s singles teammates, Nozomi Okuhara – the Rio 2016 bronze medallist – and Akane Yamaguchi, who last April became the first Japanese singles player to reach world No.1 status, will have the spotlight on them also as will defending Olympic women’s doubles gold medallists, Matsutomo/Takahashi; aiming to emerge from a packed field to have the opportunity to repeat their Rio success in front of family and friends.

Fans will also be tracking the fortunes of legendary Malaysian, Lee Chong Wei, and defending women’s singles gold medallist, Carolina Marin. Lee, aged 36, is a triple Olympic silver medallist in men’s singles. He is rebounding from nose cancer which was diagnosed last year. Spanish sensation, Marin, was given a six-month recovery timeline following an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury to her right knee in late January. The 25-year-old is determined to be back on court as soon as possible.

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Dear Colleagues and Friends

Wow, have four years gone by already?

We barely blinked and here we are again, ushering in another Olympic Qualification Period with all the excitement and anticipation that accompanies this year-long vigil to the most prestigious spectacle in the sports world.

It seems like just yesterday that we were absorbing the drama of that amazing Badminton Competition at Rio 2016 – and now we are in the home-stretch countdown to the next Summer Olympiad.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games are upon us!

Monday 29 April 2019 heralds the start of badminton’s Olympic Games qualification race with some of the biggest stars in our sport’s constellation priming for next year’s Summer Games. They have until Sunday 26 April 2020 to accumulate the necessary points to ensure they are among the 172 athletes vying for the honour of competing in the Japanese capital. Fans will be watching closely as the fates of singles players such as Kento Momota, Viktor Axelsen, Tai Tzu Ying and Pusarla V Sindhu unfold. They will be equally keen to see how doubles pairs like Marcus Fernaldi Gideon/ Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo, Chen Qingchen/Jia Yifan and Dechapol Puavaranukroh/Sapsiree Taerattanachai fare in the qualification battle.

Of course, the badminton faithful will have a special eye out for triple Olympic men’s singles silver medallist, Lee Chong Wei; reigning Olympic women’s singles gold medallist, Carolina Marin, and another men’s singles ace, Son Wan Ho, all of whom are valiantly trying to recover from their respective health or injury-related setbacks.

As our elite contenders zero in on their qualification assignment, preparations for the Badminton Competition are well advanced. In March, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games pictograms were unveiled and the Games schedule was announced in mid-April, revealing that group play will start in all five badminton events on Saturday 25 July 2020. Our medal matches will take place Friday 31 July to Monday 3 August – four days that the badminton world will eagerly await!

Meanwhile, our badminton venue – Musashino Forest Sport Plaza – is already in use. It was opened in November 2017 and showcased as the first new permanent facility for next year’s Olympics. Boasting a seating capacity of more than 10,000, it hosted the DAIHATSU YONEX Japan Open 2018 which allowed players the priceless opportunity to scout around the Tokyo 2020 environs almost two years in advance. It will stage this year’s edition of the same tournament in September which will be the Tokyo 2020 test event for badminton.

While Olympic Games aspirants are now gearing up, our Para badminton athletes have already begun their quest to qualify for badminton’s historic debut in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Their Qualification Period began on Tuesday 1 January 2019 and they have started accumulating points after competing in the 5th Turkish Para-Badminton International - ENESCUP 2019 (in Antalya) in March and the 2nd Fazza - Dubai Para-Badminton International 2019 in April.

They are aiming to secure one of the 90 places awarded to badminton for 14 medal events in the Paralympics. As with the Olympics, the Badminton World Federation is working diligently to showcase Para badminton at its best when the sport debuts in the Paralympic Games. We look forward to presenting an inspiring spectacle that highlights diversity and which adds value to the Tokyo 2020 Sports Programme.

Badminton’s Paralympic Games Programme features singles, doubles and mixed-doubles with an emphasis on singles (10 medal events) to ensure a wider range of National Paralympic Committees can qualify athletes for badminton. The 14 medal events offer opportunities for wheelchair players (6 medal events), standing players (7 medal events) and short stature players (1 medal event for men) to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Regarding the venue, Yoyogi National Stadium will stage an official Paralympic Games Test Event – the Japan Para-Badminton International from 11-17 November. This will give organisers the chance to test the venue’s court and playing conditions, thus ensuring everything is in accordance with BWF regulations and match requirements.

So, as you can see, we are well on the way to a successful hosting of badminton at both the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games. In the coming months, we will continue to methodically undertake the remaining work to ensure our sport shines brilliantly next summer in Japan. Of course, we will keep a close check on the qualification rankings to see what’s happening – after all, we are fans too!

We look forward to having all of you in our global badminton family along with us on this exciting journey.

Remember - don’t blink or you might miss the action!

Poul-Erik Høyer
BWF President
The Paralympic dreams of a swathe of athletes attempting to qualify for Tokyo 2020 have started to take shape.

China have already played their cards, showing their prowess in all six categories. They, along with athletes from Indonesia, dominated the 5th Turkish Para-Badminton International – ENESCUP 2019, claiming a combined 12 of the 22 gold medals on offer at the first Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games qualifying event in Antalya.

Qu Zimo was the hero securing a treble in winning the men’s singles wheelchair (WH 1) event, men’s doubles WH 1 - WH 2 with Mai Jianpeng and mixed doubles WH 1 - WH 2 with Liu Yutong.

He was subsequently nominated for the IPC’s Allianz Athlete of the Month for March. Poland’s Oliwia Szmigiel also won three titles in the short stature (SS 6) category. Szmigiel and Brazil’s Vitor Goncalves Tavares won an exciting final in the mixed doubles SS 6 over Nagar Krishna (India) and Maria Bartusz (Poland) 19-21, 24-22, 21-16, before Szmigiel returned for the singles and defeated Russia’s Irina Borisova 20-22, 21-12, 21-16.

Szmigiel and Bartusz topped the four-pair group in women’s doubles SS 6. Liu Yutong won a double – continuing her dominance in the women’s singles WH 2 beating her compatriot Xu Tingting 21-17, 21-15.

Two other players scored a double – Indonesia’s Dheva Anrimusthi and Leani Ratri Oktila. It’s been a bright start for reigning BWF Female Para Badminton Player of the Year, Oktila.

In Turkey, she dominated China’s Ma Huihui in the women’s singles Standing Lower (SL 4) final, complementing her earlier success in mixed doubles SL 3 - SU 5 with Hary Susanto.

At the 2nd Fazza - Dubai Para-Badminton International 2019, Oktila won another two titles going back-to-back with Susanto in mixed doubles and claiming the women’s doubles SL 3 - SU 5 crown with Khalimatus Sadiyah Sukohandoko against China’s Cheng Hefang/Ma Huihui.

Anrimusthi had another sterling campaign in Dubai, twice a winner when he first beat Malaysia’s Cheah Liek Hou 21-19, 18-21, 21-16 in the men’s singles SU 5, and then captured the men’s doubles SU 5 title with Suryo Nugroho.

“Cheah is definitely more experienced but, in the five times I have played him, I have only lost once. Maybe because I’m faster on court,” said Anrimusthi following his singles win.

Cheah responded: “Dheva is much younger, faster and more accurate with his shots. My movements were slow today. I want to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics so I plan on working on my fitness, strength and agility.”

The rivalry between Hong Kong’s Chan Ho Yuen and Korea’s Kim Jungjun in men’s singles Wheelchair (WH 2) has been something to savour during the first two tournaments. In Turkey, Chan defeated the Korean legend 21-12, 11-21, 21-18. That was only Kim’s second defeat in his international career since his debut in 2012. The world No.1 was quick to exact revenge, however, taking the Dubai final 15-21, 21-13, 21-19.

“Chan is highly skilled and very strong and I was nervous going into the match, but I have set myself a high goal for the Paralympics and I am determined to succeed,” Kim said.

Women’s doubles WH 1-WH 2 duo, Sarina Satomi/Yuma Yamazaki, flew the flag for Japan as they continued their journey towards a strong Paralympic campaign on home soil defeating China’s Xu Tingting/Zhang Jing 21-15, 21-13.

“We have played each of them in singles and combined our knowledge to get ahead. The other advantage I think is our rotation style movement on court,” said Yamazaki.

Their victory added to the surprise win of compatriots Mio Hayashi and Ayako Suzuki in Turkey, who claimed the women’s doubles SL 3 - SU 5 title against China’s Cheng Hefang and Ma Huihui.

The athletes next turned their attention to the Uganda Para-Badminton International 2019 in Kampala (which concluded on 28 April), followed by the Canada Para-Badminton International 2019 in Ottawa in May.
"I’ve been working on an anti-gravity treadmill so I can control (how much of) my weight I want (to use) to walk on the treadmill. Now, I’m working with half of my weight so we can control my steps. Also, I’m doing some work on the bicycle and I’m trying to walk in the pool," said Marin, detailing her rehabilitation programme.

Meanwhile, the BARFOOT & THOMPSON New Zealand Open 2019, which starts tomorrow, will have the distinction of being the first event in which players can gain Olympic qualification points.

Fans can follow the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games qualification race on the BWF Olympic Games website.

QUALIFICATION FACTS

- The total quota of places in badminton has been set at 172. Of this, 164 places (82 each for men and women) will be determined through the qualification process, while six places in singles (three each for men and women) will be Tripartite Commission Invitation places. The remaining 2, also in singles (one each for men and women), will be reserved for the hosts.

- Each National Olympic Committee (NOC) can have a maximum of two participants per singles category if both are ranked in the top 16, and two pairs in each doubles category if both pairs are ranked in the top 8, at the end of the qualifying period. The BWF ranking lists of Tuesday 28 April 2020 will be used to determine the qualifiers.

- The initial number of athletes has been set at 38 for each of the singles categories and 32 (16 pairs) in each of the doubles categories. The break-up is as follows: the 38 places consist of the 34 quota places (including continental representation places), three Tripartite Commission Invitation places, and one host country place. There is no quota for Tripartite Commission Invitation places or host country places in doubles.

QUALIFICATION TIMELINE

- 29 April 2019 to 26 April 2020: Ranking Period for the World Ranking Lists
- 26 April 2020: World Ranking Lists published
- 6 May 2020: Deadline for the Host Country to confirm in writing Host Country Places to BWF
- 7 May 2020: BWF to inform NOCs/NFs of their allocated quota places
- 21 May 2020: NOCs to confirm in writing the use of allocated quota places to BWF
- By 6 July 2020: BWF to reallocate all unused quota places
- 6 July 2020: Tokyo 2020 Sport Entries deadline
Three years ago, a fresh-faced, samba-swaying young man from Brazil became badminton's poster boy for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games – promoting the sport and engaging fans as much with his sunshine smile and personality as with his on-court bravado versus veterans like Marc Zwiebler and Scott Evans.

Ygor Coelho’s story was compelling: a bright spark who emerged from one of Brazil’s favelas, where his father coached badminton, to become among his country and continent’s best prospects in a sport not well entrenched in the region.

Now, three years on from South America’s first Olympics, Coelho’s stock has risen as he trains and competes in Europe – and who can forget him knocking India’s HS Prannoy out of last year’s World Championships to reach the men’s singles third round!

As players gear up for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, we catch up with the 22-year-old who is determined to show he is the real deal!

1. It’s time for another Olympic qualification. How has your preparation gone?

Coelho: It’s going well, I’ve been training since last year with Nadia Lyduch and I’m playing for Højbjerg Badminton Club and training at National Center 2 in Denmark. I think I am in good shape right now.

2. Outline your progress since the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

Coelho: I trained for two years in France with Peter Gade, Jesper Hovgaard, Thibault Cambuzat and Junling Zhou as coaches. Since August last year, I have been practising with Michael Kjeldsen, Sven Sørensen, Qian Zhang and Nadia Lyduch in Denmark.

3. How much have you improved as a player? Can you give an example?

Coelho: After the Olympics I wanted to be Top 50 in the world, but Zhou changed my way of thinking and made me dream of being in the Top 30. In 2018, I achieved this goal and I discovered I had talent but I didn’t know how to work to achieve more. Now Nadia is teaching me how to become even better.

Nadia and I are focused on the technical aspects of my game – footwork and more deceptive shots. I think Nadia a really smart coach and I trust in the process, and I’m really looking forward to the challenges this year. I want to get a medal at the Pan American Games in Lima.

Also, I have support from my national team in Brazil and I’m working on improving physically and regarding nutrition. Doctors and physical coaches are making a difference in my badminton.

4. You were the badminton poster boy for Rio 2016. What are your memories from that tournament as a player – and as a Brazilian?

Coelho: Playing at home was amazing! Every single player in each sport wants to play in the Olympics but to do that at home is a special feeling. All my friends, family and teammates could see my dream coming true in Brazil.

5. How do you think badminton is seen in Brazil now, following Rio 2016?

Coelho: I think a lot of new badminton clubs started in Brazil after the Olympics. Badminton is becoming more popular. It is always great to see more people in my country playing this amazing sport.

6. What are your goals for Tokyo 2020?

Coelho: My goals for the Tokyo Olympics are, first of all, to qualify for the Olympics and then to try to get out of the group stage.
Japan and China head into the TOTAL BWF Sudirman Cup 2019 as the two strongest teams in contention for the title. There will be a mountain of expectations on them, for very different reasons.

China, in Group 1D with India and Malaysia, face the daunting prospect of regaining the trophy in front of an expectant home crowd, and with a squad that has a few questions to answer. The last time they hosted a team event – the TOTAL BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals in 2016 – their men crashed out in the quarterfinals despite boasting a number of world and Olympic champions in their line-up. The crowd wasn’t kind to then-head coach Li Yongbo.

China have been rebuilding the team after the Rio Olympics in 2016. Once nearly unbeatable in women’s singles and women’s doubles, their fortunes in these two categories took a downturn after Rio. However, there are recent signs that these two areas have been fortified. Chen Yufei (1) and Chen Qingchen/Jia Yifan’s victories at this year’s YONEX All England Open proved that China are still a force to be reckoned with in these two categories.

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Chinese doubles coach Zhang Jun conceded there would be home pressure, but assured the team has come of age.

“It hurt a bit when we lost the last Sudirman Cup final,” said Zhang Jun. “But it was also an opportunity, since our young players got invaluable experience during the event last time. After our loss we repaired our mixed doubles, that’s why our current mixed doubles pair is doing so well.”

Top seeds Japan, who are in Group 1A with Thailand and Russia, face a different set of pressures. With Tokyo 2020 on the horizon, every major event carries enormous significance to fans of the team.

Having never won the World Mixed Team Championships, the Japanese are aware that – with top-notch players in all five disciplines – they have their best shot at the title this year. But in a curious twist of fortune, their women’s doubles pairs have suddenly appeared vulnerable this season, just as the Sudirman Cup draws near.

“Our next target is the Sudirman Cup, we’ve never won it,” said Japan head coach Park Joo Bong.

“Over the last year we’ve had good results. Nippon Badminton Association also believes it’s a new challenge. We have a good chance to win. We want to try to be the champions, but it’s not going to be easy, because China will be on home ground.”

The two frontrunners apart, there are a few teams capable of making a strong pitch for the championship. Indonesia, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong and India have the depth to trouble China and Japan.

Indonesia in particular, given their strength in men’s singles, men’s doubles and women’s doubles, might fancy the historical significance of the Sudirman Cup this year – for it was 30 years ago that they won their one, and only, title.

Group 1C, with Chinese Taipei, Korea and Hong Kong, promises to be the most closely-fought sub-group in Group 1. Chinese Taipei have a strong all-round squad, with Chou Tien Chen and Tai Tzu Ying leading the challenge.

Defending champions Korea will count themselves unlucky after men’s singles spearhead Son Wan Ho was injured recently. They will hope that their young players in the other categories can step up to the plate.

Denmark have traditionally carried Europe’s hopes, but the recent retirement of doubles icon Christinna Pedersen – who excelled in both categories – is expected to hurt their prospects. England, who are in Group 1B with Indonesia and Denmark, might thus fancy their chances of advancing to the knockout stage.
MORE PARA BADMINTON DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The Badminton World Federation (BWF), in partnership with the AGITOS Foundation, the Uganda Badminton Association and the Uganda Olympic and Paralympic Committees, staged another Para badminton training camp in Kampala (19-21 April) - working with athletes, coaches, administrators and classifiers from six African countries to provide increased support for national Para badminton programmes in the region.

The premise is that participants return to their respective countries and share the knowledge and skills they have acquired, thereby helping to develop Para badminton further and grow the sport nationally. It’s the second straight year the programme has been held in the Ugandan capital, following the roaring success of the inaugural BWF-AGITOS Programme in 2017 in Peru and last year’s staging in Uganda.

The camp was run by BWF Development Manager John Shearer, BWF Experts Guillaume Gailly and Kaity Hall, and BWF Para-Badminton Athletes’ Commission Chair, Richard Perot. Gailly, currently a Para badminton player in the Standing Lower (SL 4) class, said it was a great opportunity for new players to gain experience training, playing and competing in Para badminton.

“We knew we would have many new players. In Africa, they are always very enthusiastic. Though they are from different countries, they become friends very fast. So, it’s easy for us to have fun and make sure athletes are enjoying the experience,” said Gailly.

The camp again coincided with the Uganda Para-Badminton International, giving the athletes a chance to test their learnings in a competitive environment.

“We had some players who were brand new, some who were with us last year and some with a lot of experience,” said Hall.

“As a result, we covered some of the basics, including forehand and backhand grip, how to score, where to stand and the different rules for each classification. The aim was to give them the confidence to not only play the shots but also how to play in a match situation.”

The camp also featured a Proud Paralympian workshop delivered by AGITOS Foundation Proud Paralympian leader, Perot. This initiative aims to inspire and educate athletes to be the best they can be, both on and off the field of play.

“Here in Uganda, we focused on the history of the International Paralympic Committee and the Para sport movement, as well as athlete wellbeing,” said Perot.

“It’s important to provide this education as we need more athletes to be involved in Para badminton. These athletes will be role models in their countries and will inspire other new athletes. So, this education and teaching about the values of Para sports is very important.”

In a further boost for Para badminton, the BWF announced the delivery of 10 new Para badminton wheelchairs to be loaned to participating nations to assist in their training of players, coaches, administrators and classifiers. This is part of BWF’s broader development strategy leading to the sport’s debut at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.
In March, Badminton celebrated its biggest event for people with an intellectual disability at the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi.

Badminton was among 25 sports on the programme of the Games, which showcased the sporting prowess of people with intellectual disability from 15 to 21 March.

This also extended to officials, with participants in the SOOPA programme (that encourages Special Olympics athletes who have grasped a sport to become certified officials), taking part as line judges.

There were 13 medal divisions in badminton – five men’s, five women’s, and three mixed. Overall, 7,500 athletes from 190 nations participated, marking a new high in the 50-year history of the Special Olympics.

BWF continued to deepen its engagement with Special Olympics International (SOI), with BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer and ambassadors Peter Gade and Wang Yihan attending the event.

“I’m very happy that we have come so far. Special Olympics means that badminton is able to embrace inclusion. It’s very important that we can include a lot of players so that hopefully everybody will be able to play badminton in the future,” said Høyer.

Meanwhile, Dr. Choue noted: “At World Taekwondo our motto is ‘peace is more precious than triumph’, and this landmark agreement further highlights our commitment to humanitarian, peace and development-supporting activities around the world. Taekwondo, and sport in general, is such an important vehicle for world peace and we are all very excited to work closely with the BWF to improve the lives of those who need it most.”

With the recent installation of artificial turf outside the Academy, badminton has a football-sized field playground at its disposal to develop fun activities for the many children and youth visiting the Academy daily.

Looking at pictures from the Academy set-up and from the camp, Høyer reasoned it made perfect sense to cooperate with other sports federations which share BWF’s vision and which are willing to get involved in such projects. United efforts, he added, usually maximise the impact of such initiative.

*BWF UNITES WITH TAEKWONDO IN HUMANITARIAN MISSION*
BWF LAUNCHES ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMME FOR ATHLETES

With the rapid growth of the sport, it is essential for our key stakeholder group – the athletes – to be able to communicate at the highest level to various sections of the media, public and badminton community.

As such, having a good command of the English language will allow players (and entourage) to interact with all those involved in our sport in a much more comfortable, effective and professional manner.

In recognition of this need, the BWF is running a pilot project in conjunction with Rosetta Stone, a global leader in online language learning. The Federation has signed up 17 athletes and eight technical officials from 10 countries to participate in the first intake. Some of the top athletes enlisted include Japan’s world No. 2 Nozomi Okuhara and world No. 4 Akane Yamaguchi and China’s Jia Yifan.

The women’s singles stars said they are excited to be part of the programme and to improve their English language skills. The learning platform is customised according to the learner’s level and pace and allows them to study online, and from wherever they are, to fit into their own schedule.

“I want to be able to respond to interview questions in English,” said Okuhara.

“It will make ordering food and drinks at tournaments easier,” added Yamaguchi.

Another participating athlete, Goh Soon Huat from Malaysia, told BWF “it would be great to be able to converse in English with more badminton athletes from other countries”.

A number of athletes attended an orientation session with Rosetta Stone’s global implementation strategist, Troy Tilus, at the YONEX German Open 2019 in February. They were shown the different features of the programme, such as live tutoring classes, and participated in mock interviews with other athletes.

Classes involve scenario-based activities with speaking practise to maximise learner interaction, talk-time and engagement. BWF can also track proficiency, usage and progress for all language learners via online reports while learners are able to monitor their own progression and even other players’ progression online.

Emi Sakamoto from Japan, one of eight technical officials partaking in the course, said the online classes were fun and interactive, and useful in showing her how to form correct sentences.

“I can learn English not only with a textbook but by listening and speaking. The lessons are like a quiz, so I don’t get bored and I can keep on learning.”

Rosetta Stone’s Tilus said the self-learning programme was a great way for the athletes and technical officials to gain the confidence needed to communicate effectively in English.

“Through the programme, the athletes will become more communicative and comfortable in front of the media which in turn will help better promote the sport of badminton,” he noted.

BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund added: “The end goal of the pilot project is to provide not just the linguistic ability but the confidence to the learner to interact with their fans, sponsors, media and even each other.

“As a result, hopefully this will also provide further career opportunities to our athletes and officials outside of badminton.”