WORLD OF THEIR OWN

Long before he became the architect of Japan’s success, Park Joo Bong (1) etched his name in his Korean compatriots’ hearts and in badminton history, winning a record five World Championship gold medals (two men’s doubles; three mixed doubles).

It’s an honour he shares with China’s Lin Dan (3) (five men’s singles) and Zhao Yunlei (2) (two women’s doubles; three mixed doubles). Lin is pictured here delighting in his second world title in 2007 while Zhao shows off her two gold medals from the 2015 World Championships.

For an event that started in the shadow of the venerable All England Open, the inaugural World Championships of 1977 enjoyed a fairly auspicious start.

The Malmo Ice Hockey Stadium hosted 135 participants from 26 countries – quite an impressive number for the time – and although the numbers have rocketed since then, the momentum that was set by the first World Championships provided the thrust for this tournament to reach continuously greater heights.

From Malmo to Basel

25 Amazing Editions of Badminton World Championships

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When St. Jakobshalle lights up for the opening day of the 25th World Championships, there will be 359 players from 46 countries waiting to script their stories at the world’s premier individual championships. Today, the event – supported by TOTAL, HSBC, YONEX, GoDaddy, ALPS, hosts Swiss Badminton and the city of Basel – has achieved the kind of global following that few in 1977 would have dreamt possible.

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Dear Colleagues and Friends

The global badminton community has been abuzz about AirBadminton since mid-May, discussing the endless possibilities for further developing our sport.

Thanks to the evolution of our new outdoor shuttlecock – the AirShuttle – we are putting in place the structure for people of all ages and abilities to play badminton on hard, grass and sand surfaces around the world in our new game: AirBadminton.

The AirShuttle has increased resistance to wind compared to the traditional shuttlecock, helping people to experience a more positive introduction to the sport in an outdoor environment. It was amazing to share the prospect of playing badminton outdoors with the world at our global launch and we were thrilled with the enthusiastic response and to receive so much interest.

We are keenly aware that our membership is eager to pursue this opportunity and we are working diligently towards finalising the mass production and distribution of the AirShuttle and to collaborating with our Member Associations to deliver AirBadminton worldwide.

I am truly excited about this bold initiative which the Badminton World Federation has taken and what it means for badminton’s future in the massively-competitive international sports marketplace. It has tremendous potential for the development of badminton at all levels and we are fully committed to exploring all options – from providing a pathway for increased global participation in the sport, to opening doors for a new, highly-attractive form of competitive badminton.

Strategically, AirBadminton will allow us to fulfil our overall objective of putting a badminton racket in the hands of as many people as possible and to inspire more people to play more badminton in more places.

Preparations are ongoing regarding the mass production of the AirShuttle and there is still a long way to go in the implementation of AirBadminton, but this has been an exciting first step and we are eager to see what the future holds once the AirShuttle is ready for global distribution.

In other news, I am pleased to congratulate Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul on her election as BWF Deputy President at our Annual General Meeting in Nanning, China, and to welcome Kinji Zeniya as a BWF Council Member. I look forward to working with them and I am confident both will contribute meaningfully to the BWF during their two-year terms. I also wish to welcome the new Continental Vice Presidents for Asia (Jassem Kanso) and Europe (João Matos) as well as Geraldine Brown who was re-elected Continental Vice President for Oceania. They join current serving Continental Vice Presidents Michel Bau (Africa) and Vishu Tolan (Pan Am).

Additionally, BWF is happy to have another International Olympic Committee Member among our ranks, with the election of Odette Assembe Engoulou – President of the Badminton Federation of Cameroon – as one of 10 new IOC Members at the 134th IOC Session in late June. Congratulations on your election, Odette.

On the court, I wish to applaud China’s outstanding victory in the TOTAL BWF Sudirman Cup 2019, recapturing the BWF World Mixed Team Championships which they lost two years ago in Gold Coast. It was a magnificent performance by the hosts, with their young stars leading from the front, and it augurs well for China with the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games next year. Also, well done to Japan for reaching the final and to Indonesia and Thailand for capturing bronze.

Thank you to the Chinese Badminton Association and to the tournament organisers in Nanning for a superb event and wonderful hospitality.

Before closing, I must of course pay tribute to one of badminton’s greatest treasures – Lee Chong Wei. His retirement leaves a void that may never be filled for the sheer immensity of his achievements and the dazzling flair with which he played for two decades. As fans, we will miss his showmanship, his unerring dedication to his craft and, yes, his rivalry with Lin Dan. We are aware of his more-important battle off-court in the past year and we pray for his continued recovery and good health.

Thank you, Lee Chong Wei, for your service to badminton. We trust you will stay close to the sport and that upcoming generations will have the chance to learn from you.

Finally, as we count down to the historic joint hosting of the TOTAL BWF World Championships 2019 and the TOTAL BWF Para-Badminton World Championships 2019 in Basel, I wish all competitors well for this mega-event. Best wishes also to the hosts, Swiss Badminton, for undertaking this twin-championships feat – another first for badminton!

We look forward to great action and passion from our players in both tournaments and to crowning new champions when the final shuttles fall.

Good luck, everyone!

Poul-Erik Huyer
BWF President
Basel will make history with an estimated 240 Para badminton athletes competing alongside their able-bodied peers at their respective World Championships, being held jointly for the first time.

Given Para badminton’s inclusion in the programme at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, there is obviously heightened excitement around this tournament. Ranking points earned at the TOTAL BWF Para-Badminton World Championships 2019 will count towards Tokyo 2020 and therefore competitors will be much more motivated to excel.

The one rivalry that currently stirs Para badminton fans is that between Korea’s Kim Jungjun (1) and Hong Kong’s Chan Ho Yuen (2) in men’s singles Wheelchair (WH 2). Kim was unbeaten in international competition until Chan inflicted his first defeat on him, at the Australian Para-Badminton International last November.

Since then, the two athletes have met in four finals this year, splitting the honours evenly. While Chan beat Kim in Turkey and Canada, Kim got the better of his rival in Dubai and Ireland. The stage is thus set for a dramatic showdown between three-time singles world champion Kim and his biggest challenger.

Kim has inspired several players, but none more so than women’s singles WH 2 ace Liu Yutong, who seeks to emulate his achievements in her category. Liu won both her events this year – the Dubai International and the Turkish International, and is at the head of her country’s challenge in WH 2, that includes Xu Tingting (No.2) and Li Hongyan (No.10).

Liu’s compatriot Qu Zimao appears to be the player to beat in WH 1. Qu won a triple crown in Turkey, followed by two titles in Dubai, at the only two tournaments he played in this year. But WH 1 has a number of contenders, with Qu’s challengers predominantly from Korea - Lee Sam Seop (No.1), Choi Jung Man (No.3) and Canada winner Lee Dong Seop (No.5).

Swiss hopes hinge largely on Karin Suter-Erath in women’s singles WH 1, but she faces some stiff competition, notably in the form of Germany’s Valeska Knoblauch (3), who beat her in the Canada Para-Badminton International final and leads the rankings. Thailand’s Sujirat Pookkham, who hasn’t been seen in competitions this year, and Irish Para-Badminton International winner Sarina Satomi are also among the top contenders.

The standing categories have seen India and Indonesia dominate this year. The men’s singles Standing Lower (SL 3), for instance, has three Indians in the top 10, led by Pramod Bhagat (4) in first place. Bhagat has had an exceptional season, winning four of his five events – he emerged champion in Turkey, Dubai, Uganda and Ireland. The only title that eluded him was the Canada Para-Badminton International, where he fell in a thrilling semifinal to England’s Daniel Bethell, 22-20 in the third.

Indonesia will count on No.2 Ukun Rukaendi, runner-up to England’s Daniel Bethell in Canada, and on Dheva Anrimusthi in SU 5, who has had a brilliant season, winning the singles in all four of his tournaments. Anrimusthi returned with a double at three of these, marking him as a prolific winner, alongside women’s star Leani Ratri Oktila (5). The latter has barely done a thing wrong through the season – she won a double in Turkey and Dubai, and a triple crown in Canada and Ireland.

The competition in men’s singles Short Stature (SS 6) has been riveting. Hong Kong’s Chu Man Kai triumphed in Turkey, India’s Nagar Krishna in Dubai and Uganda, England’s Jack Shephard in Canada, and his compatriot Krysten Coombs in Ireland. World champion Shephard, who was BWF Para-Badminton Player of the Year in 2018, had a relatively slow start to the season, going down in the semifinals to Nagar Krishna in Turkey and Dubai, before his memorable triumph in Canada.

In the women’s SS 6, England’s Rachel Choong (6) will return to the spotlight after missing all tournaments this year. The triple world champion from 2015 and 2017 will be hoping to strike it rich once again after spending months away from the action.
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In its 42-year journey, the World Championships has been a distinct marker of the evolution of badminton.

The first World Championships, for instance, saw Lene Køppen win gold in singles and doubles. At the next edition, Verawaty Wiharjo was close to emulating her, returning with a gold in singles and a silver in doubles. Players like Thomas Kihlstrom and Gillian Gilks – medallists at different editions – were adept in singles and doubles.

Over the years, however, the increasing specialisation of singles and doubles has meant that these are now nearly two exclusive worlds, and the World Championships of the past three decades have demonstrated that Køppen’s achievement will possibly never be matched.

China entered the World Championships after the first two editions and has demonstrated the ability to come good at each edition. Indeed, China’s least profitable World Championships came back in the early 1990s – when they won a solitary gold medal in 1993 and 1995 when Indonesia were at their peak. Since then, the resurgent Chinese have won at least two gold at every edition; on three occasions – 1987, 2010 and 2011 – they have swept the board.

Much of their China’s dominance was thanks to women’s singles and women’s doubles. They won 15 out of 17 women’s singles titles between 1983 and 2011, while in women’s doubles, they won 20 out of 21 gold medals from 1983 to 2017.

Recent years have shown that no single country is dominant in any category. Women’s singles has seen an explosion of talent from various countries; China’s last victory was in 2011. Japan’s strength in women’s doubles halted China’s march last year. In men’s singles too, there is exciting talent from countries like Denmark, India, Indonesia and Japan.

Given the form of the top players this season, there is an element of unpredictability about what may unfold in the Swiss city hosting this year’s spectacle. The presence of the 1977 medallists in Basel will make this an even more special occasion as the badminton community waits to see which players will seize this historic 25th edition of the World Championships to add their names to the sport’s illustrious annals.
What a difference a year can make!

Last year at this time, the circuit was dominated by distinct players/pairs: Kento Momota (men’s singles), Tai Tzu Ying (women’s singles), Marcus Fernaldi Gideon/Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo (men’s doubles), Japan in women’s doubles, and Zheng Si Wei/Huang Ya Qiong (mixed doubles).

A year later, while these players are still heading the rankings, there is no sense of infallibility in four of the five categories. The only exception, of course, is Zheng/Huang, who have rarely let their foot off the pedal. The reigning world champions are heavily favoured to retain their crown in Basel.

What makes Zheng/Huang exceptional is that they have never lost twice to the same pair. Over the last year, they have lost just four completed matches, to four different pairs, even as they have claimed 10 individual titles. The most high-profile of these losses was to compatriots Wang Yi Lyu/Huang Dong Ping at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals – which was avenged at the Malaysia Open this year.

Any pair that hopes to claim the world title in Basel will probably have to get past Zheng/Huang. Those who have beaten them once – Wang/Huang, Thailand’s Dechapol Puavaranukroh/Sapsiree Taerattanachai, Japan’s Yuta Watanabe/Arisa Higashino, and Malaysia’s Chan Peng Soon/Goh Liu Ying – are all serious contenders at the Worlds, but all will know that it will take a monumental effort to upset the world’s best pair.

The other categories are far more open. Kento Momota might be world No.1 in men’s singles, but the aura that he carried in Nanjing has dissipated. The player responsible for that is China’s Shi Yuqi, who twice destroyed the Japanese in high-stakes battles – in Guangzhou last year, and in the Sudirman Cup final this year.

Indonesia’s Anthony Sinisuka Ginting and Jonatan Christie; China’s Shi, Chen Long and Lin Dan, Chinese Taipei’s Chou Tien Chen and India’s Kidambi Srikanth. Lin Dan, given his surprise win at the Malaysia Open, will back himself for his sixth world title – a monumental

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achievement should it come to pass. Meanwhile, Denmark’s hopes may rest solely on Anders Antonsen as his senior peer, Viktor Axelsen, is currently sidelined with persistent leg pains.

In women’s singles, Tai Tzu Ying (3) will hope to break her World Championships jinx. Last year she was shocked in the quarterfinals; this year she has played relatively few tournaments in the run-up to Basel. Her performance at the Sudirman Cup was unconvincing due to fitness concerns, and it will be interesting to see if she can raise the bar in Basel.

The player most in focus will be Chen Yu Fei, the All England champion who has won three tournaments this season besides leading China to the Sudirman Cup title. However, women’s singles has a recent tradition of being the most competitive of all categories, and her challengers will be many, including the likes of India’s Pusarla V Sindhu and Saina Nehwal, Japan’s Nozomi Okuhara and Akane Yamaguchi and Thailand’s Ratchanok Intanon. Spain’s Carolina Marin is on the road to recovery after a serious injury. If she does play it will be a testament to her determination as she seeks her fourth world title.

In men’s doubles, Gideon and Sukamuljo have, like Momota and Tai, lost their glow. The Minions have had an average season, and will hope the lack of expectation works in their favour as they seek their first world crown. Their chief challengers are likely to be China’s Li Jun Hui/ Lii Yu Chen (4) and Han Cheng Kai/ Zhou Hao Dong; Japan’s Takeshi Kamura/Keigo Sonoda and Hiroyuki Endo/Yuta Watanabe; Indonesian compatriots Mohammad Ahsan/ Hendra Setiawan and Fajar Alfian/ Muhammad Rian Ardianto, and Denmark’s Kim Astrup/Anders Skaarup Rasmussen.

Japan have the aces in women’s doubles, with the three highest-ranked pairs led by reigning champions Mayu Matsumoto/ Wakana Nagahara. However, Japan are not the unstoppable force they were not so long ago. The revival of fortunes of China’s Chen Qing Chen/Jia Yi Fan – who won the All England, the Malaysia Open and the Badminton Asia Championships this year – has opened the field, as has the form of Du Yue/Li Yin Hui, who beat two of the top Japanese pairs on their way to the German Open title.

Other pairs, such as Indonesia’s Greysia Polii/Apriyani Rahayu, Bulgaria’s Stoeva sisters, and Korea’s Lee So Hee/Shin Seung Chan and Kim So Yeong/Kong Hee Yong (5), have the ability to go far in the draw.
In May, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) in collaboration with HSBC, its Global Development Partner, successfully launched its new outdoor game – AirBadminton – and new outdoor shuttlecock – the AirShuttle – at a ceremony in Guangzhou, China.

BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer officiated the launch alongside his opponent from the 1996 Olympic Games men’s singles final, current Chinese national Para badminton head coach Dong Jiong. The pair played the first ceremonious shots with the new AirShuttle while key members of the badminton community watched outside the Tianhe Gymnasium.

Høyer said AirBadminton would provide a pathway for increased global participation in the sport while opening doors for a new, highly attractive form of competitive badminton.

“The launch in May was a momentous occasion for badminton. Strategically, AirBadminton will allow us to fulfill our overall objective of putting a badminton racket in the hands of as many people as possible,” he said.

Joining Høyer and Dong at the launch was Global Head of Brand Partnerships, HSBC, Jonathan Castleman; Athens 2004 Olympic Games gold medallist, Yang Wei; 2009 women’s singles world champion, Lu Lan; and 2010 men’s singles world champion, Chen Jin.

“Outdoor badminton is very exciting for the sport. I think this has tremendous potential here in China and around the world,” said Dong.

“It’s also great that it is an inclusive game that can be enjoyed by people with disabilities.”

The AirBadminton project started with a vision to develop a new outdoor shuttlecock with increased durability, stability and wind resistance to allow people to have a more positive experience of badminton outdoors.

The goal is 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.

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“It’s really about accessibility and inclusivity and getting more people to play badminton,” elaborated BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund.

“It was great to share this new thinking with the world and we’re delighted to receive many expressions of interest to implement the outdoor game.

“We hope that AirBadminton will provide a lasting option for everyone to be involved in sports.”

Castleman said: “(At HSBC) we believe sport is a force of good. Whether that’s in bringing people together, keeping them fit and healthy – both physically and mentally – or teaching them skills such as teamwork, respect and discipline.

“Our belief is that AirBadminton and the AirShuttle will go a long way to making badminton more accessible to more people in more places.”

BWF is now collaborating with its Member Associations to deliver AirBadminton to the masses, as well as finalising the mass production and distribution of the AirShuttle.
The name Lee Chong Wei will echo in badminton’s pantheon for ages and highlights of his on-court wizardry will continue to be as in demand as he was in his playing days.

When the legendary Malaysian announced his retirement on 13 June, after 19 years as a professional, the statistics that underscore his greatness sprung to the fore – among the most prominent his reign as men’s singles world No.1 for 200 consecutive weeks.

It could well prove an insurmountable mark that stands as a monument to the enduring consistency of one of the sport’s most popular icons.

That number – 200 unbroken weeks at the top – underlines a weighty achievement: year after year of dominance in a super-competitive circuit; physical and mental excellence for prolonged periods; and repeated brilliance amid diverse challenges – younger and hungry opponents, the stresses of competition, and varying playing conditions.

Once Lee Chong Wei hit his stride, he was a constant force in the closing stages of major tournaments. The Malaysia Open turned into his personal fiefdom. He started with a hat-trick of titles (2004, 2005, 2006), and from 2008 won seven straight titles. The streak was interrupted by an eight-month ban for a doping violation; the one smudge in an otherwise exemplary career. Nevertheless, he returned to reclaim the crown in 2016 and 2018 – the last versus a resurgent and youthful Kento Momota, completing his dozen. No other player has ruled a single event in similar fashion.

The Malaysia Open in 2006 was also the scene of one of the biggest comebacks in badminton. Lee held off eight match points in the final against his Chinese arch-rival Lin Dan to secure his hat-trick. In a career spanning two decades, the 36-year-old still counts this as his most memorable feat.

He enjoyed many other highs, including three Olympic silvers, three World Championships silvers, four All England triumphs and two Asian Championships golds.

He came tantalisingly close to achieving any player’s ultimate dream – winning the World Championships and the Olympics. At the World Championships 2011, he held two match points against Lin Dan; at the London 2012 Olympics he led 19-18 in the third, only to misjudge a shuttle in the deep and lose the momentum in a flash. At the next World Championships, he had the early momentum in the final, only to be denied by a stubborn Lin Dan and cramps late in the match.

From 2008 to 2016, Lee was the most consistent player on tour, reaching seven major finals. Between 2009 and 2017, he featured in seven All England finals too, winning four. His record of 47 World Superseries/World Tour titles will take some beating.

Repeatedly falling at the ultimate hurdle, Lee’s remarkable ability to rebound from big heart-breaking losses earned him global admiration – and fans will long applaud his tenacity as much as his astounding accomplishments.
So often sporting success springs from previous bitter defeats – and so it proved with China’s triumph in the TOTAL BWF Sudirman Cup 2019 in May.

Stung badly by their loss in the 2017 final to Korea, the badminton powerhouse returned with a vengeance on home soil to wrest their 11th World Mixed Team Championships, authoritatively demolishing top seeds, Japan, in the title decider in Nanning. That their triumph was achieved for the loss of just one match – Viktor Axelsen’s straight-games rout of Chen Long in the quarterfinals – was as satisfying as the fact that a youthful brigade led the charge to re-establishing China’s supremacy in this tournament which they have long bossed.

Add to the narrative that, in the final, the Chinese dished out an imperious 3-0 drubbing to the rivals who have most threatened to steal their thunder in recent years – and the story was even sweeter for home fans. The cherry on top was clinching the trophy versus Japan’s men’s singles titan, Kento Momota. Strangely subdued, the world No.1 succumbed 15-21 21-5 21-11 to a fired-up Shi Yu Qi.

China’s first point came from men’s doubles aces, Li Jun Hui/Liu Yu Chen, who clinically stifled Hiroyuki Endo/Yuta Watanabe, 21-18 21-10. Then Chen Yu Fei further enhanced her credentials with a gritty 17-21 21-16 21-17 win over Akane Yamaguchi. The latter was 11-6 in the third game but inexplicably wilted in the critical dying stage.

China’s head singles coach, Xia Xuanze, was delighted by his players’ performance, candidly highlighting the role of their 2017 demise in this year’s success.

“We gained a lot of experience which laid a good foundation. We made a lot of progress in our training, competition preparation as well as in our knowledge of our opponents. “So, indeed, the last Sudirman Cup loss to Korea was instrumental to our victory.”

By contrast, Japan’s head coach Park Joo Bong – who had declared “We’ll go all out (in the final)” – was at pains to explain their spectacular meltdown. The Japanese were seeking the final piece to their recent team accomplishments, having won the Thomas Cup (World Men’s Team Championships) in 2014 and last season’s Uber Cup (World Women’s Team Championships). Seemingly directing blame more towards himself, Park noted it was a major blow to lose a second Sudirman Cup final 3-0 to China (the first being Dongguan in 2015).

“It is a comprehensive defeat for me. I cannot say our players played their best and I’m sorry about that. I commit myself to preparing better for the (Tokyo 2020) Olympic Games.”

Meanwhile, Indonesia and Thailand earned bronze medals as the beaten Group 1 semifinalists. The latter fell to China (3-0) while the Indonesians won the opening men’s doubles match before losing to Japan (3-1).

Canada took top place in Group 2, overcoming France 3-1 in their final. Sri Lanka repeated as Group 3 champions, with a stunning comeback to beat Ireland 3-2, having been 0-2 down in the Group 3 finale.
Thailand’s Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul was elected BWF Deputy President during a busy week in which Nanning, China, hosted the 80th BWF Annual General Meeting in May.

The 54-year-old, who is President of the Badminton Association of Thailand, secured a majority victory over Chinese Badminton Association President, Zhang Jun, and has assumed the role of BWF Deputy President for a two-year term from 2019-2021.

During her address, Leeswadtrakul – who sits on BWF’s Executive Board and is an International Olympic Committee member – spoke of increased diversity, reach and opportunity within the sport and championed the concepts of sport for all and outdoor badminton.

“I am very thankful for being elected BWF Deputy President. I am very humbled by this announcement and thank you to the membership for trusting me. I will do my best for the sport of badminton,” said Leeswadtrakul.

Nippon Badminton Association Secretary General Kinji Zeniya won the election for the vacant BWF Council member position. Zeniya’s term is also for a two-year period from 2019-2021.

BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer said it was a significant day for the sport of badminton.

“We are very pleased to announce the successful candidates in our two elections. I have full trust they will carry out their duties with honour and distinction,” he told delegates.

At the AGM Gala Dinner, 1996 Olympic gold medallist Bang Soo Hyun of Korea was inducted into the BWF Hall of Fame.

She was recognised alongside Ronny de Vos (Belgium), who received the Distinguished Service Award, and Ranjit de Silva (Sri Lanka) and Jean-Guy Poitras (Canada), who both received Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Bang said of her recognition: “I am honoured and thankful to receive this award. I would like to thank God for giving me the talent and skills to get me this far.”

The highlight of her career was the women’s singles gold medal at the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996 after winning silver four years earlier in Barcelona. She won a number of other individual tournament titles, besides guiding Korea to two Sudirman Cup championships.

In the year following her Olympic gold-medal-winning feat, she retired from competition but continued to be actively involved in badminton; coaching school children and junior players. Bang also served as a BWF Council Member from 2005 to 2009.
It has been five years since BWF’s Integrity Unit was formed.

In that time, the unit has evolved from a small operation to what is now a dedicated team with full-time analytical capabilities and external expertise.

Every athlete has the right to compete in clean and fair sport, and so the unit has centred its work on keeping badminton free from match manipulation and free of doping.

In doing so, it focuses on two key areas – education and awareness – which is about prevention, and monitoring – which is about deterrance.

The unit has delivered a number of programmes designed to monitor athletes and tournaments, conduct testing, and investigate any possible doping or match-manipulation cases in badminton.

The unit currently monitors all HSBC BWF World Tour events for suspicious betting patterns and in 2018, more than 7000 matches were monitored. There also exists a standalone reporting mechanism for individuals that want to report wrongdoings.

At the forefront of this is the ‘i am badminton’ integrity awareness campaign in which players have been able to express their love and respect for badminton by advocating and committing to clean and honest play.

It’s hoped such a concerted effort will not only raise the standards across the entire badminton landscape but encourage athletes to be active participants in shaping the integrity of the sport.

In reflecting on the last five years, BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund said the Integrity Unit has excelled in its efforts to transform the reputation of the sport and has helped lay the foundations for badminton to be industry leaders in sports integrity.

“The BWF Integrity Unit is one of the few standalone integrity operations among International Federations,” Lund said.

“We value this area of governance with extreme importance and it’s pleasing to see how far the unit has come.

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“More resources will be dedicated to expanding its operations and now with the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games on the horizon, the unit has heightened anti-doping and anti-match manipulation efforts to ensure both competitions are completed with the utmost integrity.”

The unit’s sophisticated anti-match manipulation approach covers the entire spectrum from monitoring and information gathering, investigations, reporting of match manipulation and other wrongdoings, as well as the independent Judicial Process that follows these steps:

Lund gave an insight into some of the unit’s activities over the last 12 months.

“In the past year, two integrity hearings were conducted with significant periods of ineligibility imposed.

“Although this resulted in unfortunate outcomes for the athletes involved and the wider badminton community, we view this as a positive achievement in the sport’s endeavours to protect clean athletes and maintain a high level of integrity.

“Unlike the unit’s anti-doping investigations which are built on laboratory test results, anti-match manipulation is based on intelligence gathering where we do need the cooperation of players and the wider community.

“As a result, these investigations do tend to take a long time but the BWF is committed to dedicating the resources and time required to protect the game,” said Lund.

Tokyo 2020 is a major focus for the unit and it is estimated that all athletes who will take part in the Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo would have been tested prior to the event.

To aid this, the Integrity Unit will also be delivering their comprehensive education and awareness iZone campaign at the Japan Para-Badminton International 2019 in November – a tournament that is doubling up as the official Paralympic Games Test Event.

The iZone is a multi-faceted integrity awareness mechanism designed to educate Para badminton athletes on what to expect in terms of testing and intelligence gathering at events like the Paralympics.

In particular, it raises awareness on the risks associated with match manipulation and doping, but also educates the athletes on what to do and how to act if they are ever placed in a situation where they are approached and attempts to made compromise integrity.

The iZone set up at the Japan Para-Badminton International 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 the build-up of Tokyo 2020.

Lund said the iZone has proven to be an important tool in the development of all athletes and believes the current crop of Para badminton players vying for Paralympic qualification will benefit greatly from campaign.

“The iZone has been delivered at every BWF World Junior Championships since 2015 and a high number of Para badminton tournaments including the TOTAL BWF Para-Badminton World Championships 2017.

“The target audiences for the iZone have been our youth and Para badminton players as they are perceived to be at greater risk of match manipulation and doping in relation to their exposure on the international circuit.

“Already we have done a lot of work done in the lead up to Tokyo 2020 to continue to create awareness about Para badminton including development initiatives such as integrity education.

“We are therefore looking forward to the delivery of the iZone in Tokyo and believe it will be valuable activation for all athletes and teams.”

Para badminton will make its debut as a Paralympic sport at Tokyo 2020, with a total of 90 players competing in singles, doubles and mixed doubles events across six sport classes.