

## **FIR Council Meeting, Zoom, 2. April 2020, 18:30-20:30**

### Council Members present:

Anna-Klara Ahlmer (AK), Dan Busby (DB), Amke Fischer (AF), Kresten Hougaard (KH), Kirsten Kaptein (KK), Graham King (GK), Frank Kleiber (FB), Poku Salo (PS), Duncan Stahl (DS), Marcel Weigl (MW)

### Agenda:

1. Better Retention of New Players at FIR tournaments
2. Update on current FIR response to coronavirus
3. Financial Report & Budget
4. Ideas for how the FIR can best use this extended down time with no tournaments
5. Marketing Update and Targets
6. Round Robin Rule Change
7. Report on trial use of Rankedin
8. Review of Tournament Player Surveys and plan for next 12 months

DS opened the meeting at 18:35 and welcomed all present at the first FIR Council online meeting held with Zoom.

### **1. Better Retention of New Players at FIR tournaments**

DS re-stated the main result from Beni Gränicher's tournament statistics analysis, that players participating for the first time in a FIR tournament were much more likely to be retained within the Racketlon community if they played another FIR tournament within 3 months.

DS/AK presented the plan to deliver additional support to first time players to address this:

- Beni delivers AK the list of first-time players ca. a week ahead of the tournament
- The players are sent an email ahead of the tournament
- An experienced player (not necessarily an Elite player, given that many first-time players are in the B/C/D or age-group classes) is assigned to act as their mentor at the tournament
  - o Meeting them soon after arrival to "show them the ropes"
  - o Watch some of their matches and give them encouragement/support/info
  - o Check they are having a positive "player experience" at the tournament
  - o Make sure the tournament organisation is working for them (hotel, shuttle-bus, player dinner/party, playing schedule etc.)
- DS/AK have a list of players in mind, which they will use if they are unable to recruit some volunteers

- A first-time player WhatsApp group<sup>1</sup> for the tournament will be set up for them to allow them to help each other with transport, training/warm-up, meal-times etc. and to generally support each other
- Their names will be forwarded<sup>2</sup> to their national Racketlon federation (where one exists), to allow their federation to give them information about local activities and offer general support and encouragement

This action has not been possible for the past 3 tournaments, partly due to the Corona-virus induced tournament-stop.

DS will send an email to the players to mitigate this

## 2. Update on current FIR response to coronavirus

DS summarised the tournament status

- Nick Matthew Steel City Open – cancelled, possibly to be rescheduled for later in the year
- Czech Open / World Championships, Doubles – cancelled, possibly to be rescheduled for later in the year
- Massachusetts Racket Masters - cancelled
- Berlin Open - cancelled
- King of Rackets - cancelled
- Swiss Open / Champions League – decision on possible cancellation/rescheduling mid/late April
- Latvian Open – decision on possible cancellation in May
- World Championships, singles and teams – decision by 1<sup>st</sup> week June

MW suggested FIR advise players to not yet book their flight / hotel for any tournament at present, unless the booking is cancellable/flexible.

DS stated that any TD wanting to reschedule their tournament should apply to him, so that the FIR World Tour Committee can make a decision.

Although not many reschedule requests are expected, a possible bunching of tournaments towards the end of the year may occur, perhaps not even keeping to the unwritten rule of maintaining at least 2 weeks between FIR tournaments, to reduce the risk of fewer entries due to “Racketlon-saturated” players. The Council generally anticipated that more players will be very hungry to play as many Racketlon tournaments as possible, than those who are nervous about travelling.

DS stated that the Champions League is uncertain, depending on the Zurich decision, and may even need to be held as a single one-day event or even cancelled for 2020.

The Council discussed whether any special measures would be appropriate once the World Tour resumes, noting that budgetary issues would be handled under point 3 below.

- DS proposed FIR issues supplementary guidelines as advice to TD's, to promote players' feeling of advance confidence that the tournament would definitely be held, using the appropriate hygiene measures.
- DS summarised discussions on the number of tournaments on the World Tour should not be reduced, as this is one of the best methods of promoting Racketlon at the local, national and international level

<sup>1</sup> GK has prepared a GDPR waiver which allows this. The players must sign to join the group

<sup>2</sup> GK stated that the FIR GDPR policy had been updated to allow this

- The Council briefly decided the impact on the World Rankings caused by the hiatus in tournaments, with DB commenting that some sports have frozen their rankings. Any decision was postponed until the next Council Meeting
- Possible financial measures to rebuild some of FIR's financial position were discussed. The Council agreed that there is currently too much uncertainty to implement anything, or even set a date for a decision, but instead agreed to keep the situation under constant review, with another Council Meeting to be held within the next one month

### 3. Financial Report & Budget

AF commented that without the Corona virus, this Council Meeting would have been held in Prague in preparation for the AGM. She stated that the financials for 2019 (attached) had been approved by the FIR auditors<sup>3</sup>, showing a surplus of EUR 1'130 for the year, roughly in line with the budget.

GK presented the budget for 2020, alongside two projections in which:

- Only 50% of the tournaments are held during the year, but including the World Championships Singles and Teams events
- A worst-case scenario in which no further tournaments are held for the rest of the year

The "standard" budget showed a Surplus of ca. EUR 2'500, with:

- Tournament status fees of ca EUR 13'000, covering the cost of running tournaments (Tournament Software, re-imbursing TD's for Council Member entry fees, medals and trophies)
- Marketing Fund Contribution of EUR 12'500, completely covering the marketing expenses
- Players licence fees of EUR 14'000, covering the costs of the FIR President
- Country Membership fees of EUR 5'700, covering all other administrative costs

The 50% reduced budget was surprisingly almost break-even. This was primarily due to:

- The assumption that the World Championships would still be played, contributing ca. EUR 6k (incl. MCF)
- Only Ca. EUR 6'500 had already been collected in Players Licences (over half of which were already paid for in 2019)
- No change in Country Membership fee income
- Little change to the expenses, other than slightly reduced marketing fees and costs. The Council agreed that a strong marketing presence is particularly important during the Corona Virus, when there are no tournaments to actively keep in touch with the Racketlon community

The worst-case scenario budget shows a catastrophic deficit of nearly EUR 13'000, which would use up nearly all the FIR reserves built up from retained earnings of previous years.

The Council agreed that it is currently not sensible to decide any firm measures at this stage, due to the complete lack of knowledge of the further development of the Corona virus. Possible outcomes and countermeasures were actively discussed, with the conclusion that:

- Country Members would still be asked to pay their full membership fees as an act of solidarity
- No refunds of already paid player licences would be offered
- Where possible, any decisions will be taken once the World Tour resumes

<sup>3</sup> Joachim Gersdorf and Patrick Wartia

- Any cases of extreme hardship would be reviewed on resumption of the World Tour

#### 4. Ideas for how the FIR can best use this extended down time with no tournaments

Points 4 and 5 were combined, see below.

#### 5. Marketing Update and Targets

DS presented the statistics of various marketing activities over the past 12 months, showing a surge in player interest around the world. Additional coverage for the future, such as paid online marketing, and targets for 2020 are currently under review.

The Council confirmed their full support for these initiatives.

MW proposed posting old pictures of former players as a means to further player interest.

DB stated he had collected a wealth of information dating back to 2003 from Tournament Software, World Tour results, various internet sources, available printed material, etc. and would aim to present it for the general public once ready.

DS stated he had received a lot of inquiries (Facebook, emails to [info@racketlon.net](mailto:info@racketlon.net) etc) asking for help on how to set up Racketlon and stage tournaments in their countries (incl. India, Singapore, Estonia, Ireland, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Malaysia, Spain and more) and that this was one of the clear benefits resulting from the marketing and awareness campaign of the last 12 months

#### 6. Round Robin Rule Change

GK proposed a change to the way winners are calculated in Round Robin groups. Currently, the standard process<sup>4</sup> is to play tennis to completion, using total relative point difference, should three or more players tie for any position. This has a very negative consequence on the playing schedule and often results in a “traffic jam” at the tennis courts, where games typically take the longest to complete.

An alternative approach, as used by Swiss Racketlon Federation, is to:

- Stop all Racketlon matches once a winner has been decided i.e. even before tennis in some cases
- Should there be a tie (e.g. 3 players each winning 2 matches in a 4-group), a “Gummiarm Playoff” amongst those players is held
- Should the Gummiarm Playoff not produce a winner, it is repeatedly played once more until there is a clear winner

This produces an enormous benefit to managing the TD’s playing schedule and offers the opportunity to promote a very exciting finale to the group’s matches. There are issues with the modality of carrying it out. The Council agreed that this change is very desirable if an efficient and fair way to carry it out can be found. Discussion points were:

- How to avoid one of the players possibly already completing their group matches and leaving the venue

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<sup>4</sup> As laid out in the FIR Rules of Racketlon and the FIR Players & Draws Regulations

- Whether this approach unfairly favours tennis players. KH suggested making the Gummiarm sport random. MW favoured a tennis Gummiarm to keep more in line with regular Racketlon. GK pointed out he has won more Gummiarms than he has lost, and is surely one of Racketlon's worst tennis players
- DS questioned whether scheduling the Gummiarm Playoff could be difficult, especially in the case of doubles. A counterargument was, that with so many tennis courts being freed up, this should be less of an issue
- DB stated that his research had shown that such an issue had only occurred 6 times since 2014 – i.e. once per year
- DB also stated that he had been informed by many players, especially seniors, that they dislike round robin groups, because it requires them to continue playing till then end with no real purpose for them

## 8. AOB

MW asked whether the deadline to apply for tournaments in the 2021 World Tour would be extended. DS confirmed it would be moved from June to August.

MW queried the status of Hans Van Daele's Council Membership. GK responded that the FIR statutes require him to remain, even after his resignation, until an AGM can approve a replacement or reduce the number of Council members. DS stated that GK had always taken care of all changes to FIR regulations anyway and had taken over the role of Rules Officer ad interim. GK pointed out that with the FIR Delegates taking on more decisions since the beginning of 2019, there has been much less demand for neutral objective interpretations of the FIR Regulations.

MW inquired if there had been a player survey carried out for the World Championships in Leipzig. DS replied he would check with the Delegate.

MW inquired whether anyone was aware that Racketlon is a Trademark owned by 4 persons, one of which is MW. Only PS knew of this. MW requested this be recognised on the FIR website.

*Minutes by GK and approved by DS*