

Minutes of FIR Council Meeting, Zoom, 14. September 2021, 18:00-19:30

Council Members present:

Anna-Klara Ahlmer (AK), Kresten Hougaard (KH), Kirsten Kaptein (KK), Graham King (GK), Jean Michot (JM), Poku Salo (PS), Duncan Stahl (DS), Marcel Weigl (MW)

Council Members excused:

Dan Busby (DB), Amke Fischer (AF)

Guest (agenda point 1 only):

Karim Hanna, Swiss Racketlon Federation (SRF)

Agenda:

1. Proposal from Karim Hanna (Swiss Racketlon Federation) about a change in the calculation of country membership fees and registered nationalities. *Karim to present.*
2. VOTE on "Paypal Authorisation". *Graham to present*
3. Update on fundraising campaign & summary of financials since last AGM. *Duncan to present*
4. Information on Dubai project for 2021 and beyond + update on World Tour 2022. *Duncan to present.*
5. Live streaming on World Tour. *Duncan to present an update.*

DS opened the meeting at 18:00 and welcomed all. GK was chosen to take the minutes.

Item 1:

SRF presented their slides (attached), explaining the rationale for giving FIR member countries an option to influence the issuance of FIR player licences, and proposing three possible solutions.

DS/GK pointed out that the Council would listen and discuss, but a formal decision will only be possible at a later AGM after the Council had prepared a concrete proposal.

GK pointed out that the last FIR AGM accepted a change to the statutes to assign a player's country based purely on their nationality.

SRF's first two options involved a member country's veto right of players assigned to them. GK added that the implementation details would be determined within the Council and do not need to be discussed at this meeting.

SRF's preferred solution is that selected countries be designated as responsible for issuing all FIR player licences for that country, combining it with their own national federation licence, at a reduced cost. SRF conceded that the implementation of such a rule change would not be simple.

DS mentioned that the European Squash Federation had had difficulties with national squash federations who had blocked certain players from international or European squash, following domestic issues with them. GK asked SRF how they would handle FIR member countries who might try to block players, whether for this or other reasons, such as to reduce their FIR membership fees. SRF conceded this, although it constituted an abuse, was a possibility, adding that players should still be allowed to purchase a FIR licence, but directly with FIR at a different cost, and without affecting the member country's membership fees.

DS commented that there is only a very small number of members with the ability and manpower to implement SRF's preferred solution and asked the Council whether it would agree to the principle that FIR should allow only selected countries such an option and force all others to use the current licencing system only.

- DS ok with the principle
- KH agreed, if it does not result in players being unable to get a FIR player licence
- GK agreed, if it is open to all countries, most of who would decline, and the Council should be able to decide which of those wanting such an option should be allowed, based on the extra effort and cost for FIR
- PS agrees but says Finland would have no interest in such a system
- JM agrees, commenting that France could also be interested in such a system
- MW agrees, adding that Austria does not have a mandatory player licence for its tournaments, but instead offers a "bonus licence" giving players a rebate from the tournaments they do play

GK cited two issues with a national federation supplying FIR with the authorised players:

- Tournament Software does not have a batch upload option, which would be a pre-requisite for such an option. Tournament Software would need to agree to develop this at a cost. SRF offered to discuss taking over these costs
- Players buy ad hoc licences, so the national federations would need to supply FIR with regular (monthly?) uploads to allow player tournament participation

The Council approved unanimously the principle of allowing such an option to selected countries only. GK/DS will analyse the cost and effort of any implementation of such a solution for discussion at a future Council meeting, with subsequent proposal to a FIR AGM.

Item 2:

GK gave a summary of the status of the FIR PayPal account.

He explained that PayPal had requested various KYC-related ("Know Your Customer") information from FIR to satisfy regulatory requirements. He added that some of the information requirements are difficult to interpret and provide, as they are more oriented towards an enterprise than a federation/association. After seeking advice from the Swiss Racketlon Federation president on how best to interpret the definition of "economically authorised persons" ("wirtschaftlich berechtigte Personen"), it was decided that the FIR Council positions which are allowed to have any access to the FIR PayPal account should be formally listed. These would then define the economically authorised persons.

In the meantime, PayPal has since blocked the FIR account (currently balance of ca. EUR 8k) from sending any money until this regulatory declaration has been satisfactorily completed.

GK proposed that only the following positions should be authorised to have any access to the FIR PayPal account (current persons occupying these functions in parentheses):

- President (Duncan Stahl)
- Treasurer (Amke Fischer)
- Vice Presidents (Graham King)

The Council approved this proposal unanimously.

GK concluded that FIR would use this confirmation to complete the PayPal regulatory requirements and report back to the Council should there be any issues.

Item 3:

DS presented the financials of the fundraising campaign (attached) and declared it a success.

- 147 T-shirts sold @EUR 50
- Racketlon Angels donations totalled EUR 4'000
- Some immediate costs (e.g. postage) and future (tournament entry fees)
- Total net income of over 8'000 compared to a budget of EUR 4'000

After some delays due to the factory closing for 6 weeks due to Covid, some shirts have already been handed over at tournaments, and those which cannot be collected at future tournaments later this year will be posted to players' homes at their cost.

DS is keen to expand this concept in the future to business and companies, as part of a sponsorship deal.

With the run of tournaments now starting up, tournament-related income (TSF/MCF) are on the rise (as are the marketing costs), which together with the fundraising puts FIR in a much better position now than at the beginning of the year.

MW congratulated DS and asked if the Angels will be named on the website. DS said none had expressed any wish for this but he will go back to them again to ask specifically if they should, or should not, be named publicly.

Item 4:

Regarding Dubai, DS has, with the assistance of Tarik Koubaa, held numerous discussions with the Dubai Tourist Board and the Dubai Sports Federation, who are interested in bringing a regular Racketlon tournament to Dubai as part of the November "30 by 30" fitness challenge programme run by the Dubai royal family, which seeks to get all Dubai nationals to exercise for 30 minutes daily for a month. The tournament would be a regular FIR World Tour tournament, with some promotional activities amongst the general public, such as in shopping malls.

The long-term plan of the Dubai authorities is to sponsor an end-of-season World Tour Race final in Dubai at their excellent facilities, with the top Elite players being there after qualifying for the finals. A regular FIR World Tour tournament would be held in parallel. In advance of this being launched in 2022, Dubai really wants to start November of this year by sponsoring a regular FIR tournament, with a reduced number of categories and a limited number of players. DS stated he is still looking at the budget, but hopes to use the sponsorship money to attract as many top players as possible; the top 3 men and women are already interested in playing.

PS inquired whether Dubai had applied to become a FIR member country. DS confirmed the application was in progress and he had already discussed with Dubai's Sports Council.

MW felt it is very short notice to hold a tournament this year and, given the continued reduction in the number of players travelling to tournaments, felt it could do more harm than good if there were too few players and the tournament was not successful. He added it would be wrong to guarantee

Dubai the World Tour Finals without any evidence of how well the regular tournament runs, and that FIR should keep to its rules of offering first a Challenger before upgrading to an IWT, rather than start with a top level SWT.

DS says no guarantees have been made regarding using Dubai as host for the FIR World Tour finals, and there were no expectations of a large number of players participating, though it was important to have many of the best ones.

JM added FIR needs to take opportunities to secure financing and implement its vision, but doesn't understand why Dubai, as a new FIR country member with no track record, should get the privilege of a SWT, rather than a Challenger, and at such short notice, unless it is considered part of the "lite" tournament regulations introduced at the last AGM. DS confirmed the "lite" rules are being applied to enable the tournament to be held.

After considerable debate (some via email subsequent to the online meeting), the Council approved SWT status as a majority decision, to give the tournament the prestige Dubai expects, and to make it more attractive to players.

DS then ran through the proposed 2022 FIR World Tour, which already includes 14 tournaments with 3 new venues, and a further 6 tournaments still under discussion. He plans to finalise the World Tour as far as possible by the World Championships in October.

KH pointed out it is difficult for members to confirm 2022 tournaments, if they have not yet held one in 2021. MW commented he is not sure so many tournaments is a good idea, as it will result in reduced numbers of players participating, given they do not yet travel as frequently as in pre-Corona times. JM asked whether it might make sense to postpone new Challengers until the following year. GK/KH/DS countered that Challengers are intended to offer a means to introduce tournaments to new locations, and that this had been shown to be very successful, such as in the recent Romanian Open with attracted 18 local players, mostly new to Racketlon.

MW commented that it should be possible to do this using national, instead of FIR tournaments and that the number of non-Challenger tournaments should be restricted to one per country per year.

Item 5:

Sam has been working on a concept for live-streaming individual matches with a partner "Swish". The service is simple and easy, using an iPad or mobile phone, with options to upload player names, score-cards and add commentary. This is now offered to TD's with the hope of at least covering the semi-finals and finals of Elite matches, at no cost other than providing wifi and the manpower to do the filming, upload scores and add the commentary. Sponsorship logos can also be attached to the live-stream.

MW spoke of a new live-scoring app to be used at the Austrian Open, with referees having tablets which can upload the scores directly to the screens. He looks forward to presenting to FIR at the tournament and discussing if this can be offered to other TD's at low cost.

KH is working on providing a service to offer high-quality videos (to FIR or individual players) of individual matches at a moderate cost. This contrasts with the large number of private videos at different qualities spread all over the internet. These videos could be edited to remove the empty fillers (e.g. in between games), gathered into a single source and made available as a form of a FIR YouTube channel. KH intends to try this out at the World Championships.

A General discussion on players' readiness to travel, with so many local tournaments available at less travel effort and expense.

AOB

JM asked about the rules for completing the tennis set in round robin groups and from which side players serve on reaching 20-20 in doubles.

GK responded that the last AGM changed the Rules of Racketlon to stipulate that tennis should not be played to completion in round robin groups, but instead stopped as soon as a result is reached, with the introduction of a Gummi-Arm Playoff to decide the winners if multiple players or pairs had the same number of victories within the group. GK agreed to summarise the ruling to the Council to make sure everyone has the same understanding,

KH added that on reaching 20-20 in doubles, all 4 players serve once from the right, before moving to the left for 4 services, then moving back to the right and so on. Players must stay on the same side of the court in tennis as they had played the whole set.

The meeting was closed at 19:45

Minutes by GK and approved by DS