

FIR Council Meeting - 3rd June 2024 - 21:00 CET

Attendees: Duncan Stahl (DS), James Pope (JP - minutes), Graham King (GK), Poku Salo (PS), Kresten Hougaard (KH), Anna-Klara Ahlmer (AKA), Jean Michot (JM), Amke Fischer (AF)

Apologies: Marcel Wiegler (MW), Adarsh Vikram (AV), Kirsten Kaptein (KK)

Agenda

1. Updates from DS

AF is in process of stepping down as treasurer, as per her own plan. We approved Michael Gonnou (MG) from France introduced to us via Joss Gade. MG is currently being set up and is in the process of transitioning to take over in collaboration with AF and GK. As a result of MG coming in, there was a need for either Myriam Enmer (ME) or JM to stand down (as only 2 players from 1 country can be on the Council). After consultation with JM, ME and Joss Gade, ME has chosen to stand down. AF will remain on the council, but not as treasurer.

The meeting acknowledged an email from MW that was sent to the council on Sunday, and his stepping down as Racketlon Federation Austria (RFA) President, with Roland Pichler (RP) replacing him. No known plan for MW with respect to his position on the FIR Council, and DS and GK are finding out what his plans are.

DS advised that the council will need to respond to a letter addressed to the council from presidents of several national federations regarding MW's behaviour at the FIR AGM. This will be dealt with in the near future.

KH asked whether the EuroGames Racketlon are going ahead? DS is unsure about the entries as it has a different entry mechanism. KH highlighted that there has been no information about it from RFA. DS pointed out that Sanne Veldkamp has been trying to get information from RFA with no joy. RP has told DS that as far as he knew it was going to be decided based on the end of May entries, but DS has no information back from MW. DS suspects that Racketlon in EuroGames will be cancelled. AKA asked about what this means for people who have already booked flights? DS responded that he had expressed this to the RFA, DS has asked the RFA to speak to those players who have entered already regarding flights, accommodation etc. Once DS learns confirmed information about the EuroGames then the FIR will spread it ASAP.

1. Prize Money on 2025 World Tour

With a view to ensuring the key outcomes are accessible I will first detail the votes with the discussion following on.

Votes

IWT Prize Money

Proposal: From the 2025 season a minimum total prize money pot of 500 Euros which will be split 50/50 between the Men's Elite singles and Women's Elite singles for the top 3 players. The division of the money will be as is documented in a matrix in the Tournament Regulations.

Votes: Unanimous support.

SWT Prize Money

Proposal 1: From the 2025 season a minimum total prize money pot of 1500 Euros which will be split 50/50 between the Men's Elite singles and Women's Elite singles 50/50

Votes P1: Unanimous support.

Proposal 2: That for the SWT events there will be no requirement to provide prize money for doubles categories.

Votes P2: Unanimous support.

Proposal 3: That the prize money will be divided between either the top 3 players or the top 4 players.

Votes P3: In favour for top 3: DS, JM, KH, AF and AKA

In favour for top 4: GK, PS and JP

Result P3 - Top 3 players receive a share of prize money, using the split that is applied in the Tournament Regulations for the IWT.

World Championships Prize Money

Proposal 1: From the 2025 season a minimum total prize money pot for the World Championships will be 2500 Euros for the Men's and Women's Elite singles, 1500 Euros for the Men's, Women's and Mixed Elite doubles and 0 Euros for the teams. In the Singles the prize money will be split 50/50 between the Men's and Women's Elite events. For doubles the pot will be split as per the Tournament Regulations

Votes P1: JM, KH, AF, AKA, GK, PS and JP voted in favour for singles and doubles, DS abstained as he is currently the WC singles and teams organiser.

JM, KH, AF, AKA, GK, PS and JP voted in favour for teams, while DS (as organiser) and KH abstained

Proposal 2: That the prize money will be divided between either the top 3 players or the top 4 players.

Votes P2: In favour for top 3: DS, JM

In favour for top 4: JP, GK, KH, AKA, PS

AF - abstained

Result P2: Top 4 players receive a share of the prize money, as documented in the current Tournament Regulations.

Action

GK will update the regulations and circulate these updated regulations around the Council (please see attached to the e-mail of the minutes)

Discussion

(Please note, the following discussion took place before, during and after the votes held above and has been edited to reflect the conversation leading to those different voting options by JP)

Rationale for the discussion

DS - This needs discussing now as we are now in the process of receiving applications from tournament directors (TDs) to host events next year. Hence the need to firm up both items 1 and 2 tonight.

GK: The World Tour is the heart of Racketlon, but it is a juggling act. The TDs worry about costs (inc things players are keen on) and players want things as perks (shuttles, meals etc). The FIR looks to balance these through regulations. 2018 saw prize money scrapped along with council member rebate from FIR, mandatory t-shirts etc with savings used to produce a levy on tournaments that would pay for Sam Barker to drive Racketlon's growth online. The regulations working group (GK, ME, AK, JP and KH) proposed reintroducing prize money for WC (2500 Euros), SWT (2500 Euros) and IWT (500 Euros) and was approved by council in an e-mail vote in November 2023 for 2025 onwards. We need to consider the balance now for the TDs to cover these fees (Item 2).

We also need to consider if that vote was fair and are we making the right decision with WCs and SWTs being the same level of prize money? (KH confirms this was the way it was done when it was scrapped in 2018).

DS - We should highlight this is a minimum especially at SWTs.

Discussion on total pot

DS highlighted that the player entry numbers between WC and SWT are not equivalent, a WC may well host 400-500 players, but an SWT more like 130-150. GK points out that this is also like a Grand Slam having the same prize money as a standard ATP tour event. DS notes that the World Tour Race has a separate prize pot, which should hopefully engage the elite players in addition to general tour prize money. KH notes we have already promised the return of prize money in an Elite players meeting last year, if we don't then we will upset players. DS: we need the balance between not too much for TDs to pay out and being too little for players to win.

DS also noted that these figures represent minimum prize money pots, and a TD can offer a bigger pot (and promote that if they wished). DS had previously spoke to TDs and there was voluntary prize money for some events in 2024, ahead of being mandatory in 2025. From his perspective the value for an IWT feels a good minimum, but SWT minimum feels too high.

AKA suggested that it could be WC 3000 Euros, SWT 2000 Euros? DS responded that we could, but considering the number of player entries at an SWT is for him a SWT of £1500; KH suggested that he felt some SWTs would struggle (i.e. Czech Open in his opinion) at 2500 Euros prize money. AKA wished to note that we need remember that is split between both male and female Elite categories, so for IWT prize money would pay the entry fee of Elite winners, but nothing more. Offering a perspective based on the French Tour JM shared that their prize money was, 3 x entry fee (so a 25 Euros entry fee would be a 75 Euros prize money pot for the Elite category winner).

JP sought clarification based on the tournament regulations matrix regarding WCs which stated that Singles is 2500 Euros, Doubles is 1500 Euros. Are we doing that? - KH responded that this was correct. DS highlighted that he felt that the teams prize money feels too high at 1000 Euros. KH pointed out that this is rarely divided amongst players as some nations use it to pay for the federations costs, plus you are playing for your country. DS wanted it noted that it makes it hard for a stand alone WC Teams (in the same way WC Doubles can be held in a long weekend with a supporting IWT/SWT singles event), because the finances don't add up with this level prize money, hence why teams is attached to the WC Doubles or more usually WC Singles (but still tricky with Doubles financially) with the other event covering the budget for teams. DS would rather focus on Singles for prize money as we will for the foreseeable future have Singles and Teams together due to the way the finances work. JM questioned what do you offer instead, maybe goodies? DS responded that we could look to this. AF queried how has the teams entry fee changed since 2013? GK checked the data to show it had Increased from 150 Euros (2013) to 200 Euros (2018) and is currently 200 Euros in 2024. DS as a WCs TD highlighted that you ultimately make a significant loss on teams even without prize money. GK stated that he would vote for no prize money for teams, as you are playing for your country. AKA agreed, but she would increase Teams entry fees over increasing Singles entry fees for WCs. JM suggested that we Could go to 250 per team which is 50 euro per player in a team of 5. DS would not currently be pushing for this, but GK would agree with extra increase in team fee.

DS asked KH would having mandated a 1500 Euros WC Doubles prize money pot been feasible this year? KH responded that in the initial budget it would not have been, however in the end they would have been able to do it. DS wanted it noted so that everyone was aware that finding WC Doubles hosts is really tricky. As such, DS has some nervousness about 1500 Euros for doubles. KH felt that if we have no one applying then offer a dispensation to scrap the prize money, but it should be feasible, particularly with the fees for the supporting singles event (which should be a SWT event in DS's eyes because it is a great venue with excellent field). JM also reminded the meeting that it is a split prize money pot in Doubles. KH thinks you could add more prize money to WC doubles due to benefit in supporting singles event field, and a positive on the field.

Discussion on how many players get prize money & if doubles is included

DS - For simplification there should be 1st to third prize money awards only, based on a matrix produced by KH and documented in the current tournament regs (with 4th place award prize

money for WC & SWT singles). DS is very keen to avoid diluting it down beyond top 3 and give the podium winners more money. Both KH and AKA suggested that it should be first to fourth for WCs and first to third for SWTs if we drop it to £1500.

AF asked what about doubles? DS reiterated that he is keen to avoid dilution by including doubles (which would come out of the total prize money pot), but KH points out doubles entries are important to a TD. GK if we include prize money for doubles it doesn't hurt TDs, only elite players some of whom had indicated some felt doubles should have prize money, but not all. DS suggested that maybe we go back to them. AF felt that we don't need SWT doubles prize money. JM raised that possibility that perhaps keep the current matrix from the tournament regulations for now, give it a couple of years and see player feedback. JP felt that we should offer the TDs the right to choose if doubles is included, mandating only that that tournament regulations matrix is as a minimum? DS raised the alternative idea that the TDs could offer the doubles other prizes, however he also doesn't mind the idea of leaving the TDs the choice doubles and singles pots (JM also likes it), AKA thinks having it in doubles then it adds incentive to players to pay that additional entry fee? However, pots could be very small, the winner might get only 37 Euros per player in the pairing, which is a tiny amount barely covering entry.

GK ask KH (who had earlier said he considered doubles a warm up), then what can we offer as an incentive to make people go for doubles? KH responded that even if it was a prize (booze, balls) then it is more than just a medal/trophy. KH is not fussed if it is only Doubles prize money for WCs.

JM put the cat amongst the pigeons by asking what if a TD wants to give B draw events prize money? DS - that could get complicated (JP chimed in that imagine if a player got bumped up to A, but thought they could win B, they wouldn't be happy!) DS felt this was better not to be written down, but left as a decision made on a case by case basis for the World Tour Committee (WTC) and that tournaments delegate.

2. Maximum entry fees and tournament finances on 2025 World Tour

(The intention of the agenda was to then discuss this topic, and while some initial thoughts were made by people, by the time we had concluded the voting on Item 1 above, it was approaching 23:00 CET and the feeling was there was a need to focus on this item in a fresh meeting on Monday 11th June at 21:00 CET. However for record I record the rough thoughts on this topic below).

GK - If we increase prize money then we need to consider raising entry fees., or take some other measure to fund the numbers in Item 1. JM is interested in how we keep the entry fee the same while maintaining prize money. DS feels the current WCs set up (2500 Euros with 75 Euros entry fee) is fair, but if we want more than this then we would need to look at higher entry fees (as GK suggests for IWTs). PS not keen on raising entry fees to pay for prize money. GK asked DS in his experience as a TD when he would expect to know your sponsorship situation and therefore when

could you announce a resulting increase to the minimum prize money pot? DS responded that it can vary by event and by year, so you have to set a budget 12-18 months out based on your best guess and if you find extra income, you can then use it as a motivator for entries down the line, even if you lose people who made early choices on entering that event or not.

GK returned to PS to clarify if he prefers using sponsorship money, rather than higher entry fees to cover prize money, are entry fees an issue in Finland? PS felt that for an IWT 55 Euros feels not too much, but 60 or especially 70 Euros would be very hard for players. GK highlights IWT and CH events have the same entry fee levels as in 2013, should these not be slightly increased (with knock on up the chain to SWT and WC). DS - Could we set fees as a range, i.e 55-65 range maximum, allowing tournaments to still charge less if they wish.

GK said he emailed existing TDs to find out what hurts them financially, and several complained that entry fees are not reflecting the change in costs. DS asked what sort of costs. GK specified court and ball/shuttle costs. DS stated that from his experience court costs have increased 30-35% in the past 5 years. GK noted that to cover this they either need to do less for players to cut costs or raise entry fees.

GK - Now that we have finalised the prize money, we now need to see how we fund that at tournaments, primarily through entry fees and can we make it happen. This will be the focus of the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 23:00 CET.