

THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2020

An Open Letter

BWF Secretary General: Thomas Lund

Dear friends and members of the badminton community,

Our thoughts are with everyone affected by this global pandemic and I hope you are keeping well and safe.

I understand and fully appreciate that coming to grips with the rapidly progressing situation over the last few weeks has caused much uncertainty – and for some, a fully understandable fear and concern for your own health and safety, and that of your relatives.

It has been our No.1 priority since this started to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all athletes, their entourage, officials and the greater badminton fraternity, while also providing full support to those most vulnerable to the coronavirus – the elderly and people with underlying health conditions.

We have been deeply engaged in conference calls with the World Health Organization (WHO), plus various health experts and have sought the advice of local and national health authorities to ensure that we always acted in the right way, at the right time and at the right place.

Our actions have been based on the highest level of expertise, although admittedly this situation has rapidly changed due to the unpredictable nature of COVID-19 and many characteristics are totally new and unknown to even the most experienced scientists. We have constantly worked with tournament hosts and local health authorities to assess the local conditions for play on a case-by-case basis.

It has been very disappointing to see some members of the badminton community speculate on the sincerity and motives of the BWF in this time of crisis.

Our No. 1 concern has always been the health and safety of all of our participants. However, at the same time, we are deeply concerned about the cancellation of tournaments and the flow-on effect this has on elite players and coaches whereby they could now be in a position of temporary unemployment and loss of income.

This includes the inability to train and compete in an efficient and targeted way leading up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games – at least until the sad, but necessary postponement of Tokyo 2020 on Tuesday 24 March 2020.

BWF fully supports the decision made by IOC President Thomas Bach, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe and the Tokyo Organising Committee (TOCOG) to postpone Tokyo 2020, and we are working with these parties to gain a better understanding of what the next 12 months will look like.

None of the above circumstances should be taken lightly and you can be assured that BWF will continue to seek the best possible conditions for our elite players, while taking all necessary precautions around health and safety – something I hope all international badminton players around the world can support.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

One extreme difficulty in this situation has been reacting to decisions from different governments on how to protect the health and safety of the populations in a proportionate way.

Different countries and governments put in place different precautions and implemented different strategies on how to best deal with the COVID-19 threats. Some took advice from WHO, while others took more restrictive measures due to local government policy.

This has been the case since the beginning of January when issues started to arise in Wuhan, China, and then even more so when the situation was upgraded to a global pandemic with significant upscaled measures put in place.

Overall, BWF, players, teams and hosts have had to work within a very volatile environment with significant differences in the way governments have applied protective measures. Guidelines for staging sports events were revised on a daily basis in different countries and not always with consistent approaches. Many countries allowed events to take place in what they found were safe environments. In this time, we reviewed all feedback carefully and addressed concerns and fears.

Given the fast-changing landscape unfolding with governments implementing measures in inconsistent ways and with many considerations and speculations within our own community, it has therefore been challenging to meet all global expectations from all of you.

Of course, hindsight is a wonderful thing. It was not difficult to argue that “wrong decisions” had been taken in an environment changing on nearly an hourly basis, with further decisions therefore required. This has not only been the case for BWF, but most authorities around the world. However, we maintain that BWF made the best possible decisions at the time and with sincere motives to protect both the health and livelihood of all participants.

YONEX ALL ENGLAND OPEN 2020

In relation to the staging of the YONEX All England Open 2020, thorough safety measures had been put in place by All England organisers in line with recommendations from national health authorities and implementing best practice advice provided by WHO.

During the initial days of the competition, the situation remained relatively unchanged in the United Kingdom. However, from the Friday, significant health and travel restrictions were employed by governments all around Europe and understandable concerns were raised about the implications in the UK.

The situation was not at all an easy one but the decision was made to complete the tournament with the knowledge that BWF and Badminton England followed every piece of advice from local and national health authorities in the UK. This included, first and foremost, assessments on the health and safety of all participants. But given there were few players remaining in the tournament at that stage, that government advice was clear that the All England Open could continue, and that no travel restrictions were being enforced in Birmingham and the UK, it was found reasonable to play the last two days.

We were glad to see the playing group in Birmingham support the tournament and stay on for the last two days of competition in an environment where several governments started to implement more severe measures, providing further uncertainty to us all.

It is easy to evaluate and come to different conclusions, but BWF is confident this was the right decision for everyone.

Things have now drastically changed even more around the world and we are faced with a period of no international tournaments.

This is a sad and difficult situation for everyone, but a necessary one given the severe health concerns and travel restrictions. BWF will review the whole COVID-19 period as part of our internal evaluations and provide feedback to all parties.

LOOKING AHEAD

Moving forward, we will review the impact the situation has on the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system to ensure the process is fair for the postponed Games. Preparations for the Games will also continue with a clear priority on identifying suitable dates.

BWF is also looking into the possibility of freezing World Rankings until international tournaments start again. However, the exact system to deal with both the freezing and eventual un-freezing of World Rankings is still being closely considered before we initiate any such process.

BWF will also work closely with all tournament hosts to provide avenues for competitions for all international players as soon as practically possible, taking into account that we need to ensure a safe environment to travel and compete in.

It is our responsibility to ensure we are ready to present top class badminton to fans around the world – and thereby also supporting the livelihood of international badminton players in a situation where very few tournaments will now happen before August 2020.

We have strong human and commercial considerations to protect the key structures of our sport that will ensure it survives these volatile and uncertain times, and with the full support of our Member Associations, Continental Confederations, international top players and key stakeholders, we hope to “start again” soon when the time is right.

I appeal to all our great badminton players and other stakeholders to share directly with us any concerns and questions you may have.

That being said, we do understand that everyone is eager to get information as quickly as possible. Please allow us to work in a structured, efficient and prioritised way to ensure we make the right decisions in the interests of international players and the general badminton community to ensure badminton comes out stronger on the other side.

In the meantime, be assured that BWF is monitoring all updates from WHO, various health experts, IOC and IPC very closely.

Stay safe and please follow the advice of authorities by staying at home and keeping a social distance that will help bring us through this global crisis as quickly as possible.

With my best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Lund', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

BWF Secretary General, Thomas Lund