

Marcin Kowalczyk

1. What is your take on there being several memory associations presenting themselves as being global? Where does the IAM fit in?

IAM's job is to popularise sport, as a sport, without bothering with people who are ready to destroy any potential growth with their greed. It was created by memory athletes, for memory athletes, only with a better future of a sport in mind. It's democratic, as opposed to dictatorship, which can allow it to go for something more than pursuing a vision of one person. I see it as a tool, that if used correctly, and with a work of some good people, can allow us to actually see that better future one day.

I believe that we should ignore the existence of organisations that aren't democratic, because I can't see any good in working with people who weren't chosen by the community, since it usually means that their vision isn't a good representation of what that community actually wants from them.

If an association with IAM's potential would exist earlier, then IAM wouldn't be created in the first place while also gathering so many big names from a sport, so I believe that it itself means that there is a clear place for us.

2. What would be your top two ideas to help broaden the memory competitor base?

I was talking about it in my motivation letter. First, we need to make sure that it's easier for people to find learning materials. Right now it's not easy. You are probably aware of the fact that most of the "memory trainers" cannot even memorise things by themselves, and most books about memory are just a copy-paste from earlier books of other people who copy-pasted someone else. Pay attention to the fact that I said "most", not "all", but, while definitely getting a little better, it's still a huge problem. And they usually don't talk about sport at all, so even if those things exist, they are not helping us.

I learned memory techniques from wikipedia, and then "mastered" them by a lot of practice, and by reading old forum posts written by world record holders, in times when forums still existed and were relevant. And it doesn't really sound like a good way to learn it. It was an awful way to learn it. Additionally, Facebook killed those forums, without providing anything to replace it, because finding anything older in facebook groups is basically impossible.

I came here from speedcubing community, which is a really big, fast growing community, so I think that using it as an example is a good idea. Speedcubing is growing so quickly, because it's incredible easy to just buy a cube, and then find online tutorial for solving it, in any language you want, in text or on youtube. I think we should provide our own tutorials, prepared by competent people, in many languages, to have something that we can show those who are seeking for knowledge. Normally community would take care of it, but because memory courses are a business, google is showing you a list full of people making business, not a sport, so I believe that we need to help in this process by having one place that can gather actual tutorials for sport.

Here, in theory, we have a conflict of interests, because some memory athletes are making money on teaching people how to memorise things. I am doing it

too, that's my main source of income. But I don't think that some tutorials aimed for sport, and sport only, would hurt it in any significant way, because I believe that people with years of practice in memorisation can offer a lot more than just a few simple tutorials to earn their living, so I don't see a problem here.

Second, we need to have some tools for practice, that are more accessible for everyone, ergo, newcomers don't need to pay for them. That idea has its own problems, but it's something that I am putting here for you to think about.

Third (!), I am actually spending some of my free time to talk to kids at schools about speedcubing and memory sports. And while it's easy to convince some of them to try speedcubing, it's way harder to convince them to try memory sports, because of problem 1) and 2). With those problems solved, any public speaking about memory sports would be much more effective in convincing people to actually try it for real.

3. Some motivation letters referred to the value of memory sports for education and implied a role for IAM extending beyond sports to promoting the broad benefits of memory training. Do you see this as a role for IAM? If so, to what extent?

I don't think anyone argues here about the benefits of memory sports for education. And while I don't think that reforming the education system is part of what IAM is supposed to do, I still believe in the value of inspiration provided by talking to kids about those things - I am doing it by myself. And kids, from schools, especially older ones, are a great source of potential competitors (the average age of a competitor in speedcubing is WAY lower than in memory sports, they are the future).

I believe that IAM should encourage promoting it at schools, but that's it. We are here for sport, and we shouldn't bother too much with other things before making sure that our sport works and is growing. Right now - it really isn't doing that well, so let's focus on what is important for sports' future.

4. Some motivation letters talked about the high entry level into the sport. Can you point to some successful efforts in that field and / or ideas you have for making it more accessible?

I really described it both on my motivation letter and in the answer for question number two. But about the "successful efforts" - Yes, I can. One day I decided that I want to see more people in Poland that can solve Rubik's cube blindfolded. I identified the problem: we didn't have any good source of knowledge for that in Polish language. So I turned on my camera, and created a 3 hours of tutorials on youtube, explaining how to do that in Polish. So now we have more people in Poland that can solve Rubik's cube blindfolded, that learned it from me. (and one of them almost took my world record, but I am not even mad, because he learned it from me, so I am actually proud of him)

5. What is your approach to bringing new members, especially young ones, into the sport?

That's the thing we need the most. Without numbers - we have no competitions. Without numbers - records aren't growing as quick as they could, and it makes better competitors lazy, because they don't even need to try to stay on a

relevant level. Everything is easier to do and achieve when there are a lot of us. I hope that we are not a bunch of elitists, and that everybody is fine with trying to grow our numbers to a level, where we can feel that memory sports are relevant, and not only a little play for few people. That should be the goal. We cannot achieve anything without growing our current numbers, so it's not only important, but it should be a priority. And young ones should be always welcomed, because they usually have more will to do things than we, old and bored of life dinosaurs, have.

6. What is your opinion on the ongoing digitalisation of memory sports? Yay or Nay? Why?

I think it's pretty obvious for anyone that there are pros and cons for both solutions, so we cannot just say that one is superior to other. I can have a strong opinion on things that have solution that is, from my point of view, objectively better for our purposes, until somebody will prove me wrong. Here I don't see an obvious choice, so I would start by trying to gather more data from people that it affects.

The answer for a question is: "why not". If this is where it's going, I have nothing against it. If community will decide that digitalisation is meh, then I also have nothing against their decision. So effectively, right now, I abstain from voting on that one.

7. The IAM is currently looking for a host for the IAM World Memory Championship 2019. The DL for applications is the 7th of December (so before your answers to these questions will be published). What do you think about the feasibility of organising an IAM World Memory Championship in your country, either next year or sometime in the future? What are the the biggest obstacles? Is there anything that could be done or changed to make it easier / more convenient in order for someone to host it in your country?

I don't really see any obstacles, other than the fact that we don't have enough competitors in Poland who could bother with helping in organising it. Projects like that usually need some dedicated people, who can make it work, but it's not something that IAM can enforce. So once again the solution is to grow our numbers to the point, where it's easier to find people dedicated enough to host a competition.

8. The memory sports community has many dedicated volunteers who are contributing to it in many different ways, both internationally and nationally. If you could highlight one such person today (who is not also running for the IAM International Board right now), who would it be, and why?

Boris Konrad. I am pretty sure I am in place where I don't need to say anything more, but continuing my answer: I am putting him here, because it's the guy who finally gave us some scientific background for what we are doing. When I started doing memory sports 8 years ago, I was terrified by the science around it. Or more by the lack of it, despite claiming that memory techniques are known to humanity for at least 2500 years. Thanks to him I started to feel that I am doing something real, and that I am not lying to people by telling them that they can learn how to use memory techniques too.

9. How do you consider your own potential contribution to the board to be unique, compared to the other candidates?

While I understand the purpose of that question, I can't stop myself from putting that clause here: I don't believe it's a competition, so I don't like the idea of explaining you "why I am a better choice than other candidates". I believe we are bunch of people who declared that they can use some of their time to try to do something good for a sport, so I hope we have the same goal in mind.

But actually answering the real question here: I came here from speedcubing, where I spent 8 years of my life, beating 14 world records, competing in 50 competitions, tracking the World Cube Association decisions and growth. In last 8 years it grew from 10 thousand to 120 thousand registered competitors, from 200 official competitions per year to 1200 official competitions per year (and in 2005, just 5 years earlier, those numbers were just 662 people and 24 competitions). And it didn't do that by accident. We don't have such a cool toy in our disposal, but I still believe that we can use some of their history to make our sport bigger. And I know that history very well.