

2020 IAM Board Election Answers - Darren Michalczuk

Questions for all candidates from Sylvain Arvidieu:

What can be done and is it in your opinion necessary to make it possible for athletes from different continents to compete together? It happens too seldom at the moment, possibly because of travel costs and lack of incentives (financial or others). What do you think?

I believe you are right. Although we are becoming more of a digital community, the benefits that come from attending an event, such as the relationships built through face to face meetings, the integrity of the sport and energy and excitement of being a part of the action make it a tradition worth saving. Finding a balance between sponsorship and attending fees to keep things like volunteers, venues and maintenance costs consistent is always a challenge.

Is it the IAM's goal to help spread the memory techniques to the masses (i.e. making resources available for free, I guess) ? How is it then possible to coexist and collaborate with professional memory trainers?

Part of the IAM's goal should be to spread memory techniques, for sure. Offering resources from an introductory level would make it appealing for newcomers to get started, but still allow for specialists to train or offer more. Resources offered could be simple programs such as a number generators, samples of different systems such as a peg list up to 20 or a 2 digit number system and links to those with credible resources.

Should the current 10-event formats be kept? Why?

I'm sure the events will change over time as they already have. This may happen because some may become more relevant, for example if memory becomes more mainstream in the education system, vocabulary may become more popular again. It may also depend on scoring challenges, which may be why poetry, being difficult to consistently score or compare year to year, is a part of the US competition, but not seen as an official event. I like the 10 event format, but see how new or younger members may be overwhelmed by the length and number.

Questions for all candidates from Boris Konrad:

How would you like to see the IAM interact with other memory sports organizations in the (near) future?

I'd like to see memory organizations interact more, but I am unsure of what that would look like. Each organization has its own methods and motivations and would need to see the benefit of changing these. If it hasn't happened yet, it may be because it is unlikely that it will or needs to happen on its own time.

Is it a goal for you that memory sports gets an official sport?

I would like to see memory sport recognized as an official sport. I am not sure how to speed up this process, but hope as it grows it will gain merit as well. If poker can be considered a sport, then there is hope memory will be there soon.

How will you help making memory sports more appealing for beginners and media?

Working with so many young memory athletes I have seen many things that both inspire and discourage them.

I often give them ready-made palaces or peg lists to reduce the amount of time they have to train before seeing results. Kids come from very different homes, some being very rich in objects they could use as placeholders and others live in very sparsely furnished rooms. Giving them a standard 'room' to work with keeps everyone on the same level and allows us to work together on the same objects/stories. They can always build their own palaces later on if they choose.

I give them some 'memory rules' to make it easy for them to start. Each word or name is turned into an 'object they can see or hold in their hands'. This keeps the stories or memory images manageable, at least at the beginning. For names, everyone has to have a job, such as an occupation or sport (something I learned from Katie Kermode).

I also try as much as possible to connect memory with school curriculum or at least practical or useful knowledge. They love to memorize the elements of the periodic table, for example. I try to make training fun, but also instil habits of hard work and discipline.

Question for Darren Michalczuk from Akash Rupela:

What are your ambitions to improve the number of IAM Competitions in your region?

In February and March of this year I will be speaking at 9 events during teachers' conventions. I will be speaking at the Calgary City Teachers' Convention for roughly 3 hours on memory techniques. I will take these and every opportunity that comes up to share what I know about the IAM and memory to encourage teachers and students to take part in the events, or at least try the techniques.

Questions for all candidates from Florian Minges:

In your opinion, what are the two most important things the IAM has to work on in the next two years (so basically during your mandate, if you should get elected)?

Although there is a lot to consider with the upcoming years, two things that stand out are:

1. I would like to see more people involved in memory sport, especially youth.
2. I would like to see memory become a bigger part of the education system. This could be more memory clubs in schools, educators seeing the value of using these strategies in the classroom or some events reflecting more practical uses of memory even if in optional events.

What is something that the IAM could learn from AMSA/GAMA (ie what is something they are doing very well)?

I respect the discipline and practice habits of the competitors involved in these organizations. It seems like a good work ethic is a part of the culture and though this may not apply to all members of the IAM, I feel it is something that western countries could benefit from. I notice this in the education systems as students are taught to focus and dedicate hours of practice to learning such things as basic numbers computation. It seems as though this transfers to memory practice.

There are many things and projects that volunteers within the IAM need to work on to operate, manage and develop the organisation. If you had to pick one thing among all of these that you were the most passionate about, which one would it be? (For example: maintaining the website/database, developing the competition software, working on an arbiting certification system, establishing national organisations, developing new competition formats etc)

The ones I would favour (in order from most preferred are) developing competition software, developing new competition formats and maintain the website/database.

This is kind of an expansion on a question by Sylvain: AMSA/GAMA have developed and proposed some new potential memory disciplines (spoken flash numbers, fantasy map, flight plan). At the same time, we also have the Memory League format. How do you think the IAM should go about integrating new disciplines and competition formats into memory sports, or is that something that you think should be avoided?

Possibly the way new events are introduced into the Olympics meaning give them a trial year. After this year evaluate the success/reception and consider keeping the event and any changes that may be needed to make it work.

Same question as last year: The IAM is currently looking for a host for the next World Memory Championship (application deadline is 15th of January, 2020). What do you think about the feasibility of organising a World Memory Championship in your country, either next year or sometime in the future? What are 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 think we are ready to host a world event in the near future. Memory sport is still relatively new and will take time before it is more recognized and accepted. The obstacles would be finding venues, volunteers and sponsors for the event. My best estimate of when we would be ready would be after four year's time. I do have thoughts on some possibilities on who could help with this, but am unsure of the likelihood an event like this could happen. If and when it does, however, I think it could a great opportunity for all involved.

Same question as last year: 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?

I have many people in mind from Alex Mullen who I believe gave North America a boost by his wins and accomplishments at competitions to Jim Gerwing, a local retired teacher/principal who over the past few years has consistently trained and competed with respectable scores being a living example that anyone can be a part of the memory community. I would say, though, that my vote would be for Serena Wang, an educator who has started a school based on memory skills. She has brought her expertise from Asia and trained some of her students to compete in the Canadian Mind Sport national competition. With her inevitable success, I believe memory sport will gain both recognition and credibility.