

2020 IAM Board Election Answers - Nathalie Lecordier

Question for European candidates from Gordon Cowell:

Numbers at competitions are often very small. What would you do to try to increase the popularity of memory competitions in Europe?

Given that the population of Europe is smaller than that of many individual countries with a population of hundreds or thousands of millions and that relatively small European countries can attract competitors from many different countries, I am not sure how fair it is to say that numbers at European competitions are that small.

Nonetheless, increasing the popularity of memory sports is certainly worth considering. As well as being a sport that is more relevant to daily life than many others, it is one with unusually high potential for being inclusive irrespective of age, gender, physical ability and numerous other factors.

Media coverage including interviews and other involvement with a broad range of competitors and other active members of the community would be one place to start in making the sport more visible and appealing.

Outreach in schools, universities, community centres etc. would also help. Whenever I am asked what the point of a given memory sport discipline is, I point out that while I have little use for the skills I learned playing football as a child on a daily basis, most human beings need their memories several times a day! Moreover, while none of my students' parents would be capable of doing their jobs without years of training, society seems to think it is acceptable to expect people to study for at least a decade without equipping them with the skills to do so. The fact that many of our championships are held in libraries and places of education shows that we are already reaching out to the community but, of course, more can be done.

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?

The first step is that as many championships as possible should be open to competitors from different continents and even different countries within the same continent.

Venues need to be chosen, so as to make them accessible both in terms of location and facilities.

I like that our world championships try to embrace part of the point of a world championship by trying to change country and preferably continent too year after year.

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?

I don't see that one precludes the other 😊.

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

A decathlon format gives breadth and does not favour athletes whose strength is or is not in a given area. It also allows comparison more easily over time, space and organisations. However, in a classic sport such as chess variations on the classic format are available and enjoyed and I am open to experimentation and specialisation for those who want that option.

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?

Many sports have more than one association or federation, each standing for something different or placing emphasis on different aspects of the sport. What matters is our own identity, values and integrity in a structure of harmonious diversity. Notwithstanding, there is also a lot of valuable common ground and that needs to be honoured too whenever and wherever possible.

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

I don't really know what constitutes an "official" sport, but I would certainly like memory sports to reach the general public in the same way as many people gather both formally and informally to practise physical sports.

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

Looking at the range of scores in overall rankings, I would say that a high entry level is far from the case. A number of competitors work hard over a period of years to improve in one

or more disciplines. In fact, an important element in many championships is that competitors are clearly there at least in part to compete against themselves. However, we can learn a lot from what is happening in Germany, for example, where some schools are not just a convenient venue for championships but actively involved on a year-round basis. It may also be worth considering recognition for athletes who make the most progress in a given period.

For a relatively young sport it falls to us to inspire schools to introduce memory sports as part of what they offer for a broad education for youngsters who will become life-long learners in a society where knowledge evolves at an ever-increasing speed. Once again, it is worth looking to Germany and considering different formats that encourage youngsters to try the sport. Nevertheless, memory sports can transcend arbitrary barriers such as gender and age, and I would be especially keen to explore ways to introduce the sport to new members at both ends of the age spectrum, perhaps by reaching out to university students first, so they, in turn, can reach out to older and younger people.

It is also important, especially in the early stages, to be able to measure one's progress and the system that is being implemented is a tangible and motivating way of doing this.

Involving the media is ultimately one of the most powerful tools at our disposal for popularising the sport and one way of making the sport media friendly is digitalisation. One appealing factor in spectator sports is fast, accurate feedback and digitalisation allows this in a way that marking by hand does not in quite the same way. The South German Open in Würzburg in 2015 showed the potential for zooming in to particular competitors' recall in a way that is not possible with paper recall but I still believe there are benefits of being able to watch physical memorisation and recall, such as showing memory to be a practical skill and not just a computer game. Although the card disciplines are very time-consuming to prepare and mark, speed cards in particular is spectacular to watch, which is important in terms of bringing the sport to the public.

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)?

Having regular championships in every continent and an arbiter certification and continued development system to make the former possible.

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

As an arbiter I am impressed by aspects of their arbiter development system and would be keen to see whether some of these might work equally well on a more global level.

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)

It would have to be the arbiter certification and continued development system, but that isn't to say that I haven't already been working on that in the background for years.

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?

All I would add to my answer to Sylvain's question is that our different ranking and progression systems also give flexibility in terms of formats and measuring progress.

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?

To a large extent the same question as last year requires the same answer as last year: the United Kingdom has already hosted more WMCs than all other countries put together, so I would not see yet another one as benefitting the global community as a whole just yet. I think it would be far more important for the time-being to give a chance to other committed countries or even to consider new formulae. For example, the preparation phases for the European and World Memory Championships in 2018 show that dedication, vision and co-operation across borders are more important than some of the factors that have been emphasised in the past.

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?

In an organisation that depends on volunteers, this remains one of the most difficult questions. Only one? And not running for the board? That's really tough as there are several

people and it's hard to know where to start without offending all the great volunteers without whom championships would not be possible. How about the team of French volunteers who worked together both in the arbiters' room and behind the scenes to run a wonderful French Memory Open in October? Or those who anticipated our every need in Zhuhai? Or experienced, volunteer translators who give so generously of their time and skills for championship after championship?

In 2019 it was 10 years since I met so many of the people who make my experience of memory sports what it is today. The question does not allow me to mention all of them but one constant has not changed in my life as an arbiter. Although it is nearly 18 months now since she stood down as an arbiter, not only have Gaby Kappus' passion, integrity and work ethic contributed so much to the sport in the last decade, but on a personal level her support and loyalty have done so much to make me the arbiter I have become since working alongside her.

Question for all previous board members (Simon, Mohamed, Charifa, Sanchit, Nathalie, Akash, Corinna) from Florian Minges:

Working in a volunteer organisation with people from many different time zones and backgrounds is bound to be tricky. In terms of working together, what is something that didn't work quite as well as you expected, and what would you suggest to the next Board to make it better?

Far from being tricky, the factors above give the opportunity to bring together various strengths and backgrounds to create something that is bigger and better than a sum of the parts. Working in different time zones makes non-spoken communication more important and in this day and age that opens up a wealth of possibilities that allow people to contribute in writing when they have had time to consider issues properly. It took time to reach this point, so my advice to the incoming board is to take the opportunities offered by state of the art communication technology from the outset. (Dare I ask what happened to Anastasia in the question 😊?)