

2020 IAM Board Election Answers - Sanchit Sharma

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?

Getting participation from across the globe in open events is certainly important for the growth of the sport. The same can be tackled with a strong financial backing for the IAM by looking for partnerships with organizations / brands (with a targeted approach). Agreed, that this option is easier said than done, but it is surely an avenue that should not be ignored. More realistically, efforts can be made to improve the scenario by negotiating suitable arrangements with the organizers, liaising with hotels for better deals and distributing the prize money to a greater number of candidates (in a pre-decided proportion to say, the Top 10 or 15 instead of just Top 3).

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 think if not an immediate short-term goal, it should be a long term one at least. Members can of course help spread memory techniques on their own individual level, but yes, getting as much information and accessibility on the IAM's website to guide beginners is important. Collaboration with professional memory trainers, well, now that is something that should be decided on a case by case basis if at all there is an expressed advantage for the improvement of the community with such a collaboration.

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

In my cover letter for the previous year's board elections, I wrote an analogy comparing memory sports to the sport of cricket. I'll reiterate it in brief here and then explain how it is relevant to this question. Cricket has 3 formats - Test matches (can take 5 days to complete), One Day Internationals (take about 8 hours to complete) & T20 Internationals (conclude in around 3.5 hours). Memory sports also has its own variety of competitions which are quite comparable to cricket, in terms of the WMCs, National (and continental) events and the fast-paced Memory League format. Each of these formats has its own charm, requiring tweaks in strategizing and preparation, as they test the athletes for different levels of endurance, which is why I believe they should be kept.

Now in case your question is about the specific number of events (10) in an IAM competition, up until now I believe it has worked well in terms of the time required to conduct the events and the variety of skills tested in competition. Any addition (or removal) of events to extend (or shorten) the format or create a new format in itself can be discussed if it is with good reason and can add a new flavour to the sport.

It is only after proper discussion and brainstorming for ideas that reveals the pros and cons when looked at from different perspectives.

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 would like to see the IAM interact with other memory sports organizations where there are found to be synergies and the organizations can go from strength to strength. This interaction may be in the form of co-organizing a competition, for example. This does not mean associating with any and every organization, but rather deciding after a careful consideration with regards to the events, members and potential objectives as to how a friendly interaction may be beneficial. Of course, there are (and will be) organizations that the IAM does not see eye to eye with on various levels, and in such cases I believe it is important to know how to peacefully co-exist. However, when necessary, the IAM should be upfront to clarify its stance on items of importance in the memory community.

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

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

If by an official sport you mean an activity that gets worldwide recognition, I don't see why that wouldn't be possible in the near future if we keep efforts ongoing and work to get more and more positive media attention. There are counterparts like cubing which we have seen rise astronomically over the years from which we can take cue. Solving a cube is widely seen as a sign of 'intelligence' and 'genius' by those not familiar with it, and the truth about practice and persistence strikes when one actually gets down to learning for themselves. The situation is not so different with memorising say, a deck of cards. Hence, making memory sports an 'official sport' and making it appealing for beginners and media definitely go hand in hand.

I believe that digitalization of the sport has and will continue to make access easier to a wider audience. Fast paced formats like the Memory League (and tournaments like the XMT with live commentary and interaction with athletes), formats where people compete head-to-head also go a long way to attract more people. Personally for me, that was how I got immersed into the sport - after reading about the World Memory Championships and the top athletes for the very first time, I was spell-bound to say the least. And when one day I

was surprisingly matched with the then World Champion and other top ranking athletes on the platform, well, let's just say it is akin to playing tennis in a club and suddenly a Rafael Nadal / Roger Federer walks in to play with you!

Hence, my perspective is that the fast paced formats should not be ignored because I strongly believe that it is how many more people can get excited about memory sports, and subsequently, people begin to value the rigour of the longer formats. Memory sports requires an intervention like that of Kerry Packer in the world of cricket, making the game much more interesting to audiences. This past year especially, a giant like Netflix promoting memory sports has been a huge win for the sport, and this is a direction I definitely would like to pursue.

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)?

Increasing public interest & improving efforts towards digitalization

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

I really admire that they bring in new events, and make efforts to keep things interesting for the athletes! This is something which the IAM also believes in, and can take cue from the AMSA.

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 best part about working with the IAM that I've found is the very thorough and detailed level of discussion, brainstorming that is undertaken on all kinds of matters. I find myself most passionate about pursuing opportunities for worldwide recognition of the sport, promotion and ideating on novel competition formats.

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?

Personally, I don't think it would befit a democratic and open-minded organization like the IAM to avoid new formats if it is clear that the public enjoys them and they can benefit the sport if adopted to a greater extent. And the IAM has continued to stay open and change with the times, as can already be seen with ML scores being a part of the IAM Levels Calculator. Also doesn't mean every new discipline should automatically make the cut, since there are various factors which have to be taken into consideration, a lot of which generally come out after due deliberation.

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?

Although I have not competed in one yet due to reasons relating to my own schedule, I have watched the Indian Championship being conducted very ably in the past with a good level of participation. My fellow board member(s) have also had pleasant interactions with the organisers. The primary obstacle appears to be travelling for people outside of Asia. As I stated in an answer above, negotiating better deals, a widespread prize distribution, are some options to augment convenience should there be a bid by the organizers.

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?

There are so many people who have worked tirelessly for this community in the background and I thank you Florian for asking this question. I would like to highlight Katie Kermode for all her efforts towards memory sports. The software used for the WMC and all the people who've used it for training have this wonderfully energetic, self-effacing and positive individual to thank. She has been so helpful in preparations for various tournaments, and the community is fortunate to have someone like her. Thank you, Katie.

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?

The start of our tenure was not ideal since the communication was not structured and we were discussing things all over the place. We tried implementing ideas like having a meeting every Wednesday, but even that didn't quite work out as planned. Eventually, however, we figured it out with some excellent suggestions (I would be remiss if I didn't give a shout-out to my fellow board member Akash, who played a big role in structuring our communication by suggesting to make a shift to channels better suited for our purpose). As communication channels improved, the participation from most members also augmented. This is something that I believe should not be as big a problem for the next board as we have a proper system in place now, in terms of tasks to do, in progress, completed, and follow up reminders.

Thank you all for these thought-provoking questions. Do not hesitate in reaching out to me for any other questions/clarifications.

Best Wishes,
Sanchit