



World English-language Scrabble Players' Association

WESPA BIENNIAL GENERAL MEETING 2013

8.30 p.m. Friday 6th December 2013

Scrabble Champions Tournament, Andel's Hotel, Prague

MINUTES OF MEETING

See Appendix 1 for attendees

1. The Chair, Elie Dangoor, called the meeting to order at 8.30 p.m and introduced the committee.
2. RESOLVED that the Minutes of the 2011 Biennial General Meeting be adopted.
3. Chairman noted that the annual surplus was about US\$2,400 a year and WESPA's current balance was about US\$11,300; expenses were mostly fees for webmaster and ratings officer. Ideas for sustainable use of surplus would be desirable. Chairman reminded meeting that the accounts could be viewed on the WESPA website.
4. RESOLVED that the Audited Accounts and the Treasurer's report for the Financial Years 2011 and 2012 be adopted.
5. Elie Dangoor delivered his report, thanked the committee and heads of the subcommittees, and expressed wishes for the speedy recovery of Henry Yeo KH, who had been admitted seriously ill to a Prague hospital earlier in the week. The WESPA ratings system had been improved during the previous term, and Elie expressed hope that the WESPA and NASPA dictionary committees would continue liaising with a view to eventual word list unification. The WESPA version 2 rules had gained good acceptance and suggestions for changes should be directed to the head of the rules subcommittee, Amy Byrne.
6. Elie explained that Mattel had dropped a bombshell in May 2013 regarding the World Scrabble Championship (WSC) and expressed gratitude to Mind Sports International (MSI) for running the 2013 Scrabble Champions Tournament (SCT) to the established WSC format. He understood that MSI proposed to hold the SCT annually, which would require a sped-up qualification cycle and early visa applications, especially from African countries.
7. The results of the elections for the 2014-2015 WESPA committee were announced. Since there had been 10 nominations for the 11 committee positions, the following were elected unopposed: Elie Dangoor (chair), Cheah SH (secretary), Andrew Fisher (treasurer), Chief Toke Aka, Phil Robertshaw, Tony Leah, Chris Lipe, Karen Richards, Nikhil Soneja, and Evan Cohen. Henry Yeo KH retired from the committee, but remained head of the tournament subcommittee.
8. The committee would deliberate and appoint an eleventh committee member to fill the vacant seat. Tariq Pervez (Pakistan Scrabble Association) and Albert Martono (Indonesian Scrabble



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Federation) had been advanced as possible invitees for the vacant seat. John Chew suggested that Henry Yeo could also be considered for reappointment.

9. RESOLVED that the incumbent auditor, Mpakaboari Jack, be appointed as Honorary Auditor until the conclusion of the next Biennial General Meeting. Chairman thanked the Auditor on behalf of WESPA for his services during the previous term.
10. The ordinary business of the General Meeting being concluded, Chairman invited Peter Ramsay of MSI to give his views on the SCT and take questions on MSI's plans for this and other events. Peter Ramsay advised that it was planned to hold an annual SCT as opposed to the WSC which was held every two years, and MSI hoped to be able to make an announcement at the end of January 2014. In addition, it was planned to continue with the MSI Festival formats four times a year across the world, but with emphasis on Europe and the US. He hoped that these would attract player support.
11. Ray Tate opined that the SCT winner should be recognized as the World Scrabble Champion. Peter Ramsay noted that MSI had preferred to retain the WSC title, but did not control the Scrabble brand, Nevertheless the SCT champion should be recognized as the best player in the world.
12. Tony Sim asked about the qualification process for the SCT. Chris Cree noted that the 4 qualifiers from the Last Chance Qualifier (LCQ) had not harmed the quality of the WSC/SCT invitational field. Had there been more qualifying spots, the LCQ would have attracted more participants.
13. Beverly Robertshaw asked which countries were likely venues for the next SCT. Peter Ramsay advised that Mattel preferred to hold the WSC around the world but the next SCT would likely be in Europe.
14. Howard Warner noted that his team of 5, from New Zealand, had a well-constructed fund-raising process but had still struggled to raise funds to attend the 2013 SCT. It would be difficult for them to attend an annual event in Europe. The New Zealand association also had constitutional difficulties raising funds for an event which was not titled the "World Scrabble Championship".
15. Peter Ramsay, responding to Karen Richards' question, advised that the next SCT would likely be in November.
16. Tony Leah expressed his view that going from a biennial event to an annual event might reduce the attendance. John Chew supplied attendance figures for the 2013 SCT: 46 players in the SCT Open, 110 in the Elite and about 100 players in the other languages. Tony noted the high attendance figures at the Godswill Akpabio championship in Nigeria, which suggested that an event in Africa would also have high attendance. He also pointed out that Africa had a large Francophone population. Hervé Bohbot said that the French-language championship had been held in Dhaka in 2008. The Fédération Internationale de Scrabble Francophone was in fact



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considering moving to a biennial World Championship from an annual one because there was no funding from, for example, MSI.

17. Theresa Brousson said that an annual event should be tried, rather than saying that it was not possible. In squash, an annual event had been a greater success than the previous biennial.
18. Elie Dangoor reminded the meeting that Mattel had expressed unwillingness to fund future WSCs. It would be fair to expect players to pay something to cover costs, in return for which they should expect service such as invitation letters. Peter Ramsay noted that budgets for additional services were tight.
19. Beverley Robertshaw asked if there were plans to change the WSC qualification system. Peter Ramsay replied that MSI wished to see more participants.
20. Toh Weibin asked about the rationale for the MSI Academy and if there were plans to extend it beyond the UK. Peter Ramsay replied that MSI Academy was an initiative to get more people involved; casual players might become competitive players one day. It was planned to launch the MSI Academy on the US West Coast and then the East Coast, then to work inland. MSI was engaging with schools and had had good response from the chess community in particular.
21. Elie Dangoor asked if there should be a requirement of minimum ability to play in the WSC, for example, by ratings. There was a problem with inexperienced players from new countries 'giving away spread'. Hervé Bohbot opined that the WSC should be open to every country. In France, spread limits were used. John Chew suggested that spread caps could be used, narrowing as the tournament progressed and mismatches became less frequent. Ben Berger pointed out that the initial participation of Germany in a WSC had led to development of [English-language] Scrabble in Germany, which had since held two international tournaments. Excluding countries that had not reached minimum standards would defeat this. Evan Cohen expressed the view that the WSC should be inclusive of as many countries as possible, after which ability standards could be imposed. It was desired to increase the numbers of good players.
22. Karen Richards deplored Austria not receiving an SCT invitation. More countries participating would have been good publicity; WESPA had not been involved in the country invitations. John Chew advised that the countries represented in the 2011 WSC had been contacted to send representatives to the 2013 SCT. Karen noted that no new countries took part in 2013; John responded that there had been inquiries, and that a Russian player had been expected, who however had had to cancel due to a family matter.
23. Vannnitha Balasingam asked if the LCQ should be a future qualification route. Theresa Brousson pointed out that wanting many countries to take part, and having a high quality field were different things.
24. At the Chairman's request, the meeting indicated by show of hands that it strongly favoured allowing every country at least one representative.



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25. Howard Warner observed that standards of play in countries tended to increase after initial participation in the WSC. Chris Lipe observed also that the opportunities for players to network at WSCs was important.
26. Bob Linn suggested that the LCQ should have more games. Amy Byrne proposed that future SCT qualifying events could be multiday, held in a variety of locations and dates. Peter Ramsay allowed that this was a valid suggestion and cautioned that cost would be a factor. Amy Byrne responded that national associations, for example, could run these; she further noted that all the meeting's attendees had all personally given time and effort to organizing events at no cost. Evan Cohen pointed out that there were internationally recognized events which could be designated as qualifiers. Beverley Robertshaw added that this would make it easier for players to get to qualifiers. Chris Lipe contrasted the goals of qualification and getting more players. Theresa Brousson raised the analogy of squash, which had divisions, and a promotion and relegation system.
27. John Chew, replying to a question by Elie Dangoor, responded that in his opinion there was no practical limit to the number of participants in an event. Peter Ramsay advised that MSI could work to secure larger facilities if the numbers could be forecast with some certainty.
28. Elie Dangoor expressed his opinion that a 100 euro participation fee would be acceptable. Bob Linn noted that those present at the BGM were generally qualifiers and would naturally be against the idea of a further fee.
29. Chris Lipe pointed out that the easiest way to increase participant numbers was to increase the country allocations. Theresa Brousson reminded the meeting that Michael Tang's Causeway events regularly attracted 300 to 400 players. Howard Warner said that a two division event might attract more players.
30. Phil Robertshaw requested that there should be some provision for good 'stateless' players such as Ed Martin who were excluded for one reason or another from any country's qualification process. Evan Cohen was against interfering in national associations' qualifying schemes.
31. Philip Nelkon opined that if MSI was not setting qualification rules, then WESPA would have to. Peter Ramsay was agreeable to WESPA setting the qualification rules for the future SCTs. Barry Harridge requested that WESPA formulate proposals and consult with MSI. Peter Ramsay advised the meeting that MSI would be agreeable to a doubling of player numbers. Chris Cree suggested a 50% increase as being more practical as even the United States might have difficulty filling a doubled WSC quota every year.
32. Beverley Robertshaw asked about funding. Peter Ramsay said that MSI was contracted to run an SCT next year. Events would have to be self-funding or sponsored. He said that it took considerable time to cultivate sponsors, and the intention of the electronic board and webcasting was to attract sponsor attention.



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33. Chris Cree argued for the desirability of increasing the number of youth players in the tournament system.
34. Chris Lipe remarked that future MSI Festivals needed to be announced earlier. Peter Ramsay advised meeting that the Las Vegas and Prague festivals were expected to continue, and possibly Marbella.
35. Philip Nelkon expressed the view that the MSI events where participation had been low was due to a communication gap with players not having details on which to plan. WESPA should take it upon itself to fill the gap created by Philip's absence. John Chew recommended that WESPA appoint an MSI liaison.
36. Karen Richards remarked that the MSI forum was hard to use and locate information on. John Chew recommended that such information be included on WESPA's website.
37. There being no further business, the Chairman declared the BGM concluded at 10 p.m.

Minutes: Cheah SH, Secretary

Approved: Elie Dangoor, Chairman



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Appendix 1: 2013 BGM Attendance List

Thanks to Phil R for taking attendance. Please advise shcheah@gmail.com if there are any errors or omissions.

Committee: Elie Dangoor, Andrew Fisher, Karen Richards, Tony Leah, Cheah SH, Evan Cohen, Chris Lipe, Phil Robertshaw. Absent with Apologies: Henry Yeo KH, Chief Toke Aka.

Present

Prithwiraj Mukerjee (India)	Robert Springer (France)
Pam Morris (Austria)	John O'Laughlin (USA)
John Chew (NASPA)	Dave Wiegand (USA)
Ray Tate (Scotland)	Brian Bowman (USA)
Hubert Wee (Singapore)	Dave Koenig (USA)
Toh Weibin (Singapore)	Poh Ying Ming (Singapore)
Philip Nelkon (England)	Ben Berger (Germany)
John Barker (Australia)	Steve Polatnick (USA)
Amy Byrne (Scotland)	Bob Linn (USA)
Herve Bohbot (France)	Birgitte Brath (Germany)
Nigel Richards (New Zealand)	Peggy Fehily (Germany)
Odette Rio (Philippines)	Mary Doyle (Ireland)
Tony Sim (Singapore)	
Liew Kian Boon (Singapore)	
Tan Jin Chor (Malaysia)	
Barry Harridge (Australia)	
Peter Ramsay (Mind Sports International)	
Beverley Robertshaw (England)	
Chris Cree (NASPA)	
Vannitha Balasingam (Malaysia)	
Alastair Richards (Australia)	
Omri Rosenkrantz (Israel)	
Naomi Landau (Israel)	
Howard Warner (New Zealand)	
Theresa Brousson (Malta)	
Evans Clinchy (USA)	
Wong Zhi Yuan (Singapore)	
Sanmi Odelana (England)	