



PRESS RELEASE

Thursday 11 March 2021

## **BWF WELCOMES FIRST BATCH OF SEMI-PROFESSIONAL UMPIRES IN BADMINTON**

The era of semi-professional umpires has dawned in badminton, with members of the first batch appointed by BWF officiating at the Asian Leg in January and at the recently-concluded YONEX Swiss Open 2021.

The appointment of Bert Vahorenbeeck (Belgium), Diraj Gooneadry (Mauritius), Fabio Betto (Italy), Iris Metspalu (Estonia), Jiten Bhatt (Australia), Robbertus Tommy Oscariano (Indonesia) and Trish Gubb (New Zealand) is a milestone in BWF's quest to achieve excellence in officiating.

The umpires were selected by a BWF recruitment panel that interviewed them after examining their grading and appraisal in previous tournaments. Their appointment is a significant moment in over 120 years of competitive badminton as umpiring has all along been on a voluntary basis.

BWF President Poul-Erik Høyer said: "This is an important step towards ensuring that umpiring becomes a viable career. Umpiring has always been voluntary work, and, while we greatly value those who continue to volunteer with us, we did feel that in certain key areas, it was time to have a stronger engagement with them as this involves a lot of hard work and commitment and time away from their regular jobs.

"For badminton to have paid technical officials is huge for the sport. It's something people have been demanding. This is a great way to achieve consistently high umpiring standards."

The umpires will participate in workshops and other educational and developmental activities that will help them improve their skills and support the development of technical officials around the world.

The professionalisation of umpires follows a similar step for referees which was started two years ago; both part of a joint plan towards ensuring excellence in officiating.

BWF has eight semi-professional referees: Carsten Koch (Germany), Chris Lawrence (USA), Eric Lissillour (France), Girish Natu (India), Ivanka Pokorni (Croatia), Lynne Nixey (New Zealand), Nicos Vladimirov (Cyprus) and Pencho Stoyanov (Bulgaria).

Of the seven semi-professional umpires, three – Vahorenbeeck, Betto and Oscariano – officiated at the three-tournament Asian Leg in Bangkok; two – Betto and Metspalu – were on duty at the YONEX Swiss Open 2021, and one – Vahorenbeeck – will be officiating at next week's YONEX All England Open 2021.

Candidates were interviewed by a recruitment panel which consisted of the Chair of the Technical Officials Commission, Chair of BWF Umpire Assessment Panel, and BWF representatives. The process to select the seven umpires from a pool of 19 candidates took over a year.

ENDS

**Contact:**

[pressoffice@bwfbadminton.org](mailto:pressoffice@bwfbadminton.org)

Lloyd Green  
Communications & Media Manager  
Mobile: +60 19-384 0556

Dianne Pierre  
Deputy Communications & Media Manager  
Mobile: +44 7961 714540

\*\*\*\*\*

**ABOUT BWF**

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) is the international governing body of the sport of badminton, recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). It was originally the International Badminton Federation (IBF) which was founded on 5 July 1934, before being rechristened the Badminton World Federation in 2006.

The purpose and objectives of BWF include regulating, promoting, developing and popularising the sport of badminton throughout the world and organising, conducting and presenting international events at the highest level.

The BWF's vision is to make badminton a leading global sport accessible to all – giving every child a chance to play for life. Its mission is to lead and inspire all stakeholders; to deliver entertainment through exciting events to drive fan experience; and to create innovative, impactful and sustainable development initiatives.

BWF has its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with 196 Member Associations worldwide.

Poul-Erik Høyer is the BWF President and Thomas Lund is the BWF Secretary General.

**Websites:** [www.bwfbadminton.com](http://www.bwfbadminton.com) and [www.bwfcorporate.com](http://www.bwfcorporate.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/bwfbadminton>