
**WORLD
SQUASH**

AFRICA

SQUASH FEDERATION AFRICA 2020

Around the world COVID 19 has affected most countries and every sport federation with many major international events eg Olympics, ParaOlympics, Boston Marathon, New York Marathon, Comrades Marathon to name but a few. Universities, schools have had no sport. Spectators are not allowed creating quite eery scenes at empty golf courses, tennis stadiums. Economically, few have escaped and 2021 will be interesting to see how the world economy emerges.

Squash came to a standstill. Nigeria and South Africa saw the lockdown of all sports facilities. National sports events were postponed or cancelled. Egypt also experienced a serious lockdown. Botswana and Namibia were perhaps the least affected by the pandemic numbers, as their borders were closed.

Health protocols were drawn up by the various Government Health Departments: sanitisation of hands, equipment, court, wearing of masks was a challenge. Asymptomatic players were also a challenge: squash was declared a non- contact sport in South Africa despite it being in an enclosed space. Health measures had to be drawn up for clubs regarding sanitization, social distancing. Clubs would suffer from a lack of income, being closed .

Perhaps one advantage of the pandemic was the number of Zoom meetings held around the world. Lucky Mlilo, a Board member from Zimbabwe, organized the first one for Squash Federation Africa and Boyo Oyerinde from Nigeria, the second. It was a delight to have Mr Jacques Fontaine and Mr William Louis Marie present - thank you for your time and commitment and your offers of assistance.

Simon Minto – thank you too - added that Edgbaston Cub (England) club had been proactive and had gone into survival mode to keep squash players engaged. A number of Whatsapp groups had been formed: quizzes: videos had been initiated and there had been tennis vs squash matches amongst the members.

Pre Covid 19, Squash Federation Africa has always struggled. The practicalities are difficult to explain to someone who has never been to the various countries or to describe to people from First World countries what the situation is like in Third World Countries: the wars : the struggles for political power: poverty, famine, unemployment apart from the lack of communication not only because of language but also inaccessibility to technology in rural areas and many areas lying far from towns or cities.

Geographically everyone appreciates that Africa is a huge continent with each country differing radically from the next as regards culture, education, technology, various structures including government, accessibility to facilities, transport.

It was really pleasing to see the number of countries participating in the meetings as one of our biggest weaknesses is the lack of paid up affiliated members as well as the few countries attending Annual General Meetings.

Egyptian Squash dominates Africa and the world. 2000 courts: 70 clubs with 20 playing league throughout the year. 200 senior players : 300 Masters and 2000 juniors : 400 coaches 300 of whom are male and 50 referees. And yet the number of players in the top 20 men and women: the number of world team titles .One wonders what that magic ingredient is.

Botswana has had some highs and lows. At one time sponsored by the diamond mines, there was a good sound development programme, which they are trying to rebuild. Botswana was the last country to host the All Africa Junior team and individual championships in 2015. In the zoom meeting, Mr T K Rabasha added that they had hosted a PSA tournament hosted by Lefika Ragontsa, who was now based in the USA. Mr Ragontsa had wanted to give back to Botswana where he had played his junior squash and sponsored 4 Botswanean juniors to the USA for 3 months. The plan was that the tournament would be held annually and 4 juniors would travel to the USA, but with COVID 19 Mr Rabasha was not sure what would happen in 2020. They have very few senior players. Their courts and sports centre are in Gaborone.

During 2019 3 players, 3 administrators plus one translator on a commission, headed by Mr Simon Yoka of the Democratic Republic of the Congo visited Johannesburg where the players had coaching at the Parkview Squash Centre from Craig van der Wath. There are about 1050 players of which 50 are juniors. Kinshasha boasts 14 clubs. The Association was presented with 54 hectare of ground a number of years ago to build a centre, but money has not materialized. They battle to get equipment.Sadly the Congo is divided by war.

Esawatini Squash, formerly Swaziland Squash, which is another landlocked country surrounded by South Africa on 3 sides and Mozambique on the other, is faced with a few challenges. Again a very poor country with few courts and clubs, they have little equipment. A large percentage of the population work in South Africa.

20 years ago, Kenya was one of the stronger squash countries in Africa, with major tournaments, including international players, being hosted. They have faced some difficult administrative issues, but Mr Chukwade Gakue said that they were trying to develop tournaments again and improve the standard of play.

Lesotho, a landlocked country within South Africa has 50 players. Their learners mainly study in South Africa. They participated in the 2018 Commonwealth Games where their one player had received only 6 weeks of coaching in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Mauritius is starting with the right training for juniors as they wish to raise the level of play in the country. They also wish to borrow “the best practice from other countries” and adapt it. Mr Adrian Wehrli would like to see everyone collectively come together for development and support on the way going forward. What is needed is the right person at the right time to drive the organization. They had been fortunate in finding a big sponsor who is putting them on the PSA map.

Mauritius has 4 clubs and 20 courts. There are 125 male/female players and 15 juniors. There are 2 male coaches and no registered referees.

Mr Khusar Yussuf, from Mozambique, said that they faced many challenges. In the Portuguese country the influence of squash is minimal. One of the biggest challenges is that there are only 2 courts, 1 club, 55 players of which 3 are women and 3 junior males and 2 junior women. He is trying to establish alternative ways to develop squash and to formalize an Association.

Namibia, a beautiful country, mainly desert, borders on to Angola, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa and the sea. Its population of 2 million people with more than half living below the poverty line is spread over a vast area. There are 3 main towns where squash is played: Windhoek, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay which lies 450kms away from Windhoek, the venue for the 2014 WSF Junior Championships. Since 2014 the Namibian Squash Association has grown the number of players from 400 to 700. There are 4 clubs, 3 female coaches and 6 referees.

Three years ago Nigeria held \$35000 prize money events and spent even more money on promoting the events. They realized that nothing else was happening in the country so although it was enjoyable and fun to organise with players from Egypt, the UK and South Africa, they realized they had to develop their own players. These players had lost in the first round and so the Association debated what they could do to develop squash. In 2017 Mr Boye Oyerinde became Chair of Nigerian Squash. They are now hosting PSA Closed Satellite events and using the remaining funding to develop their players. Nigeria pays for the players' PSA fees, who are earning PSA points on their home ground saving the cost of travel and accommodation and there are now 11 players on the PSA ranking.

Nigeria has 10 clubs and about 50 clubs. There are about 750 senior players: 500 Masters and 1000 juniors. 4 clubs play league. There are 6 coaches of which 2 are female and 39 referees. There are seniors and junior tournaments and most of their tournaments are the PSA Closed for which they have sponsors.

Another country Tanzania, which 20 years ago was a strong member of Squash Federation Africa, is now based in the small community of Zanzibar where there are only

about 20 players. They struggle to get equipment and the correct training. They are also trying to get some sponsors.

As Mr Asif Chaudry, the Mauritian champion in 1985 and 1986, said in that period there were a series of tournaments hosted by Kenya, Zambia, the then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and South Africa attended by players from the UK, Canada and Egypt.

The Southern and Central African Championships were held regularly in the 80's and 90's for both seniors and juniors, but in 1995 it was changed to the All African Championships so as to include Egypt. The All Africa Senior Championships were last held in 2013 and the Juniors in 2015. Funding is the biggest obstacle while the number of women players is diminishing - apart from Egypt and South Africa.

South Africa in the south has 240 clubs and about 1400 courts. Only clubs which play league are affiliated to us, and in the past decade because of the distance between clubs in the rural areas, league has stopped for safety reasons and we have lost clubs.

There are about 9000 registered league players 2000 of whom are masters and about 1500 juniors. We have a strong Universities structure. There are about 300 coaches, most of whom are part time, with only about 10 being full time. All players playing league and interprovincial tournaments have to have written the Level 2 refereeing examination but the number of higher qualified referees has diminished to about 15.

2019 saw 15 PSA Closed satellite tournaments around the country and the S A Open being staged at the V and A Waterfront in Cape Town thanks to the Growthpoint sponsorship.

Covid 19 saw us unable to play until the middle of July 2020 when the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture gave us the authorisation to start. This has affected our clubs financially as they have not received league fees which pay for their administration and ultimately thus Squash South Africa as their affiliation fees to us pays for our administration.

Growthpoint showed their support for which we are very grateful and we have just staged our National Championships in a shopping centre in Pretoria and our interprovincial championships although with less teams start on 19th October. We are able to include 3 of the planned PSA events.

The Rwanda representative reported that they had 1 club.

Mike Raymond from Uganda commented that they are getting lots of players through the Universities but were in need of support and sponsorship.

Zimbabwe is active in 2 main areas: Bulawayo and Harare. There are 17 clubs with about 60 courts: 200 seniors and 150 juniors, 18 coaches with 2 being female: 4 referees.

Equipment is a challenge with many of the African countries. Liz Mackenzie from South Africa travelled to Malawi to present a WSF Level 1 course. 8 coaches attended: they did

not have rackets nor balls. Squash South Africa and Pretoria University where MrsMackenzie is head coach, provided rackets and balls but this is not sustainable.

Mr Fontaine commented that there seemed to be a lack of infrastructure. The countries needed to concentrate on participation in the Commonwealth Games. Regular communication was needed.

Mr William Louis Marie mentioned that there were 200 professional players in Africa. He suggested that one needed to be more digital savvy and that digital courses could be implemented.

He felt that the WSF needed to focus on Africa as there was huge potential. There needed to be more international events in Africa attracting players and experienced officials. WSF needed to drive the move and Africa needed to play a bigger role in the WSF .

This has been a lengthy report – most of the content was gleaned from the Zoom Meetings as communication and reports are an interesting challenge.

On behalf of the Squash Federation Africa Board, may I thank World Squash Federation and particularly the staff, Lorraine and Jasmine, who have left and Carol most sincerely for all the support and communication we receive from them .

Liz Addison
Secretary General