

# 1<sup>st</sup> World Mind Sports Games

The International Mind Sports Association was founded in 2005 by the international federations of Chess, Bridge, Go and Draughts. In the spring of 2007 it was agreed to hold the 1<sup>st</sup> World Mind Sports Games in China immediately following the Olympics and Paralympics. Chess indicated that this would be very near its traditional Olympiad and, to ensure participation by a large number of its federations, would need support for travel, which was agreed by the IMSA President. Free hosting was to be given by the Chinese Organizers. These conditions were relayed to the FIDE federations so that they did not need to make budgetary considerations for two major events in a short space of time.

Initial announcements of dates were made, followed by full details of the competitions and regulations. Meanwhile FIDE awaited details of the free tickets and the process of issue. In June 2008 we were informed by the President of IMSA that there were 745 tickets available from Air China (later it was discovered that 1200 tickets had been received from Air China) and at a meeting of IMSA in Athens, Chess was allocated 280 of these 745 free tickets. Bridge was allocated a similar number, Go around 108 and Draughts around 75.

The funds for the remaining tickets for our member federations were to come from sponsorship arranged by the President of IMSA, through a Vice President of IMSA, who was also President of the Russian Bridge Federation. In spite of many meetings, the latest in August 2008 involving the FIDE Deputy President and Berik Balgabaev, the money did not materialise even though we were receiving assurances until the last moment that the funds would be transferred shortly. We had no choice but to give this disappointing news to our federations. Although the money was still promised, we could give no guarantee that if federations bought tickets they would be reimbursed.

The regulations for the competitions at the Games were approved by the Presidential Board in Athens. Entry forms were posted on the web site with a final date for return to the Secretariat of July 14<sup>th</sup>. The entry was encouraging with 76 of our federations deciding to participate. However, the ticket fiasco meant that only 51 federations finally had representation in Beijing.

The Secretariat was put under considerable strain by the plethora of forms that the Chinese organizers requested to be completed covering free tickets, IDs, visa requests, accommodation, entries and arrival and departure details. The workload was further increased by many federations ignoring deadlines and failing to complete forms correctly or wanting to amend details or change players.

The free tickets were also proving troublesome, with Air China providing different departure points and dates of arrival and departure to those requested. Changes were very difficult and could only be made on payment of penalty fees. With a week to go we were still awaiting tickets for three federations. As a result of these actions, some of the free tickets were unused. In addition, just a few days before the Games opened we were informed that tax would have to be paid by the federations on the free tickets. This amounted to some 200 to 300 euros per ticket, which was an unexpected expense for our federations. Currently this matter is on hold whilst ways of mitigating the tax are sought.

The lack of sponsorship meant that our income was lower through fewer participants and our expenses higher as we had to cover all of the costs, some of which we had expected to be met by the sponsorship package. There will be a significant deficit on the event.

The players that did arrive in Beijing seemed to enjoy the event, expressing satisfaction with the accommodation and food. The Chinese won the trophy for the best results in the Chess events with 4 gold medals. Russia (2), Bulgaria, Ukraine, Ecuador and Hungary were the other gold medallists. The format of the blitz and rapid events gave the opportunity for federations such as Vietnam, Singapore, Greece, India and Iran to finish in the medals. Several FIDE officials were included in the medal ceremonies.

Only 4 of the 10 arbiters appointed on the recommendation of Continental Presidents eventually arrived and one of the Deputy Chief arbiters left after one round. However, as the number of participants had been much reduced, we were able to cope thanks to the help from the Chinese Chess Association and some replacement arbiters from Asia.

There were 5 Press conferences involving FIDE, some of which were televised. There was some criticism in the closing Press conference by the Chinese Assistant Minister for Sport of the marketing effort and the larger than expected number of participants but she rightly praised the Organizing Committee and the Beijing Municipality. The Games received extensive coverage in China, both on television and in the Press. Short programmes were made available to all National television stations through satellite. There were visits to the Games by many distinguished Chinese officials.

Although the number of participants in the chess events was disappointing with around 350 players plus some 100 officials, staff and captains, they were none the less very successful Games. The Organization was very good, once the initial problems had been dealt with, and the cooperation from the Chinese Chess Association was on a very high level. However, if we are to repeat the exercise then we need to address the following:

1. The timetable for the Games must be structured so that Chess does not have two major events so close together.
2. The format of competition needs to be reviewed. Whilst blitz chess is very fast and exciting, the impact of this was lost as there were no spectators other than from the other sports.
3. It is essential that we have maximum representation. In Beijing, there were 1452 players from Bridge, 338 from Chess, 560 from Go, 288 from Draughts (Checkers) and 125 from Xiangqi (Chinese Chess). As a result it seemed more like the Bridge Games at times. If Chess is to be one of the driving forces of IMSA then we must ensure that we have appropriate numbers of participants in the Games.
4. IMSA needs to consider whether these Games are for sporting excellence or should be a kind of Sports festival. There was a wide gap between the top players in some of the Sports and the other participants. It was said that some of the players had only learnt how to play their sport within a few weeks of the Games.
5. All the pre-Games work was channelled through the World Bridge Federation. Whilst this was a financial saving, a centralised office with direct links to the organizer, offering an equal service to all international federations is a necessity.
6. FIDE needs to take a more proactive role in IMSA. Bridge people carried out the work as coordinators and bulletin staff. The problem with this approach is that the individuals did not understand fully the operations of the other sports federations. An office at the venue where all the central staff and IMSA members can meet regularly during the Games is essential. Problems can be dealt with in an organised manner rather than on a one to one basis.