

An Official's View Umpires and the New System By Dr. Azmy

As the game has changed for the players, the umpire's selection system has changed for umpires. I hope this article will ease some of the concerns of many umpires.

Since the start of the ITTF's Umpire & Referee's Committee (URC), there has been an effort to raise the standards of umpires. Many ways have been tried, even before the formation of the Committee. At one time the ITTF asked each association to submit the names of 10 umpires. The purpose was for the ITTF to select, from those submitted, the umpires for the World Championship, Olympics, and Pro Tour Final.

The URC started a different approach to raise the quality by holding educational seminars around the world. Each seminar will take a whole day followed by an exam. Those who pass the exam will be evaluated in several tournaments. The evaluations will be conducted in two steps. One will take place at the beginning of the tournaments, followed by a discussion session between the evaluator and the umpire. The evaluator who does the second evaluation will hopefully be from a different association than that of the umpire's. Those who will receive high level of several evaluations will be designated as blue badge umpires and the URC will select from them the umpires to serve at the World level.

Some umpires felt uncomfortable by the fact that the URC rather than their associations will handle the selection. Many umpires felt that they have no chance to participate in any major World tournaments under that system. Logically, associations have more knowledge of their umpires, and their performances during the years, than the URC. They also felt that there is no incentive to continue offering their services to their associations, since the road to such achievement will cost them a fortune, which they cannot afford.

Finally, here is the good news.

1. The URC has abandoned the ITTF 10 umpires list.
2. The URC system is based on the Associations and the ITTF procedures. That means each umpire has to continue his progress through CU, RU, NU, and IR.
3. The URC seminars are conducted to help the umpires achieve higher levels.
4. The associations will have a list of their umpires who have achieved these levels.
5. When needed the URC will ask for a certain number of umpires from each association.
6. Each association will select the number of umpires assigned from the list of their high level umpires.

Another difficulty stems from the availability of URC seminars and their locations. The URC is trying to locate these seminars in different continents. Luckily, North America is fortunate to have several of them. The first seminar held in the world was in Fort Lauderdale at the 2002 U.S. Open.

There will be another seminar before the coming Nationals in December, 2003. I hope that many of our qualified umpires will take this opportunity to come to the seminar and attend the Nationals in December. This will be a golden chance to hit two birds with one stone.

Below are some additional changes in the Rules which did not appear in the previous issue. Please note that these are not the final official wording of the rules, which will come out soon.

4.6.4 As soon as the ball has been projected, the server's free arm must be removed from the area

between the server's body and the net.

3.2.2.1 Playing clothing shall normally consist of a short-sleeved or sleeveless shirt and shorts or skirt, socks and playing Shoes; other garments, such as part or all of a track suit, shall not be worn during play except with the permission of the referee.