

“SEKISUI is looking forward to further support Squash as an Olympic discipline candidate and to promote it as a very healthy sport for the community.”

The Interview of Mr. Igor Allinckx, CEO, SEKISUI ALVEO AG

by Japan Squash Association PR

First of all, we would like to thank you for taking time for our interview.

We would like to congratulate you on successfully holding your tournament for the 3rd year in a row.

As a national association and a big PSA/WSA fan, it is a privilege to see a tournament with a Japanese name on the tour calendar.

① Could you tell me how and why this event got started?



First the why: SEKISUI has more than 30 companies acting quite independently from each other in Europe. 5 years ago, nine of us got together along with SEKISUI CHEMICAL CO., LTD and looked at ways to unify our activities and what we do have in common despite our different business structures and markets. We recognized that we all value CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and a common Brand "SEKISUI".

From the CSR side we have been actively promoting environmental activities like children eco-summit, biodiversity checks and developing products having a positive contribution to the environment.

From the brand side we discussed possibilities to reinforce the brand internally (That employees recognize the SEKISUI company as a good company and are proud of it) and externally (that customers of the various companies in Europe realize that we are all belonging to a bigger, stronger "umbrella brand": SEKISUI).

Due to my contacts to the Swiss Squash Federation (See details below under point 7) I realized that it was possible to create an international event holding our company name as Tournament Title for a "limited" amount of sponsoring. Limited because if you want to have an international tournament in

Tennis, Soccer, or Golf etc. it will cost you hundreds of thousands or million US\$ every year.

With the SEKISUI Open we have a budget of US\$12.000 (10.000 for the prize money and 2.000 for the organization) and twice as much in 2016 and 2020 as we will have double this budget. The total amount is then US\$ 122.000 from 2013 to 2020. So I proposed to the other European companies who are willing to join and our Headquarters in Japan to set up the SEKISUI Open and we agreed that this is a way to promote our brand in associating it with:

- A very healthy sport (As many people know Forbes Magazine described it once as the "Healthiest Sport in the world"), so it contributes to people well being.

- A very international approach (SEKISUI is an international company) as already with a 10.000 US\$ prize money event you get players from 10 to 15 different countries.

- A possible success if Squash would be included in the Olympics (we hope still in 2020) as SEKISUI Brand would benefit from having been an "early supporter" of this discipline

Last but not least we agreed that the ratio of the cost versus the possible use for positive branding was acceptable



SEKISUI



<https://www.facebook.com/SekisuiOpen>

On the how, I am living in a city in Switzerland where the biggest Swiss squash club (in terms of junior players) is located and was in direct contact with the possible tournament organizers what make it very easy for us. I know these people, I know the club and it is 10 minutes from home so I can easily control the set up, the branding etc. So we had a meeting with the Swiss Squash Federation (Where I know a few people as well because squash is a very small world) that agreed to always give us a priority date (no other squash tournament is organized in Switzerland during the SEKISUI Open) and the tournament organizers that agreed to organize everything with only a limited activity from our side. (We provide them with SEKISUI Stickers to brand the court and around and we (I) maintain a Facebook page).

② Who are the actual staff running the event?

Tournament organizer is the Squash Festival Association who is led by Mr. Pascal Bruhin that is at the same time the Trainer of the local club and the official Swiss Junior Below 19 and 17 years old National Trainer. There is no staff involvement from our side apart from me on my personal time.

③ What is the best thing about holding the event?

It supports a nice sport and gives us the possibility to communicate on a positive activity

④ Is there any downside to holding it?

No

⑤ As the event starts on a weekday, how much squash do you get to watch during the event ?

Depending on my traveling and meeting schedule. This year for example I couldn't see any of the qualifying games, I saw 6 matches in the main draw including semi final and final.

⑥ Have there been many memorable matches that people keep talking about for a while?

Well, having a PSA 10 (US\$ 10.000) means that you have usually best players ranked around number 50-60 and above in the world ranking. This year we had 7 players from the top 100. To have really top quality squash with top 15 or 10 players you would need a PSA 50 (US\$ 50.000). So we do have very nice matches, but not by the very top players. Last year final for example was a terrific game between two Egyptian players (M. Abouelghar v/s Ali Anwar Reda). From SEKISUI we had Kubo-san (Director SEKISUI Chemical) assisting to this match. It was very impressive.



⑦ Please tell me about your squash life. Do you play squash regularly?

I don't play squash at all. However, I have a son aged 16 who plays since 5 years and a daughter aged 13 who used to play tennis and now since 2 years plays squash. That's through my son that I got to know the trainer of the local club, then the Swiss squash community and the federation and then realized the opportunity to set up the SEKISUI Open. My squash life is basically to drive my kids to tournaments over the weekend and support them.

⑧ What aspects do you like about squash?

I love the fitness needed to play, the speed of move and the tactical "chess play" needed. I enjoy the fairness of (mostly) all the players on court and outside. I enjoy the international scope (played in more than 180 countries) and the fact that many nations are represented in international tournaments.

⑨ What is your favorite style of play? Do you have any favorite player?

Offensive play, in front, volley, nicks and stops. Ramy Ashour (Egyptian) is my favorite player to watch. (And my son plays this kind of squash as well)

⑩ Do many Sekisui workers play squash regularly?

Not so many in Switzerland, more in the UK, Germany and Netherland. (Based on my company SEKISUI ALVEO only)

⑪ We have been aiming to be selected for the short list of sports for the Tokyo Olympics by Tokyo 2020 OC on the 22nd June, and of course finally to be included as an Olympic sport. What do you think of our chances of being included in 2020?

If baseball were not in the candidate list, I think the squash chances would be very high. But Japan is a country where baseball is very popular so I am afraid that the committee will go for baseball. The chance for squash would be if they go for 2 additional sport.



⑫ What kind of impact do you think you would receive if that happened?

As I mentioned under point 1: A possible success if squash would be included in the Olympics (we hope still in 2020) as SEKISUI brand would benefit from having been an "early supporter" of this discipline

⑬ How much do you think squash deserves to be in the Olympic Games?

Absolutely a MUST. This is a sport that has all Olympic values, that is not corrupted by money nor by doping. This is the healthiest sport.

⑭ Squash missed the chance in Buenos Aires in September 2013, but we believe that we have the biggest chance now in Japan. Could you give us a supporting message?

Squash deserves to be in the Olympics as it represents all of its values! Furthermore it gives countries that have so far not so many medals chances (Like Egypt, Malaysia, Columbia, Indonesia, Pakistan, India etc) new opportunities (Because it is (so far) not dominated by USA, China or Russia for example).

Thank you so much for your time and kind cooperation. We thank you and your companies for supporting squash and we hope you all enjoy this excellent sport and the athletes for a long long time .

June, 2015 Kamiya



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See also <http://www.squashsite.co.uk/sekisui/index.htm>