BSF EXECUTIVE MEETING REPORT:  
21 MAY 2020

The BSF Executive held its latest meeting by video conference on the evening of Thursday 21 May 2020. Below is a journalistic account of the main discussions and decisions.

Attendance

Present: Jenny Fromer (President), Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Liz Graham (Competitions Officer), Alexis Markham-Hill (National Teams Officer), Mike Lott (Coaching Officer), Chris Moon (Technical Officer), Mike Jennings and Stella Ackrell (General Officers), Bob Fromer (Administrator).

Apologies: Steve Getraer (General Officer).

Covid-19 planning

The Executive discussed possibilities for softball play in 2020 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and government restrictions, taking into account submissions on this topic from seven BSF leagues plus softball Ireland.

While it’s clear that some leagues are keen to have a view from the BSF on when and how play might be able to happen, there is no real basis at this point on which to give definitive advice. Like many leagues, the BSF is hoping that there can be some softball activity later this season, but it will need to be legal and safe -- or as safe as possible. No organised team play would be possible under current government restrictions, and when the lockdown might be loosened to the extent that such activity could take place is at this point a matter of guesswork.

Although one or two leagues – and indeed the BSF – are holding out hope that some tournaments might survive, the consensus from leagues that made submissions to the BSF is that informal local games might be the most that can be achieved this year, since it is hard to predict at this point how many players on established teams would be willing to play.

The good news is that most leagues are reporting that the lack of a season (so far) is not putting a strain on their finances, as little or no expenditure has been necessary.

Meanwhile, BaseballSoftballUK has advised the BSF that fields at Farnham Park are being maintained and that the facility could open soon, with July 1 as a possible target date, but for softball activity rather than games.

If and when it looks like organised play might be possible, the BSF will work with BSUK and others to issue guidance on how to conduct training or games safely. The BSF will also explore whether there will be any issues with our current Civil and Public Liability insurance covering play this year, and whether a
rebate might be possible on Accident and Injury insurance that has been paid in advance based on last season’s numbers but with take-up this year expected to be miniscule.

Issues of how registration will be handled, and what kind of affiliation fee the BSF might ask from teams were there to be a partial season, will be considered by the Executive if and when a return to some form of play looks likely.

**Financial matters**

BSF President Jenny Fromer reported to the Executive earlier this month that the BSF had applied for and received a £20,000 grant from Sport England to help support the Federation’s finances. This should mean that the BSF can meet all its financial obligations this year without the need to defer payments and can go into 2021 with at least some reserves. But BSF policy for the remainder of the year will be to spend only when necessary.

Treasurer Laura Burkhardt told the meeting that there had been little change in the Federation’s cash position since April, though ESF refunds of European tournament entry fees and the repayment of a loan made by the BSF to one of its leagues has made the position stronger.

In light of the Sport England grant, the Executive has decided that the BSF will cover any losses suffered by national teams that made early bookings for cancelled tournaments where the money cannot be recovered. National Teams Officer Alexis Markham-Hill told the Executive that national team staff had made every effort to recover money and in many cases had been successful, so the BSF’s liability is likely to be less than originally thought. By supporting national teams in this way, the BSF is ensuring that national team programmes can resume next season on a secure financial footing.

**Succession planning**

Jenny has begun talking to League Heads to get recommendations for qualified people who might be prepared to run for President at the 2021 AGM, since Jenny will be stepping down at that time.

Jenny will prepare a job description for her role, with an indication of how much time it takes, to help potential candidates make a decision.

A quick poll during the meeting suggests that other Officers who will be coming to the end of two-year terms at the next AGM are planning to re-stand. Technical Officer Chris Moon and Coaching Officer Mike Lott, who are currently serving the first year of two-year terms, will not need to do so.

**Revision of BSF Constitution and Articles**

Jenny Fromer, Mike Jennings and Bob Fromer will work together over the next few months to update the BSF Constitution and Articles and make sure they are consistent with each other.

Changes made will need to be presented to the membership at the 2021 BSF AGM.
International issues

Men’s and Women’s European Championships. Over the past month, the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) has cancelled both Men’s and Women’s World Cups planned for 2021, and the European Softball Federation in turn has cancelled the Men’s and Women’s European Championships it had postponed to late September in the hope it could use them to qualify teams for those World Cups.

On the women’s side, GB is one of a number of countries that would struggle to field a competitive team in September because of the difficulty of getting players released from US college programmes, so the cancellation of this September’s tournament is a relief. But the bad news is that the ESF is thinking of playing the postponed European Women’s Championship in September 2021 to accommodate Italy’s preparations for the Olympics, which will present GB and others with a similar problem. Arguments made to the ESF about this by the BSF have been dismissed.

With the next WBSC Women’s World Cup put back to 2023, the WBSC has attempted to fill the void by designating the softball competition at the 2022 World Games in Alabama as a “World Championship”. But unlike the WBSC Women’s World Cup, which has 16 places including three for Europe, the World Games tournament will have only eight places and thus only one European entry. Given this, and the likelihood of a September Women’s European Championship to qualify that one team, it could be that GB’s string of appearing in every Women’s World Championship since 2006 could be broken next year.

Co-ed Slowpitch World Cup. Mike Jennings told the Executive that plans are proceeding to hold the first-ever Co-ed Slowpitch World Cup for national teams (in effect, a World Championship) in 2021, probably in Florida with the USA as host. ASA President Craig Cress and WBSC Competitions Director Laurie Gouthro and Umpire-in-Chief Bob Stanton are enthusiastic and are agreed that the competition should be designed to be run as frugally as possible so that costs for the host and teams can be kept low. Mike Jennings is designing a proposal for a competition along these lines to be presented to WBSC officials for approval.

WBSC tournament sanctioning. The WBSC recently sent a letter to all national federations announcing that national and club teams at all age levels and in all formats participating in “unofficial” tournaments in other countries could only do so if the tournament in question had been sanctioned in advance by the WBSC. Similarly, any “unofficial” tournament that Federations want to host in their own country will require WBSC sanction. Penalties for violating these rules could include fines and player bans.

The BSF wrote to the WBSC asking for clarification on this, and the answer that came back was that these rules are absolute and all-encompassing and need to be followed. This means that it will be the responsibility of any of our national or club teams playing abroad to ascertain whether their chosen tournament has received WBSC sanction, and we will need to apply for sanction for international tournaments that we want to host, such as the Softball World Series or the London Cup.

While there may be little issue with the WBSC sanctioning the many unofficial tournaments that take place in Europe each year (though the procedure to receive sanctioning is cumbersome), there could be serious issues where our teams plan to play in tournaments in North America or elsewhere in the world. The USA, for example, has a number of national softball organisations that host tournaments, but only tournaments organised by the ASA, the governing body recognised by the WBSC, are likely to be sanctioned. This is a potential minefield!
The BSF will post advice on this matter shortly for national teams and club teams that hope to compete overseas in future.

**Proposed national teams training camp**

With none of our national teams likely to compete in 2020, the idea of re-booting our programmes with a multi-team training camp at the end of the year, probably in Florida, has been gaining currency. The emphasis at the camp would be on training and development, as well as the chance it would provide for coaches to see players before selections are made.

A video conference was held on 18 May with staff from the GB Senior, Under-22, Under-18 and Under-15 Women’s Teams, plus representatives from the BSF, to discuss the possibilities for these four teams to hold a joint camp should it be safe and economically viable to do so.

Although there are clearly a number of obstacles to such a camp, including pandemic conditions at the time, the potential cost of air fares and the timing of key decisions, the consensus was to explore the idea further, starting with a survey of players to see how many might be interested and what their main concerns might be. This survey should go out to the relevant player pools shortly.

National Teams Officer Alexis Markham-Hill, who chaired the meeting, noted that many of those who attended appreciated the opportunity to talk with staff from other teams, and more such meetings may be held in future to discuss other topics and issues.

**Website and web-streaming update**

Tim Stride at BaseballSoftballUK has been working on updating and upgrading the BSF website, and will be invited to the next BSF video conference in June to present the results so far.

The Executive has decided that even if tournaments such as National Championships or the Softball World Series are able to go ahead at the end of the 2020 season, BSF finances will not allow money to be spent on web-streaming. The hope is that key tournaments can once again be web-streamed in 2021.

**Reports from the BSUK Board and Committees**

Jenny Fromer reported that the only BSUK Board or Committee meeting held since the BSF last met was a meeting of the Governance Committee, which reviewed the ongoing revision of member rules (BSUK “members” are the BSF and the BBF).

Once finalised, the proposed new rules, which govern relations between BaseballSoftballUK and its two members, will be circulated to the BSF Executive for review, since the BSF will be bound by these rules once adopted.
AOBs

**Softball World Series.** A decision about whether the World Series might be able to go ahead on 19-20 September at Farnham Park will be made, if at all possible, around 15 June. It may be that many overseas teams will be unwilling or unable to travel to the UK, in which case it may become a smaller and more local tournament this year.

**ESF Slowpitch Webcast.** Mike Jennings and Wolfgang Walther from Germany (and the Windsor Knights) took part in an ESF webcast on slowpitch on Saturday 16 May, and though there were some technical hitches early on, there was eventually more than an hour of interesting discussion. The webcast can be accessed here: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=272281834512478&ref=watch_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=272281834512478&ref=watch_permalink).

**Next meeting**

The next BSF Executive video conference is currently scheduled for the evening of Thursday 11 June.

Anyone with topics, issues or questions to bring to the meeting should contact BSF Administrator Bob Fromer ([bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org](mailto:bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org)).