

BSF EXECUTIVE MEETING REPORT:

20 JULY 2023

The BSF Executive held its latest monthly videoconference meeting on the evening of Thursday 20 July. Below is a report on the main discussions and decisions.

Attendance

Present: Lesley Morisetti (Interim President), Liz Graham (Competitions and Membership Officer), Laura Hirai (Fastpitch Development Officer), Nicola-Jane Dyson (General Officer), Tim Bishop (Athletes Commission), Bob Fromer (Administrator).

Apologies: Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Pete Saunders (Technical Officer), Stella Ackrell (Safeguarding Officer).

Guest: John Boyd (BSUK).

Report from the Athletes Commission

The BSF's new four-person Athletes Commission, made up of players representing both slowpitch and fastpitch, has started its work over recent weeks by talking to players from up and down the country as well as to members of League Committees.

Tim Bishop, who has been unofficially chairing the Commission, attended the BSF meeting to report on issues that have emerged as being of most concern to players.

Tim told the Executive that while overdue, the Commission has been welcomed by many players, and there has been extensive feedback on a range of issues. The Commission had chosen the three issues that had received the most mention to bring to the attention of the Executive:

- 1) NSL scheduling.
- 2) Conditions at Farnham Park.
- 3) Questions about BSF insurance: who does it cover and what does it provide?

There wasn't time at the meeting to discuss all of these issues in depth, and separate meetings will be set up to provide more information on NSL scheduling and insurance. But with BSUK CEO John Boyd present, there was some discussion of issues to do with Farnham Park.

Questions raised by the Athletes Commission were:

- The state of the dirt infields at Farnham Park, which are often either rock-hard or too muddy.

- Would it be possible to have some means of rain protection in the dugouts?
- Could drinking water be available in dugouts?
- The state of the changing room/shower/toilet facilities owned by the Council.
- Queues (at times) at Home Plate. Could the outside bar facility be set up for drinks only to lessen the problem? And: could children's meals (at children's prices) be served?

John Boyd responded to some of these issues and will have further discussions with Tim and the Athletes Commission soon. John said he will take the idea of children's meals and the outside bar facility back to the caterers at Home Plate, was unsure about the idea of dugout rain protection, and told Tim and the Executive that BSUK is putting increasing pressure on the Council about the shower and toilet facilities, though in the end this is not in BSUK's control.

With regard to the problems with the dirt infields, John told the meeting that BSUK is investing a substantial amount of money in a borehole to enable more adequate watering. With regard to rain making the pitches unplayable, tarps that could cover the infields would make a substantial difference, but BSUK doesn't have the staff on site that would be needed to roll them out when rain starts and take them off when the rain finishes. The solution might be to get teams to agree to do this, and Tim told the meeting that he was sure this would be possible, so the idea will be explored further.

The Commission will now send the BSF Executive a list of the other issues that have been raised by players, and further meetings will be scheduled.

BSF Executive vacancies

Bob Fromer has told the BSF Executive that he will be stepping down from his position as BSF Administrator at the end of February 2024, following the 2024 AGM, and will be ending his involvement with British softball.

However, Lesley Morisetti, who has been serving as Interim President, has told the Executive that she will run for the position in 2024 and will serve at least another year if elected.

The BSF has recently co-opted Laura Hirai to serve as its Fastpitch Development Officer, and Laura attended the July Executive meeting.

An offer has been made to provide assistance to BSF Treasurer Laura Burkhardt, who is finding that pressure from her day job is making it increasingly hard to deal with BSF finances.

In addition, the BSF has co-opted two other people – not to join the Executive, but to act as BSF representatives on specific issues or projects. David Lee is representing the BSF as an advisor on BSUK's project to re-start a Slowpitch Academy, and Bristol League Head Neil Butterfield is consulting with BSUK on the BSF's behalf as part of a review of coach-training structure, courses, and course delivery.

All this means that the BSF still needs to fill the following vacancies, either as soon as possible or at the 2024 AGM:

- **Slowpitch Development Officer.** This role is not so much about active development work, but rather working with BSUK on the design of development plans and initiatives and monitoring BSUK's performance to ensure that agreed plans are delivered.
- **National Teams Officer.** This role is to support and oversee Softball National Team programmes on behalf of the BSF, mainly through chairing the GB Management Committee, and to monitor the work of BSUK in operating the performance programme for the Senior Women's Fastpitch Team and age-group women's fastpitch teams.
- **Administrator.** This is currently a part-time paid position, though the Executive will need to decide whether the position will be carried on in its current form. At the heart of the role is secretarial services to the Executive, but the role has come to encompass many other functions, and a job spec outlining these functions is available. While this role does not need to be filled until after the 2024 AGM, it would be good to find someone willing to take it on sooner, so that they can shadow the current Administrator.

Anyone interested in any of these positions, all of which are crucial to the effective functioning of the BSF going forward, should contact the BSF Administrator (bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org) for more information.

Slowpitch development

BSUK has recently sent the BSF Executive an Action Plan for slowpitch development, focusing specifically on coach development, and a lot of conversation has followed.

John Boyd told the Executive that for this year, generic Level 1 coaching courses will continue to be offered which can apply to baseball, slowpitch or fastpitch while an expert is brought in later this summer to review BSUK's coaching structure and course provision. The hope is that for 2024, some courses can be format-specific and tailored more around "what to coach" rather than "how to coach".

A major problem, John said, is that coaching courses are not being taken up – but that may be because they don't currently fulfil the needs of the slowpitch community in particular.

Meanwhile, plans are well under way to re-launch the Slowpitch Academy, which will be headed by Luis Arrevillagas. There are plans for Academy sessions to be delivered regionally, and plans are already in motion to deliver specific clinic sessions, some for women only, at a range of tournaments during the rest of the season.

One question raised was whether some of these women-only sessions, particularly those dealing with fielding, could be attended by both slowpitch and fastpitch players.

As mentioned above, David Lee has been appointed by the BSF to consult with Luis on the Slowpitch Academy project, and they have already had productive discussions. The aims of the new-look Slowpitch

Academy sound very positive, but as always, the question, both for the Academy and for coaching courses in 2024, will be whether qualified people are available to deliver a quality product.

Fastpitch development

The BSF's new Fastpitch Development Officer, Laura Hirai, attended the meeting and reported on a meeting the previous day where she and Bob Fromer for the BSF met Chris Rawlings, John Boyd and Jon Rye from BSUK to discuss plans for fastpitch development.

Thanks to resources that are available through the MLB London Series Legacy Programme, there is a programme in place this year to introduce fastpitch to girls in the lower end of secondary school clusters in four regions in London and the South and to create community fastpitch clubs that can, starting next years, be the basis for girls to transition from school programmes to the softball mainstream. In addition, there is a plan to train more fastpitch coaches, and a need to train more fastpitch umpires.

Meanwhile, Laura has a number of plans and ideas to help more talented young female fastpitch players develop, including a mentorship programme for players who might want to play college softball in the United States, and building a relationship with clubs in the Netherlands to set up joint training sessions and player and coach exchanges.

2026 European Slowpitch Championship Working Group

The Working Group to plan for the 2026 European Co-ed Slowpitch Championship, to be hosted at Farnham Park, now has a draft budget to work with thanks to John Boyd. BSF General Officer Nicola-Jane Dyson, who chairs the Working Group, will convene a meeting soon to discuss finances, including sponsorship possibilities.

360 Softball

360 Softball is a European slowpitch softball organisation that stages league competitions and tournaments in various countries in Central Europe.

The BSF plans to make contact and find out more, to determine if this could be a way for UK-based teams or players to play more softball, including, perhaps, a GB Slowpitch Development Team.

NSL3 Nationals

BSUK has managed to persuade Bucks County Council to make two additional grass pitches available for softball use at the beginning of September, and this raises the possibility that a National Championship can be held for qualifying NSL3 teams on 2-3 September, alongside the NSL1 and NSL2 Nationals.

BSF Competitions Officer Liz Graham will now canvass NSL3 teams to see if there is an appetite for the competition. The late notice may make it tricky for some teams, but the BSF will be flexible on player eligibility requirements.

BSF container

Shelving units in the BSF container at Farnham Park have now been enclosed with potentially lockable doors, almost everything in the container has been assigned to shelves, and a list of where everything is will shortly be circulated to relevant user groups. The hope is to keep the container in better order than has been the case in the past.

Equipment donations

A reasonable amount of used equipment has been donated so far this summer through the Donations Box outside the BSUK office, and the Executive will need to make some decisions about how best to use it.

Next meeting

The BSF Executive's next videoconference meeting will take place on the evening of Thursday 10 August.

Anyone on the Executive or from the softball community with matters to raise at the meeting should contact BSF Administrator Bob Fromer (bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org).