

BSF EXECUTIVE MEETING REPORT:

13 MAY 2021

The BSF Executive held its latest monthly videoconference meeting on the evening of Thursday 13 May. Below is a journalistic report on the main discussions and decisions.

Attendance

Present: Ieuan Gale (President), Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Liz Graham (Competitions Officer), Alexis Markham-Hill (National Teams Officer), Pete Saunders (Technical Officer), Simon Mortimer (Communications and Marketing Officer), Mike Jennings (General Officer), Steve Getraer (General Officer), Lesley Morisetti (General Officer), Bob Fromer (Administrator).

Apologies: Mike Lott (Coaching Officer), Stella Ackrell (General Officer).

Guest: John Boyd (BSUK).

Financial matters

BSF Budget. Shortly before the meeting, BSF Treasurer Laura Burkhardt circulated a Budget v Actual update to the Executive for the 2020-21 financial year to date.

However, the Executive won't have much information about its post-pandemic income for 2021 until after 1 June (the deadline for affiliating teams to register and pay membership fees), and the Budget will need to be revisited and adjusted after that date.

The Plan is for the Executive to hold a special Finance Meeting during the week beginning 14 June to finalise the budget in light of its income, as well as major changes to expenditure such as the withdrawal of GB National Teams and some British club teams from European competition in 2021.

Service Level Agreement (SLA) with BSUK. For many years, BaseballSoftballUK has performed a number of non-development services for the BSF under an annual Service Level Agreement, and the BSF has paid for these services at an agreed hourly rate (though BSUK has also contributed a set number of "free hours" each year). The SLA has lapsed during the pandemic, though BSUK has continued to provide some services at no charge, in response to the fact that the BSF had no membership income in its 2019-20 financial year. A new SLA now needs to be negotiated, and the services it will cover need to be redefined. BSF President Ieuan Gale and Treasurer Laura Burkhardt will carry out these negotiations over the next couple of months with BSUK CEO John Boyd.

National Team training at Farnham Park. Negotiations between the BSF and BaseballSoftballUK are continuing over a sum that the BSF will pay in exchange for GB National Teams being able to train at

Farnham Park at no direct cost to the teams. The BSF needs to supply more information about which teams want to train and on which dates, and BSUK will then propose a heavily discounted price since, as John Boyd told the meeting, BSUK sees Farnham Park as the National Training Centre and is keen that national teams should use it as such. Use of the facility for training could be even more important than usual for national teams this year, since our teams have withdrawn from European competitions but will need to keep up momentum with their athletes.

National Teams Levy and GB Affiliation Fee. Each year, the BSF ringfences £10 from the fee paid by each affiliated member team and uses the money from this National Teams Levy (NTL) to give grants to GB Slowpitch and Fastpitch Teams playing in official international competitions that season. This year, with GB Teams having withdrawn from international competitions due to Covid, the Executive had planned to discuss how to use this year's NTL funds.

However, BSF Communications and Marketing Officer Simon Mortimer has put forward a more far-reaching proposal that would change the system for helping national teams and for funding the GB Management Committee (GBMC), which supports national teams in a number of ways. Currently, GBMC income is provided through a GB Affiliation Fee (GBAF), currently £50, which is charged to all players selected to represent GB Teams in official competitions and is paid as part of the trip fees assessed to players.

Simon's proposal would, in effect, combine the NTL and the GBAF and create a simpler system for funding the GBMC and helping national teams, but it has a number of ramifications which need to be explored more fully. So the Executive has set up a Working Group to explore the issues involved and to finalise a proposal that can be considered by the full Executive at a future meeting.

National Championships and the National Softball League

Competitions Officer Liz Graham reported that up to 18 teams that qualified through results in the 2019 season have indicated an interest in competing in this year's BSF Co-ed Slowpitch League National Championships, scheduled for 7-8 August at Farnham Park. Final numbers will be confirmed over the next few weeks.

With regard to player eligibility for National Championships this year, the Executive has agreed to suspend normal qualification requirements due to the effects of the pandemic and the shortened NSL league season.

Rosters for the **Co-ed Slowpitch League Nationals** will need to be signed off by the appropriate League Head, who will be certifying that players on the roster are bona-fide members of their teams.

For the **Co-ed Slowpitch NSL Nationals**, players will need to have played for their team in NSL league competition on two days during the 2021 season to qualify for Nationals.

Liz also reported that all arrangements are in hand for the NSL2 league season, which will be played at the Diamond Series tournaments in June and July, and for the NSL1 league season, which will be played at the Windsor Tournament in July and at a standalone event in mid-August, run on the BSF's behalf by BaseballSoftballUK.

BSF Administrator Bob Fromer, who organises the Softball World Series, told the Executive that 16 teams have indicated a willingness to play this year, including eight from overseas.

With the tournament now scheduled for Farnham Park, 15 places are available. Bob will go back to the teams later in May to ask for confirmation of entry.

Registration

Liz Graham, who is also the BSF's Membership Officer, told the meeting that as of 13 May, four leagues and around 20 independent teams, including some NSL teams, had registered and paid fees for the 2021 season. The deadline is 1 June and Liz has sent out reminders.

The expectation is that most registrations will come in near the deadline.

John Boyd noted that affiliation to the BSF means that teams are also signed up automatically to BaseballSoftballUK's Development Charter and can take advantage of a range of services provided through the Charter. More information about services or support that teams can access will be posted soon on the BSF website.

Jurisdiction over softball in Northern Ireland

After three-way discussions involving the BSF, BSUK and Softball Ireland, the BSF has responded positively to a request from Softball Ireland to renew an agreement, first made in 2008, to cede jurisdiction to Softball Ireland for all softball activity in Northern Ireland.

As part of the renewed agreement, however, teams in Northern Ireland will be able to access services from BSUK through its Development Charter, and discussions are ongoing about opening this opportunity to teams in the Republic of Ireland as well.

E-Softball

The World Baseball Softball Confederation has recently been promoting the development of baseball/softball as an E-sport, and a baseball event will be part of the first-ever Olympic Virtual Series taking place in May and June this year.

The BSF Executive has decided to monitor developments but not to take any action at the present time, since its main priority is to get real people playing sport and trying to develop softball as an E-sport would divert time and resources.

However, BSUK CEO John Boyd noted that there could be commercial possibilities in E-softball and E-baseball that should eventually be explored.

Personal Accident Insurance

Mike Jennings told the meeting that Personal Accident and Injury Insurance for the required minimum of 50 teams had been purchased in late April and took effect on 1 May for registered teams that have signed up for it.

And, he told the meeting, an accident that happened on 2 May had already produced a claim!

As of the meeting date, 39 teams had signed up for the insurance, but many more are expected as league team registrations come in before the 1 June deadline. The BSF will extend the number of teams covered as required, and the total number of teams that take out the insurance this season will become the new baseline for purchasing this insurance in future.

BSF website and social media

Simon Mortimer told the meeting that the plan to set up a Document Repository for the BSF was still being worked on in conjunction with BSUK but would probably be delayed by Operations Manager Tim Stride leaving BSUK on 14 May.

John Boyd said that the BSF could use BSUK's Intranet service in the meantime, though the technology is fairly old. Otherwise, development of a new joint system will have to wait for Tim's replacement, and the BSF might explore a stop-gap solution in the meantime.

National Teams

Following the withdrawal of GB National Teams from European competitions this year because of Covid issues, team staff have been discussing ideas for maintaining momentum in their programmes and upskilling athletes, and National Teams Officer Alexis Markham-Hill gave the Executive a brief summary of what is being planned.

Some teams, including the GB Cubs Under-13 Fastpitch Team, GB Slowpitch teams and the GB Men's Fastpitch Teams programme, including the Seniors, Under-23s and Under-18s, are planning series of training sessions at Farnham Park and elsewhere.

The GB Under-22, Under-18 and Under-15 Women's Fastpitch Teams will be working collaboratively with players over the summer, providing online instruction and requesting data from players, and will then hold a combined winter training camp in Florida.

The Senior Women's Fastpitch Team is planning to create a wider pool of up to 30 players and will have a 15-month programme of work leading to the European Women's Championship in 2022, possibly including training camps in the US in August of this year and in the winter.

Meanwhile, most UK-based male and female GB Fastpitch players will be playing over the summer in the Great Britain Fastpitch League.

“Every GB Fastpitch Team wants every opportunity in this country for their players to play,” Alexis said, “and the less experienced athletes particularly need the work and the reps. But a lot of activity is being planned for athletes both here and overseas, including athletes who trialled this year and weren’t originally successful.”

In addition, Alexis reported, some overseas-based GB coaches may be coming to the UK during the summer to work with athletes here.

Slowpitch Academy

BSUK has told the BSF that there may be a possibility of holding Slowpitch Academy sessions this year.

The concept of a Slowpitch Academy was first developed in 2019 but was suspended in 2020 due to Covid.

Joelle Watkins at BSUK will consult with BSF Coaching Officer Mike Lott.

BASU

The BSF has agreed to adopt a proposal from BASU, originally made last year but never actioned because of Covid, on the wearing of jewellery during play.

The proposal is that jewellery should only be banned if it could be distracting for other players or has the potential to cause injury or harm to the wearer or another player. Decisions on this will need to be made by umpires.

This policy will replace the previous blanket ban on jewellery.

BSF Technical Officer Pete Saunders told the meeting that BASU has been trialling material for an online revision course, and feedback has been positive. BASU is still working to complete all the materials for the course.

Lightning policy

The BSF wrote and adopted a policy a couple of years ago on what to do when there is lightning in the area where play is taking place (https://www.britishsoftball.org/uploads/documents/Policies_and_Codes/British_Softball_Federation_Lightning_Advice_and_Policy.pdf), and this policy and advice has now been adopted by Softball Europe as well.

In light of the recent incident where a nine-year-old footballer was killed by lightning in Blackpool, the BSF is now featuring this policy on the BSF website to remind people that it exists and where to find it.

Next meeting

The next BSF Executive videoconference meeting will be held on the evening of Thursday 10 June.

Any member of the Executive or the softball community with items to raise at this meeting should contact BSF Administrator Bob Fromer [bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org].