

## BSF EXECUTIVE MEETING REPORT: 9 JUNE 2022

The BSF Executive held its latest monthly videoconference meeting on the evening of Thursday 9 June. Below is a report on the main discussions and decisions.

### Attendance

**Present:** Ieuan Gale (President), Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Liz Graham (Competitions and Membership Officer), Mike Lott (Coaching Officer), Simon Mortimer (Marketing and Communications Officer), Bob Fromer (Administrator).

**Apologies:** Stella Ackrell (Safeguarding Officer), Mike Jennings and Lesley Morisetti (General Officers).

**Guest:** Joelle Watkins (BSUK).

### WBSC announcements

**Women's World Cup.** At the beginning of the meeting, the Executive heard the news that the WBSC Board, meeting on 9 June, had awarded both the Group Stages and the Final of the 2024 Women's Fastpitch World Cup to Europe.

Italy, Spain and Ireland will host the Group Stage tournaments and Italy will host the Final, marking the first time that a Women's World Cup or World Championship has ever been held in Italy and only the second time such a competition has been held in Europe.

Women's World Cups are now played in a new format, consisting of three stages over three years. The first stage in the three-year cycle, Continental Championships, will be played this year, and for Europe, that tournament is the European Women's Championship to be played in Sant Boi, Spain at the end of July. Similar tournaments will take place in Asia, Oceania, Africa and the Americas.

From these Continental Championships around the world, the top teams will qualify for three six-team Group Stage tournaments to be played in 2023. Because countries hosting these tournaments qualify automatically, even if they haven't qualified through competition, Europe could have up to six countries – but more likely five – in the Group Stage round.

The top two teams from each Group Stage event, plus a host and/or wild card teams, will qualify for the eight-team Women's World Cup finals in 2024.

Should the GB Women's Team qualify this summer for the World Cup Group Stage by finishing in the top three at the European Championship, the immediate benefit will be the cost saving of having their Group Stage tournament in Europe rather than in some far-flung part of the world.

**Co-ed Slowpitch World Cup.** The Executive was also told, at the beginning of the meeting, that the same WBSC Board meeting was likely to give the go-ahead for the first-ever WBSC Co-ed Slowpitch World Cup for national teams to be played in 2023, but this had not been confirmed when the BSF met. However, an announcement was made by the WBSC the following morning, and the details have been posted on the BSF website (<https://www.britishsoftball.org/news/article/wbsc-gives-the-go-ahead-for-first-co-ed-slowpitch-world-cup>). This is the culmination of over two decades of campaigning for an official slowpitch world championship event and presents a great opportunity for the GB Co-ed Slowpitch Team, all-conquering in Europe, to test itself on a world stage.

## Registration

BSF Competitions and Membership Officer Liz Graham has nearly finished collating 2022 registrations as well as chasing leagues and independent teams for payment and reported to the Executive that there has been a significant bounceback in the number of affiliated teams compared to 2021.

Many leagues around the country have seen small increases in team numbers, and so far there appear to be just under 280 registered teams, a gain of around 30 teams over last year. The fact that numbers are still short of pre-pandemic levels is mainly down to the fact that some corporate leagues in London have yet to re-form, while others are still short of where they were in 2019.

The result of this increase in affiliated teams is that the BSF will receive more fee income this year than was projected in the budget approved at the AGM. This is a welcome development because it will give the BSF the opportunity to build back reserves along with greater flexibility in spending this year.

## Development

**BSUK Facilities Grants.** At the BSF Executive's May meeting, a discussion was held with BSUK CEO John Boyd about almost why all of the annual Facility Development Grants made by BSUK in 2021-22, amounting to over £10,000 in total, went to baseball organisations.

The Facilities Fund is designed to cover items such as backstops, infield dirt surfaces, fencing, dugouts, pitching mounds and 'permanent' storage, and while acknowledging that some of these items are more essential for baseball play than for slowpitch softball, the BSF would like to identify where improvements could be made in slowpitch facilities around the country and also where more fastpitch play could be facilitated.

The Executive will be talking to League Heads and others about softball applications to the Fund and looking at ways to raise awareness about this opportunity in the softball community.

**Equipment vouchers to meet Development Grant requests.** With more and more development grant requests to the BSF centering on the equipment needed to start new teams, the BSF will explore the possibility of getting discounted vouchers from equipment suppliers that can be used where relevant to supplement or replace cash grants. BSUK Head of Commercial Joelle Watkins will explore the possibilities with BSF Marketing and Communications Officer Simon Mortimer.

**Recycling equipment for new teams.** BSUK's official equipment supplier, Baseball Outlet, will soon have a dedicated space within BSUK's new office building at Farnham Park, and has offered to be a repository for used equipment donations that the BSF can refurbish and recycle for development purposes.

## National Championships

BSF Competitions Officer Liz Graham reported that there have so far been 20 confirmations from teams that have qualified to play in the **BSF Co-ed Slowpitch League Nationals** at Farnham Park on the weekend of 6-7 August. With six pitches available, there are still places for another four teams.

Fourteen women's teams and 10 men's teams have committed to play in the **BSF Single-Sex Slowpitch Nationals** on the weekend of 25-26 June at Keynsham, near Bristol, where six pitches are also available. But Liz reported that because the competition will break down into two-seven team divisions for the Women's Nationals and two five-team divisions for the Men's Nationals, a seventh pitch would be really useful for making schedules work. Discussions are in progress with the venue to see if this might be possible.

## Farnham Park

**Scoreboard.** The manual scoreboards on Pitches 2, 3 and 4 at Farnham Park have rarely been used, and there has never been a fixed scoreboard for the main softball field on Pitch 1. But the construction of BSUK's new office building behind the third base line on Pitch 1, with a rooftop standing space fronting by railings, seems to offer the perfect opportunity for BSUK to buy and mount a small electronic scoreboard that will at least let players and spectators know the score during games. This possibility was suggested to Joelle Watkins during the meeting, and she will let the Executive know the response from BSUK.

## International matters

**WBSC Biennial Congress.** The WBSC's biennial Congress, postponed from last year, will be taking place in Taiwan at the beginning of July, and Mike Jennings will represent British softball at the Congress. Tom Thornhill, elected last year as BBF President, will represent British baseball. This will be an Election Congress, so important decisions will be made.

**Sweden Series.** There was general agreement among Executive members who attended (or played in) the event that the Sweden Series on 28-29 May at Farnham Park, where the Swedish Men's Fastpitch National Team played a three-game series against the GB Men's Team, plus games against the GB Under-23 Men and a GBFL Invitational Team, was a big success.

The Series brought international fastpitch softball to Farnham Park for the first time since 2018 and gave the GB Men and Under-23 teams a chance to prepare for upcoming European Championships, which will be this summer for the Under-23s and next year for the Senior Men.

The GB Men, who mercy-ruled Sweden in all three games (the Under-23 Men hung on in their game to beat the Swedes by 16-15), are committed to a return series in Sweden next year before the Europeans. However, GB Men's Team Head Coach Colin Barrett will look at the possibility of getting other national teams involved as well.

The standard of softball displayed by both the GB Men and Under-23s, with teams now almost entirely UK-based, was very high, and particular credit for this goes to Ian Tomlin, who has done so much to develop men's fastpitch over many years, and who was presented with the BSF's Glover Cup award on the Sweden Series weekend.

### **All Stars Fastpitch League Series**

Joelle Watkins, one of the main organisers of the All Stars Fastpitch League Series played on Saturday evenings at the May and June National Softball League weekends, told the Executive that she was very pleased with the outcome of the project.

The All Stars Series consisted of two games that brought the best women fastpitch players in the UK together for high-level games showcasing fastpitch softball. Both games were well played, well presented and well-attended.

Joelle said: "We've now got a foundation to build on to showcase fastpitch softball and get more people playing it, but the question is where we go from here."

BSUK will do a survey of those involved in the initiative in an attempt to answer that question.

### **BSF Development Grants**

No BSF Development grant requests were received for consideration at this meeting.

BSF Treasurer Laura Burkhardt reported that half of the BSF's budget for development grants in 2021-22 has been committed, leaving £750 still available for potential applications before the BSF's financial year ends on 30 September.

### **Next meeting**

The BSF Executive's next monthly videoconference meeting will be held on the evening of Thursday 7 July.

Any member of the Executive or of the softball community who wants to raise an item at the meeting should contact BSF Administrator Bob Fromer on: [bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org](mailto:bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org).