

BSF EXECUTIVE MEETING REPORT: 9 SEPTEMBER 2021

The British Softball Federation Executive held its most recent monthly videoconference meeting on the evening of Thursday 9 September. Below is a report on the main discussions and decisions.

Attendance

Present: Ieuan Gale (President), Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Liz Graham (Competitions Officer), Mike Lott (Coaching Officer), Simon Mortimer (Communications and Marketing Officer), Pete Saunders (Technical Officer), Mike Jennings and Lesley Morisetti (General Officers), Bob Fromer (Administrator).

Apologies: Stella Ackrell (General Officer).

Guest: John Boyd (BaseballSoftballUK).

Financial matters

2020-21 accounts. BSF Treasurer Laura Burkhardt reported that there had been no additional fee income or major liabilities arising over the past month as the BSF's 2020-21 financial year draws towards a close on 30 September. The focus now will be on drawing up a budget for 2021-22, a process which will take place over the next couple of months.

Service Level Agreement with BSUK. During much of the pandemic, with BSF finances under strain, BSUK suspended the Service Level Agreement (SLA) under which the BSF pays BSUK for a range of non-development services, while continuing to provide many of those services without charge.

With the BSF having received membership income in 2021 (albeit at a lower level than before the pandemic), a new SLA now needs to be drawn up and put into effect, and a subcommittee of the BSF Executive met by videoconference on 8 September to define which services it wishes to purchase from BSUK in the immediate future and in the longer term. A meeting with BSUK will be arranged shortly to agree a new SLA for the coming year.

Umpire travel costs. For every national or club team that the BSF sends to an official European competition, British Softball is required to pay the cost of a BASU umpire travelling to officiate in Europe. In the past, for European Championships, this cost was shared between the BSF and BASU.

Although only one British team competed in Europe this year (The Mix in the European Women's Cup) and only one umpire travelled, questions have arisen about who should pay this cost. A meeting will be arranged shortly between members of the BSF Executive and the BASU Committee to discuss this and wider questions of responsibility for umpire travel to both Softball Europe and WBSC competitions.

National Championships and other BSF tournaments

NSL National Championships. BSF Competitions Director Liz Graham told the meeting that, on the whole, the NSL Nationals on 4-5 September at Farnham Park went well, though there was a delay to the start of the two Page Playoff finals which meant that the NSL1 final was completed in problematic light conditions.

Both finals were webstreamed by a team headed by BSUK Public Relations Officer Chris Knoblock, very much on a trial basis, and some technical difficulties were encountered. The aim is to get the system for webstreaming working efficiently so that a number of events can be broadcast during the 2022 season.

The BSF has noted some complaints about the safety of the infield on Pitch 2 at Farnham Park. This pitch, in the right-field corner of a baseball field, is part grass and part dirt, and the lips between these surfaces can create dangerous bounces. The BSF has spoken to BSUK about this issue and there has been a quick response, with measures being taken to mitigate the problems before the Softball World Series on 18-19 September. After that, a longer-term solution will be considered.

Another issue that arose at the NSL Nationals was the unwillingness of at least one team to play a scheduled placing game after failing to make the Page Playoff. This is an issue that has arisen before, and at its planned face-to-face weekend meeting in November, the BSF Executive will look at the question of whether placing games are required in a National Championship competition and if so, what the penalties might be for teams that decline to play them without sufficient reason (for example, injuries at the end of a long weekend that make it impossible to field a team).

Softball World Series. World Series organiser Bob Fromer told the Executive that even though all six overseas-based entries had been forced to pull out for Covid-related reasons, the tournament would be going ahead on 18-19 September at Farnham Park with 12 UK-based teams.

2022 Softball Calendar. The BSF has begun to put together the Softball Calendar for 2022, beginning with dates for National Championships and other BSF events. This Calendar will shortly be circulated to tournament organisers so they can request dates for their events next year.

Hosting international tournaments in the UK

The BSF Executive held a preliminary discussion about the possibility of hosting Softball Europe or WBSC competitions at Farnham Park over the next few years.

Farnham Park is perhaps the best slowpitch facility in Europe and is also capable of hosting fastpitch events to a high standard, and BSUK CEO John Boyd noted that taking advantage of Farnham Park as an asset by hosting international tournaments could demonstrate how we are moving forward as a sport.

The barrier, of course, is cost, which is likely to be in the region of £20,000-£25,000 to host a Softball Europe event and considerably more to host a WBSC World Cup, so significant sponsorship would be required.

The BSF Executive will work with BSUK on this issue and consider it in more depth at its face-to-face meeting in November.

WBSC portal

The World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) has been working to put the administration of all world and regional tournaments under its jurisdiction on a single online portal.

This year, as the system developed, access to the portal was restricted, and BSF Communications and Marketing Officer Simon Mortimer had the task of uploading information for all British teams competing in Europe this season.

Fortunately, in the end, this turned out to be only one team.

Next year, however, a nominated person from each team in European competition will be able to upload the required information for their team, thus spreading the workload. Additional BSF administrators will also be nominated for access to the portal.

Slowpitch World Cup

The WBSC still plans to hold the first-ever Slowpitch World Cup for national teams in 2023, and BSF General Officer Mike Jennings, as a member of the WBSC Slowpitch Working Group, has submitted possible formats for the tournament to WBSC officials.

With the Olympics now over, the hope is that the Slowpitch Working Group will hold another meeting soon to advance plans for the competition as well as for slowpitch development around the world.

UK Sport grant

John Boyd told the BSF Executive that the contract for the four-year £288,750 UK Sport grant to the GB Women's Team programme and talent pathway has been signed and the first tranche of money is now available, allowing programmes that the funding will support to get under way.

This is likely to include US-based training camps for GB Women athletes early in 2022.

A key element will be to recruit a part-time Head of Performance Systems to drive the programmes, but the recruitment process has been delayed due to the recent possibility that GB Baseball may also be able to access a UK Sport grant and that the Head of Performance Systems position could be expanded to serve both sports.

However, John assured the Executive that recruitment will not be delayed to the point where progress on softball programmes could be hindered.

“Getting the Head of Performance Systems in place,” John said, “will kick-start a lot of good things.”

Update from Kendal Softball Club

A new softball club in Kendal in the Lake District which received a BSF Development Grant earlier in the year has updated the BSF on progress so far.

The club has slowly but steadily been getting more interest and more players and will be focusing on possible indoor activity over the winter and a strong start to the 2022 season.

The long-term plan is for the club to spawn a new league in the Lake District.

BASU update

BSF Technical Officer Pete Saunders reported that he and Chris Moon have been approached by Softball Canada to put together information on a two-umpire system for slowpitch to forward to the WBSC.

BSF Safeguarding Officer

BSF General Officer Stella Ackrell has agreed to become the BSF's Safeguarding Officer.

She will work closely with BaseballSoftballUK, which has ultimate responsibility on safeguarding for the Federations.

"Let's Go GB" campaign

The GB Baseball Team is competing at the European Senior Men's Baseball Championship from 12-19 September in Italy, and a "Let's Go GB" social media campaign is being organised, similar to the campaign that supported the GB Women's Team at the Olympic Qualifier in 2019.

It would be good for the softball community to support this!

Next meeting

The next BSF Executive videoconference meeting will be held on Thursday 7 October.

Anyone from the softball community with matters to raise at the meeting should contact BSF Administrator Bob Fromer [bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org].