

BSF EXECUTIVE MEETING REPORT: 11 MARCH 2021

The BSF Executive held its latest monthly meeting by videoconference on the evening of Thursday 11 March 2021. Below is a journalistic account of the main discussions and decisions.

Attendance

Present: Ieuan Gale (President), Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Liz Graham (Competitions Officer), Alexis Markham-Hill (National Teams Officer), Mike Lott (Coaching Officer), Pete Saunders (Technical Officer), Simon Mortimer (Communications & Marketing Officer), Mike Jennings and Stella Ackrell (General Officers), Bob Fromer (Administrator).

Apologies: None

Guests: Alyson Spinus-Valainis (BSF/BSUK Fastpitch Development Manager), Kellie Whitaker (GB Slowpitch Team Manager).

Fastpitch development update

BSF/BSUK Fastpitch Development Manager Alyson Spinus-Valainis will be attending BSF meetings every three months to update the Executive on fastpitch development plans and achievements, and Alyson made her first report at the March meeting. Although there is still some Covid-induced uncertainty about when activities can get underway, plans include:

- Running Summer Academy Softball and High Performance Academy (HPA) sessions, either regionally or nationally, in part to get national team athletes quality practice time before tours.
- Setting up a framework for upskilling and mentoring existing fastpitch coaches and players interested in becoming coaches, in part through Academy and HPA sessions.
- Using some HPA sessions to run high-quality scrimmage games involving both women and men, to provide game time for national team players beyond that provided by the Great Britain Fastpitch League (GBFL).
- Working with staff from the GB Under-13 Cubs and Holly Ireland from RBI Wales to plan in-country tournaments and game play for this age group, since the Cubs will not be able to attend the European Massimo Romeo Youth Trophy tournament this year due to Covid issues.
- Working in schools, including American Community Schools, over the next few months to recruit more players to GB Under-13 and Under-15 female programmes.

- Developing Introduction to Fastpitch initiatives over the summer aimed at young players, possibly in partnership with other organisations.
- Working with others at BaseballSoftballUK to complete a Fastpitch Development Plan, related to expected UK Sport Progression Funding. The BSF Executive will have a chance to input and review the Plan and will need to sign off on it before it's finalised.

Financial matters

BSF Treasurer Laura Burkhardt reported that the budget for 2020-21 presented at the AGM will be reviewed at the next BSF Executive meeting in April, when more is known about what kind of playing season will be possible this year and how many teams will be returning to BSF-affiliated leagues and/or the National Softball League.

One possible addition to the budget is a one-off payment to BSUK to allow national slowpitch and fastpitch teams to train at Farnham Park at a reduced rate. This payment will be negotiated with BSUK once training needs are known.

Laura also reported that the BSF has paid entry fees for all national and club teams intending to play in European competitions this summer, with assurance from the ESF that fees will be returned if tournaments are cancelled or if any of our teams have to withdraw from tournaments for Covid-related reasons.

Laura will wait to re-invoice club teams for their share of entry fees and Organiser Contributions until it's clear that their tournaments are going ahead and that our teams will compete.

The BSF has now had four requests for Development Grants for the 2021 season, two of which were first submitted in 2020. The Executive will consider these requests at its next meeting on 8 April when more should be known about prospects for play this year.

Return to Play in the UK

The government Roadmap announced by Boris Johnson on 22 February has suggested that some kind of playing season should be possible in 2021, but the details remain to be clarified – particularly around how many people can come together to play, and by when.

Joelle Watkins at BaseballSoftballUK is continuing to talk to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Sport England, and further advice is likely to be forthcoming on or around 22 March. BSUK is confident that numbers won't be limited for outdoor play, but protocols will need to be observed for games and tournaments to take place safely.

Mike Jennings, who is the Competitions Director for the European Softball Federation as well as a BSF Executive member, told the meeting that the ESF will soon be publishing protocols for its competitions this summer, and the BSF may want to borrow from those. It will be important to make people who may be hesitant feel that they can return to softball safely.

Simon Mortimer pointed out that vigilance will be the key to maintaining a safe environment, primarily off the field. Softball is largely a non-contact sport on the field, and socialisation around games may pose more of a transmission threat. Comprehensive guidelines will be more important than any attempts at enforcement, which will be difficult for the BSF to maintain.

Further information will be published on the BSF and BSUK websites and BSUK's Return to Play Hub (<https://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/returntoplay>).

Return to Play in Europe

Those who attended the BSF's remote AGM at the end of February will have heard GB Women's Team Head Coach Rachael Watkeys talk about the difficulties of planning for overseas tours without knowing what restrictions or regulations might be in effect at the time tournaments are held and the potential cost implications.

Simon Mortimer, who is the GB Women's Team Manager, reported that, to mitigate this problem, Rachael and Czech Republic Head Coach Vojtech Albrecht organised a meeting recently of teams planning to attend the European Women's Championship this summer at the end of June. Queries arising from the meeting will go to the ESF and hopefully be covered in their protocols.

The problem is that every country is in a different situation. For example, travelling to a competition by air, as GB Teams have to do, poses a lot more issues and restrictions than those faced by teams that can drive to the country where their tournament is being held.

However, travel restrictions might be able to be bypassed, Mike Jennings said, by the ESF, as a Regional Governing Body of Sport, issuing certification that could lead to elite athlete exemptions.

Simon Mortimer said, "We can't make decisions now, but we need to look at different scenarios and see how they can be dealt with. What would happen, for example, if a player at a tournament tested positive? What would the effect be on the player, the team and the competition?"

Mike Jennings said that ESF tournament and umpire officials are holding meetings of their own to explore different scenarios and will make recommendations to the ESF which will hopefully be reflected in their protocols.

Update on Personal Accident and Injury Insurance

Mike Jennings told the meeting that the BSF was close to the minimum number of teams needed to commit to buying Personal Accident and Injury Insurance through their leagues that would allow the BSF get a quote from insurers that would keep the costs to around £20 per team. Once that minimum number is achieved, the BSF can take out the policy and drop in additional teams as required.

The BSF will send registration forms to leagues in mid-April, and the return of these forms should allow the BSF to put the insurance into effect around the time that league playing seasons begin. At the earliest, this will probably be at the end of April or beginning of May.

The deadline for teams to pay BSF affiliation fees through their leagues – or directly in the case of independent tournament teams – will remain as 1 June.

Safeguarding Officer

The BSF urgently needs to find someone to take on the role of Safeguarding Officer for the Federation, working in tandem with BSUK's Lead Safeguarding Officer, Mark Caress.

Though the position is important from a governance point of view, the workload is unlikely to be heavy, and there will be no requirement for the Safeguarding Officer to attend every Executive meeting.

Jenny Fromer, who served as the BSF's Safeguarding Officer while she was BSF President, has agreed to draw up a job description for the role, and once this is approved by the Executive, an article advertising the post will go on the website and on BSF social media channels.

Meanwhile, BSF General Officer and former BSF President Stella Ackrell has agreed to stand in as an interim Safeguarding Officer for the BSF. Stella has had all the relevant training and performs this role for the Oxford Softball League.

New BSF Website

Reactions to the new BSF website, which went live at the end of February, have generally been favourable.

But a large amount of material on the old website has not been transferred to the new site, and decisions will need to be made about this.

New BSF President Ieuan Gale will set up a small working group to look through documents in the Resources section on the old website to decide which documents should be transferred to the new site as they are, which will need rewriting and which can be discarded as out of date.

Meanwhile, the GB Management Committee will be reviewing National Team-related documents on the old website and BASU will review BASU-related documents.

The hope is that news articles on the old website, which go back to 2011 and embody much of the BSF's more recent history, can be archived on the old website and remain accessible to Executive members and others.

WBSC Slowpitch Working Group

The World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) has set up a Slowpitch Working Group to look at the development of co-ed and single-sex slowpitch on a worldwide level, and to set parameters and a date for a Slowpitch World Cup involving national teams, hopefully to begin in 2022.

The Working Group will hold its first meeting on 23 March, and Mike Jennings and Softball Ireland President Colum Lavery will represent Europe.

The aim is to make slowpitch one of the WBSC's key disciplines, alongside baseball, fastpitch softball and Baseball5.

National Championships and NSL

Single-Sex Nationals (26-27 June, Birmingham). Competitions Officer Liz Graham told the meeting that 1 May was the final date when the BSF could cancel the pitches booked at Moor Lane Sports Ground without losing the booking fee, so a decision on whether the tournament can go ahead will need to be made before then. This will require Matt Tebb, who has volunteered to be the Tournament Organiser, to canvass all potential entrants by at least the middle of April to see if enough teams will commit to allow the tournament to go ahead.

BSF Co-ed Slowpitch League Nationals (7-8 August, Farnham Park). The BSF still needs an Organiser for this tournament.

National Softball League. With the Windsor Tournament agreeing to host NSL1 league play, proposed dates and venues for NSL play, all at Farnham Park, are:

- NSL2 at Diamond Series 2 (5-6 June)
- NSL1 at Windsor Tournament (10-11 July)
- NSL2 at Diamond Series 3 (17-18 July)
- NSL1 as a standalone event (14-15 August)

The NSL schedule at these events will have teams playing all of their opponents once over two weekends, with the top eight teams going forward to NSL Nationals at Farnham Park on 4-5 September.

These dates will be circulated to NSL teams to see if there are any problems. But options for other dates are severely limited.

The BSF will confirm NSL league dates at its next meeting on 8 April.

BASU

BSF Technical Officer and BASU Training Officer Pete Saunders reported that Crew Chiefs have now been assigned for all tournaments on the 2021 Calendar, and these assignments have been posted on the BSF website.

BASU will shortly be canvassing umpires to see who is willing to umpire this year.

Training courses this year will only be revision for existing BASU umpires.

Feedback from BSUK Board and Committee Meetings

BSF President Ieuan Gale reported that with the BBF having left the tripartite Agreement, leaving the BSF as the only member of BSUK, work on a new Membership Agreement is proceeding.

Next meeting

The next monthly videoconference meeting for the BSF Executive will be held on Thursday 8 April.

Anyone with matters to bring to the meeting should email BSF Administrator Bob Fromer.