

BSF Executive Meeting Report:

26 April 2017

The BSF Executive held its latest monthly conference call meeting on the evening of Wednesday 26 April. Below is a journalistic report on the main discussions and decisions.

Attendance

Present: Jenny Fromer (President), Stella Ackrell (Administrator), Laura Burkhardt (Treasurer), Jana McCaskill (National Teams Officer), Liz Graham (Competitions Director), Mike Jennings (General Officer), Steve Getraer (General Officer), Chris Moon (BASU Representative).

Apologies: None.

Guest: Bob Fromer (BSUK).

Development grants

A number of applications for BSF Development Grants have been received since the Executive last met, and the following decisions were taken:

- A grant of £250 was awarded to the Greater London Softball Mixed League (GLSML) to help support the purchase of more equipment for weekly open development sessions that the league runs from June through August. These sessions generally result in the creation at least one new team that plays in the GLSML the following season. Most of the cost of supporting these sessions is covered by the league.

General Officer Mike Jennings, who looks after insurance matters for the BSF, noted that leagues running development sessions and creating new teams from them need to be aware that under the terms of the BSF's public liability insurance, a newly-formed team is only covered for five practice sessions as an unaffiliated team. After that, to retain insurance coverage, it needs to affiliate (presumably through its league) to the BSF.

- A grant of £250 was awarded to the Misfits Softball Club in the East Midlands Softball League to support the expansion of the club through the creation of a development squad and an additional diamond. Additional support is being provided by the league.
- A grant of £128 was awarded to BASU Fastpitch Officer Bridget Cameron for the purchase of two hockey-style face masks for additional umpires who have been required to support the growth of the Great Britain Fastpitch League (GBFL) this year. The grant is equivalent to the cost of the masks. The GBFL, with support from the GB Management Committee, has already purchased more traditional facemasks for use, on an optional basis, by pitchers and corner infielders during GBFL play.
- A grant of £250 was awarded to Herts Baseball Club, based in Hemel Hempstead, to help develop slowpitch softball activity within the club and run recreational games on Saturday

afternoons during the coming season. The money will primarily be used for equipment, and the ultimate aim is to create a local league in the area.

Two other grant applications, from new teams in Manchester and Harrogate, were not supported at this time. But BSF President Jenny Fromer will follow up with each team to discuss their needs and to see if the creation of a re-shaped application is warranted.

Support for purchase of helmets

Three years ago, after the BSF made it mandatory for under-18 players in adult slowpitch teams to wear helmets at bat, on the bases and while coaching, and for under-18 catchers to wear face masks, the BSF offered to match the cost for leagues and teams purchasing helmets and face masks up to a maximum contribution of £25.

Since then, more and more adult players are using helmets and some leagues have made their use mandatory, and the BSF has had to consider how much support it can provide to a growing and welcome trend.

The decision is that the BSF will pay 50% of the total cost, on request, to teams or leagues purchasing helmets and face masks for use by under-18 players, with no upper limit. But requests to support the purchase of helmets and masks for adult players will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and, on the whole, the BSF considers this to be a league responsibility.

National Championships

BSF Competitions Director Liz Graham reported that entries are already coming in for the Single-Sex Slowpitch National Championship on 8-9 July in Birmingham.

Entry forms for the Co-ed Slowpitch League Nationals, scheduled for 12-13 August at Farnham Park, will be available shortly.

National Teams

BSF National Teams Officer Jana McCaskill told the Executive about two recent appointments to GB Fastpitch Team staffs.

Kirsten Leal, a former GB Women's Team player who now has a PhD in Physical Therapy with a focus on injury prevention and sports medicine, has been appointed as the physiotherapist for the GB Junior (Under-19) Women's Team when they compete in the 12th WBSC Junior World Championship in Clearwater, Florida in July.

Christina Whitlock, a former All-American catcher, Team USA player and a current college assistant coach, has been appointed as the pitching coach for the GB Women's Team for the European Women's Championship this summer in June in Bollate, Italy and beyond.

The Executive was also informed that GB Under-16 Girls' Head Coach Johanna Malisani has added GB Women's Team pool player Sean Wigington to the staff as an assistant coach for the European Cadette (Under-16) Championship in July in Ostrava, Czech Republic.

Memo of Understanding for representation to the BOA and UK Sport

With baseball and softball now back in the Olympics, relations have been resumed with the British Olympic Association (BOA) and with the Olympic funding agency UK Sport. However, as baseball and softball are regarded as one sport in an Olympic context, these agencies require single representation rather than having a representative from each discipline. BSUK, which has taken the lead in re-establishing these relationships, has been consulting with the BSF and the BBF on how this can be achieved, who the representative should be and what authority he or she would have.

Stella Ackrell, Mike Jennings and Jana McCaskill have been constituted as a subcommittee to consider this issue on behalf of the BSF, and they reported, after a meeting with their baseball counterparts, that both Federations feel a need for the current proposal on this to be re-drafted. Jana McCaskill will take the lead on re-drafting and will consult with the BBF when a new draft is completed.

There is a certain amount of urgency to finalising a proposal, because until relations with the BOA can be formally resumed, baseball and softball are unable to apply through the BOA for potential grant funding from the International Olympic Committee's Olympic Solidarity programme. While there is no guarantee that Olympic Solidarity applications will be successful, delays may mean that other sports get in first.

Event coverage and webstreaming

BSUK's ability to send reporters overseas to report on GB Softball Teams playing in ESF or WBSC competitions is likely to be reduced this year because of funding cuts and rising costs due to Brexit's effect on the pound. In light of this, the BSF has agreed to provide an initial contribution of £500 to support on-the-ground reporting, and may consider a further grant if necessary.

Last year, the final games of the BSF's Premier Nationals were successfully webstreamed through a partnership between BSUK, the BSF and the broadcast company Webcast Sports, and attracted an audience of over 2,000 on-demand viewers after the event.

BSUK's ability to fund this kind of multi-camera webstreaming is likely to be reduced this year, and the BSF will need to consider how much it can pay if it wants to repeat this type of broadcast.

Meanwhile, however, BSUK has been trialling a much cheaper DIY webcast system involving a fixed camera elevated behind home plate and possibly a second camera to follow the ball, which could be accompanied by basic graphics and a commentary. If the trials are successful, and depending on cost, this could allow the BSF to commission webstreaming at additional events this year.

While this system will not produce results comparable to the set-up used at the Premier Nationals last year, it would allow members of the softball community – and others – to see more play throughout the season and can help raise the profile of the sport.

BSUK has been asked to supply costings and the BSF will consider which events it might want to consider webstreaming if this project goes ahead.

Governance Code compliance

All sports that receive public funding are having to work towards compliance with a major new Governance Code, and failure to comply with the Code's 75 or so provisions by October this year is likely to result in loss of funding.

In the case of baseball and softball, perhaps uniquely among funded sports, compliance is complicated by the fact of three organisations being involved – the BSF, the BBF and BSUK – whereas the public funding goes only to BSUK. It's clear that meeting the Code requirements will necessitate changes to the current formal arrangements between the three organisations, and the implications of these changes are currently under discussion.

The BSF Executive will devote the bulk of its next scheduled conference call meeting, on 11 May, to looking in detail at the Code requirements, what they will mean and whether and how they can be implemented. The Executive will also consider which changes will need to be taken to the members for formal approval at next year's AGM.

Contribution to umpire travel

Two BASU umpires – Bridget Cameron and Jana McCaskill – have been selected to umpire at the 12th WBSC Junior World Championship in Clearwater, Florida, USA in July, in which a record number of 26 countries will take part, including the European Champion GB Junior Team.

Umpires selected to officiate in European or World Championships are required to find their own travel costs to get to the tournament venue, after which accommodation and food costs are covered by the tournament organisers. BASU and the BSF have an established mechanism for helping BASU umpires with travel costs to ESF tournaments, but not for World Championships and Cups outside Europe.

In those circumstances, the Executive decided to award grants of £250 each to Bridget and Jana to help with the cost of flights to Florida.

Next meeting

The next BSF Executive conference call meeting will be on Thursday 11 May.

Anyone with items to raise should contact BSF Administrator Stella Ackrell on: stella.ackrell@britishsoftball.org.

