



12 November 2019

To: Softball Ireland Membership

Re: 2019 Year in Review

Similar to the Year in Review sent last year, I am writing to you on behalf of the Softball Ireland Board in advance of the Softball Ireland AGM to update on progress in 2019 and plans for 2020. We hope that this letter will be circulated to all Softball Ireland members.

The attached letter addresses the following key areas:

- Differentiation of the Role of the Governing Body and the Regions
- Composition of the Softball Ireland Board
- Communication
- Irish Open Softball Tournament 2019
- Slowpitch Working Group
- Umpires Working Group
- Marketing & Promotion
- Softball/Baseball Merger
- Coaching
- Launch of Fastpitch League

As a board, we wrote to the membership identifying a number of areas needing improvement in 2019 and progress is outlined in the update below. The 2020 priorities are being developed to reflect the needs of Softball Ireland subject to their adoption by the new Board on November 30, 2019. However, we cannot do this without the support of our membership and most importantly, without volunteers.

As you will note below, the Board consists of two Executive members and representatives from the Slowpitch Regions of Ulster and Leinster and the Fastpitch discipline. These representatives have their own responsibilities and limited time to give to the national body.

We would ask that you take a moment or two to read the attachment so that we may have a robust and positive discussion at the Softball Ireland AGM.

We have had great success on and off the diamond in 2019 and we look forward to sharing these with you at the Softball Ireland AGM, which will be held in ALSAA on November 30, 2019.

Yours in softball,

Colum Lavery

**Colum Lavery on behalf of the Softball Ireland Board
President**



Differentiation of the Role of the Governing Body and the Regions

Softball Ireland is the National Governing Body (NGB) of all variations of the sport in Ireland. As NGB, we are primarily responsible for constitutional governance, regulation, representing the sport at national and international level, strategic planning, management of national teams, organisation of national tournaments, and, most importantly, supporting our Regional Associations.

Softball Leinster and Softball Ulster are responsible for the growth, development and organisation of adult slo-pitch softball in their respective regions. Softball Ireland recognises the regional ownership of the lead role in development (as requested by both the regions and the Softball Ireland membership) and have provided support upon request.

Fastpitch Ireland is responsible for the development and organisation of Fastpitch Softball Ireland including coaching, promotion and the launching of the inaugural league.

2019 Key Achievements

- **National Recognition**
 - Completion of Softball/Baseball Merger and the creation of Baseball Softball Ireland (MOU attached)
 - Initial meetings with Sport Ireland to identify recognition pathway
 - Meetings with Olympic Federation of Ireland
 - Attendance of ESF & WBSC Meetings
 - Appointment of Dr. Melanie Cunningham as Chairperson of WBSC Europe Medical Commission
- **National Tournaments**
 - Brian Walshe Cup (Start of Season Blitz) – *won by Team No Name*
 - Irish Open Softball Tournament – *won by Dodder*
 - Softball Ireland National Club Championships (SINCC) – *won by Dodder*
 - Successful re-launch of Indoor Softball – *thanks Julie!*
 - Fastpitch League to launch on November 10, 2019 – *thanks Melanie!*
- **International Participation**
 - Co-ed Slowpitch European Championships (Bronze Medal)
 - Co-ed Slowpitch World Series of Softball (10th place finish)
 - Women's Fastpitch European Championships (8th place finish)
 - Womens U19 World Cup (14th place finish)
 - Hosting of USA Softball in Dublin with 300 spectators and 140k viewers on streaming
- **Coaching**
 - 5 x Open Softball Skills/Training days delivered by Fastpitch WNT
 - Softball Ireland Coaching programme – implementation delayed, update at AGM
- **Media Saturation**
 - Articles in on-line and print media
 - Tweet from the President of Ireland
 - Large footprint on Ireland v USA Game
 - Media articles on National Teams
- **Promotion / Marketing**
 - Radio interviews and promotion
 - Participation in Sport Ireland SPORTFEST Event
 - Soft launch of play softball mark
- **Successful application for Development Support**
 - Softball Ireland to receive equipment & starter packs from WBSC



Composition of Softball Ireland Board

The Softball Ireland Board currently consists of six volunteers: President, Secretary, an independent member and representatives from Leinster, Ulster and Fastpitch. Treasurer role remains vacant since the last AGM despite numerous attempts to find a candidate.

Communication

Softball Ireland listened to the concerns of the membership that there was not enough communication and the Board worked hard to improve transparent communication in 2019, a priority for the incoming board in 2020 is the need to appoint a comms officer which may need to be a paid position.

The website was refreshed and updated throughout 2019, Softball Ireland increased its social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Softball Ireland (as NGB) is also dependent on the Regions and clubs to create additional media for us to share. Softball Ulster made a concerted effort in 2019 (14% of SI twitter social media driven by Softball Ulster) whilst Softball Ireland will continue to work with Leinster to increase its social media footprint (1% of SI twitter social media driven by Softball Leinster).

Softball Ireland issued regular newsletters to update members across the season, we are dependent on these being shared by the team contacts whilst we also put links to them on Facebook and Twitter.

Further ideas are welcome from the membership. Our aim is to let you know what we are doing but acknowledge we need to “boast” our achievements more.

The Softball Ireland Board can be contacted by email (the president and secretary e-mail addresses have not changed in 10 years), by phone or in person, and will always respond to queries.

Irish Open Softball Tournament 2019

The Softball Ireland Board would like to especially thank Julie Trundle and Elaine Barr who volunteered to run IOST 2019 and particularly the social side of the 2019 IOST tournament and made the “S” in IOST mean social once more. The work and time commitment from both Julie and Elaine were phenomenal and plans for 2020 have already commenced with aplomb. The choice of weekend in 2019 was unfortunately unavoidable due to a number of other events in UL and few other venues offering the combination of fields and accommodation.

Softball Ireland would also like to thank Jonathan and Colum for their assistance in scheduling and running of the tournament over the weekend and the Softball Ireland board for their input.

The dates for IOST 2020 are already set: 21st – 22nd August, 2020.

Slowpitch Development Working Group

Following on from a number of false starts, this working group is now up and running. We would like to thank the members who completed the survey and the Working Group members will be reaching out individually to clubs who didn't respond to get their views. Katie Sadleir, an outside consultant and chair of the group, will provide an update to the AGM on November 30, 2019.

We are hopeful that development plan can be agreed from the Working Group to be applied across Ireland. Softball Ulster have finished and shared a detailed development plan for their region, and we hope they will give a high-level overview of this at the AGM.



Baseball Softball Ireland

The merger of Baseball and Softball continued to be both a key challenge and time-consuming priority for the President and Secretary of Softball Ireland in 2019. Softball Ireland were delighted to enter into an agreement of an umbrella body merging Softball and Baseball and wish to thank Colum, Conor and Baseball Ireland for their perseverance in bringing this to a conclusion.

The Baseball Softball Ireland transitional Board currently consists of Colum Lavery (President SI), Conor Sayles (SI), Melanie Cunningham (SI), Tom Kelly (President BI), Sean Mitchell and Anne Murphy.

Following a meeting of BSI with Sport Ireland on recognition, Sport Ireland confirmed the merged entity must meet a number of criteria and this will be a very time-consuming process for the incoming board in 2020. Sport Ireland recognition was identified by the SI AGM as a key priority for the Board in 2019. While we can see a path to finally meet this goal, and the potential benefits are becoming clearer, significant work on our governance structure and policies is required and will likely require a 5-year timeline.

As part of the merger, Softball and Baseball have committed to exploring working together on a number of joint projects including youth development, multi-purpose fields, coaching and umpiring.

Softball Ireland Coaching Programme

In 2018 Softball Ireland confirmed an agreement to franchise the BSUK coaching programme. Unfortunately, getting the correct coaches from BSUK has been challenging for both sides and something we hope to be able to sort shortly. However, the benefits of the relationship were seen during the summer with invitations to the MLB Cadet and Coach Development Camps.

- **MLB Cadet Camp**

To coincide with the Boston Red Sox v New York Yankees series played in London in June 2019, Major League Baseball (MLB) ran a Cadet Camp targeted at high level young male and female athletes.

Softball Ireland through our continued partnership with BaseballSoftballUK nominated Caitlyne De Lange (Dodder) and Maeve Og O'Leary (WNT) to attend the MLB Cadet Camp at the end of the May 2020. Softball Ireland covered the cost of the Players flights as a development grant to allow them to participate.

- **MLB Coach Development Programme**

As part of the legacy programme ran by MLB in advance of the RedSox v Yankees London Series in June 2019, Softball Ireland were invited to nominate an attendee to the MLB Coach Development programme.

Softball Ireland nominated Jonathan Spielberg to attend the MLB Coaches Development Programme in London on May 25/26, 2019 in his capacity as an assistant coach on the Slowpitch National Co-ed team and his responsibility for Slowpitch development in Leinster as Chairman of SL. Softball Ireland covered all costs associated with the tournament as a development grant to Jonathan.



Umpiring

- **Softball Ireland Umpires' Working Group**

Conor Sayles was asked by the SI President to lead a group of six umpires (three Leinster and three Ulster) to consider the current challenges with quantity and quality of officials from league to international level. Summary output will be provided in advance of the AGM.

- **Umpiring Development Grant**

Following a request from the Softball Leinster Committee, Softball Ireland were delighted to provide Softball Leinster with a development grant in 2019 to assist in the offsetting of costs of training new umpires. Softball Ireland hope that outcomes from the Working Group can create a more centralized and common approach from the Regions.

Marketing and Promotion

Softball Ireland's exhibition at the 2019 Sport Ireland Family *SPORTFEST* was an overwhelming success introducing hundreds to the sport. Softball Ireland's invite to the *SPORTFEST* was a direct result of the merger with Baseball Ireland and the engagement with Sport Ireland.

Softball Ireland created a Softball Village at the Family *SPORTFEST* demonstrating slowpitch softball and allowing those attending an opportunity to try the different skills of the game including throwing, hitting and pitching. The Softball Village was one of the more popular exhibitors on the day with a constant flow of willing participants trying to hit the target or hit the ball from a Batting Tee.

The exhibition stand staffed by Softball Ireland President Colum Lavery together with current and past Softball Ireland national team players and representatives from National Champions Dodder. Softball Ireland would like to thank Caitlyne De Lange, Brian Connolly, Jordan Sylver and Niall Lavery for volunteering their time on the day.

Charity Blitzes

Not something we are taking glory for, Softball Ireland would like to congratulate and thank Suspects (Alacoque & Adrian), Castleknock (Alan) and Kegs (Peter) for the organisation and running of tournaments which are for great causes. Softball Ireland are delighted to be able to support these tournaments in little ways by providing gloves and insurance.

Fastpitch League Launch

Fastpitch Ireland, the Committee responsible for the development and running of the discipline of Fastpitch in Ireland, launched its inaugural league on November 10, 2019 in Abbottstown with four teams and over 50 players involved on day one of which ½ were new to softball in Ireland.

The league season will run indoors on a full-size diamond from November – March each year. The league season has been chosen in order to compliment the existing Slowpitch and Baseball summer seasons and give players the option to play Softball through the winter months. The next league day is December 15, 2019.