



BaseballSoftball SPORT REVIEW PROPOSAL

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CYCLE TWO

SUMMARY

Governance

This document contains a proposal for both baseball and softball to be added to the BUCS Inter-Varsity Competition programme. Since 2013, when the International Baseball Federation and the International Softball Federation merged to form the World Baseball Softball Confederation, the sports have been governed jointly, and inherently linked together. As the Development Agency for both baseball and softball in the UK, we are bound to continue this approach of presenting the sports together.

Structure

Our proposal consists of the following baseball and softball proposed competition structures to be adopted into the National BUCS Inter-Varsity Competition Programme for the 2020/21 season and subsequent years, delivered in partnership between BUCS and BaseballSoftballUK (BSUK). For both softball and baseball, we will be working with the British Association of Softball Umpires (BASU) and the Association of British Baseball Umpires (ABBU) to secure high quality, impartial officiating for the competitions. BASU have committed to sourcing and supplying umpires all of the softball regional central venue events as well as the season ending National University Softball Championships. We are working closely with ABBU to provide a list of suitable and available baseball umpires for the universities to approach for the regional league fixtures. They will also be providing umpires for the season ending National University Baseball Championships.

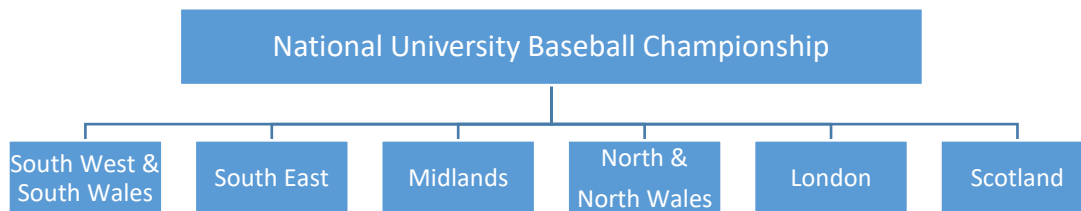
1) **The National University Baseball Competition structure.**

This will initially comprise of six regional baseball leagues playing home and away fixtures between October 2020 and March 2021. This home and away format has been successfully in place for the past four years. Indicative playing dates are as follows:

- Game Day 1 – Saturday 31 October 2020.
- Game Day 2 – Saturday 7 November 2020.
- Game Day 3 – Saturday 28 November 2020.
- Game Day 4 – Saturday 13 February 2021.
- Game Day 5 – Saturday 6 March 2021.
- Game Day 6 – Saturday 20 March 2021.
- National University Baseball Championship – Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 March 2021.

The leading two teams from the regional baseball leagues will then qualify for the season ending National University Baseball Championship, which will determine the best team in the country. This will be staged in March each year at the Farnham Park National Baseball and Softball Complex. The season ending National University Baseball Championship will be organised and delivered by BSUK staff.

Structure of the National University Baseball Competition: this is based on the known number and location of university baseball teams that are currently playing. We have tried to build in capacity for future expansion of these regional leagues. This means that initially at least the structure of the baseball and softball competitions will be slightly different. This also recognises the cultural differences in how baseball (travel to home and away games) and softball (central venue tournaments) are played in the UK.



To ensure a high-quality competition is put into place, we will be asking all universities entering to put in place the following requirements:

- An identified university representative through which to communicate.
- Appropriate equipment provision to ensure safety and quality of experience for all players.
- Access to appropriate playing facilities (area required will be a half football pitch sized grass area or astro-turf).
- All fixtures will be confirmed with opponents and results submitted following completion of the games in accordance with existing BUCS regulations.

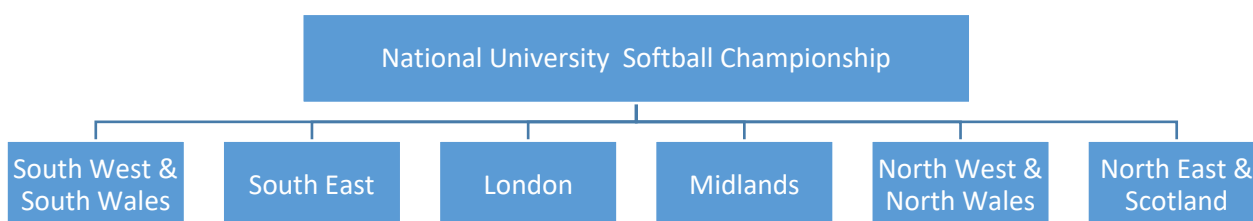
2) The National University Softball Competition structure.

This will initially comprise of six regional softball leagues organised as central venue events with five playing dates per region between October 2020 and March 2021. Indicative dates are as follows:

- Game Day 1 - 10 October 2020.
- Game Day 2 - 21 November 2020.
- Game Day 3 - 6 February 2021.
- Game Day 4 - 27 February 2021.
- Game Day 5 – 13 March 2021.
- National University Softball Championship – Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 March 2021.

The leading two teams from the regional softball leagues will then qualify for the National University Softball Championship, which will determine the best team in the country. This will be staged in March 2021 at the Farnham Park National Baseball and Softball Complex. The season ending National University Softball Championship will be organised and delivered by BSUK staff.

Structure of the National University Softball Competition: this will be based on the known number and location of university softball teams that are currently playing. We have tried to build in capacity for future expansion of these regional leagues. This means that initially at least the structure of the baseball and softball competitions will be slightly different. This also recognises the cultural differences in how baseball (travel to home and away games) and softball (central venue tournaments) are played in the UK.



The regional softball leagues will be organised and delivered directly by BSUK Development staff. Facilities, umpires and equipment will be organised and provided for teams. It is our intention that these competitions are staged where possible at university sites, but at times maybe run at other sites according to availability and location to universities.

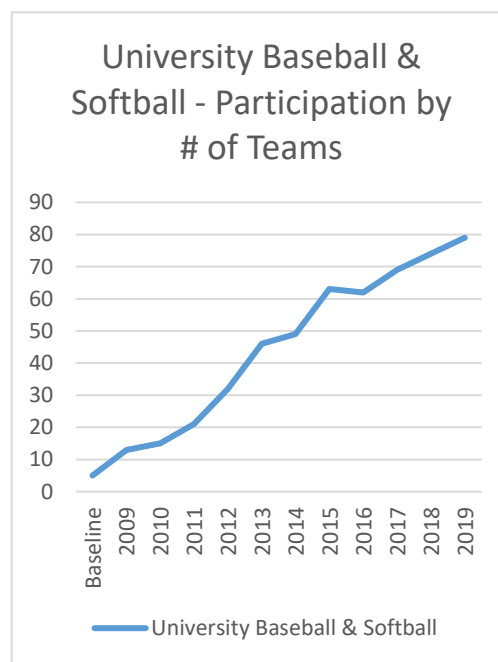
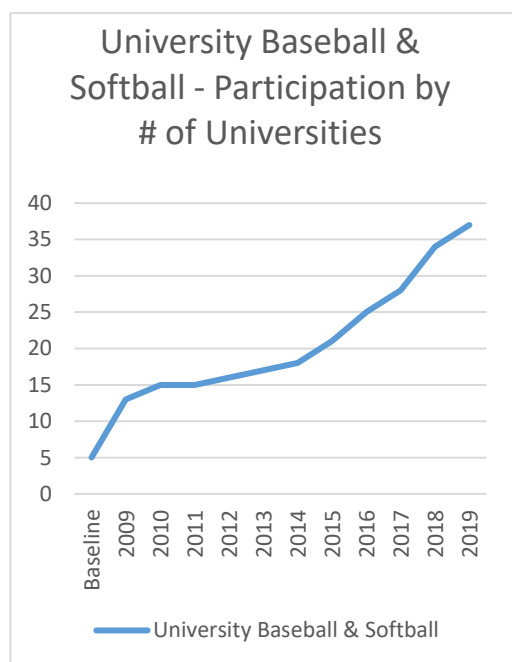
In preparation for potential inclusion into the BUCS Inter-Varsity programme, BaseballSoftballUK has put into place these competition structures for both baseball and softball as outlined above. 17 teams have entered the National University Softball Competition for season 2019/20, with 100% of fixtures being played on the opening weekend of central venue competition, held on Saturday 12 October 2019. For season 2019/20, 24 teams have entered the National University Baseball Competition, with play due to commence on Saturday 2 November 2019.

1. INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to set out the rationale, strategic context and proposed structure of a baseball and softball university competition to be adopted as part of the National BUCS Inter-Varsity Competition programme to commence in Autumn 2020. It has been devised as part of the BUCS competitions review started in May 2018 and is submitted by BaseballSoftballUK.

BaseballSoftballUK (BSUK) is the development agency for baseball and softball in the United Kingdom. Since 2005, BSUK has been in receipt of Sport England funding, to grow and promote the sports of baseball and softball. Higher Education Institutions and the university sector have been a central part of our plans to grow participation since 2009. At that stage, just five institutions were known to have a single baseball team each. In October 2019, that number stands at 79 teams from a total of 36 separate institutions.

The charts below show the growth of university baseball and softball.



Here is a current (October 2019) list of the institutions (36) currently with BaseballSoftball societies and teams:

Cardiff University (B&S)
Coventry University (B)
Durham University (B&S)
Edge Hill University (B)
Imperial College London (B&S)
King's College London (B&S)
Loughborough University (B&S)
Manchester Metropolitan University (S)
Oxford Brookes University (S)
Queen Mary College London (B&S)
Sheffield Hallam University (B)

Swansea University (B)
University College London (B&S)
University of Aberdeen (B)
University of Bolton (S)
University of Brighton (B&S)
University of Cambridge (B)
University of Chichester (S)
University of East Anglia (B&S)
University of Essex (B&S)
University of Hertfordshire (S)
University of Hull (B)

University of Kent (B&S)
University of Leeds (B)
University of Manchester (S)
University of Northampton (B)
University of Nottingham (B&S)
University of Oxford (B)
University of Portsmouth (S)
University of Reading (S)

University of Salford (S)
University of Sheffield (B)
University of Southampton (B&S)
University of Stirling (B)
University of Surrey (B&S)
University of the West of England (B&S)
University of York (B&S)

Legend: S – Softball
 B – Baseball B&S – Baseball & Softball

Two driving factors have been behind this rapid and sustained growth:

- 1) Competition - has been at the core of sustaining newly formed clubs and societies. University baseball & softball clubs and societies were looking for a focal point to sustain interest from student-athletes. We have found that appropriate competition is an essential element in achieving this. To date , the growth of the competition programme for universities has been organic and at times slightly incoherent. This review has allowed us to revisit the purpose and structure of our competitions.
- 2) University students – the growth in the university sector in baseball and softball has been driven by staff from BSUK identifying and supporting students from within member institutions to establish clubs and societies. Our University BaseballSoftball Officer programme has been modelled on the Higher Education Volleyball Officer programme through a partnership with Volleyball England. Students are provided with resources, training and development support, meaning that the impact on member institution staff is reduced. It provides the students with the necessary tools to establish, grow and most importantly sustain a club or society at their institution.

2. PURPOSE

This competition review process has allowed staff at BSUK to take a good look at the current competition structure and allow us to put in place a new proposal that is better aligned, more coherent and most importantly provides a better experience for the universities and their students. The current National University Baseball and National University Softball Championships are staged bi-annually, every Spring and Autumn. At present, they are direct entry events and seen as the focal point of our competition, but there is an emerging over-subscription issue as well as a desire to experience more appropriate and regular opportunities to play. We also want to see this growth of both baseball and softball in universities continue and think that it will attract a wide variety of student-athlete types:

- Type 3s – those student-athletes who are currently attracted to participate in university baseball and softball teams playing in regional and national competitions. In addition, baseball will particularly appeal to sport orientated males who have previously played team sports such as cricket and hockey who are seeking a new interest. Softball will appeal to sport oriented females who have previously played team sports such as cricket, rounders and hockey.
- Type 1s & 2s – those student-athletes who are attracted by the prospective of a new activity at their institution, where they will meet different people, develop new social circles and help settle into life at university. As a sport new to most, many will find introduction sessions reassuring without the fear of being judged. Softball will particularly appeal to women and girls, international students and members of the LGBTQ+ community, who are over-represented in our softball playing demographics.

When adopted, we believe that this proposed competition structure will:

- 1) Give further credibility to BUCS and member institutions by adding in sports that are fast becoming very popular with students.
- 2) Add sports to the BUCS Inter-Varsity competition programme that will broaden its current portfolio of sports offered at minimum impact to them.
- 3) Add sports to the BUCS competition framework that will broaden the number and background of students that will play in them at member institutions.
- 4) Give further credibility to those university baseball and softball clubs and societies that are already formed and playing.
- 5) Respond to the needs and feedback of student-athletes currently playing within established clubs and societies:
- 6) Provide appropriate, differentiated and engaging competition opportunities for a wide variety of students at member institutions; engaging a cohort of students who may not currently be catered for within BUCS competitions.

Further considerations:

Facilities – baseball and softball can be played on any large flat space, approximately half a football pitch in size for one game. Current competitions are played on grass fields, artificial pitches and indoors - often during non-peak time to ensure accessibility. Softball will be played as central venue competitions minimising the pressure on university facilities. Baseball will be played on a home and away basis, with universities responsible for organising their own facility bookings as the home team. There is no requirement for any other facility amendments or investments by the university. Bases can be placed on the ground and removed once the game has concluded. University baseball generally does not require the use of pitching mounds, although some societies do have access to them already. Further details of the field dimensions can be found here [Baseball](#) & [Softball](#).

Timings – the regional leagues will commence in October each year and the competition programme will conclude with the National University Baseball & National University Softball Championships over two consecutive weekends in March each year. The Spring championships have been staged in March each year since their inception in 2013, following close consultation and collaboration with teams. They have seen entry levels rising since their inception, with limiting factors of the number of fields at Farnham Park and the amount of daylight in March.

National University Baseball and Softball Competitions – BSUK will oversee the organisation and delivery of the regional softball leagues and the organisation of regional baseball leagues.

National University Baseball & Softball Championships – BSUK will oversee the organisation and delivery of the annual National University Baseball and National University Softball championships.

Equipment – all universities with existing teams have their own playing equipment. Newly formed clubs and societies will be supported initially by BSUK Development Managers and where appropriate through our University BaseballSoftball Officer programme to ensure that new teams are able to provide a high quality experience.

Student BaseballSoftball Officers – all student baseball & softball Officers will be supported by BSUK Development Managers on an ongoing basis and will also be invited to attend the National University Baseball and Softball Conference. This has run annually since 2014.

Higher Education Institutions – we are hopeful that through inclusion into the BUCS Inter-Varsity competition programme, the number of university baseball and softball teams forming will increase. BSUK will pro-actively support both university staff (AU and Sports Development) and students in the creation of new teams. This will be in the form of:

- Identified BSUK Development Manager to work through.
- Signposting to quality assured equipment through preferred suppliers.

- Training for students in the basics of baseball and softball.
- Provision of coaches to support with initial training sessions where needed.
- Marketing and promotional materials to help raise awareness of the club.
- Facility requirements - including field dimensions and markings.

3. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

We feel that including baseball and Softball into the BUCS Competition programme it will align closely with the following strategic aims:

Inter-Varsity University Sport – we will add popular and fast growing sports to the list that institutions can engage with.

Social & Recreational Sport – The new competition programme will be attractive to some students who want to take part in competition but with a more recreational experience.

Professional & Workforce Development – Our University Baseball and University Softball Officer programmes are well established and positioned to support the creation of university baseball and softball teams. Each university seeking to establish new teams to enter the competition would receive the following development support direct from BSUK:

- Development funding from BSUK.
- Access to training and BSUK qualifications.
- Direct support from BSUK development staff.
- BSUK clothing to promote and assist the role.
- Attendance at the annual National University Baseball & Softball Conference.

For further details on the University Baseball & Softball Officer role please visit this [website](#).

Universities with baseball and softball teams already in existence, will continue to be supported in a number of ways:

- Development funding from BSUK.
- Access to training and BSUK qualifications relevant to role.
- Direct support from BSUK Development staff.
- Attendance at the National University Baseball & Softball Conference.
- Support at recruitment events for their society.
- Connection into the local baseball and softball community where feasible.

Profile and Influence – Major League Baseball games are being staged in the UK in 2019 and 2020 and both sports have been re-introduced into the Tokyo Olympic programme. UK Sport has now recognised baseball and softball as eligible sports to receive Aspiration Fund investment and partnerships with member institutions are key elements of this. Baseball and softball have grown significantly in universities in the UK in the past 10 years. We now want to maximise the potential growth of university baseball and softball teams and are keen to use the BUCS competition structures to grow the profile of our sports in the sector.

Inclusion – we know that Women & Girls (56%) and LGBTQ+ (14%) are significantly over-represented in our sports. Through inclusion into the BUCS competition programme, we know that this would increase further and support institutions to engage a broader section of their student-athletes into sport and physical activity.

4. CONSULTATION AND SUPPORT

There are several routes through which we have consulted and gained support for this proposal:

- One to one discussions with university baseball and softball teams.

- Facebook group discussions with all university baseball and softball teams.
- Face to face consultation process through our annual National University Baseball & Softball Conference.
- Focus group session held in July 2018 with 20 universities in attendance.
- BUCS-led consultation as part of the strategic review - shared with all affiliated universities.
- Annual University Baseball and Softball survey - undertaken by BSUK.
- A strong track record of increasing the number of university baseball and softball teams.

At present there are 36 separate institutions that have 79 established teams for baseball, softball or both. With each team equating to roughly 20 players per team, this brings our current student playing population to ~1,600 players. We have a close and effective relationship with all of these institutions and are aware of large-scale support for our proposals through consultation.

This quote is a good reflection:

"The structure already exists with a well organised NGB. BUCS would be missing out not to get on board with this opportunity to have a new sport within the BUCS structure that has high participation rates."
Laura Marty Baseball & Softball Society President, Loughborough University

Much of our proposed competition structure is already in place and would further add to the credibility and breadth of the current BUCS Inter-Varsity Competition programme. With the MLB London Series in 2019 & 2020 and the inclusion of both baseball and softball for the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, the profile of the sports in the UK will only grow. By including baseball & softball into the BUCS programme in 2020, the member institutions and BUCS will be well placed to be ahead of the curve.

This is supported by:

"In general, I feel that the ideas in the proposal are things that have been voiced back to BSUK over the past years and so it is encouraging to see that there is a proposal in motion to establish them."
Luc Chignell, Team Manager, University of Nottingham

"The format suggested looks sensible and shows the NGB has a good understanding of HE sport."
Fergus Chan, Baseball & Softball Society President, Durham University

Again, our university survey highlighted that 73% of our students play the sports in order to take part in competition, and over 80% indicated that they would like further playing opportunities.

BSUK has a development remit for all four home countries but does recognise that our support is focused towards England because of stakeholder investment. That said we are delighted to see teams from both Wales and Scotland entering recent competitions. We do not think any other organisations at this stage need to be further involved in this proposal.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

BSUK – Limited Impact. Much of the proposed baseball competition structure is already in place. There is an established National University Baseball League and existing National University Baseball Championship. There are some modifications and amendments to make to the regional softball events, but Development staff at BSUK will have a key role in organising and overseeing delivery of these. The regional baseball leagues are currently self-organised and as such will not require a great deal more resource. The National University Baseball and National University Softball Championships would continue to be hosted and organised by BSUK at Farnham Park every March. The timing of these Championships has always been undertaken in consultation with university clubs to ensure that are not inaccessible.

BUCS – moderate impact. We will need some promotional support and marketing of competitions to member institutions; administration of entry process; and an optional presence at National University Baseball & Softball Championships in March each year.

Universities – some support will be needed at those universities to seeking to establish new clubs and societies. This will be eased by the University Baseball/Softball Officer programme. Students are provided with resource, training and development support, meaning that the impact on member institution staff is in many cases negligible. For universities with current baseball and/or softball clubs and societies, we do not expect any substantive changes. There may be some facility access issues to overcome for new societies. Both baseball and softball require access to large and flat spaces – both indoors through the winter months and outdoor in the Autumn and Spring months. Pressure on university facilities is reduced by the use of community baseball and softball facilities where available to stage games and the central venue softball programming, meaning that only one venue is required each game day across up to five university sites. It is important to note that neither sports require any long term investments or amendments to facilities to be used for play. Throw down bases can be used in all cases.

6. WIDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The potential impact of moving to this new competition structure will be positive. It will help us to align our national university competition structure more closely with community outlets, despite the challenges of university term dates and a predominantly summer focused sport. The move to one national championship per year (in Spring) will reduce the perceived pressure from institutions to form teams very quickly at the onset of each new academic year.

Since instigating the National University Championships in 2013, and subsequent regional leagues and events, we have taken guidance on eligibility from BUCS for all competitions and believe that at this stage, we comply with BUCS general rules and regulations. We will seek to instigate a more formal governance structure to oversee this area of our work, similar in style to those existing currently in other BUCS affiliated sports. This will be in the form of a Sport Advisory Group. Membership for this would be drawn from Universities, BUCS, BSUK, Baseball and Softball Federations and Umpires.

Our proposal does align with all of our current priorities and development plans and features in our funding submission to Sport England as a high developmental priority for BSUK.

Since 2009, the growth of university baseball and softball teams has been vast. We have also worked hard to ensure that these new programmes are sustainable. We have a very small attrition rate for teams that have formed and there is evidence that we are fast approaching a critical mass of universities playing baseball and softball that will start to see further growth and sustainment of new clubs and societies.

BSUK has a full-time professional Development staff, who would take responsibility for the organisation of this proposed structure. Aligned with the University Baseball/Softball Officer programme we are confident that high quality experiences can be provided for all student athletes. The National University Baseball and National University Softball Championships would continue to be staged at our National Baseball and Softball Complex at Farnham Park in South Buckinghamshire.

We are also clear that the impact for the individual BUCS, individual institutions, and most importantly the students will be a positive one. As set out above, institutions wishing to form teams to enter will be provided with a comprehensive support plan, as set out in this document.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, BSUK proposes that the outlined baseball and softball competition structures be adopted into the National BUCS Inter-Varsity Competition Programme. Therefore, we invite BUCS and member institutions to support this proposal for inclusion in 2020/21.