



Colum Lavery – Vision for Softball Ireland Presidency

Dear Softball Ireland Member,

I am writing to you, seeking your support, as I put myself forward for re-election as President of Softball in Ireland.

I wish to start by welcoming the candidacies of Karey Lewis and Jonathan Spielberg for the position of President of Softball Ireland. I believe that a contested election is important for softball in Ireland and provides a mandate to the elected President to continue the work of developing the game.

I am further delighted by the commitment of my fellow candidates, should they be elected, to continue the work started by the existing Softball Ireland Board, particularly in the areas of our merger with Baseball Ireland, the ongoing creation of a Slowpitch development plan, youth development and Fastpitch.

Let's Play Ball

Currently softball in Ireland is in a period of transition and it's important to continue building our new initiatives – ie. supporting the implementation of the Softball Ulster Development Plan and the newly formed Fastpitch league, but it is also a time for refocussing our main efforts on the core of our sport, Slowpitch softball, and in particular the divisions outside of Prem in Leinster, which represent the majority of our membership, but who on occasion do not receive the focus they deserve!

A key priority, should I be re-elected, is to ensure the implementation of the Slowpitch Development plan across the island of Ireland and actively engage with the new Softball Leinster Board to assist in their development efforts and implementation of a region-specific plan with a focus on the lower divisions; as well as encouraging the retention and recruitment of new players.

On Deck Circle

Check out the following exciting plans and works in progress I have set up for the next two years:

- **Home Base:** A further pressing priority for the SI Board is the identification and development of a home(s) for softball. Further to initial contact with the DLR Council, I have appointed a working group, chaired by Alacoque McMenamin, who are engaging both with DLR Council and Baseball Ireland to identify locations and will project manage the building of the diamond(s).
- **Taking a Lead:** As outlined in the Year in Review, the largest workload facing the Softball Ireland and Baseball Ireland Boards in the coming two years is the development of an application for Sport Ireland membership. Currently a gap analysis of the criteria is being undertaken by both Boards, and irrespective of the outcome of the elections, this must continue to be one of the top priorities for the game we love.

Having successfully led negotiations to create Baseball Softball Ireland (BSI) in 2019, through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Baseball Ireland (BI), my priority for 2020 is to agree a 5-year vision with BSI to attain full Sport Ireland membership. It is a long road, but one very much worth traveling, and will eventually



enable us to seek a permanent home for softball in Ireland and annual funding for development projects.

We will also look to set in motion the initial governance changes to facilitate this strategy, proposed by the membership at the 2018 Softball Ireland AGM, and which I have worked diligently on over the last two years.

- **Coach Knows Best:** As part of the networking I have undertaken over the last few years with the ESF, WBSC and the continued support of USA softball, I have a few exciting opportunities in place for the exchange of coaches and expert led training sessions. We have had our first graduates of the BSUK/Softball Ireland coaching programme with more to follow in 2020.
- **Swing for the Fences:** An exciting new project currently under development with Baseball Ireland, is the opening of a shared indoor facility for baseball and softball that will have batting cages, an area for defensive work, and gym services. Whilst still in the very early stages, I will continue my negotiations with sponsors and investors to turn this into reality.
- **Youth programme:** Over the last 12 months, I have met with USA Softball, PONY Softball and Little League with a view to developing a sustainable youth programme in Ireland with a clear pathway into all disciplines of the game. Together with Baseball Ireland, we have had initial conversations on youth co-development with a break out opportunity for girls between 12-16 years of age – identified as a time they often leave the sport. We just met with the first cohort of young women in this age group for creating a team - can't wait to see the next generation take the field!

PONY Softball, Little League and USA Softball have indicated a willingness to sister with us to send teams over from the USA and invite our teams to take part in tournaments back there. Conversations are ongoing at the WBSC Congress this week in Japan and I hope to be in a position to present a proposal to the Board in the coming weeks.

- **Infield Fly:** We must recognise the changing face of our membership across the three BSI disciplines, and player ambitions from local to national to international. As a group, we must develop new ideas for recruitment, beyond the tried and trusted social media ads and intervarsity tournaments.

I requested two working groups be setup in 2019 to begin this process and we await their findings shortly. Slowpitch growth and Umpiring are key concerns, which our largest region, Softball Leinster, has failed to progress under their remit in recent years. It therefore falls to the national governing body to define a revised approach which meets the needs and expectations of all members on the island. The Softball Ulster strategic plan launched this year provides an excellent model for other regions to adopt.

A key player source for Slowpitch should be professional graduates. Most large companies now offer tag rugby as a coed, recreational sport. We have seen the formation of a few company teams in response – but not in a sustainable way. An obvious new avenue for us to explore is how to create a new slowpitch player stream from the large companies established in each Irish city. I have some exciting ideas on how we can build on the success of previous Business league iterations and



Carathon, including a shortened format of the game which has been successful in the UK and Australia.

- **Taking a Lead:** We recognise and respect the variety of opinions held by the membership on Fastpitch. With Melanie in place as the head of our newest region, I am only too aware of the challenges it faces. It must be acknowledged that our participation in Fastpitch has significantly increased our international standing with ESF, WBSC and the Olympic Federation of Ireland. Our top down approach is being highlighted as best in class by our world body at the recent meetings in Japan. Our grassroots league launch this past month has immediately demonstrated the drawing power of this discipline to bring new women into our game. The first day of the league alone, has introduced 67 new players to Fastpitch and 30 new players to softball in Ireland (16 women and 14 men). We welcome these new additions to the SI family.
- **Draft Day:** Volunteers remain the foundations on which our plans rest. I am delighted to see that we have nominees for treasurer and ordinary members this year - and newcomers to the SI Board too, offering new perspectives and ideas. Please consider putting yourself forward to help out in whatever way you can - coach, umpire, social media, tournament support - there are no shortage of ways to give something back.

I wish to highlight the nomination of Andrew Craven, who I have asked to seek election to the Softball Ireland Board. As author of the Softball Ulster Development plan and the Secretary of Softball Ulster for a number of years, I feel Andrew would be the perfect fit to be the Softball Ireland Board Member with responsibility for Slowpitch Development. This position on the Board will oversee the implementation of the Slowpitch Development Plan and guide all our Slowpitch Regions on the development of their plans and assist and monitor with their implementation.

Over the past few years, together with the Board of Softball Ireland, I have been honoured to work tirelessly both in Ireland and abroad to try and represent Softball Ireland with honesty, integrity, distinction, promote our sport and grow the game. During this time, we have strategically looked at ways to increase the profile of the sport whilst establishing key relationships at the highest level of the game. The 2018 and 2019 Year In Review, copies of which I have attached, show what we have achieved since my election at the 2017 AGM.

Should the members of Softball Ireland honour me with re-election as President of Softball Ireland, I will continue my efforts to ensure Softball Ireland's ongoing strategic leadership of our game and continue to support and push our Regions and Clubs to grow and improve.

I thank you for taking time to read my commitment to the Softball Ireland Membership outlined in my Programme for Softball in Ireland through 2021 and beyond.

Colum Lavery
President, Softball Ireland



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.



Differentiation of the Role of the Governing Body and the Regions

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2018 Key Achievements

- National Recognition
 - Negotiation of Softball/Baseball Merger
 - Softball Ireland elected to Olympic Federation of Ireland
- National Tournaments
 - Brian Walshe Cup (Start of Season Blitz)
 - Irish Open Softball Tournament
 - Softball Ireland National Club Championships
 - Re-launch of Indoor Softball
- International Participation
 - Men's Slo-Pitch European Championships
 - Co-ed Slo-Pitch World Series of Softball (8th place finish)
 - Nomination of Umpire to ESF umpires' school
 - Womens U19 Fastpitch European Championships (Silver medal)
 - Womens U22 Fastpitch European Championships (Bronze medal)
 - Dodder Softball Club & TNT participation at European Co-ed Super Cup
- Coaching
 - Support of Softball Leinster open training days
 - Softball Skills day (October 20, 2018)
 - Franchise Agreement with BSUK for Coaching Programme
- Media Saturation
 - Articles in on-line and print media
 - Tweet from the President of Ireland
 - Agreement for TG4/BBC documentary to film in 2018

Composition of Softball Ireland Board

The Softball Ireland Board currently consists of 7 volunteers: The President, Secretary and Treasurer, Independent member and representatives from Leinster, Ulster and Fastpitch. As you will no doubt appreciate, the primary focus of the Leinster, Ulster and Fastpitch members is their respective areas and to represent you, the member, at a National Level. After several months of a vacancy, Softball Ireland have welcomed the addition of Conor Sayles as Secretary in September, as he brings many years of softball experience and acumen to the Board.

Communication

We recognise that a key area for improvement is our communication with the membership. To this end, we created and advertised a new position – Voluntary Communications Officer – and hope to have the successful candidate in place prior to the 2018 AGM.



We intend to overhaul the website, increase our social media presence, develop a quarterly newsletter and provide a members' summary from Board meetings. Softball Ireland (as NGB) is also dependent on the Regions and clubs to create additional media for us to share.

Further ideas are welcome from the membership. The Softball Ireland Board can be contacted by email (the president, treasurer 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 2018

The Softball Ireland Board would like to thank all members who completed the IOST survey and provided comments (the results were circulated and will be provided at the AGM). We agree that the tournament was not up to the desired standard, and will use our learnings and your feedback to make a step change improvement for next year.

We have advertised a new position – Competitions & Events Officer – to oversee national tournaments in 2019. Further we are delighted to confirm that Julie Trundle and Elaine Barr have volunteered for the IOST Committee, and will deliver the IOST with the Competitions & Events Officer, as a working group of the Board.

Future of Slo-pitch Working Group

On September 26th, Softball Ireland announced the creation of the Future of Slo-pitch Softball Working Group (previously named Slo-Pitch Development Working Group) which will be chaired by external development and high-performance expert. We (Softball Ireland) wish to re-emphasise that the **number one** priority is Slo-Pitch Softball in Ireland, and the creation of this Working Group is to allow Softball Ireland to work with Leinster, Ulster, Galway and Munster to undertake a SWOT analysis, identify realistic and attainable growth targets and what support the Regions wish Softball Ireland to provide.

Baseball Softball Ireland

One of the key challenges and time-consuming priorities for 2018 is the negotiation and agreement of an umbrella body merging Softball and Baseball. After a number of positive discussions held in good faith with Baseball Ireland over the last 14 months, a draft Memorandum of Understanding will be presented at the Annual General Meeting for your review.

Sport Ireland advised that, to apply for recognition, we must merge to align with our world governing body (WBSC). Sport Ireland recognition is a key priority for us, as membership allows us to apply for grants towards development officers, equipment, coaching and access to numerous training courses, and other resources reserved for members.

Additionally, as a member of Sport Ireland we can apply for land to build a centralised venue and home for Softball in Ireland. In the history of our sport, this may well become a defining moment.

Softball Ireland Coaching Programme

Softball Ireland have entered into an agreement to franchise the BSUK coaching programme. Early 2019 will see Regional Coaching trainers and coordinators appointed with a view to rolling out the programme before the 2019 season. There will be three levels with the intention being every team in Ireland will have at least one level one qualified coach by April 2019.