



EUROPEAN
SOFTBALL
FEDERATION

NEWSFLASH
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A BUSY START TO THE SLOWPITCH SEASON...

by John Austin, ESF Slowpitch Development Commission

The 2012 slow pitch season got off to a busy start with two development clinics organised in April.

The beginning of the month saw a two day, full on clinic in Linz, Austria, followed shortly after by a series of development workshops in Dupnitsa, Bulgaria.

Linz Clinic, 14th & 15th April

A total of 26 players of differing standards and ages braved the early Spring weather in Linz, Austria for the first ESF slow pitch development clinic of the 2012 season.

The clinic run by myself and James O'Farrell over two full days focused on a combination of skills coaching, rules, strategy, and game play.

The stated objective of the clinic was to show that the slow pitch format is more than just a recreational form of the game and can be played at a very high, strategic and competitive level.

According to the local event organiser, Marc Stein, "The ESF Clinic was an huge step for developing slow pitch in Austria because players of all ages and genders were able to learn the important aspects of the game like hitting, pitching, rules, etc..."

With this clinic everybody realized the potential and the excitement of this game. It is more than only hitting the ball, it is a game full of strategy, competition and fun."

My thanks to local event organisers Marc and Gabi along with fellow ESF Clinician James O'Farrell for making this clinic such a success.



Dupnitsa Clinic, 21st & 22nd April

The weekend of the 21st and 22nd of April saw an ambitious plan by Youri Alkali (Bugarian Federation President) come to fruition.

The plan was to host two slow pitch tournaments, run a 4 day ESF Umpires accreditation course (using the two tournaments for umpire assessment) as well as host a series of one hour slow pitch development workshops during team's off time.

The first of the two tournaments was an international affair with teams from Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey competing in the first Balkan Championships on the Saturday.

The ESF slow pitch development team of Mike Jennings and Pat Reddy gave a series of workshops to each team in turn (during breaks in their schedules) and covered a range of slow pitch topics including rules, pitching, batting and game play.

Because of the short duration of each workshop it was very much player driven and this format seemed to be well received by the players.

Sunday saw the second tournament of the weekend, The Bulgarian Open. With 8 participating teams, Mike and Pat were busy providing a series of short one hour workshops to all the teams throughout the day.

Like Saturday their workshops were player driven, but focused on rules, pitching, batting, and game play.

The format of the weekend proved to be a great success for the development of slow pitch in Europe, and introduced an understanding of the skills, strategy and competitiveness of the slow pitch game to 8 teams from 3 ESF Federations. Definitely a format to be repeated.

My thanks to local event organisers Youri and Peter along with ESF Clinicians Mike and Pat for making the event a great success.

If you or your federation is interested in developing slow pitch, please contact me, John Austin via slowpitch@europeansoftball.org



ANDREA MARCON IS THE NEW ESF DIRECTOR OF UMPIRES

by the ESF Technical Commission

During the Congress held in Malta on February 4th, new Director of Umpires (DoU) Andrea Marcon has been introduced to delegates.

He takes the place of Marlies Struvyè, who has done a great job in these years in the office and all European Softball movement thanks her for this.

Andrea Marcon has appointed Romina Tolu as Assistant of DoU, Gilbert Tobback as Umpire in Chief responsible, Bert Loggen as manual review responsible and James O'Farrell as slowpitch activities responsible.

The staff has been completed by

Pavel Prahar
Joeri Tobback
Fabio Capitoni
Geri Lindberg
Tony Ilegems and
Carolien Standhouders

who will participate at the tournaments as Umpire in Chief, together with Gilbert Tobback, Bert Loggen and James O'Farrell.



BRITISH SLOWPITCH PLANS MAJOR ASSAULT ON EUROPE IN MAY

by Trevor Clissold

British slowpitch plans major assault on Europe in May

British softball has carried out a long-standing campaign to help the slowpitch format gain a foothold on the European continent, and has been rewarded with a slow growth in the number of countries playing the sport and sending teams to the European Slowpitch Championship and Cup.

But on the weekend of May 25-27, there will be an all-out invasion of Europe in the name of slowpitch promotion, with the GB Slowpitch Team playing a high-profile series of exhibition games in the Netherlands and the TourCats, the international touring arm of the Birmingham Bobcats Softball Club, co-organising and playing in a three-country tournament in the German city of Cologne.



GB Slowpitch tour

The GB Slowpitch Team tour to Holland is the brainchild of European Softball President Andre van Overbeek, who is keen to grow interest and participation in slowpitch in his home country.

The GB Team will play evening exhibition games on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, May 25-27, against a hand-picked group of Dutch ex-national team baseball and fastpitch players.

On Friday, the teams will play at the Olympia Softball Club stadium in Haarlem, and on Saturday, the game will be staged at the Gryphons Softball Club field in Rosmalen, as part of a "Super Saturday" tournament involving the country's top women's fastpitch teams.

On Sunday, the show will move to Zeist, where the slowpitch exhibition game will be featured during a men's fastpitch tournament.

The Netherlands has long been considered ripe for slowpitch development, and getting the format going in Europe's leading softball country will provide a huge boost for the future of slowpitch in Europe.

Bobcats abroad

Meanwhile, on that same weekend, the Birmingham Bobcats Softball Team, winner of the BSF President's Club award for 2011, will send its international travelling squad, the TourCats, to Cologne, Germany for a co-ed slowpitch tournament involving the host fastpitch club Cologne Cardinals, two other fastpitch teams from Germany and a slowpitch team put together by the Sittard Condors baseball team from Holland.

The event is the outcome of the TourCats' first venture into Europe, when they went to Maastricht in Holland last summer for games against the Sittard Condors.

A video from the trip recently won BSUK's 2011 video competition.

The TourCats will leave Birmingham on May 24 and head first for a sightseeing tour in Gent, Belgium.

Then they will then join the Cardinals, Condors and the other German teams on Saturday, May 26 for a day of slow-pitch softball, followed by an evening of traditional German entertainment hosted by the Cardinals in honour of the TourCats.

Birmingham Bobcats Tournament and Marketing Manager Kate Page-Smith said: "The aims of the trip are to build team spirit, enhance individual and team skills, develop the profile of the Birmingham Bobcats in the softball community – and, more importantly, to have fun! However, the tournament will also develop links between European softball and baseball teams and promote slow-pitch softball to teams outside the UK."



SOFTBALL IN POLAND, A SMALL-TOWN GAME

by Christopher Sweeny, Headcoach Polish National Team

With only a single formal league (PLSK) with just five teams, fast-pitch softball is not a big sport in Poland. But look more closely at the Polish softball scene and you will notice something strange.

Like most countries in Central and Western Europe, Poland has seen emigration from its minor towns to its major cities, a process that accelerated after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Despite this movement, softball in Poland is still primarily a small-town game.

Yes, Warsaw has one team (Warsaw Diamonds). But Łódź does not. Nor does Kraków. Or Poznań. Or Gdansk. Or Katowice. None of the other major Polish cities support teams (though Wrocław has a Cadet squad, which plays in a Czech Republic league).

In fact, you have to go fairly far down on the list of most populous Polish cities before you get to the next metropolis with a presence in the league – Kędzierzyn-Koźle. Its population of 65,636 makes it 66th on the list.

Smaller still is Kutno (population: 48,323; ranked #93). Even more surprising than finding a softball team here is the realization that Kutno is considered by many to be the hub of Polish baseball and softball. The city sports a large complex with four fields, on-campus dormitories and the home of Europe's Little League headquarters.

Brzeg, in western Poland, has 36,384 citizens and a distinctly small-town atmosphere. Yet, tucked away behind a school on a sleepy, tree-lined street is arguably the nicest softball field in Poland. And the town has a rich and long (by Polish standards) history in the sport.

League games draw dozens of enthusiastic fans. Parents often travel with the team for tournaments. And, despite its diminutive size, Brzeg has routinely provided some of the nation's best players.

In 2010, two teams from Brzeg (Szóstka and the now-defunct Delfiny club) battled it out in the Polish Championship.

Teams from Brzeg have also played and performed well in European and World Championships.

Miejska Górka has had a softball team on and off since the mid 1990s and their Demony (Demons) joined the PLSK for the 2012 season.

A visit to the Demons' home field reveals a surprisingly expansive

sports complex, with two softball-ready fields, a full high-quality baseball field and a soccer pitch on the adjacent commons.

Miejska Górka's central square is a 3-minute walk from the field, as is the only church. And if you walk a few minutes further, you



realize how truly out of place a well-groomed and fenced softball field is here. Because that few minutes of walking takes you to the village's border. Miejska Górka has only 3,100 residents.

How does a town like this end up with such an inviting place to play softball? "A few people passionate about the sport, committed parents contributing time and energy, and persistent pursuit of funding assistance from the European Union," answers Jan Zbaraz, President of the Miejska Górka club.

Sylvia Wójcik lives in Warsaw and plays for the lone team there. She also represents her country on the National Team. However, Sylvia started in the sport in Augustów (pop. 30,351), when a field was built in 1996 in front of her apartment building. Sylvia believes this is the foundation of why softball has been more popular in smaller towns.

"It is easier to create places to play softball in places like this. And where fields exist, it is easier to attract new players and spread knowledge about the sport," Sylvia explains. She attributes the difficulty with fields in larger cities to the already high and escalating price of land in major conurbations.

While it can be frustrating that softball has not been more readily adopted by the major municipalities in Poland, there is a positive way to view the situation – there is plenty of room for the sport to grow. After all, great things start small.

ISF UMSCHOOL 2012 COMING

by ISF, Bruce R. Wawrzyniak (Director of Communications)

A 2012 release of UmpSchool is about to come online. ISF Director of Umpires Bob Stanton has been coordinating new content that will be added to the online resource that is available to softball umpires around the world, whether ISF-certified or not.

The highlight of this release will be the addition of hundreds of new questions for the practice exams that men and women can take within UmpSchool.

Available in both English and Spanish, the site can be accessed through links from any page in the Umpiring section of www.ISFsoftball.org.