



GENERAL PROGRESS REPORT 2019

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EUROPEAN SOFTBALL FEDERATION



The European Softball Federation (ESF) is a non-profit sports organization that connects and represents all European National Softball Federations on a European-wide level. The ESF itself is a member of the WBSC Softball Division. The ESF is also known as Softball Europe (new brand since 2017).

The European Softball Federation was established in Rome, Italy in 1976 by the representatives of six European National Baseball and Softball Federations (Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain), with the objectives of promoting and developing softball in Europe. Today, there are 33 affiliated National Federations. The ESF is recognized as the regional governing body for fastpitch and slowpitch softball for the whole of Europe in all age and gender categories. The two main interests of the ESF are competitions and development.

AUSTRIA		GUERNSEY		ROMANIA	
BELGIUM		HUNGARY		RUSSIA	
BULGARIA		IRELAND		SAN MARINO	
CROATIA		ISRAEL		SERBIA	
CZECH REPUBLIC		ITALY		SLOVAKIA	
DENMARK		JERSEY		SLOVENIA	
FINLAND		LITHUANIA		SPAIN	
FRANCE		MALTA		SWEDEN	
GERMANY		NETHERLANDS		SWITZERLAND	
GREAT BRITAIN		NORWAY		TURKEY	
GREECE		POLAND		UKRAINE	



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Officials and Umpires Development

In March the bi-annual **TC/UIC meeting** was held in Prague. The main theme of the meeting was teamwork, communication, cooperation, representation and evaluation.

In May, the **Fastpitch basic clinic** was held in Prague under the professional and enthusiastic leadership of Raoul Machalet and Geri Lindberg. In total, there were 17 participants, 12 of whom received their Softball Europe umpire license: Stefan Thilemans (BEL), Sara Marcova (BUL), Veronika Hollova (CZE), Jan Svatos (CZE), Benjamin Gorlen (DEN), Gregorio Carletti (ITA), Matteo Sabbadini (ITA), Raul Salgado Perez (ITA), Matas Linkevicius (LTU), Vyacheslav Popov (RUS), Kristina Bohunicka (SVK), Dmytro Levchuk (UKR).

In December 2018 the UIC Development ran an **umpire clinic in Turkey** and in April 2019 a local clinic was held in **Israel**. We organised a pre-tournament clinic for the umpires assigned at the U-16 WECh in **Zagreb**.

In total 16 European umpires have been assigned to **WBSC events**: 4 to Men's WC in Prague; 8 to Olympic qualifier Europe/Africa; 4 to U19 WWC in Irvine, USA. 3 european umpires took advantage of the **exchange program** and traveled to Australia or Canada.

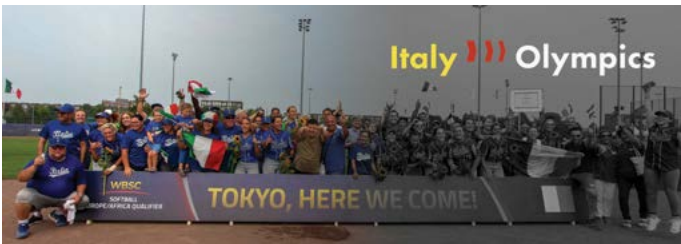
PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear friends,

Let me welcome all of you, my friends, to the ESF Congress in Vilnius, an amazing city in Northern Europe with its historic baroque architecture.

I would like to thank all of you for all your efforts in promoting, developing and making Softball a top priority in your country. Your efforts are the most important factor for all of us, for the development and recognition of softball in every corner of Europe, and finally for the ESF board and myself. Your initiatives make us stronger, because your enthusiasm and dedication in this hard work is a confirmation that we are headed in the right direction.

I would like to congratulate Italy on their success on being the Team representing Europe in Tokyo 2020. Italy was focused and pursued this goal after winning almost all women's ESF events in the past 2 years.



One of the key tools of my Presidency is communication and information, a very important factor in our current world. You have received my three reports from this past year, which updated you about the issues at hand. Your feedback confirmed to me that this information was well needed and helpful. You also received weekly/monthly information from our Communications Director, Helena Novotna. The Executive Board Meeting minutes are on the ESF website. Information and transparency is one of the main pillars of our work.

Now I would like to point out some key issues from this past year.

I would like to begin this report with a number of specific Softball Europe interests. One of our major roles is to increase the number of participants at our events and prepare a portfolio of options for our members, our NFs. I believe we have taken the right course, for example, we had a total of 135 teams participating at our (ESF) events in 2019.

It is not only the number of the teams, but also creating an environment of stability and development of our events. The majority of our competitions had the same amount or more participants than the previous year. This strongly confirms the development and progress of softball in Europe.



I would like to specifically point out two competitions - Coed Slowpitch European Championship and European Masters Cup. We almost doubled the number of teams at CSPECh and I was glad to see that Italy and the Netherlands entered a team for the first time ever. The very first European Masters Cup was held in Sant Boi de Llobregat, Spain. The Masters Cup is a 35+ tournament for men and women. It was an amazing event and a huge success. It took a few years to get this tournament going and a special thanks to VP Mette Nissen Jakobsen continuously pushing for the event to happen. I am personally happy that we have finally created room for these players, who were able to meet each other again after so many years. This is yet another role of the ESF to create events for all ages, who would like to play our sport.

However, the increasing number of participants also brings certain difficulties to run these events and involves much higher requirements for organizers and ESF staff. Being realistic and true to our cause, I must say this year has not been excellent from our side and we feel that our level of accomplishment has stagnated or may I say, dropped below our normal standards. We had some operational inconsistencies including inconsistent decisions, poor communication or no communication at all and this recurred in some of the events. The EC reviewed this past season carefully and the EC together with Technical Director have prepared solutions for the next year.

Europe, after five years, again hosted a World Championship. The Men's World Championship came to Europe for the first time ever and the Czech Republic, in the opinions of the participating Federations, did an excellent job. Many have expressed that this event was the best Men's World Championship ever, and with that, Europe gained more prestige. We must continue to host more world-class events.



Seven teams in total at two World championships represented Europe this year. Only one team – the Czech Republic at MWC – progressed to the playoffs. We as a collective need to work harder with the objective to always have at least one European team in the playoffs at every World Cup.

The second area is our regional tournaments or events. Not only do our official ESF events help us reach our goals successfully but also other events under the ESF umbrella are making our sport known and accessible throughout the regions. Women's Euroleague project in central Europe, Mike Stapleton Memorial for boys, Triple Ball for the Balkan countries, Baltic Open for Scandinavians or the Ayelet Multi Sport Games in March, where softball with more than 400 male and female softball players was named the largest sport of the event. All regional events are important for our NFs. The main effort is to bring ESF sanctioned events into the regions and to enlarge our portfolio of options of events.

The third area is the development of our human resources. March was dedicated to the ESF technical forces – Technical Commissioners and Umpires in Chiefs. The convention was held in Prague, Czech Republic. There were 23 TC and UiC members at the convention, including the new additions – Zsuzsa Balog (TC) and Christopher Moon (UiC).

One of the main building blocks of development of European softball is the education of our technical leaders. ESF Director of Umpires Carolien Stadhouders participated at the 10th Blue Convention Softball Canada in Montreal. ESF Technical director Mike Jennings participated at the WBSC seminar for Technical Commissioners and Scorers held in San Jose.



ESF Coaching Commission Chair Craig Montvidas represented Europe at NFCA Convention in Atlantic City. We continued with the ESCA Training Camp. ESCA 3 was successful again and has become an integral part of development of coaches and players in Europe.

The last area that I would like to point out is promotion and special projects. I am not able to number all the projects that came to fruition mainly by Helena Novotna, and the team of people around her, but most of these projects you may have noticed such as the live streaming. I also would like to point out the third edition of Softball Europe Photo Contest, which has three categories – More than just Softball, Softball Faces and My best photo ever.



The WBSC Europe Congress in Vilnius is just around the corner and I would like to share with you the position of softball in Europe and in the world. The main issue at the WBSC Europe Congress will be the approval of the WBSC Europe Statutes and Code of Divisions.

I received several opinions on what the structure should look like, some of them seemed to me to be motivated from self-interest and position seeking. However, we, and I mean all of us, need to have an independent view of what is good for Europe and why we are doing this. In my opinion we need to provide for all NF's their own space and possibility to realize their own activities in Europe. I am not naive and I know that there is no ideal structure that is fitted for all, it simply does not exist. We have to have open minds, find common solutions, respect each other and take a step back from our own personal ambitions.

We have all of this in our hands and let me please ask all of you to very seriously consider this 'out of the box' concept from a long-term perspective. I strongly believe the outcome from Vilnius will be a very strong WBSC Europe organization with strong Divisions – Softball Europe and Baseball Europe – that will devote all their efforts to the development of both sports in every corner of our great continent. Only a final common agreement on the key issues and strategic points will make Europe stronger especially at the World level. We are at an important junction now and I really do hope Europe will win.

My final words to you here are to believe me when I say, I was, I am and I will always be behind you on this journey.

Gabriel Waage
ESF President

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Women's Softball European Championship Ostrava, Frydek Mistek (CZE), Rybnik, Zory (POL)



1. Italy

2. Netherlands

3. Great Britain

4. Czech Republic

5. Spain



6. France

7. Greece

8. Ireland

9. Israel

10. Germany

11. Russia



12. Poland

13. Austria

14. Belgium

15. Sweden

16. Switzerland

17. Croatia



18. Ukraine

19. Slovakia

20. Denmark

21. Lithuania

22. Hungary

23. Turkey

Women's Championship (June 30 - July 6) was held under a cooperation of two countries - Czech Republic and Poland; and four cities - Ostrava, Frydek Mistek, Rybnik, and Zory. 23 teams competed for the title of a European Champion and also for the 6 spots at the Olympic Qualifier Europe/Africa. Italy won the trophy and proved to be the best women's team in Europe.



This year, the live-streaming responsibilities were moved onto the organizers and so we experienced some new challenges. The Championship was live at various channels and through various providers. This fact didn't make it easy for the fans to follow all the games.

92 437

total views

14 187

final game views

46

games live

The championship was live at baseballsoftball.tv, and then on Softball Europe YouTube. Dino TV (Dutch provider) also helped by broadcasting 12 games, until finally Playto.tv came for the final two days of the competition. Some of the games were also FB live by media staff of the national teams.

Despite this non-ideal situation the numbers were great. Grega Valancic, Dirk Steffen, and Jan Benes provided a great photo-coverage.

The tournament consisted of 113 games; 23 umpires were needed to manage such amount of games at 5 fields. Technical forces; technical commissioners, umpires in chief, and scorers lead by their scorer in chief faced a big challenge to handle such a big event, just like the organizers.

There were more than 13 000 spectators at the event.



EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Coed Slowpitch European Championship - Budapest (HUN)



1. Great Britain



2. Germany



3. Ireland



4. Czech Republic



5. Netherlands



6. Belgium



7. Austria



8. Bulgaria



9. Italy



10. Serbia



11. Hungary

Coed Slowpitch Championship (July 16 - July 20) was held in Hungary - this was the first time that Hungary hosted an official European competition. The number of participating teams almost doubled to a record of 11 National Teams. Great Britain won the title for the 11th time.



U-16 Women's European Championship - Zagreb (CRO)



1. Netherlands



2. Italy



3. Czech Republic



4. Russia



5. Ukraine



6. Germany



7. France



8. Croatia



9. Belgium



10. Poland



11. Slovakia



12. Hungary



13. Turkey

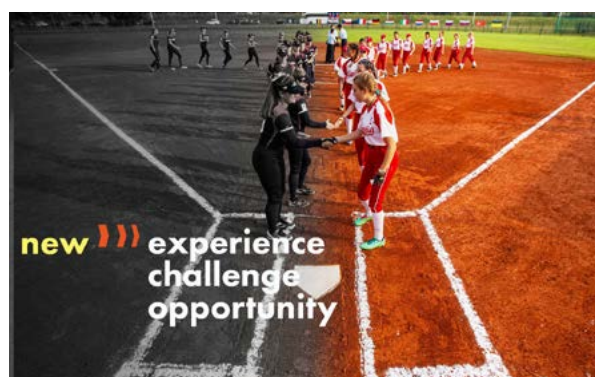
U-16 Women's European Championship (July 29 - August 3) was held in Zagreb, Croatia. There were 13 teams which was the most teams we've ever seen in this category; Hungary, Turkey and the hosting Croatia participated for the first time.

The Dutch team was undefeated throughout the whole tournament and became the European Champion in the U-16 category again (also in 2017). The next edition of this competition will take place in 2020, however the age limit will be 15 (U-15 Women's Championship) due to WBSC changes in categories.



11 628
total views

29
games live



The organizer deserves compliments for their approach towards live-streaming of the event. Using the ESF manual „How to live-stream low-budget“, they managed to broadcast all games from the main field and handled this particular organizers' responsibility perfectly.

EUROPEAN CUPS

Women's Premiere Cup



- 1 Bollate (ITA)
- 2 Bussolengo (ITA)
- 3 Olympia Haarlem (NED)

Women's Cup



- 1 Atletico S. Sebastian (ESP)
- 2 The Mix (GBR)
- 3 Hørsholm (DEN)

Women's Cup Winners Cup



- 1 Forli (ITA)
- 2 Terrasvogels (NED)
- 3 Rivas (ESP)

In 2019, three European Cup competitions were organized, the dates were August 19 - 24.

The **Premiere Cup** where National Champions of the ten qualified countries compete was held in Bollate, Italy. The **Women's Cup** is the competition from which the winner qualifies for the Premiere Cup. In 2019, it was held in Dupnitsa, Bulgaria. Spanish team Atletico S. Sebastian won and seized the Premiere Cup spot for the Spanish National Champion of 2019.

The **Cup Winners Cup** consists of National Cup winners from all European countries that wish to take part in the tournament. Eagles Prague (CZE) hosted the event.

Men's Super Cup



- 1 Hurricanes V. Holmbäck (DEN)
- 2 Oslo Alligators (NOR)
- 3 Academy of Nettuno (ITA)

Men's ESF Cup



- 1 Rehovot Warriors (ISR)
- 2 Spectrum Praha (CZE)
- 3 Zuidvogels (NED)

Men's European Super Cup was held in Nettuno, Italy, August 26 - 31.

21 teams entered the competition and after the round robin games, they were divided into two separate tournaments (12 and 9 teams) competing for the Super Cup, and for the ESF Cup. Many world-level non-European players took part in the tournament and stepped up the quality of the game.

Men's Masters Cup



- 1 Magos Tenerife (ESP)
- 2 Denmark All Stars (DEN)
- 3 Israel Stars (ISR)

Women's Masters Cup



- 1 Italia Women (ITA)
- 2 Miralbueno Softbol (ESP)
- 3 Cechie Carrots (CZE)

In 2019, we finally managed to open an official competition for the 35+ category - The **European Masters Cup**. The Spanish organizer Saint Boi decided to host this event and start the tradition of this new competition. It was great to see the number of players who keep on playing the game and loving the sport.

European Massimo Romeo Youth Trophy

EMRYT (August 14 - 17) takes place in Collecchio, Italy since it was founded in 2012. The competition is divided into two divisions; SPORT (6 teams) and FUTURE (11 teams). Not only girls but also boys are allowed in the tournament (with certain limitations). The regulations keep evolving, though, in cooperation with the participants.



- 1 Italy (ITA)
- 2 London Cubs (GBR)
- 3 Moscovia (RUS)



- 1 Kalita (RUS)
- 2 Sever Brno (CZE)
- 3 Molecules (UKR)

TOP SOFTBALL IN EUROPE

WBSC Men's Softball World Championship



The Czech Republic hosted the WBSC Men's Softball World Championship in two cities - Prague and Havlíčkův Brod. This was a historic moment for European softball as men's championship was never on our continent before. Three teams represented Europe: the Czech Republic (8th), Denmark (9th), the Netherlands (13th). By many, this event was complimented as the best ever organized.

Argentina won the title of the World Champion for the first time in history when they defeated Japan in the most incredible final game.

This was an excellent opportunity for the European softball fans to witness the very top softball in the World.



WBSC Softball Europe/Africa Qualifier



After long years of waiting, hardwork and preparations the time came to determine the one team to compete in Tokyo 2020 in the Olympic Games. Utrecht, the Netherlands hosted the Europe/Africa Olympic Qualifier where six European and Two African teams met; Italy, the Netherlands, Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Spain, France, Botswana, and South Africa.

The weather decided not to make it easy for the teams; high temperatures made the tournament extra challenging.

The system was pretty clear; each team faces all the others, and the one with the best result goes to Tokyo. Lose twice, go home. For those who experienced the moment of „the dream not coming true“ it was heartbreaking.

The last game of the event turned out to be the deciding game, too. The only two unbeaten teams paired up; Great Britain and Italy.

The one and only team that qualified for the Olympics 2020 was Italy in the end! They won all their games and deserved the only spot in Tokyo.

U-18 Men's Qualifier

For the WBSC U-18 Men's World Cup, two teams had to be chosen from Europe. Four teams took part in the Qualifier; the Czech Republic qualified as the undefeated team and Denmark joined them later.



Israeli organizer premiered with an official ESF competition and they showcased some great coverage service for the fans. All games were broadcast live on Facebook!

27 400
total views

14
games live

EUROPEAN SOFTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION

ESCA Training Camp 3 was held for 5 days, with more than 50 players and shadow coaches. Although we had less participants this year, all those who came had an incredible experience learning more softball and brought coaches and players from several European countries to meet with high level coaches.

New friendships were created, shadow coaches were able to continue the important networking which in turn will create even more opportunities for the players throughout Europe. We would like to thank again Craig Montvidas and his staff for leading the training camp.

The concept „Getting Better Together“ still stands strong and will lead Europe into the future.



This year ESCA membership will start! The NFCA and ESF partnership agreement is moving forward where NFCA will give benefits to all ESCA members. European coaches and individuals that want to learn connect, and shadow coach will have an opportunity to become a member of a unified organization. The benefits are really worthwhile, since with ESCA membership members will also receive NFCA international membership. Along with that there will be more opportunities for networking as the new members will be assigned NFCA mentors who will assist in increasing our coaches' knowledge and experience.

We hope all of you will help us promote this to all your coaches and whoever would like to be a part of this incredible growing organization within the ESF.

DEVELOPMENT

Development at our Championships

This year we fell short on our clinics at tournaments and were able only to show up at WECWC in Prague. Guillermo Spotorno („Willy“), a former Coach from Argentina, has been one of our top clinicians and tried to fit in the training for some of the teams during this tournament.



In our opinion the value of these clinics during the tournaments is of the highest importance and we will continue to incorporate them in as many of the tournaments as we can. The feedback from the past has proven that these clinics during our tournaments have an incredible positive effect.

The Development Commission is working for you and we will continue to move forward in the enhancement of the game of Softball throughout Europe and will make sure that every federation receives the attention it deserves. See all of you in 2020!

Equipment for Europe

Our agreement with Pitch in for Baseball and Softball is continuing although we did meet some difficulties this year. We are trying to restart the process with some of our Member Federations and we hope along with agreements being signed with Little League, PONY and the NFCA that we will be able to supply more equipment at a timely fashion to all those who are in need.

DEVELOPMENT

Mike Stapleton Memorial

When thinking of European Men's Softball the name Mike Stapleton always comes to mind. A giant gentle man/coach who had a dream of Men's Softball growing throughout Europe and left us too soon. From that point we need to remember another name. Ondra Stroner, another gentle giant who believes in the dream that Mike had and along with the Czech Softball Association, lead by Gabriel Waage, the Mike Stapleton Memorial Tournament has become the major international event for young men's fastpitch softball.

The powers at work include a handful of dedicated people that we feel



need a mention here in our yearly report.

Ondra's wife, Zuzka, has assisted him in creating and maintaining this incredible event for years. Kevin Stockford and Corey Vyner bringing teams from Denmark and Israel and helping with the pre tournament training and of course the other organizing committee members, Helena Novotná and Jitka Chaloupková.

The ESF will continue to support this incredible developmental tool and we would like to thank all of the above for their commitment and dedication to the Dream.



Baltic Open

The sixth edition of the ESF-sanctioned regional development tournament Baltic Open was played on May 31st through June 2nd at Saints Park in Skövde, with both men's fastpitch and women's fastpitch on the schedule.

Originally formed by the Swedish and Danish Federations from a concept developed by ESF Vice Presidents Kristian Palvia and Vice President Mette Nissen Jakobsen in cooperation with the European Softball Federation, the tournament is aimed at developing and spreading fast pitch softball throughout the Baltic region.

This year saw a new wave of potential fastpitch players in the Norwegian women's team, of which the most never had played fastpitch before.

The Norwegian team did not record a win in the standings – but being present was a win in itself.

Norway did get some help over the weekend, having a short batting clinic with Skövde Saints head coach Priya Mohlén.

The host club, Skövde Saints, put together the tournament for the sixth straight year and provided as always a solid hosting experience with a top notch playing surface and good grounds crew. Also, all games of the tournament were broadcast.



Euroleague

This will be the 6th year that the Central Europe Women's Euroleague exists, and as previous years it had stats and constant notifications throughout the season. Countries that participated in the 2019 season were: Slovakia (2), Croatia (1), Hungary (3), Bulgaria (1) and the Czech Republic (1).

We continue to try and create more regional tournaments to provide more local competition with the futuristic outlook of having a final for all regional champions. We are in the final stages of creating a Men's Euroleague beginning from this year and with some hope it will come to fruition this year.

If you would like to participate in a regional Euroleague please contact us for more information (pcizmic@gmail.com).



DEVELOPMENT

Norway



Last year we began a process of bringing the game to Norway and in order to move forward we sent Coach Damir Mandic of Croatia to teach the coaches and players the basic fundamental skills in both teaching and playing so they can spread the word of softball throughout Norway.

As we mentioned last time there will be a possibility of a future men's team as well as the women's team (who already play in the Baltic Open) for our European Championships, but that will take a little more time and investment in their development program.

Great Britain, Switzerland, Spain, Serbia



Yet again this year the ESF Development efforts have gone into funding clinicians to the Member Federations high level coaches conferences. Craig Montvidas, one of our top clinicians, created an atmosphere of professionalism at the Great Britain Coaches Summit. This Summit has been a long standing event that continues to help the GB Coaches advance to higher levels of coaching.



At the Swiss Coaches Convention Ben Ten Pas from the Netherlands took the lead and instructed the Swiss Coaches on new ideas including a different approach to pitching for Women.



Although we have not reached the end of February we will be assisting the Spanish Federation with their Convention and we hope this will be another convention that will successfully allow coaches to learn and progress in their training knowledge.



Serbia received a coaching clinic from Ben Ten Pas as the Serbian Softball President Slobodan Djuric continues to try and make fastpitch happen in his country. Two days of learning and enhancing the players abilities in preparation for the summer.

Slowpitch

Slowpitch is growing in Europe. Apart from last year's Danish Federation's player development clinic, the word has passed on to more countries who are requesting similar clinics.

Hungary for the very first time hosted and participated in the Coed Slowpitch European Championship. For many years the number of participants was at six teams but this time a surprise with an additional five countries turned this Championship into a more interesting gathering of slowpitch teams. The Netherlands, Italy and Belgium came with strong teams and the return of Serbia and Austria to the Championships shows that the interest is growing and we hope to see more of this in the future. Great Britain regained the title from Germany this time around.

We need to also mention the importance of Umpire Clinics and this year Chris Moon was sent to have such a clinic in Belgium. Planning of future Slowpitch Umpire clinics will be one of the highlights in the coming years.



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