



# General Progress Report

UPDATE FEBRUARY 2016



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# ESF CONGRESS 2016

February 12-14 2016  
Hoofddorp, Netherlands

<b>Thursday February 11th 2016</b>	16.00	18.00	Executive Council Meeting
	All day		Arrival Delegates /Registration
	09.00	09.45	Financial Committee
<b>Friday February 12th 2016</b>	10.00	11.30	Development Committee
	11.30	11.45	Break
	11.45	12.30	Marketing Committee
	12.30	13.30	Lunch (individual)
	13.30	14.30	Technical and Competitions Committee
	14.30	14.45	Break
	14.45	15.30	Technical and Competitions Committee continue
	16.00	17.00	Joint committees (Optional)
	18.30	20.00	Dinner (individual)
<b>Saturday February 13th 2016</b>	21.00		Welcome Cocktail Sponsor Clearwater Sports Commission
	12.00	13.00	Lunch (EC)
	14.00	15.00	ESF Congress session 1
	15.00	15.15	Break
	15.15	16.45	ESF Congress session 2
	16.45	17.00	Break
	17.00	18.00	ESF Congress final session
<b>Sunday February 14th 2016</b>	19.00		Gala Dinner for all CEB/ESF Delegates
	All day		Departure Delegates

# ESF PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2016



**Dear ESF Federation Members,**

I would like to welcome all of you to this year's ESF Congress and, as always, I would like to express my appreciation for all the hard work you are doing for softball in your respective countries. Since my last report in 2014, there has been a lot of progress within the ESF. One of the key areas has been our Marketing and Media programs, with the live streaming of over 50 hours of softball from our tournaments in 2015. This live streaming has made our sport available throughout Europe and world-

wide.

In addition, attendance at our tournaments was high, especially at our European Women's Championship and the Men's European Super Cup.

We have taken major steps in our development programs, including support for European Interleague games, shipping equipment from the USA to Europe through a special agreement with one of our Board members and support for tournaments such as the Triple Ball in Bulgaria -- which combined baseball, fastpitch and slowpitch softball -- and the Balkan Co-ed Slowpitch Championships held in Belgrade. Top clinicians such as Michele Smith, Jarrad Martin and Thomas Makea have provided instruction at our European Championships and Cups.

We are also creating new ESF competitions, such as the Junior Women's Super Cup and the Masters Tournaments for Women and Men, which will help us extend playing time for players throughout Europe.

We have committed the ESF to assist sister federations from around the globe by providing another 'home' where they can train and play. The Junior Black Sox from New Zealand made their debut at our Men's Super Cup last year and we have also opened our doors to our African softball friends to help meet their needs.

Our financial status is good and we are constantly trying to find ways to raise more funds for all our programs. The EU is one option we have been looking into, and we hope our future programs can be considered for such funding.

We have also initiated a Joint Steering Committee with the Confederation of European Baseball (CEB) which will provide guidance on joint objectives in marketing/media, development strategy and operational strategies such as Congresses and joint-venue competitions. This agreement allows both organizations to fulfil our joint aspirations while keeping ourselves as independent confederations.

As we said in our recent press release, *"The significance of this alliance and joint venture is to promote and support the concept of unification of the sports at the Olympic level through the World Baseball and Softball Confederation (WBSC), while allowing the respective Regional Confederations around the world to continue their development of the sports at regional and local levels, independently and jointly in areas where it is mostly beneficial for both sports."*

Our Communications Director, with help from many of you as well as from our Board and Committee members, has put social media work at the top of our agenda. We are using our website, Facebook page and Twitter to show and promote the progress we are making and to disseminate news from softball in Europe and around the world.

The next few years will continue progress towards our goal of making softball a household name in Europe and assisting our Federations to expand their own programs with more youth, women's, men's and co-ed teams in both fastpitch and slowpitch. I hope you enjoy this brochure, which is a summary of some of our main programs and initiatives. If you have any questions or requests, please feel free to contact us.

**Andre Van Overbeek**



# HISTORY



The European Softball Federation (ESF) was established in Rome, Italy in 1976 by the representatives of six European Baseball and Softball Federations (Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain), with the objective of promoting and developing softball in Europe.

The ESF organized its first Senior Women's Championship in 1979 in Rovereto, Italy, with six countries participating (the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Spain and Great Britain).



Throughout the years, the ESF has grown and today has 33 National Federations or Associations from the European continent as members. The ESF has organized over 60 European Championships and more than 100 European Cups in all gender and age categories.

The ESF has also established many training programs for coaches, players and umpires, and has graduated hundreds of international umpires.

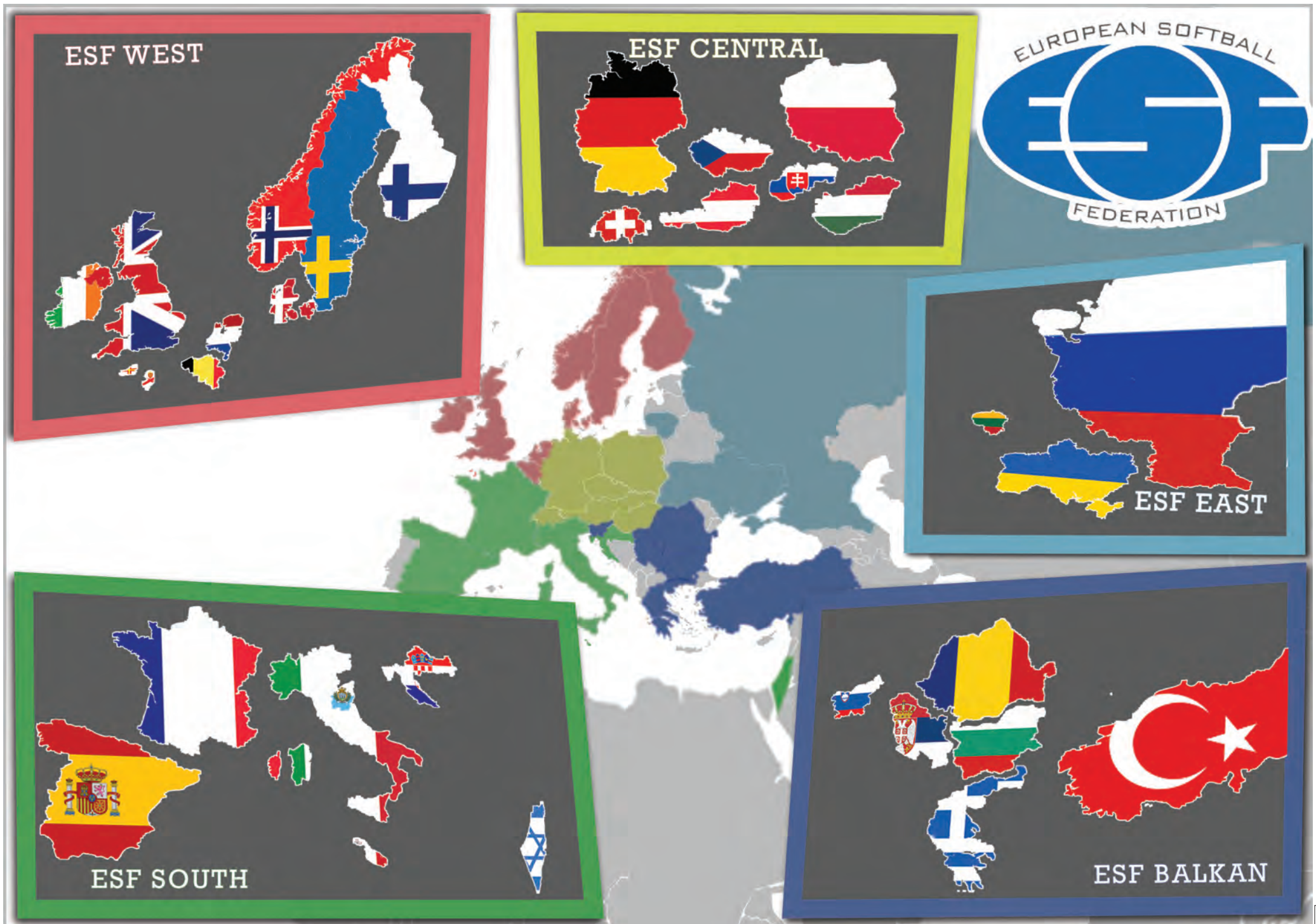
The Federations affiliated to the ESF meet each year during the General Congress. The ESF is managed by an Executive Council of nine members, elected by that Congress.



During the 2001 Congress in Sofia, Bulgaria, delegates unanimously adopted the Constitution of the ESF as an Association under Swiss law, and have modified the Statutes accordingly over time.

This year will be the 41st ESF Congress, and the fifth time the Congress will have been held in the Netherlands. The ESF Congress has been held in 21 different countries throughout the years, and as we see the further development of our Federations, we hope to see more countries willing to host this annual event.

# 2016 OFFICIAL FEDERATIONS AND REGIONS







**André Van Overbeek**

There has been a lot of progress in various areas: marketing and media, competitions, worldwide contacts and also baseball-softball collaboration. It's important to see what we've accomplished, but also to always see what is still to be accomplished



**Ami Baran**

**Secretary General- Development**

Development, as we all know, is and needs to be a process. We're supporting many different projects and we're also very glad to be developing our worldwide connections and cooperation.



**Gabriel Waage**

**1st Vice President**

**Technical and Competitions**

Softball is growing over all Europe. The number of ESF official tournaments is increasing, as well as several kinds of regional tournaments. Thank you to all organizers, volunteers and ESF staff who make this possible



**Eddy Van Straelen**

**Treasurer**

Despite the progress on various levels, we're desperately looking for financial support.



**Youri Alkalay**

**Vice President - Marketing and Merchandise**

Exciting year full of new challenges to face and overcome..



**John Austin**

**Vice President- Development**

A lot done. A lot more to do!



**Mette Nissen-Jacobsen  
Vice President-Operations**

Our 2015 tournaments were all very well run, some with additional activities such as pitching clinics. There was great energy on the fields and good softball to see at all the tournaments.



**Dejan Jesic**

**Vice President-Media**

We made big progress in gaining new followers on our social media accounts. Our first Photofest contest was a great success and we are very happy to say that our community is growing fast.



**Gilbert Tobback**

**Vice President –  
Technical Operations**

Happy to see so many people are following games on the live stream. 2016 was a year with well-organized tournaments, with teams competing in a sporting way.



# Member of Honour: (FRA)

## Mr Patrice BIENFAIT

1988 - Paris (FRA)	Administrator: Administrator:	Mr Renato GERMONIO (ITA) Mr Theo VLEESCHHOUWER (NED)
1989 - Paris (FRA)	Administrator: Player:	Mr Svend ERIKSEN (DEN) Mrs Ludy VAN MOURIK (NED)
1990 - Tbilisi (USR)	Meritorious Service: Player:	Mr Renzo RAMIERI (ITA) Mrs Carol LIDFELDT (SWE)
1991 - Venice (ITA)	Umpire: Coach: Player: Player: Player:	Mr Bert BREBDE (NED) Mr Arnoldus HOUTKAMP (NED) Mrs Renée VAN DEN BERG (NED) Mrs Annemiek VAN KAPPEL (NED) Mrs Caroline SMIT (NED)
1992 - Prague (CZE)	Administrator: Coach: Player: Player: Player:	Mrs Anny REINENBERGH-HEUSSCHEN (BEL) Mrs Ernesta MESCHIERI-CAMPIONI (ITA) Mrs Nora VERMANDER (BEL) Mrs Rita RAMIERI (ITA) Mrs Patrizia CAROTI (ITA)
1994 - San Marino (SMR)	Umpire:	Mr Gerard GILIS (BEL)
1997 - Paris (FRA)	Administrator:	Mr Enrico BERTIOTTI (ITA)
2000 - Eilat (ISR)	Umpire:	Mr Pavel PRACHAR (CZE)
2003 - Krakow (POL)	Administrator:	Mr Jacques REINENBERGH (BEL)
2005 - Prague (CZE)	Player: Player:	Mr Zednek ZYMA (CZE) Mrs Zuzana ZYMOVA (CZE)
2007 - Zagreb (CRO)	Player:	Mrs Vera VAN DE VEN (BEL)
2006 - Sofia (BUL)	Administrator: Umpire:	Mrs Güller ERIKSEN (DEN) Mr Franco BORGIA (ITA)
2009 - Lausanne (SUI)	Umpire: Administrator:	Mr Gilbert TOBBACK (BEL) Mr Massimo ROMEO (ITA)
2015 - Dublin (IRL)	Coach/Player	Mr Jens Terkelsen (DEN)

## ***“They call him the grand (old) man of the Danish Federation”***

**Jens Terkelsen** (DEN) was inducted into the ESF Hall of Fame in February 2015. The Danish Federation nominated Jens for meritorious service as a:

- Softball player.
- Club chairman.
- Member of the Danish Federation Board (in various roles including President).
- International umpire.
- National Team player.
- National Team coach.

In 1988, Jens played his first games for the Danish National Men's Team and he is still active with the team in the role of Head Coach. In 1991, Jens qualified as an ISF umpire and umpired at the World Championships in 1996 in Midland, Michigan, USA.

Besides his continuing work with the Danish Federation, where he has been active on the Board from the early 1980s, Jens is heavily involved and committed to the work of developing men's softball in Europe, a project which is very close to his heart. His first achievement in this area dates back to 1988 when he secured Danish participation in the Men's World Championship as the first European country to do so.

Jens is also a committed supporter of the European Junior Men's Championship and the European Men's Championship, where he takes pride in Danish participation. In terms of European club competition, he has been one of the main drivers behind the development of the Super Cup to construct a tournament which is more aligned with the reality of men's softball in Europe. In 2015, this tournament had a record participation of 23 teams from nine countries.







## General overview

Softball is growing all over Europe. Not only the number of official ESF tournaments is increasing, but also several regional tournaments or activities like Baltic Cup, Balkan Cup, Triple Ball or Interleague complete the whole picture of softball in Europe. ESF provides supervision and help, but also personal attendance of ESF representatives, which helps these events to be recognized as important in the calendar. I personally visited Balkan Slowpitch Cup held in Beograd and met several representatives of Serbian political and sport life. These kinds of meetings are significant in the process of raising awareness of our sport among political elites.

Another vital part of European politics is close cooperation with world-class level of softball on and off the field. Europe, as a continent, has the most individual countries playing softball and we have to be proactive at world softball meetings. I had the opportunity (with several others) to participate at the ISF Strategic Planning Meeting held in San Francisco last February and be part of the discussions about the future of worldwide softball. This meeting, together with our participation at World Championships and ISF Congress, are the gateway to implementing some of our ideas. ESF is a strong organization itself and we are running many tournaments and events. Our next step ought to be unification and we should be more successful at protecting Europe's interests at world meetings.

Apart from these activities outside of Europe, we opened the door to bringing world-renowned personalities and teams to our continent. These include Michele Smith, who ran a players' and coaches' clinic in Rosmalen and co-hosted the live stream of the final game; and the Jr. Black Sox, New Zealand's junior men's team, which participated in ESCM in Prague. They represent a foundation of making Europe more relevant and successful in world comparison also on the field. Probably the biggest thing in ESF in 2015 was the intensification of our effort in promoting and advertising our sport. We'd introduced the position of ESF Communication Director, who's brought large activity in social media. A separate report will show all of the pertinent results on this matter. In addition, we streamed live a total of 55 games from 6 ESF tournaments. All softball fans, parents, etc. had a chance to witness great softball action live from various tournaments, including interviews with players, officials, organizers or fans. We have outstanding viewership numbers we can work with. Back in 2011, I said the mandatory implementation of Play-By-Play for all ESF competitions was the biggest step forward.

6 Utilizing streaming in 2015 is another huge leap to having ESF competitions with world-class standards. We should head this direction in the future.

# ESF 1st Vice President's Report

## Managing report

The main task of ESF structure management was working in the commissions needed for the operation of ESF competitions, as we established at TC / UIC meeting in Rome in 2015. The leaders of the commissions worked on their specific tasks for successful administration of ESF competitions.

Activities for umpires were run throughout 2015, including ESF Basic Umpire clinics for Fast Pitch and exchange of umpires. The closer cooperation with ISF, and also with non-European federations was intensified during WWC in Haarlem.

The main idea is to standardize the procedure of running ESF and ISF competitions and find a way to open selected ESF tournaments to non-European teams (ESCM, ESCJW). Details will be included in the President Report.





# ESF 1st Vice President's Report

## ESF Organization structure

ESF Organization structure worked in 2015 under the same leadership as in the previous year:

**Technical Commission** headed by ESF Technical Director Mike Jennings,

**Umpire Committee** headed by ESF Director of Umpires Andrea Marcon,

**Competition Committee** headed by Cornelia Chwojka and

**Scoring Committee** headed by Dennis Duin.

The fourth edition of the ESF's TC and UIC Meeting was held in Rome in the middle of March. The first session was led by ESF Technical Director Mike Jennings and the second session was broken down into UICs headed by Director of Umpires Andrea Marcon and TCs headed by Mike Jennings. These groups discussed many different issues, including the question of scouting from behind the backstops, which is now prohibited. The final session reviewed the conclusions reached on the topics discussed, and set out the final assignment of TCs and UICs to ESF tournaments and locations that need to be inspected.

This meeting, which takes place every two years, has been beneficial for all parties and has led to more professionally-run ESF competitions. Also, structuring of ESF Regulations into two parts has brought more understanding to these. General Regulations consist of Administration Regulations (relations between parties, their duties and obligations), Competition Regulations (general regulations for participants), Technical Regulations (general regulations for organizers) and Financial Appendix.

Specific Regulations bring specifics to several types of the tournaments as Youth, Slowpitch, Super Cup Men, Super Cup Junior Women and newly Masters. Integral part of these, is an Appendix with game formats. work is an invaluable help!

## Umpires

2015 has been a very busy year for the ESF umpires, considering that one tournament had been added to the already packed calendar of European softball. A Fast Pitch Basic Clinic was held in Collecchio during the Massimo Romeo Trophy in the middle of August. Hans Hornstra, Carolien Stadhouders and Bert Loggen were the instructors. The provided facilities made the clinic successful, although the level of play was insufficient for umpire evaluation. For the third year in a row, an umpire exchange was done in cooperation with the Canadian Federation. One fastpitch and one slowpitch ESF umpire had the chance to participate in tournaments in Canada, while we hosted umpires from Canada at EChW and European Coed Slowpitch Championship. This exchange program has been very important for ESF development, and must certainly be continued in 2016.

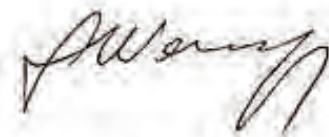
In this sense, Softball Canada has – through their UIC Jeff Whipple – already confirmed their will to keep the experience alive. For EPCW and ESCM, we had the honor of hosting an umpire from Australian Federation.

European umpires were also present at all three World Championships - 5 umpires at JWWC, 2 umpires at MWC and 2 at World Slowpitch Cup.

## Final words

*Finally, let me thank all of the organizers of ESF tournaments in 2015. It is very important to have you, because the games on your fields are what everyone's efforts come down to. Thank you so much for hosting! Also, thank you to all of the officials – TC's, UIC's, SIC's, EC's, umpires, scorers, locals and so many volunteers – for your assistance at ESF tournaments in 2015! Your work is an invaluable help!*

Gabriel Waage  
ESF 1st Vice President



# Competitions 2015



Gabriel Waage



Gilbert Tobback



Mike Jennings

Ten ESF tournaments were organized in 2015, of which four were youth competitions. This wouldn't be possible without the countless people involved, especially the clubs that provide their facilities. The ESF makes sure that its events meet the required criteria, that a professional level of organization is maintained and that there is a sufficient number of qualified umpires at every tournament.

We continue our support for the development of softball in all member states, and one aspect of this is that we are expanding the portfolio of events for both youth and adult categories.

ESF Organization structure worked in 2015 with the same leaders as the previous year:

**Technical Commission** headed by ESF Technical Director Mike Jennings, **Umpire Committee** headed by ESF Director of Umpires Andrea Marcon, **Competition Committee** headed by Cornelia Chwojka and **Scoring Committee** headed by Dennis Duin.



Andrea Marcon



Cornelia Chwojka



Dennis Duin

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
<b>EChCG</b> Cadet Girls' ECh	 Italy	 Czech Republic	 Russia
<b>ESCJW</b> Super Cup Junior Women	 Arrows Ostrava	 Birds Zoetermeer	 Joudrs Praha
<b>EChJM</b> Junior Men's ECh	 Czech Republic	 Denmark	 Croatia
<b>EChW</b> Women's ECh	 Italy	 Netherlands	 Czech Republic
<b>EChCS</b> Co-ed Slowpitch	 Great Britain	 Czech Republic	 Ireland
<b>EMRYT</b> M. Romeo Youth Trophy	 Moscovia	 Moscomsport	 Italy
<b>ECWCW</b> Cup Winners Cup	 Fiorini Forli	 Joudrs Praha	 Neunkirchen
<b>EPCW</b> Premiere Cup	 Bussolengo	 La Loggia	 Sparks
<b>ECW</b> Women's Cup	 Les Comanches	 Sant Boi	 Princ
<b>ESCM</b> Super Cup Men	 Pro Roma	 Brasschaat Braves	 Horsholm Hurricanes



# Competitions 2015



## EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP: Italy takes the title in Rosmalen - Netherlands

The Netherlands and Italy have been competing for gold at this event since 1979, and by winning the title in 2015 – their first since 2007 – Italy became the most successful country when it comes to the Women's Championship in the history of European softball. It was clear that Italy had come to the tournament determined to seize the trophy, and they managed to do it by defeating the Dutch in a very close final game.

It was notable that all of the medal games at the tournament were decided by just a single run, which means that the gap between the Dutch and Italians and the teams immediately behind them is narrowing.

Twenty teams participated in the tournament, which made it the second-largest ESF event of the 2015 season. The Championship was about 300 players and their coaches, plus around 18 umpires, 10 scorekeepers, three Technical Commissioners, other ESF staff, organizers, photographers, volunteers – and a variety of weather, including rain, wind and sunshine.

Mostly though, it was about softball. It didn't matter what level of softball the teams played – they were all passionate and they all tried to bring out their best, in every moment and against every opponent.

Ireland's National Fastpitch Team made their debut at the tournament and put on a very spirited performance.

## EUROPEAN CUPS: The Prague Softball Summer

There are four European Cups held every year: the Men's Super Cup and three women's competitions. This year, three of these tournaments took place in Prague, Czech Republic, and the event was promoted as the Prague Softball Summer -- two weeks filled with the best of European softball (plus one non-European guest team).

It was a great occasion for all softball fans, during which nearly 50 top clubs from across Europe took part in more than 180 games. For this very demanding event, the ESF had three Umpires-in-Chief leading a team of 41 umpires.

The Italian teams continued to prove the strength of their programme in the women's competitions. Bussolengo won the European Premiere Cup, where national champions play to determine the best women's fastpitch club in Europe, and the European Cup Winners' Cup is now in the hands of the Italian team Fiorini Forli.

To complete the list of winners, Les Comanches from France won the title in the lower bracket of the National Champions' Cup.



# Competitions 2015



## EUROPEAN MEN'S SUPER CUP: More success for Italy in Prague Czech Republic

The top men's fastpitch tournament, with 23 teams participating, was one of the three Cup tournaments held in Prague, with nearly 100 games played on four fields.

After the round-robin games, the teams were divided into ESF and Super Cup brackets, where they continued their quest to win titles. The Italian team Pro Roma won the European Super Cup trophy and the Spanish team Magos Tenerife seized the title in the ESF bracket.

There was also a special participant from the country of the six-times Men's World Champions: the Temperzone Junior Black Sox from New Zealand. The Black Sox coaches, Jarrad Martin and Thomas Makea, held two clinics during their stay and the European softball community had a chance to listen to these world champions talk about the way to the top.

## EUROPEAN SLOWPITCH CHAMPIONSHIPS: GB takes 10th straight title in Dupnitsa Bulgaria

So far, the ESF has two slowpitch competitions played in alternate years -- the Co-ed Slowpitch Super Cup and the Co-ed Slowpitch Championship -- and 2015 was a Slowpitch Championship year.



Great Britain has been dominant in this competition since it was established in 1998, and they won the title yet again in Dupnitsa, Bulgaria, going undefeated along the way. However, British teams have not had things all their own way in recent Slowpitch Super Cups, suggesting that if some European countries can raise their game, the European Slowpitch Championship trophy might be able to stay on this side of the English Channel in the future.



# 2015 COMPETITIONS

## YOUTH COMPETITIONS: The future of our sport

Official ESF competitions for youth players are very significant, because these players get to experience high-level competition and learn to take the game seriously

In 2015, 29 teams took part in four youth competitions, and three Junior Women's National Teams from Europe also took part in the WBSC Junior World Championships in Oklahoma

**The European Championship for Junior Men** was held in Most, in the Czech Republic. Six teams took part in the tournament, with the Czechs showing the best form and taking the trophy.

**The European Super Cup for Junior Women** made its debut in 2015, and a team from the Czech Republic – Arrows Ostrava – became the first winner.

**Cadette girls' teams** made their way to Nuoro in Sardinia, Italy to compare their softball skills, and the home team seized the title for the second time in the eight-year history of this competition.

For the last four years, the **European Massimo Romeo Youth Trophy**, a tournament for Under-13 girls, has taken place in the Italian town of Collecchio, near Parma. This tournament is also known as the Festival of Youth and, more than any other ESF competition, it's about experience, memories and new friendships. For the first time, a non-Italian team won the competition: the Russian team Moscovia.





# 2015 COMPETITIONS - REGIONAL TOURNAMENTS

The ESF is very glad that its portfolio of international tournaments is expanding. This now includes tournaments involving teams from particular regions, which are regarded as Regional Championships.



## Balkan Region -

The Balkan Triple Ball Championship is a project that offers men's baseball, women's fastpitch and co-ed slowpitch softball competition, and it was organized in Sofia, Bulgaria from 23-26 April 2015 with the support of the World Baseball Softball Confederation. Over 150 athletes participated in this first-ever event, representing five countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia.



## Interleague -

Four countries, seven teams, three tournaments. That's the idea of the Interleague tournament. Interleague is a project created in cooperation between four softball countries - Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia. Each of the rounds takes place in another participating country - in April it was Slovakia, in June the teams met in Hungary and the final matchup was hosted in Croatia.

The seven competing teams were: Trnava Panthers (SVK), Princ Zagreb (CRO), Hungarian Astros Budapest (HUN), Érd Wildcats (HUN), Vienna Mosquitoes (AUT), Lady Pirates Zagreb (CRO), Apollo Bratislava (SVK). In 2016 a team from Czech Republic will also join this project, and we're glad to see it growing bigger and more competitive every year.



## Baltic Region -

The second edition of the Baltic Softball Open was played on 13-14 June in Skövde, Sweden, coinciding with World Softball Day. The Baltic Open was organised by the Swedish and Danish Federations, with support from the ESF, to develop fastpitch softball for men and women throughout the Nordic/Baltic region and to get more competitive games for these developing softball nations.

The tournament featured four National Women's Fastpitch Teams -- Denmark, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden -- and two Men's Fastpitch Teams (Sweden and Norway). The ambition is to establish men's fastpitch softball as a discipline in Sweden and the Nordic countries, where interest in the game is growing steadily.





# ESF MEDIA IN 2015



Yuri Alkalay  
VP Marketing and  
Merchandising



Dejan Jesic  
VP Media



Helena Novotná  
Communications  
Director



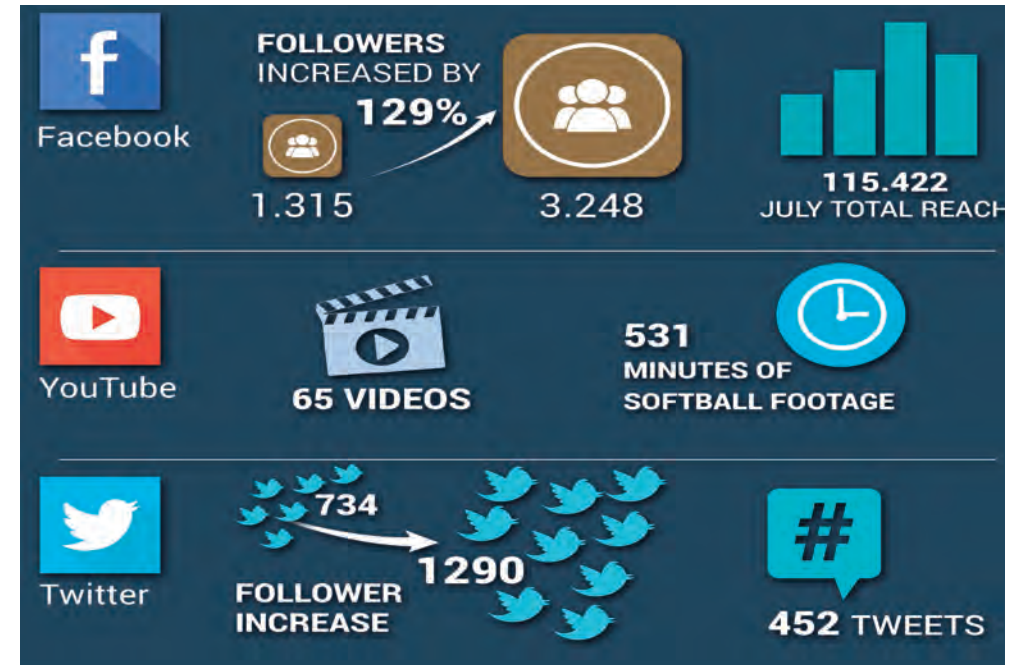
## ESF MEDIA RENAISSANCE

The year 2014 was a breakthrough for the ESF with regard to media and communication with the public. A new ESF website was launched that year in cooperation with the web provider eSports, but an even more important change was approved during an Executive Council meeting in November: a new position of ESF Communications Director was established. This has revolutionised the scope and effectiveness of ESF communication.

## ESF WEBSITE

The main source of information for everyone who wants to know about European softball is the ESF website. The website is now under the supervision of the Communications Director, who posts articles and up-to-date information. The website now has summary reports on all ESF competitions and there is also information about events and news from National Federations.

The website is undergoing continuous development, most recently with a new section for media information, as one of the ESF's main goals is to become as accessible to external media as possible.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

The ESF created its basic social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) in 2011. But both of these communication tools needed more maintenance, and in 2015 that has finally come about through the establishment of the Communications Director.

These channels have now become an everyday means of communicating -- not only about ESF matters but also about European softball in general, with an outreach to softball worldwide.

With ever more media content coming from the ESF, a YouTube channel was also created in 2015.

Today, all of our social media accounts are active, while the ESF website is going through continuous development to make it more useful and user-friendly.

We used Facebook to run two special projects in 2015.





# ESF MEDIA IN 2015

## National Federations Challenge

To start things off and to let Facebook users know that the ESF was now active on Facebook, a challenge for National Federations was set up in January 2015 to increase the number of followers. The challenge produced almost 500 new followers on one particular day, and Facebook administrators from France and their audience were announced as the winner of the seven-day event because their likes increase for the ESF Facebook page was the biggest by far.



## Photofest

Another Facebook project in 2015, the Photofest, had been planned in 2014 but finally became a reality last year. Not just established photographers but anyone who had ever taken a softball picture had a chance to take part in the project and win the main prize – a trip to an ESF event of their choice. The goal was to pick the best softball photo from those submitted and to create a collection of outstanding softball shots that a broader audience could see. We also wanted to support the newly-emerging image of the ESF as not only an organizer of European competitions but also as a catalyst for the European softball community.

Four Photofest rounds took place during the spring, each of them with its own theme: Softball Emotions, Field and Au-

dience, Softball Tattoos and Accessories, and Game Action. The winner in each round was determined by a combination of jury evaluation and Facebook audience vote. The absolute winner was later chosen by the jury, who picked the best photo from the first-round winners. A People's Choice Award was also presented based solely on public vote via Facebook.

A total of 161 photos from more than 50 photographers were submitted for the contest, and these pictures received more than 5,400 likes from Facebook users.

A similar contest will be organized again this year, along with different projects designed to widen the audience for our website and social media platforms.



## MEDIA PLANS FOR 2016

We started 2016 with a fun ESF Snowball Challenge, which became an outstanding success and reached more than 70,000 Facebook users. While we're excited to create interesting new projects, we'll also continue with the photo contest this year. And speaking of photography, we know that we are getting an increasing number of professional photographers at our official events, and so special areas for accredited photographers will be created and made a part of ESF regulations. We will also introduce a new accreditation system for media. And over the course of the 2016 ESF season, you can expect more videos, more interviews, more articles and background stories – in short, a lot more European softball information!

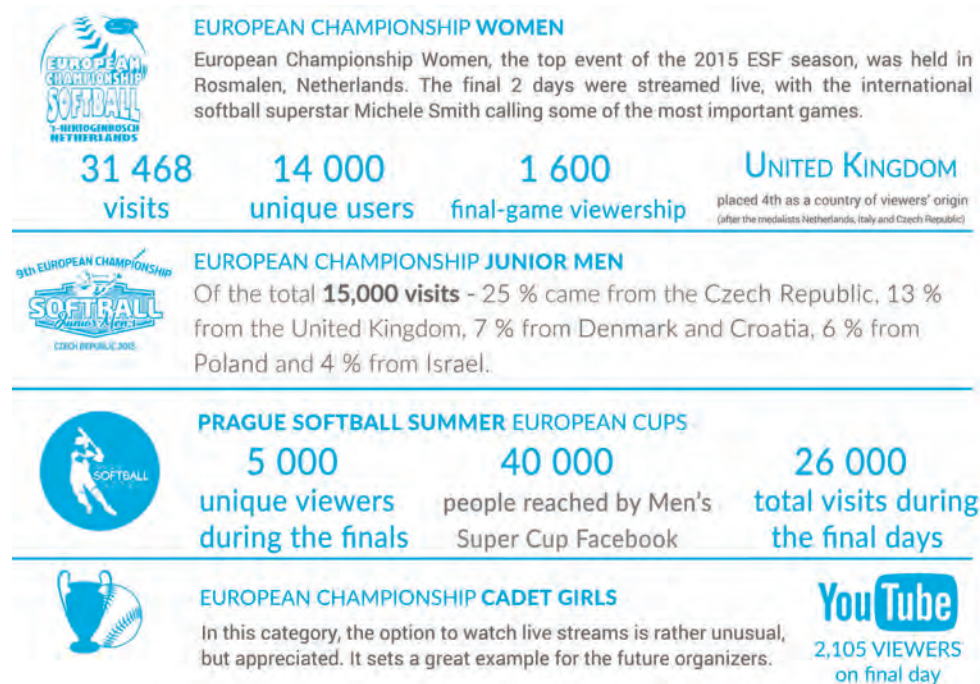
## THE BOTTOM LINE

Despite all that we have done, we're still just at the beginning when it comes to creating a platform for the European softball community as well as communicating with the public to expand the reach and excitement of our sport. It's been a great start, but now we need – as always – to develop even more.



# ESF SOFTBALL STREAMING IN 2015

In recent years, media attention has been shifting from television to online technologies and this trend has been particularly noticeable in sports (source: The Global Sports Media Consumption Report). Internet broadcasting is now a way to bring more competition to audiences, and the highest level of accessibility for sports streaming lies in the realm of the Internet rather than television. European softball has taken advantage of this trend to produce coverage which brings us closer to that of other and larger sports.



## PARTNERSHIP WITH PLAYO.TV

Playo.tv is a Czech company that focuses on live broadcasting of sports and cultural events. They are professionals who can not only bring live action from the field to distant audiences, but they can also produce so-called condensed games – five-minute highlights from each match. Their professional-grade broadcasts include live commentary and sideline interviews – not only with players and coaches but also with ESF staff, umpires, special guests, local VIPs etc. Other ESF events were advertised during the breaks, as well as information from sponsors.



## STREAMING OVERVIEW

Streaming softball games has been a trend in Europe over the past few years, not only for development purposes but to create more publicity and public awareness for our sports.

Starting in 2010, we have always had one tournament each season with webstream broadcasts. But the breakthrough came in 2014, when all the games from a single tournament were streamed. This was the European Men's Championship, held in the Czech Republic. The broadcasts were a great success and raised the bar for the organizers of future ESF events.

During the 2015 ESF Congress, delegates from the countries which were to organize major ESF competitions that year discussed the matter of live video streaming, and the result was a Congress vote that raised the streaming budget to 20,000 for the 2015 season.

Following this decision, six out of 10 tournaments organized by the ESF in 2015 had their final days streamed live, bringing nearly 50 games to the European softball community and to a wider audience. This unprecedented number represents a milestone for the ESF's efforts in this area.



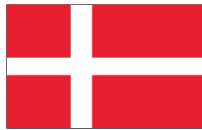
**The Bottom Line:** The viewer numbers obtained in 2015 will serve as a basis for future comparison. Only then will we know whether these efforts can be called a success.

# ESF Development Program Highlights



Ami Baran  
VP Development

Development, as we all know, is and needs to be a process. Through the years, the ESF has worked hard to assist its member Federations with their development plans and to promote our general development concepts. Below are brief reports on a few of the development programs and projects our Federations have recently carried out, but there is much more going on across the Continent.



## Denmark

The Danish Softball Federation (DSoF), following a bold decision by President Henriette Gilhøj and the Board of Directors, completed a two-year pilot project for a Modular Coaches Course which included Level 1 and Level 2 certification. The project ended in November 2015 with 14 new coaches receiving certification from the DSoF with the approval of the Danish Sports Federation.

The curriculum included not only sport-specific aspects, but also Training Theory, Anatomy, Physiology and other important elements involved in becoming a coach. Run as a joint initiative with the ESF Development Commission, the course was very successful and featured guest lecturers from Europe and around the world such as Craig Montvidas, Jen Schroeder, Andrea Marcon and Corey Vyner, while the main instructors included Jens Terkelsen, Kevin Stockford, Gilles Fournier, Jens Jakobsen and Ami Baran.

Mette Nissen-Jakobsen, ESF Vice President for Operations and one of the initiators of the project, said: "This pilot course can hopefully lead to other Federations implementing it and joining in on a unique opportunity to mold our coaches into some of the most knowledgeable in the world."

The pilot will be offered to all Federations that feel the need for more formal and structured coach education and will be a main initiative of the new European Softball Coaches Association (ESCA) and the ESF Development Commission.



John Austin  
VP Development



Mette Nissen-Jakobsen  
VP Operations



## Croatia

A year has gone by since some Croatian Junior Men's Team players took advantage of development opportunities created by cooperation between the ESF and the American Amateur Softball Association (ASA), and this initiative paid immediate dividends.

The Croatian Juniors came away from the 2015 European Junior Men's Championship with the bronze medal after an exciting game against Team Israel, and one of the Croatian pitchers who did particularly well at this tournament had taken part in that ASA/ESF initiative. Petra Cizmic Pokrajac, with the help of the ESF Development Commission, took on the organization for a larger Interleague Tournament in 2015, while the ESF provided balls and a small amount of funding for each of the host Federations. The tournament was very successful and, as you will see during the Congress, there are plans to grow the ESF Interleague concept.



## Great Britain

Great Britain, through the development agency BaseballSoftballUK, has had a consistent record of coach development, and held a very impressive Coach Summit on 30 January 2016 with speakers such as Brian Cain, a well-known Peak Performance Coach from the USA, along with Craig Montvidas, Maaike Zijlstra and GB coaches Rachel Watkeys, Steve Patterson and David Lee. These initiatives from our member Federations are very welcome and the ESF plans to become more involved in supporting them.



# ESF Development Program Highlights



## Germany

The DBV has been moving forward across a range of softball programmes.

The German Women's Team took seventh place at the European Women's Championships in 2015 and Germany finished fourth at the European Co-ed Slowpitch Championships. Discussions were held with newly-elected President Mirko Heid and Stefan Hoffman during the Paderborn Coaches Conference on a number of important issues, and the ESF DC will assist the DBV with some of their development plans. One of the aims for this year is to send a German men's fastpitch team to the European Championships in Italy.

We believe that the DBV has a good vision regarding softball development and it should be a very exciting and interesting next few years in German softball.



## Ireland

Last year, Softball Ireland committed to entering a women's fastpitch team in the European Women's Championships for the very first time, and under the leadership of Colum Lavery, the Irish Federation made this dream come true. The Irish women made it to Rosmalen and represented their Federation and country with honour. With support from the ESF Development Commission, Softball Ireland has been initiating further programs, and has signed up for the European Men's Fastpitch Championships in 2016. A lot of work will be needed to get an Irish team to Italy for the event, but we have confidence that the Irish can do it.



## Norway

The ESF Development Commission, with the cooperation of the Danish and Norwegian Federations, will be sending clinicians/coaches to continue work started last season in developing women's softball in Norway. One of the Norwegian players is now playing with a Danish women's club team and hopefully more players will do the same this year.



## Poland

Two coaches from the Czech Republic were sent by the ESF DC to Poland last year to assist the Polish Junior Men's Team that participated for the first time in the European Junior Men's Championships in Most. The team played very well, although they were short of a good pitcher. The development of these young men will continue throughout the next few years and hopefully plant the seed for a future Men's Team program in Poland.

The new Board in Poland is also looking to develop their Women's Under-22 program and, with the assistance of the ESF DC, has already hired Dutch Coach Ben Ten Pas to assist with of this program and lead a Polish team to the European Under-22 Championships later this year.



## Serbia

Serbia, under the leadership of Slobodan Djuric, hosted the Balkan Co-ed Slowpitch Championships last year as part of their efforts to develop softball across both formats. Serbia will also enter a Men's Team in this year's European Championships, and the ESF DC has committed to assist in preparing their pitchers as well as developing a greater understanding of the men's game.

Serbia's Junior Women's program will also benefit from this initiative, and we foresee a significant increase in participation numbers in Serbia and in national team performance levels in European competitions.



## Sweden

The Nordic/Baltic Fastpitch Open has turned into a very successful project, and if no problems emerge Sweden will have its first-ever team participating in Italy at the European Men's Championship this summer. The 2016 Open is set for June and hopes to include Women's, Junior and Men's divisions. The leadership of the Swedish Baseball and Softball Federation, along with Kristian Pälviä and Mette Nissen-Jakobsen, has taken this project to the next level in an effort to aid grassroots development in the countries taking part.

Meanwhile, Swedish Head Coach Mattias Grimstoft and former Dutch and British Women's Team Head Coach Craig Montvidas have been working on the implementation of the European Softball Coaches Association (ESCA), and we will hear more about this at the ESF Congress.

# ESF Development Slowpitch

## Tournaments

As a European Championship year, 2015 was an important year for slowpitch. Dupnitsa, Bulgaria was the venue for the six competing teams, with Lithuania making its debut in the competition and one noticeable absentee in Slovenia. The result proved somewhat predictable, with GB securing its 10th straight European title.

Can the other slowpitch nations develop enough over the next couple of seasons to challenge GB's dominance in 2017?

While the WBSC Co-Ed Slowpitch World Cup, held in Plant City, Florida in November 2015, isn't an ESF tournament, it still had four European teams participating – France, Bulgaria, GB and Germany. Germany finished the rain-interrupted tournament as silver medallists.

There were also a large number of privately-organised slowpitch tournaments taking place around Europe in 2015 and it appears that this number is set to increase in 2016 as a result of player and team demand.

On the back of continued growth in slowpitch in our member Federations, the go-ahead was given to stage the first-ever European Men's Slowpitch Championships in 2016. This tournament would have slotted very nicely into our slowpitch development plans, including the Team Europe project.

Unfortunately, we have had to postpone this tournament due to a lack of entries as well as having no tournament host. The reasons for this may be a bit of "chicken and egg": it's difficult to find a host for a new tournament when the number of participants is unknown, but it's also difficult to commit to a tournament with a national team when you do not know where it will be played. Either way, the postponement was disappointing, but the ESF remains committed to developing both co-ed and single-sex slowpitch among our member Federations and we look forward to including this new tournament in our calendar in the near future.

## Team Europe

With integrated plans, a setback in one part inevitably causes a setback in another. The development of male slowpitch, including the proposed European Championship, is an integral part of the Team Europe project, and the postponement of the tournament has created delays in the development of Team Europe. Despite positive beginnings in 2014, when a European Men's Slowpitch Team attended the Border Battle in Canada, we are still only at the beginning stages of a project of this magnitude. We want to build strong foundations for this program so that it can develop and grow, and we are continuing to look at ways in which this can be achieved as part of our overall slowpitch development plans.

## Development Clinics

2015 was a quiet year for slowpitch development clinics. The Dutch Federation followed up on their 2014 Beginner/Intermediate Clinic with an advanced player development weekend for their National Slowpitch Team at the Windmill Classic Tournament, with GB and Team Europe Head Coach Steve Patterson and ESF slowpitch clinician John Austin taking charge of the Dutch squad for the tournament.



The development weekend proved to be a very positive learning experience for both players and managers, and the knowledge and experience gained will be passed down to other players and teams as the Dutch build the foundations for their fledgling slowpitch league. As slowpitch continues to grow and develop in the Netherlands, we look forward to welcoming Dutch teams to ESF tournaments in the very near future.

## Communications

The use of social media to distribute information to the European slowpitch community has gone from strength to strength over the past year. Facebook, the platform of choice for our slowpitch community, now has 533 "likes" (followers), with posts containing messages, photos and links broadcasting to an audience far exceeding our expectations.

An example is a photo update from the Slowpitch World Cup in Plant City, which according to Facebook's own statistics had an "Organic Reach" (number of people who were served with information from our page without advertising) of 14,529 and an "Engagement" of 35,400 (people who clicked, reacted, commented or shared the post).

All in all, this is proving a very valuable tool for bringing our slowpitch community together and for getting information to this community. We will continue to utilise Facebook as well as looking into other social media platforms to build our ESF slowpitch brand.



# ESF Development

## EQUIPMENT FOR EUROPE

Equipment is still coming to Europe thanks to the efforts of our VP Youri Alkalay and the ESF DC, and the outlook is bright.

Pitch in for Baseball, the WBSC Softball Division and others have been instrumental in getting the equipment and sending it to the facility in Florida where it is then shipped to Europe, and this equipment initiative has helped ESF Federations to meet at least some of their development needs. Lithuania, Croatia, Ukraine and Finland, to name only a few, should have their equipment delivered within the next month or so.

A new procedure for requesting equipment from the WBSC Softball Division and the ESF will start in March, and we hope that this project will continue to help our Federations with their development programs.



Over the past two years, the ESF DC has been partnering with Federations that conduct Baseball/Softball conferences and clinics. Last year, we partnered with the KNBSB for their yearly European Coach Clinic in the Netherlands and this year the ESF DC worked with the German Federation, the DBV, in support of their ISG Conference in Paderborn.

Guest speakers Lindsey Meadows (Dutch National Team pitcher), Corey Vyner, Steve Englishbey and Ben Ten Pas led the softball part of this clinic and delivered on a wide variety of subjects that kept the 35 attending coaches enthusiastic throughout the weekend.

Clinics, such as Paderborn, the Coach Summit in the UK mentioned above and others throughout Europe are all helping our European coaches



SOFTBALL/BASEBALL COACHES' CLINIC IN PADERBORN



Overall, the DBV Paderborn Conference, also supported by the International Sports Group led by Tom O'Connell, had over 250 participants, including coaches, players, umpires and interested individuals. The DBV Board and their staff put on an event that can be used as a model for others.





# New Development Plans

Here are just a few of the plans for 2016-2017 from the ESF Development Commission:



When the Interleague started in 2014, six teams from the three countries played a minimum of 12 games per team (39 games in total). In 2015, the Interleague expanded to seven teams and four countries (Austria joined Croatia, Slovakia and Hungary). Over three tournaments, 49 games were played, some tight and exciting, but all with a high level of sportsmanship and passion



- . The final standings in 2015 were:
1. VIENNA MOSQUITOES (AUT)
  2. Trnava Panthers (SK)
  3. Princ Zagreb (CRO)
  4. Apollo Bratislava (SK)
  5. Lady Pirates Zagreb (CRO)
  6. Hungarian Astros (HUN)
  7. Erd Wildcats (HUN)

The aim of the Interleague is to build a competition with international impact and credit, but where teams can participate at minimal cost. In 2015, the Interleague was recognized by the ESF, which supported the league with game balls and with 500 euros for umpire fees.



The ESF now wants to develop a Europe league, which will be based in different regions, with countries grouped on a geographical basis.

The project will hopefully begin this season, but meanwhile, the region that began this project will hopefully have nine teams from five countries

in the 2016 Interleague, with the Czech Republic joining the four countries that took part in 2015.

These kinds of competition give teams more opportunities, and give more players a chance to enjoy the European spirit.



## Interleague and Euroleague

A Softball Interleague founded in 2014 by Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia provides competition in fastpitch softball for women and juniors on a cross-border regional level. One of the objectives of the Interleague is to raise the profile of softball and make it more attractive for players as well as for families, fans and potential sponsors.

Softball Federations that have a small number of teams and games in their country, or teams that are looking for a larger competition program, can benefit from these types of tournaments. These three softball countries, despite limited budgets, have shown a desire to play and grow.



# New Development Plans



## European Softball Coaches Association (ESCA)

ESCA is here! The ESF DC is proud to announce that ESCA has begun and this year will start to implement its objectives: to bring our coaches closer together and to professionalize coaching in Europe through instruction in all aspects of the game. Mattias Grimstoft, Craig Montvidas, Mette Nissen-Jakobsen and others have put in many hours to form an initial plan that will help us build the Association into one of the world's most comprehensive coaching organizations. Already, during the two conferences mentioned in this booklet, we have signed up more than 40 coaches. With the cooperation of our member Federations in supporting the ESCA initiative, we hope the quality and quantity of our coaches will continue to grow.

## Coaches Fastpitch Pitching Program



Pitchers are a dominant element in fastpitch, and European Federations have been trying for years to level the international playing field by developing pitchers. Some have had a little success, but there is still a gap within Europe and between Europe and other world regions.

The ESF DC has set a goal, based on ESCA and the new coaching Certification Program, to improve the quality of pitchers throughout Europe. The idea is to have member Federations designate one or two coaches, whether on a regional or single-venue basis, to host a specific modular program for the development of pitching coaches. The program will be conducted by top pitching instructors selected by the ESF DC and will enable each Federation to enhance the development of pitchers of both genders and all ages. Coaches that sign up for the programme will learn the mechanics, drills, training methods and tactics of fastpitch pitching and will be able to transfer this knowledge to others within their Federation.

## ESF Coach Certification Program

The ESF DC has come up with a pilot Coach Certification Program that had a trial run by the Danish Softball Federation, as outlined above. Thanks to their investment and logistic support, we are pleased to announce that we will be moving forward in bringing the program to other Federations that want to implement it.

We will work directly with those Federations and adapt the course to fit each country's legal requirements and/or existing certification programs. We believe that this project will enhance the knowledge and professionalism of our coaches.



## St Petersburg Clearwater Sports Commission and Michele Smith Softball Academy



Our cooperation with the St Petersburg/Clearwater Sports Commission (SPCSC) and Michele Smith has been very productive and one result has been the Czech Men's Under-19 team travelling to the USA to compete in a tournament in Florida. After the competition, the team moved on to Clearwater, where they received a tremendous welcome. The Clearwater municipality and SPCSC Director Kevin Smith provided the team with training facilities, and clinics by Olympian Michele Smith and New Zealand coach Paul Walford provided an incredible experience for the team.

We will be continuing this cooperation, and during 2017 will announce a range of options and benefits that European Federations will be able to access at the Academy, which will offer single-sex and co-ed slowpitch as well as fastpitch.



