

BAFA updates on 2020 season and COVID-19 – questions and answers

Why are you making the decision to cancel the season now, why not wait – you previously said the season wasn't due to start until July?

Teams have told us they need advanced notice prior to the start of any season – particularly contact teams – to organise transport, liaise with venues and organise medical cover. Feedback from contact teams, and from head coaches, was also that they would require a minimum of a six-week pre-season to properly prepare for competitive action.

Therefore, for a July start, a decision needed to be made by mid-May. And it has become clear, given the latest government advice, that it will just not be possible to give teams any certainty that games can start in July by this deadline of mid-May. And the overwhelming feedback from the teams is that, in this scenario, they would prefer the certainty and clarity of the season being cancelled.

We have listened to your views and assessed all the options on the table, and we believe this is the best decision in difficult circumstances.

Why has the contact season been cancelled but not the flag season?

The logistical challenges in organising a contact football season are greater than a flag season, for example in terms of the transport, venues and medical cover. Also, the contact element of flag football is, obviously, less than for the adult contact form of the game.

The feedback from our flag teams is that they would like to give the season every possible opportunity to take place. That is why we are keeping the option open for an adult flag season to start in August, and youth and cadet seasons to start in September.

Don't you think it's unrealistic that a flag season can take place? Why not just cancel the season now so everyone knows where they stand?

As flag football has a lower level of contact than contact football, and there are less challenges in organising a flag season than, for example, an adult contact league game, then it may be possible to organise a flag season starting in August or September 2020.

While we may only be able to confirm the go-ahead of the season at short notice, the feedback from the flag community was that teams preferred to take this chance, whereas contact football teams wanted certainty now. That is why we are giving the flag season every chance we can of taking place, having listened to your views.

We are expecting to receive updated guidance from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) on recreational sporting activity shortly and once we have reviewed this, we will make a further announcement on a plan for return to play – in terms of both practice and the potential flag season.

What is happening to my membership fees for this season? Will I get refund given there will be no competitive action?

For certain contact membership types, there will be a 50% refund of the net income received by BAFA for this year's membership fee. The reason that this is 50% of net income is because BAFA does not receive the whole fee paid by members. A small percentage of every payment made to purchase a BAFA membership is taken as a processing fee by the third-party online payment platform used to manage our online payments.

Which contact membership types will receive a refund?

Refunds are currently limited to our adult, associate adult, junior, associate junior, youth, associate youth and other contact player membership types. Our women's contact, university coach and university player/coach members have already completed the competitive seasons they registered for so are not eligible for a refund.

I'm a flag player. Will I also receive a refund?

For flag players, we will keep the situation with membership fees on hold for the time being until we have a clear picture on the outcome of the season.

Will contact coach and contact player coach memberships receive a refund?

We are currently reviewing other categories of contact membership, such as coach and player coach memberships, in collaboration with BAFA. We expect to have a further update on this in the next 7-10 days.

When will I receive my refund?

Our registrations team will be working with system provider GoMembership to process refunds in the coming weeks. This is an unprecedented situation and process, and will take some time to organise, so we ask for your patience.

How much money will I receive?

The table below outlines the refund amounts different membership types will receive:

Category	Original fee	Refundable total (50% - fees)
Player – Adult contact	£50	£23.35
Player – Junior contact	£15	£6.87
Player – Youth contact	£15	£6.87
Player – Associate Adult contact	£40	£18.84
Player – Associate Junior contact	£5	£2.16
Player – Associate Youth contact	£5	£2.16
Other contact – side assistant, physio, stats, photographer, videographer etc	£5	£2.16

Given there is no competitive contact season, why am I not receiving a full refund?

There are significant operational costs of running a National Governing Body that will continue over the coming months, even though we will not have a competitive contact season.

Work on core priorities, such as developing all formats of the game, creating the long term sustainable future strategy of the sport, building commercial and public funding partnerships, and implementing a new digital communications and branding strategy, will carry on as normal. Membership fees contribute towards these operational costs in addition to the organisation and running of the competitive season.

Why are membership fees not being full refunded but BAFA is still paying for a Chief Executive?

While there is no prospect of competitive football this season, BAFA at an operational level continues as normal with a focus on core priorities such as developing all formats of the game, building commercial partnerships, and implementing a new communications and branding strategy.

This work is being led by our Chief Executive, who also been leading all of BAFA's scenario planning and discussions with bodies such as Sport England, The Sport and Recreation Alliance and the NFL during the current period. Introducing a paid Chief Executive was seen as essential in professionalising the administration of BAFA and at such a difficult and challenging time, we need strong, decisive and experienced leadership more than ever to secure the long-term integrity and sustainability of our sport.

Why hasn't the Chief Executive been furloughed?

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is intended to assist organisations who cannot maintain their current workforce because their operations have been severely affected by COVID-19. During this difficult and challenging time, our Chief Executive has been busy working with our key stakeholders and partners, and planning for various different scenarios – as well as taking forward core priorities for BAFA such as long-term strategies and developing all formats of our game. Therefore, as well as not being appropriate for BAFA to furlough the Chief Executive, it would not have been beneficial, desirable or in the best interests of the sport to do so.

You say you consulted with members, but no one asked me for my opinion.

We contacted all BAFA teams, either by email or on social media, to ask for their feedback and views on the current situation and the various options available. Where this was done by email, then the designated team contact and/or head coach would have been contacted, and that person will have collected views on behalf of their team.

It would not have been practical, in the time available, to contact every member individually but we hope the person from each team who was contacted was able to represent the views of their staff and players.

If we are allowed to play friendlies, why can't we play the league as normal?

The feedback from teams was that if a July start was not possible, then they preferred the certainty and clarity of the season being cancelled – with the opportunity to organise friendlies if appropriate. The logistical challenges of organising friendlies are less than trying to organise a full, or half, competitive season.

Teams will only be able to play friendlies if this is allowed in accordance with the public health guidance at the time, but we hope this keeps an option open for some playing action to take place this season.

The season/registration period has then been extended to 31 October 2020 to give teams an opportunity to organise friendlies. All friendlies will need to be sanctioned by the relevant commission lead and roster checks will be required as normal. As in the case of pre-season friendlies, games will only be sanctioned if teams have a minimum number of players registered (which is 35 in the case of an adult contact team).

If we are being allowed to organise friendlies, when can we start practicing?

Teams will be able to return to training once this is allowed in accordance with public health guidance for your nation. We will keep this guidance under constant review and will notify teams when they can return to training.

Why are you extending the registration period to 31 October 2020?

The decision has been taken to extend the registration period to give teams an opportunity to organise friendlies if they want to. It is likely, if friendlies are able to take place, that these games will take place from September onwards, and so extending the registration period to 31 October 2020 will give teams an additional month in which to organise friendlies.

We want to give teams every chance to play some football if this is possible.

What about age ranges for youth and junior football? Will these also be extended / amended if the membership period is extended?

We will be looking carefully into the impact of extending membership expiry for youth and junior contact teams and what this would mean from a safety and welfare point of view should friendly fixtures take place. We anticipate no extension to the upper age range of junior football, but we are considering a short extension to the upper age of participation for youth contact football. Further guidance and examples will be shared with youth and junior contact teams over the coming weeks.

What about the Diamond Series for women's contact football?

Unfortunately, the Diamond Series will be postponed until 2021. The most likely window in which the Diamond Series could be organised was September/October, but this would then clash with the Opal Series, and will also clash with the Sapphire teams potentially returning to practice.

Also, for those players who didn't participate in the Diamond Series in 2019, it will be necessary to order playing jerseys, and so waiting and seeing, and cancelling at short notice after the jerseys have already been ordered, is more difficult.

However, BAFA will try to organise skill development days where possible to give players an opportunity to play 11v11 football.

What about the Opal Series for women's flag football?

As the Opal Series is due to start in mid-October, we hope that this can proceed as normal. However, this will be kept under constant review and assessed in line with public health guidance.

What about the GB teams – when will they be able to have camps again?

GB teams will return to training once this is allowed under public health guidance. At present, it is anticipated that the GB teams will not return to practice until 2021.

Will guidance and support be given to teams to help them meet government requirements to return to practice?

Yes, we will keep public health guidance under constant review, and we are liaising closely with the other National Governing Bodies for sport. We are expecting to receive updated guidance from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) on recreational sporting activity shortly and once we have reviewed this, we will make a further announcement on a plan for return to play – in terms of both practice and the potential flag season.

What support will be available to clubs who are struggling financially due to the cancelled season?

We have been liaising with Sport England to see what support may be available to teams who have suffered financially due to the cancelled season. We previously communicated details of Sport England's financial support package for community sport and the deadline for applications to this fund has been extended to this Thursday (14 May).

We will continue to investigate what support might be available for teams based in Scotland and Wales.