



# 2023 Season Report

## Directors' Report – Lorraine Phee

Work began on the new season in late December 2023 and we had our first in person AGM since Covid on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023. Registration for the 2023 season opened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2023 and closed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2024. We saw 50 teams sign up, which was up from 47 in 2022. We had Raiders Indigo return to div 6 along with the addition of the Dev squad team Base Jam. We also had 2 other new teams Bonk Squad and the Digital Dodgers join but unfortunately, due to roster issue Digital Dodgers folded during the season. Divisions 1 through 5 had 8 teams in their divisions while division 6 was made up of 10 teams. Like expected a 10 team division made the season too long and presented its share of problems last season. Ideally the committee would like to return to 8 teams per division and find a solution for the length of the season if we have more than 48 teams this season. Most teams were able to play most of their games without issue but arranging rainouts towards the end of the season began to present a problem in late August.

In late March we saw the return of New Player's Day. Unfortunately, due to the rain the first scheduled date was called off the morning of the event. The committee was able to pivot and thanks to the raiders allowing us to commandeer part of their booking at John Archer Way, we were able to reschedule this quickly to the following week. Daniel's report goes into more detail but overall it was a very successful event. Again we saw a bigger influx of 12" ball hitters while 11" ball hitters were again very much in demand.

The season kicked off on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April over 14 weeks. For the most part, the season went well, with minimal disruption. However, we did see some rescheduled games due to more transportation strikes, weather and even Glastonbury. Even with the new division format, some teams still struggled to get all their games in before the regulated end of the season. This was also not helped by the lack of field space caused by some grounds not being available to teams anymore. Tiernan's field report will go into this further.

Finally, ending on the season. We had some very tight finishes. We had 3 ties for division titles and one tie for runners up. The majors and minors reports will dive into this further:

The winners and runners-up of each division are as listed.

Div 1 - Winners: Secret Agents MI:6 - Runners Up: Mescalitos and Meteros Black

Div 2 - Winners: The Mob - Runners Up: Mezcalito's Ninos

Div 3 - Winners: Game of Throws & Soft Boiled

Div 4 - Winners: Raiders Blue- Runners Up: Bat Intentions

Div 5 - Winners: Diamond Dogs & Golden Sombreros

Div 6 - Winners: Battitude & Fly Ballers

### Outgoing roles:

**Mark Gould**- Minors Officer. Mark has been acting as one of two minors officers for the past 2 years. He has not only just been the minors officer on the committee but In 2019 I volunteered his time to co-building the new londonsoftball.co.uk website, he took/takes ownership of SEO & performance and I have been regularly required/approached for web/technical support for the website throughout the last 2 years.

#### Mark himself left us some departing words:

"This opportunity has led me to get to know many of you personally and see that many of us share the same values of finding the balance in the Minor Leagues between competitions, fun & creating a community across the spectrum of players that are entering the sport for the first time to those that have played many years. This league survives & grows from the many volunteers - inside & outside of the committee, and I want to say thank you to all of those that have given their time & will give their time in the future to make the London Softball League a continued success year on year. You provide & support a sport & community I love"

**John Rushworth**- Minors Officer. John joined the league through our 101 program the year the Diamond Dogs formed. Despite locking himself out of his email and the Slack account regularly, John has always been on hand to help and contribute the committee. Along with Mark he has supported minors teams through the season, and (due to his height) is very easy to spot at event when help is needed.

#### John has also left us some departing words:

"It's with mixed emotions that I say goodbye to my role as Minors Officer after two years. It's been enjoyable and a great experience. Working with our Minors players has been a real highlight. I've seen them grow, make friends, and become better players. Having benefited myself as a member of Softball 101 it was a pleasure to give back to the league. Thanks to the other committee members for your guidance and advice in the past. I'm not leaving the league. I'll still be around and doing whatever I can to help. Thanks again, and see you on the field!"

**Ross Smart**- Majors Officer. Ross joined the committee as a co-majors officer in 2021 and has played a vital part in many aspects of the league. Along with captaining Meters Black, running the Meteors Softball club, captaining Naturals in NSL and Pew Pew Pew in the indoor league, Ross has been on hand to offer help and an opinion for all committee matters. Ross was the one to discover and set up the pitches at Blackhorse Road and organise the storage container on site. He will still be the main contact for Blackhorse Road and is working with the BSUK and the Meters to do some outreach work in E17 which is linked to the tenancy at Douglas Ayre (Blackhorse Fields). Ross also designed the currently LSL logo when we rebranded from the GLMSL back in 2019 and has supported many teams in the league with their branding. He has been a large support to myself not only as a committee member but a teammate too. I'm sure I will still be reaching out to you in the future for some advice in the future.

**Whitney Hollis**- Development Officer. Whitney came in as the development officer in 2019, but she has been part of the 101 program since 2018. In her time she done 4 years with 3 teams due to Covid. She has run the 101 sessions on Monday nights with the help of many volunteers and fostered the likes of Base Jam, Swamp Monsters and the newly promoted Batittude into the league. She has been a great support for the Dev teams and for the development of softball in the UK. Whitney has also participated the communications with Regent's Park and the BSUK advocating for field space and storage for the development squad. She will be sorely missed and we thank her for her service to the development of softball.

## **Minors' Report – Mark Gould and John Rushworth**

As the Minors Officers representing the Minors teams in the London Softball League, it is our pleasure to provide a summary of the thrilling and competitive season across the three Minors leagues.

### **Minors 3:**

The Fly Ballers emerged victorious in Minors 3, securing the top spot in the league. Battitude secured the second position. Notably, Fly Ballers were a newcomer to the league this year. Unfortunately, the Digital Dodgers, though entering the league with enthusiasm, faced challenges in fulfilling their fixtures and were subsequently removed from the competition.

### **Minors 2:**

Diamond Dogs and Golden Sombreros were co claimants of the championship title in Minors 2, showcasing their dominance throughout the season. This was a hard fought battle as both teams not only had to compete with each other but also with the early favourite promotion contenders High Voltage. High Voltage started their season 8-0 but a few losses towards the end of the season landed them in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. On the other hand, Raiders Red and Knight Soldiers faced tough competition and were relegated to Minors 3 for the upcoming season.

### **Minors 1:**

In Minors 1, Raiders Blue celebrated their victory, securing the top position in the league. Bat Intentions finished in second place. However, Badgers and Tecumsehs faced the challenging side of the competition and were relegated to Minors 2.

### **Overall:**

Fortunately, the season across all three Minors leagues concluded without any major incidents, providing a testament to the sportsmanship within the London Softball League. As we reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of the season, we look forward to building on this foundation for an even more exciting and inclusive experience in the upcoming seasons. Congratulations to all the teams.

## Majors' Report – Ross Smart and Dana Granville

### Majors 1

MI6 are once again LSL's King of the Hill. They were pushed hard though, and at one point the spectre of a multi-team tiebreaker was looming. Meteor Blacks hopes ended in a highly entertaining August fixture, with Sixers coming out on top by the odd run. The end of the season came too soon for Mescalitos, who put an inconsistent start behind them to drag themselves into contention. They finished 2nd by virtue of S coming before T in the alphabet. Coyotes, the kingmakers in this division, finished in their customary position. An excellent campaign for Mouserat saw them thriving in a mid-table position. Sadly, Fuzzy Ducks and Dazzlers will be playing in Majors 2 next season

### Majors 2

The Mob carried over their dominant performance in NSL2 this season to finish with a 100% record in Majors 2. 14 wins. No losses. No notes. Mezcalitons Ninos stuck their heads above the parapet to secure the 2nd promotion spot. Oddsox finished a point behind Ninos after losing their final two fixtures by a heavy margin. Such terrible luck for Oddsox, I'm sure they will be redoubling their promotion efforts in 2024. BBG Muppets (catchy name) finished in the Goldilocks position. We were well into August before relegation matters were settled. Experience prevailed as Pirates and SPAM managed to stay a few steps ahead of Raiders Gold and Cheetahs. Both will be plotting their revenge in Majors 3 next season.

### Majors 3

Majors 3 was a two-horse race with Game of Throws (duh, duhduduh) and Soft Boiled racking up an impressive 11 wins apiece finishing joint top. Woof. A word of warning though: promotion to Majors 1 isn't as hard you think....

Strong showings from Oblivion and The Mafia had them relaxing in mid-table: trotters up and enjoying life. Special shout-out to the Base Invaders for being the most entertaining team in the division. Nothing to do with their personalities mind, but on multiple fixtures this season, both teams scored 30+ runs (insert wide-eyed emoji). Sadly, it was a season to forget for Meteors Purple, though there is an argument that they won 'most purple jersey' in the division (how do you like them apples, GoT?). They will be tearing it up in the Minors next year. Joining them will be the Thundercats. who never seemed to recover after an epic battle (36-35) with the Secret Agents in June.

## **Development Report – Whitney Hollis**

We continued to see new and interested players attend Softball 101 in the 2023 season. We got lucky and didn't have to cancel any of our 15 sessions. We had on average 25 people per session with the largest session having around 36 people. This year we did see a drop in the split between SBH and BBH which is something to take note of on how we better recruit and retain SBH for 101.

We also benefited this year to having two qualified coaches support 101 which shaped future drills and approaches to coaching. We have also been working closely with BSUK on coaching development in which LSL had strong representation at coaching level 1 courses. This increases the quality for our coaching and the ability to ensure we effectively develop our players.

### **101 Teams & players**

Bangers and Smash was the team that launched from 2023's cohort. They are super keen and have been practicing quite a lot in the off-season already; they are properly putting some of our teams to shame! I cannot wait to see how they attack Div six.

Their first foray at the Raiders tournament was quite positive. With the support from Bruce (GB coach), the team managed to get into the playoffs. They were also entered into Lastball where they played against various dev teams from the past and held their own. We are excited to see what they will do next season as there is a lot of potential.

### **What happens after 101...**

I want to give a huge shout out to AI who has been working with past dev squads on Mondays at Regents to continue their development in an ad-hoc manner. It has been an organic growth with the teams driving their own self-development, but I know that they can always use help from more experienced players. This has always been a desire of mine to see a 102 or a 201 level where players can further develop their skills in a safe way, but this does require committed individuals. We do leverage Sunday softball in the winter as much as possible and Claire Read also throws the Dev derby, which is another way to support their development, but we could always do more. If people are interested in taking this on, please let myself know or connect with AI or Claire who could certainly use your support.

### **SBH sessions only**

A staple of continual development for this group, these specific sessions delivered by Claire Reed aim to further develop the players and empower them. We were oversubscribed which shows how popular this continues to be and could use more volunteers to help deliver this in the future. Please do reach out to Claire Read directly if you have some ideas or would like to support.

As noted in my overall summary, we are still struggling to attract and retain SBH into the league. It might be good to hold a forum of SBH (newer to the league) to understand what we can do to increase representation. This may mean 101 SBH separate sessions or extra weekly/monthly sessions—ideas are welcome. It's time to act and stop talking about the issue. If interested, please do email me [hollis.whitney@gmail.com](mailto:hollis.whitney@gmail.com) and we can work together to find the best solution.

### **Financing and delivering 101**

We focused on using Spond again which did have more uptake this year and the functionality is continuing to improve and be useful for us. We only took a small loss this year due to the fact we lost our storage for the equipment and had to purchase some equipment to help us transport kit back and forth. We were fortunate that one of the players drove and offered to store the kit when he attended which was most of the sessions. The other sessions where we did not have someone, we did have to uber to homes. We do foresee this will be an issue going forward and may affect where we deliver 101 in the future. We are in

talks with Regents Park to help procure some storage—it has been a bumpy road but will not know more until February/March 2024.

### **Coaching & Volunteers**

WE NEED YOU! The development sessions have been an essential staple for growth and developing players for the London Softball League. It has grown and evolved with lean resources. We have taken strides to develop coaching plans that were tested and will need to be tweaked for next year; but at least lays a foundation for anyone to follow. We had a new coaching trainee, Marty who helped coach all season and has now received coaching level 1 certification. It is great to see growth in coaching but would like to see more or to have more volunteers going forward. With average numbers around 30, we had to re-deliver programmes in a circuit approach to ensure players were kept engaged and continued to develop. This helped, but again we only had three coaches and sometimes were down to two. I also want to give a shout out to the various volunteers who did manage to support when they could.

If there is anyone who would like to come out and volunteer or desires to become a coach, please do reach out to [development@londonsoftball.co.uk](mailto:development@londonsoftball.co.uk) All volunteer and coaches are compensated. We will have three coaches for the 2024 season but will need more support than ever with these growing numbers.

### **Good luck to Marty and Dani**

Marty and Dani have agreed to take over the position of development officer and I know they will do an amazing job. They passionate about the sport and Marty is even developing his own coaching career. I am excited to see where they takes the programme. I will continue to support them as and when I can. I am proud of this programme and how its grown. I look forward to seeing its continued success in the coming years and welcoming new adult players.

## **Umpiring Report – Jon Clanton**

BASU has moved to a new online training model, where prospective umpires review training materials offline and then discuss in a weekly session. Ahead of the 2023 season, LSL worked with BASU to provide two sessions with a total of 30 participants. We also offered a one-day course run by experienced LSL umpires for a further 29 people who were only interested in LSL qualification. As a result of these efforts, we entered 2023 with over 50 new people qualified to umpire LSL games.

Heading into the 2024 season, we have again partnered with BASU to run two training sessions with a total of 27 participants, and we will run a one-day course for anyone who wants to get LSL qualified (we have 16 sign-ups already).

Adding so many new umpires is not without its challenges. There was clear feedback from the End of Season survey that the quality of umpiring was spotty at times. In 2024, we hope to re-institute a mentorship program for new umpires. We also encourage anyone with specific feedback to reach out to the Umpiring Officer.

The survey also had a number of responses requesting an increase in umpire fees. As a reminder, the current payment for umpires is meant to cover travel costs only and the current rate covers the daily cap for most journeys in London. We will continue to review the fees every year, but there is no plan to increase the fees at this time.

## Tournament Report – Lorraine Phee

### Firstball 2023

On Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2023 we held Firstball at Kings House School Sports Ground. We saw 32 enter the tournament across 4 divisions and play on 8 fields throughout the grounds. It was a cold and windy day but all teams were in good spirits by the end. We even saw the gold grade cup semi-final between Meteors Red and The Golden Sombreros go into double extra innings, but ultimately the Sombreros prevailed. We were lucky to have the Softball Shop set up a booth on the grounds allowing players to buy equipment in person and test out some of the trial bats they had on offer. The venue brought in a Doritos vendor and put on a great BBQ and kebab lunch with the stand-up BBQs and time we didn't drink the bar dry because they were ready for us! The after party continued until after midnight both inside and outside of the clubhouse.

The results for Firstball were as follows:

Red Grade Cup Winners- **MI6**

White Grade Cup Winners- **Softboiled**

Gold Grade Cup Winners- **Golden Sombreros**

Blue Grade- **Flyballers**

### Lastball 2023

On Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August we held Lastball in the same location as Firstball. The tournament sold out in record time with all 32 places being filled within 6 minutes of opening, some would say it was easier to get tickets to Glastonbury! We were still able to host 32 teams but unfortunately due to developments on the site we were reduced to 7 pitches which made scheduling difficult. Some teams had to start at 8:30am and with the venue being so far west and a 20 minute walk from transport this was less than ideal. We also had to schedule in 2 hour gaps for most teams throughout the day due to fewer pitches on the site.

Other problems were presented on the day when the venue failed to communicate with us about their rules around outside food and alcohol. They originally told us that we were not allowed any outside food and drink allowed on the patio or in the bar but quickly flipped the switch on us Lastball. It came down to a lack of communication between the caterers, the booking staff and the committee. The caterers explained that they had not noticed we had been bringing it in previous tournaments or something would have been said sooner. This incident coupled with the reduced space put somewhat of a bad taste in a lot of people's mouths regarding the venue. So we have reevaluated what we are going to do for the 2024 season.

On a positive note, the sun was shining throughout the day and the people who didn't notice the angry venue staff seemed to have a great time. The Base Invaders were reunited with their bat that had gone missing at Firstball and many people had a turn at riding around on the Gator. We were also able to host a charity raffle for the Daisy Room at Kingston Hospital in honour of members of the softball community. We were able to raise just under £2000 for the charity and the recipients at the hospital were ever so grateful for contribution. We want to thank everyone who contributed to the raffle prizes and bought tickets throughout the day, it is times like this when we really notice how amazing the London Softball community is.

The results for Lastball were as follows:

Red Grade Cup Winners- **Meteors Black**

White Grade Cup Winners- **Softboiled**

Gold Grade Cup Winners- **Diamond Dogs**

Blue Grade- **Batitude**



## Updates for 2024 Tournaments

We had a look at the survey and took on board your feedback regarding tournaments in 2024. Firstball will take place on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2024. We had the choice between Kings House School Sports Ground or Regents Park. After speaking to King's House, they are still adamant that we cannot bring any outside drinks or food onto the ground. So for this reason, as well as the reduced space and distance from the centre, we have decided to host Firstball 2024 back in Regents Park.

The reason we moved away from Regents initially is because it is very difficult to get the bases into the park in the morning. They have to be collected from Slough and are very heavy so bringing them into Regents with no parking close to all the pitches as well as the weight is very difficult. They also need to be sent back to Slough after the tournament (or sit inside my car parked in front of Weird Steve's house for the night until I can go back and get my car in the morning) which is not ideal. Booking a pub for an after party is also a difficult task as all the pubs in close proximity are either too small or want a hefty minimum spend that the committee is not willing to wager. If anyone is willing to help transport the bases this year or has any ideas or leads about a pub we could use for the after party please let the committee know!

Lastball 2024 will take place on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2024. After reading through the survey responses we decided that there was enough interest to hold the tournament at Farnham Park in Slough otherwise known as "Costa del Slough". Many of the softballers in the league, particularly in the majors divisions, are already very familiar with Farnham Park as this is where we spend most of our weekends in the summer. This is the National Baseball and Softball Facility in the UK and actually has dirt diamonds and fences (what a luxury for us!). This also worked in our favour as Kings House is no longer fit for purpose and Regents is unable to guarantee us the number of pitches we would need at this current time. There is easy transport links to Slough station (14 minutes from Paddington) and the park is only a short Uber ride from the station. There is an onsite bar and grill called "Home Plate" and outside food and drinks are permitted on the site. Home Plate is also known to host some pretty chaotic after parties! We are looking forward to the new changes in 2024 and hopefully we can accommodate all teams that want to participate in First and Lastball this year due to the increased space.

## **New Players Report – Daniel Brightman**

Last season's New Players day was held at John Archer Way, after the original date at Blackhorse Road was rained off. Despite the rearrangement we had another big turn out with approximately 80 players turning up. The players were split into two groups depending on experience, and participated in fielding drills and batting practice. A good number of players and team got together at The Round House afterwards to find teams/new recruits. It takes a lot of people to put this day together, so thank you to everyone involved.

This season we are trying something new. Utilising The 108, to avoid a rain out, and for the first time an automated ticketing system to control numbers. The day will be split into two sessions, Rec [Divs 4,5,6] and Comp [Divs 1,2,3], and both capped to 30 players a session. There is also a small fee [£3 + fees] for participants to cover the venue cost.

The New Players sign up form was amended to gain better insights into player ability and experience. This has worked out well, so no changes to the form this season. The players list had over 200 names on it in 2023, with over 40 players finding places on 20 teams across all the divisions. This is up over the previous year, but could be because of more feedback from players and teams. Comments and suggestions to [newplayers@londonsoftball.co.uk](mailto:newplayers@londonsoftball.co.uk)

## **Fields/Fixtures Report – Tiernan Evans**

Thanks to the addition of several new teams, the London Softball League started the 2023 season with 50 teams, leading to 10 teams in Division 6. Unfortunately, one of the new teams, the Digital Dodgers, was repeatedly unable to field a team and thus withdrew from the season midway through. The larger division meant that Division 6 season started in late April and went through late August. The light became an issue at the beginning and end of the season, and going forward we will consider alternatives to mitigate this issue. The longer season also made it difficult to reschedule games later in the year.

2023 saw teams relocate away from the pitch at Bacon's College after a sharp increase in fees. However, the biggest disruption came from the loss of Colliers Wood for Majors teams partially through the season. This was a result of repeated disruptions to and building resentment from local residents. Despite the best efforts of the committee and cooperation from teams, this pitch is now unavailable for use (by teams in any division) for the foreseeable future. This means the 7 teams that called Colliers Wood home next year will need to find a new ground. Merton Council is keen to keep softball in the borough, and we are hopeful for a new South London ground, with multiple pitches, at Morden Sports Ground.

Following years of different leagues vying for pitches, BSUK has taken over the management of softball bookings at Regent's Park. Nevertheless, there were some conflicts with other leagues about booking nights and we are in communication with BSUK and the other leagues to minimize this going forward. The biggest oversubscription was on Tuesday nights, with teams occasionally being moved to Primrose Hill. Teams playing at Regent's Park also had some difficulty with the suitability of the fields for playing, particularly late in the season, and we are working with BSUK and the park to ensure the grounds are properly maintained.

Along with continued efforts from the committee, BSUK is reaching out to councils about playing grounds, but nothing has yet materialized. As ever, any leads from teams on new pitches are much appreciated.