

**Gridiron in the UK: A vision for the future of British collegiate American football**

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**Management/Leadership  
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**Presentation (25-minute)  
Abstract 38**

This presentation discusses the findings of empirical research conducted by the Head of Research & Development of the British Universities' American Football League (BUAFL) during the Leagues' inaugural 2007-2008 season. The research presented here contributes significantly to the British American Football Associations' (BAFA) Annual Report, and to the governing body's Whole Sport Plan (WSP) Report, scheduled for presentation at the BAFA Annual General Meeting (AGM) in April, 2008. The Whole Sport Plan Report outlines the vision and strategic direction of the development of the sport of American football in the UK, from grassroots through to elite level. The WSP also forms a major part of BAFA's strategy to secure Government-led (Sport England) investment.

**British Collegiate American Football**

Corporate Governance of the Student Game: In July 2007, The British American Football Association (BAFA), the National Governing Body (NGB) for British American Football, suspended all activities of the British Student American Football Association (BSAFA), the constituent body of BAFA charged with overseeing the management of the collegiate game. Suspension resulted from the decision of BAFA to effect legal proceedings against past and present members of the National Management Committee of BSAFA. Following the suspension, BSAFA expressed an intention to continue to operate independently of the jurisdiction of the National Governing Body.

Following the suspension of BSAFA, there was an immediate requirement for BAFA to create an interim management team and league brand, in order that the 2007-2008 football season remained unaffected by the suspension. This created a situation where two competing agencies sought to deliver American football at collegiate level; BUAFL, the newly created entity that fell under the jurisdiction of the NGB, and BSAFA, who did not.

In August 2007, the management board of the newly formed BUAFL was announced. Shortly after the announcement was made, the interim management team hosted an inaugural pre-season meeting for all 43 collegiate teams that had previously competed in the BSAFA administered league. The teams were offered the choice of retaining membership with BSAFA, or migrating to the newly formed BUAFL. Within days, all 43 teams expressed their intention to migrate to the newly-formed BUAFL league. Initial feedback suggests that a recognised need for strategic development of the sport in the UK (a key focus of BAFA and the newly-formed BUAFL) pre-empted this migratory behaviour.

The American Football Whole Sport Plan: In 2006, BAFA recognised the need to undertake a programme of modernisation and to establish the first national strategic plan in line with those produced by other sports - a Whole Sport Plan. This would not only aid the sport to capitalise upon the significant increase in interest in the sport generated by the activities of the National Football League (NFL) in the UK, but also reposition the sport within the national sporting infrastructure to be a beneficiary of increased Government-led (Sport England) investment.

As a new league operating under the jurisdiction of the governing body BAFA, BUAFL was in a strong position to contribute strategically to this programme of development. Subsequently, BUAFL appointed a Head of Research & Development, with the dual objectives of identifying the role BUAFL has the potential to play in the strategic development of British American football (i.e. from junior grassroots to senior elite level), and to also identify the most efficient strategy for the administration and corporate governance of the collegiate league.

Methodology: Questionnaires were distributed via post and email to all Head Coaches and all members of the student committees for each of the 43 member teams registered to play in the BUAFL 2007-8 season. Respondents were informed of the methodology, aims and objectives of the research at the pre-season inaugural meeting (August 2007), and via press releases on the BUAFL website. Questionnaire data will be analysed as part of a wider research strategy that includes focus group activity with BUAFL teams competing in the Northern and Southern Conference of the League, and interviews with key stakeholders (including the British University Sports Association).

Questionnaire respondents are divided into two groups; coaches and student-athletes. Separate questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the coach group and to those in the student-athlete group. The questionnaires constitute both open and closed questions to produce quantitative and qualitative data. Each questionnaire addresses distinct Key Performance Issues (KPI's) required for inclusion in the Whole Sport Plan Report, namely participation, clubs, membership, coaching and volunteer status.

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The research instruments also address the issue of corporate governance of BUAFL.

Findings: The research study is currently in progress and qualitative and quantitative findings will be presented as part of the BUAFL Annual Report, and during the 2008 BAFA Convention, in advance of their presentation at NASSM 2008. The research will inform the strategy and direction of BUAFL and BAFA, in addition to facilitating further Government-led investment in the sport via provision of data for the Whole Sport Plan Report.

### References:

- Walters, K. (March 2007) Get into American Football - the BAFA Whole Sport Plan. An Interim Report, BAFA  
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Fuller, A. (2007) BUAFL Kick Off 2007, [Online] Available from <http://www.buaf.net>. Accessed on 10/02/07