



## **World Lacrosse Blue Skies Working Group Report**

GA Submission – 19 August 2020

The Blue Skies Working Group (BSWG) have been charged by the WL Board with ‘Reimagining World Lacrosse Events’. This process was broken into two phases. Phase 1 investigated a new lacrosse discipline and Phase 2 reviewed the structure, format, and calendar of World Championship events.

This paper provides an update on the recommendations which were developed during Phase 2 of this process and have been further progressed following consultation with Continental Federations (CFs) and Member Nations.

The overarching objective for Phase 2 of the process was to: Recommend to the World Lacrosse Board and Membership a new world championship structure, format and calendar that best positions World Lacrosse to:

- Maximize media, brand exposure and commercial success of world championships
- Improve the quality and consistency of experience for athletes and spectators
- Incorporate IOC, IWGA and Continental Federation events into an integrated World Lacrosse competition calendar

There were three distinct but interconnected aims established as part of the second phase of the BSWG’s TOR, all of which were intended to align with WL’s approved strategic plan: recommend a new event calendar; recommend tactics to introduce and showcase the “Lacrosse Sixes” disciplines within each continental federation; and, recommend a new championship structure. A global pandemic was not foreseen at the time of the BSWG’s formation; however, the resulting upheaval of world sport, as well as the specific impact on WL, its CFs and members, was substantial and proved to be a significant influence on the BSWG recommendations included in this report.

What follows are specific insights and recommendations pertaining to a new event calendar and components of the world championship structure, as well as an addendum that includes an updated “Lacrosse Sixes” strategy following the impact of the global pandemic. These insights were shared prior to the BSWG Webinars in July and have been extended to incorporate CF and Member Nation feedback where changes to the original proposals have been made.

The BSWG addressed each of these aims independently but ultimately considered them within the broader context required to assure necessary alignment and have worked within the parameters of these aims in each of the recommendations which are detailed in this paper as follows:

### 1. World Championship Calendar

- 1.1 Movement of the 2022 World Lacrosse Men’s World Championship to 2023
- 1.2 Updated Event Calendar
- 1.3 Qualification timeline
- 1.4 Event timing

### 2. World Championship Structure

- 2.1 Event size
- 2.2 ‘B’ Championship
- 2.3 Event duration

- 2.4 Event participation
- 2.5 Event format
- 2.6 Inclusion of Additional Disciplines
- 2.7 Change of Age Group Category
- 2.8 World Lacrosse Sixes Event Strategy

Each item presented will be voted on at the General Assembly in October 2020 as per the summary provided in section 3 of this document.

## **1. World Championship Calendar**

The current World Lacrosse calendar consists of five World Championship events within a quadrennial with the Men's Indoor World Championship and Women's U19 World Championship occurring in the same year. The BSWG calendar proposal includes the member-approved small-sided discipline events and considers the impact of postponed events due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other factors.

### **1.1 Movement of the 2022 World Lacrosse Men's World Championship to 2023**

The spread of COVID-19 and the resulting global pandemic have created unprecedented disruption to the world sporting calendar. The movement of the Tokyo Olympics to 2021 and the World Games to 2022 has resulted in the proposal to move the WL Men's World Championship from 2022 to 2023. The rationale behind this move is as follows:

Following the decision by the International Olympic Committee to postpone the Tokyo Olympic Games by one year (from 2020 to 2021), the International World Games announced it would postpone The World Games by one year (from 2021 to 2022). The World Games 2022 represent a critical milestone for World Lacrosse, its member-National Governing Bodies and National Team athletes from around the world, as this will be the first international, multisport event to include both women's and men's lacrosse and will serve as a showcase for the new 6 v 6 disciplines.

The global pandemic also meant World Lacrosse had to postpone the Men's U19 (now U20) World Championship by one year (from 2020 to 2021) and World Lacrosse must also consider the possibility of postponing scheduled 2021 events if the impact of the global pandemic does not subside.

Without the recommended postponement of the Men's World Championship, the international calendar for 2021 and 2022 will call for four events in two years (not including Continental Federation qualifying events), placing considerable pressure on NGBs and athletes in terms of resources and availability:

- 2021 World Lacrosse Men's U20 World Championship – Limerick, Ireland
- World Lacrosse Women's World Championship – Towson, Maryland, USA
- 2022 The World Games – Birmingham, Alabama, USA
- World Lacrosse Men's World Championship – Los Angeles, California, USA

With the recommended postponement for the Men's World Championship, the international calendar for 2021, 2022 and 2023 will call for four events in three years (not including Continental Federation qualifying events), easing the pressure on NGBs and athletes:

- 2021 World Lacrosse Men's U20 World Championship – Limerick, Ireland
- World Lacrosse Women's World Championship – Towson, Maryland, USA
- 2022 The World Games – Birmingham, Alabama, USA
- 2023 World Lacrosse Men's World Championship – Los Angeles, California, USA

Given the unprecedented disruption to global business in 2020 (which will likely continue well into 2021 and beyond), the additional year is critical for World Lacrosse to effectively plan and stage its largest World Championship in one of the most influential media and commercial markets in the world – along with the added importance of successfully staging the event in the Host City for the 2028 Olympic Games.

Los Angeles will be the largest city ever to host a World Lacrosse Men's World Championship, with more than 23 million residents in greater Southern California. In order to maximize the benefits of showcasing the sport on a global stage such as this and to encourage even greater growth for lacrosse around the world, a window of three years is necessary in order to plan the event.

Finally, with an Olympic Games in 2021 (Tokyo), an Olympic Winter Games in 2022 (Beijing) and The World Games in 2022, broadcasters will be under tremendous pressure to manage the unprecedented volume of international sport content in those two years (2021 and 2022). Event rightsholders such as World Lacrosse will be faced with far fewer options for broadcast distribution in 2021 and 2022. The picture should improve considerably in 2023 as the compression of rescheduled international events begins to lighten.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *Movement of Men's World Championship from 2022 to 2023*

## **1.2 Updated Event Calendar**

The movement of the Men's World Championship to 2023 would result in the movement of the Men's Indoor Championship to 2024. While the BSWG acknowledge that this presents a five year gap between Men's Indoor Championships (2019 to 2024) the recommendation to 'snap back' the schedule so that the Men's Senior event then take place in 2026 and the Men's Indoors take place in 2027 means there will be only three years until the subsequent Men's Indoor event takes place.

The BSWG also recommend that the Women's U19 Championship be moved to 2024 so that the Men's and Women's U19 World Championships take place in the same year. However, following feedback from the CF's and Member Nations it is agreed that these would be separate events and not take place concurrently at the same venue, although World Lacrosse would consider a combined event if a suitable host proposal was received.

The BSWG continues to recommend that the 6v6 Men's and Women's World Championships are held in 2027, in the same year as the Men's Indoors. While WL acknowledge that this creates some challenges in regards to timing it is suggested that the window for hosting these two events be extended from April to September rather than the recommended June to August window for other events (see 1.4 re: Event Timing).

Year	Current	World Events - WL Proposed	Other World Events	Qualifier Proposed Dates - By 1st July of Year
2021	Women's Senior Field	Women's Senior Field and Men's U20 Field (Rescheduled)	(Olympic Games)	Men's Senior Field
2022	Men's Senior Field	Men's Senior Field	The World Games	Men's Senior Indoor
2023	Men's Senior Indoor, Women's U19 Field	Men's Senior Indoor		Men's and Womens U19 Field (Qual for 2024)
2024	Men's U19 Field	Men's and Women's U19 Field (2 separate events)	(Olympic Games)	Women's Senior Field (Qual for 2025)
2025	Women's Senior Field	Women's Senior Field	The World Games	Men's Senior Field (Qual for 2026)
2026	Men's Senior	Men's Senior Field		Men's Senior Indoor and Men's and Women's 6v6
2027	Men's Senior Indoor, Women's U19 Field	Men's Senior Indoor and Men's and Women's 6v6		Men's and Womens U19 Field
2028	Men's U19 Field	Men's and Women's U19 Field	Olympic Games (Aspiration)	Women's Senior Field
2029	Women's Senior Field	Women's Senior Field	The World Games	Men's Senior Field

*Items to be voted on:*

- *Movement of Men's Indoor Championship from 2023 to 2024*
- *Movement of the Women's U19 Championship from 2023 to 2024*
- *Men's and Women's U19 events to take place in the same year but **NOT** concurrently in the same venue*
- *Inclusion of WL Sixes World Championship in 2027*

### 1.3 Qualification timeline

The current timelines require all qualifying events to be completed by 31st December, approximately 18 months prior to a world championship. The BSWG recommends reducing the qualification window to a minimum of 12 months to allow qualifying events to occur in closer proximity to world championships. However, qualification may occur up to 24 months prior to a world championship in consideration of the timing of Continental Federation championships.

If approved this change would be effective immediately therefore incorporating the qualification tournaments for the next Men's World Championship.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *Qualification deadline reduced to a minimum of 12 months prior to the event. Note – Qualification can take place up to 24 months prior.*

### 1.4 Event timing

The BSWG agreed that availability of the best players in the world was essential to world championship success. The expansion of professional opportunities, continental federation events and increasing independent tournaments has increased opportunities for player schedule conflict, and it is imperative that World Lacrosse collaborate closely with all stakeholders to manage an increasingly cluttered international calendar.

The BSWG originally proposed that the June-through-August time frame remained the most convenient and practical timing for world championship events. However, it is noted that this may not be practical when two events take place in the same year and that the existing window for indoor events should be considered. Therefore, it is proposed that for Field Championships in years when only one World Championship is

staged, events should be scheduled in the June to August window but, in years when more than one World Championship is staged, the window may be extended to between April and September.

For Indoor World Championships the June to August window is extended to include September as the existing window for indoor events. This proposal would be effective immediately.

*Items to vote on:*

- *For Field Championships, when only one World Championship is staged in a calendar year, events should take place within the June to August window.*
- *For Field Championships, when more than one World Championship Event is staged within a calendar year, the window may be extended to between April and September.*
- *For Indoor Championships, the competition window is proposed as June to September.*

## **2. World Championship Structure**

### **2.1 Event size**

Early in its discussions, the BSWG was unanimous in concluding that the number of teams invited to attend a world championship should be reduced for the following reasons:

- o Fewer teams result in strengthened continental qualifiers
- o Fewer teams result in increased competition equity and resulting marketability
- o The Athlete Commission supports fewer teams
- o Fewer teams result in reduced event costs and increased potential for commercial success

The current world championship format allows 30 nations to compete which represents approximately 45% of the World Lacrosse Membership participating in an event. An assessment of the world championships of other sports conducted by the BSWG reveals that other international sports federations of varying sizes include only 15% - 20% of members in world championship events.

The BSWG debated tournament size of 16, 20 and 24 teams and initially recommended a tournament field of 20 for all world championship events. Following feedback from CF's and Member Nations it is now proposed that the limit of 20 teams is for the Men's and Women's Championships (Field and/or Indoor) only, as these are the premier elite international tournaments in Lacrosse. Qualification for these Championships will be through CF tournaments or pre-qualification which will be looked at during the Competition Format review – see section 2.5.

The Men's and Women's U19 Championships and Men's and Women's World Lacrosse Sixes World Championships are proposed as Open Events where entry for national teams is via application rather than qualification. These events may be subject to different cost criteria to cover the increased costs for hosting a larger field of teams. However, having Open Championships for U19 and Lacrosse Sixes provide events that can also serve as developmental tools for new and developing nations and reduce the burden on CF's for hosting qualification competitions across all disciplines.

These changes would be effective following the next Men's World Championship.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *Reduction in event size from 30 to 20 teams for Men's and Women's Competition (Field and Indoor)*
- *Men's and Women's U19 remain as Open Events*
- *Men's and Women's Sixes held as Open Events*

### **2.2 'B' Championship**

The BSWG propose that in limiting the number of teams in the Men's and Women's World Championship to 20 a 'B' World Championship in both these disciplines should be investigated. While the creation of a

'B' Championship is not a BSWG recommendation at this stage, it is proposed that a working group is set up by WL to look at the feasibility of staging these events in future.

*Items to be vote on:*

- *No vote required*

### **2.3 Event Duration**

The BSWG noted concern over the length of world championship events based on overall costs for event hosts and participating teams, as well as the health and welfare of participating athletes and the availability of those athletes. It was agreed that extending the length of the event beyond ten days was not advisable. This proposal would be effective following the next Men's World Championship.

*Items to vote on:*

- *Event duration is limited to 10 days*

### **2.4 Event Participation**

Given the growing stature and importance of continental federation championships, as well as the addition of men's and women's small-sided disciplines, the BSWG discussed the growing burden of world championship participation on member nations and concluded that members may need to prioritize world championship opportunities based on national preferences and resource limitations as they have in the past.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *No vote required*

### **2.5 Event Format**

Following an extensive review of a variety of event formats including a Blue Division, blind/seeded draw, and phased progression amongst others, the BSWG have chosen not to provide an event format recommendation at this time. Further investigation into the financial, development and global profile impacts needs to be undertaken before a recommendation will be made.

It is proposed that the format will be provided for voting on by the GA no later than the 2021 General Assembly.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *No vote required*

### **2.6 Inclusion of Additional Disciplines**

Although not anticipated in the BSWG's TOR, the addition of world championship disciplines (men's & women's U19 indoor and women's indoor) was discussed but not recommended in the short term. The BSWG noted the relative lack of members with mature programs in those disciplines, as well as concerns about WL's capacity to take on additional events, the financial viability of these events, and the burden on members to attend additional events.

While it is agreed that three new disciplines, Women's Indoor, Men's U19 Indoors and Women's U19 Indoors, should be investigated as future developments for Lacrosse the WL Women in Sport Commission will prioritise discussions on the Women's Indoor Championship to address the current gender inequity with world event disciplines.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *No vote required*

## **2.7 Change of Age Group Category**

The calendar proposal recommends that the U19 championship be changed to a U20 championship for both Men and Women. The reasoning for this recommendation is as follows:

- o Provides a higher level of competition by giving players an additional year of experience
- o Helps members field teams by increasing the age limit, particularly if eligibility dispensations are eliminated
- o Aligns with other international sport federation age groups
- o Aligns CF differences
- o Provides greater flexibility in the future to consider introducing a younger age-group competition
- o The change to U20 for the 2021 WL Men's U20 World Championship in Limerick has been received favorably by competing nations.
- o Reduce the number of dispensation requests from teams (note dispensations were requested for 49 players from 9 countries at the 2019 WL Women's U19 World Championship).

*Items to be voted on:*

- *Change of Age Group Category from U19 to U20, effective immediately.*

## **2.8 World Lacrosse Sixes Event Strategy**

The World Lacrosse Sixes Event Strategy is included at Appendix 1. No changes were advised by the CF's or the Member Nations following the July webinars; however, it is noted that this strategy is dependent on the on-going global situation regarding COVID-19. Noting that no objections were received it is requested that the membership agree this strategy in principle, subject to the progression of Return to Play globally.

*Items to be voted on:*

- *Approval of WL Sixes Strategy*

## **3. Summary**

The below list summarizes the BSWG recommendations to be voted on at the 2020 General Assembly in October:

### **Calendar**

- Movement of the Men's World Championship from 2022 to 2023
- Event Calendar changes including:
  - o Movement of Men's Indoor Championship from 2023 to 2024
  - o Movement of the Women's U19 Championship from 2023 to 2024
  - o Men's and Women's U19 events to take place in the same year but **NOT** necessarily concurrently in the same venue
  - o Inclusion of WL Sixes World Championship in 2027
- Qualification deadline reduced to a minimum of 12 months prior to the event. Note – Qualification can take place up to 24 months prior.
- For Field Championships when only one World Championship is staged in a calendar year events should take place within the June to August window.

- For Field Championships when more than one World Championship Event is staged within a calendar year the window may be extended to between April and September.
- For Indoor Championships the competition window is proposed as June to September.

### **Structure**

- Reduction in event size from 30 to 20 teams for Men's and Women's Competition (Field and Indoor)
- Men's and Women's U19 remain as Open Events
- Men's and Women's Sixes held as Open Events
- Event duration is limited to 10 days
- Change of age group category from U19 to U20
- Approval World Lacrosse Sixes strategy

## **Appendix 1: World Lacrosse Sixes Strategy**

### **1. World Lacrosse Sixes Strategy**

#### **1.1 Overview**

The BSWG, as part of the 'World Lacrosse (WL) Events – Reimagined' work, have been investigating options for the launch and roll out of the WL Sixes discipline. The intention was to start this in Q3/Q4 of 2020, growing towards a World Championship event in 2023. Due to the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic COVID-19 this timeline has been reassessed and this paper looks at a strategy for maximising the exposure of Sixes whilst acknowledging restrictions associated with international movement and economic impact.

Initial planning proposed holding three events in Q3/Q4 of 2020. These were due to be international invitational events with four international teams taking place in each of the Continental Federation regions. The objective of the series was to showcase international teams, playing the new discipline, across the world.

Due to the cancellation of most major sporting events as well as restrictions on international travel it is no longer possible to hold these events in 2020 therefore this strategy looks at alternative options from early 2021.

#### **1.2 WL Sixes Objectives**

Whilst WL Sixes was initially developed in support of the ambition for lacrosse to be included in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games the objectives behind creating this new discipline reach far beyond to encompass sport development, equality, global reach, youth engagement and widening spectator appeal as detailed below:

- To engage the youth market through the creation of a smaller, faster discipline
- As a sport development tool with a smaller roster to aid the reach of the sport into less developed nations.
- The opportunity to bring together the Men's and Women's competitions in the same arena promoting equality across the sport.
- Increase the global reach of the sport beyond the traditional North American fan base.
- Increase spectator appeal through shorter games and quicker turnaround between matches to grow the sports fan base.
- To support lacrosse's Olympic Ambition on the road to LA 2028.

It is important that the strategy and the decisions made around event hosting and promotion of the WL Sixes discipline reflect the objectives in all aspects of delivery.

#### **1.3 WL Sixes Development**

Objective 1 of the BSWG activity was the development of the rules for WL Sixes competition. The rules were developed in late 2019/early 2020 and were sent to the membership for discussion in Q2 2020, with approval to be requested at the 2020 General Assembly in October, following consultation.

The development of the event hosting strategy acknowledges the challenges around returning to play due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and proposes a growth strategy from initial exhibition games at established events in early 2021 (return to play permitting) to the inclusion of Sixes at The World Games in 2022, the first major international multi-sport event for the discipline, and beyond.

The below provides a calendar of possible events in support of the development of the WL Sixes discipline:



1. Exhibition Matches

WL to hold Exhibition Matches at existing Lacrosse events once the return to competitive sport is permitted. These games will involve local teams or athletes who are already competing in these tournaments. WL are reviewing the availability of tournaments and are discussing options with organisers.

2. Support for NGB Created Events/Leagues

WL will contact all member nations to understand each country’s ambition for holding WL Sixes leagues and competitions. WL will support these events and leagues through promotion on the WL website and provide guidance on hosting the best possible WL Sixes events. WL will also provide a mechanism for members to provide feedback on the Sixes discipline from these matches from organisers, players and coaches.

3. Limerick 2021 Sixes Festival

The World Lacrosse Men’s U20 World Championship is due to be hosted in Limerick in June 2021. Alongside this tournament Irish Lacrosse propose holding a World Festival which includes a WL Sixes category. WL will be on-site at this tournament to gather feedback and assess the benefits and challenges of WL Sixes in a tournament environment.

4. WL Quad Nation Events

WL will work with CF’s and Member Nations to host three Quad Nations Events in 2021. It is the ambition of WL that a tournament will be held in Europe, The Americas and Asia-Pacific so nations in each of our three current CF’s are represented and can experience WL Sixes international competition next year. Each competition will include four teams. The mechanism for selecting teams and hosts is yet to be determined.

5. The World Games Warm-Up Tournament

WL proposes setting up a pre-World Games Warm-Up tournament for teams competing in Birmingham, Alabama in 2022. These games may occur between national teams or against college and club teams in the region local to Birmingham and WL will work closely with potential hosts and The World Games organisers to ensure that this tournament provides the best possible preparation for the teams competing at The World Games 2022, the first major international Sixes tournament.

## 6. The World Games 2022

The World Games 2022 provides lacrosse with the best platform to exhibit the dynamic, fast and highly skilled game of WL Sixes in front of a global audience. WL are working closely with The International World Games Association and the Birmingham Organising Committee to ensure that WL Sixes is the very pinnacle of elite sport at this event.