



Stroud & District Football League



12 February 2021

Conclusion of the 2020-21 season

The League Management Committee met on 11 February 2021 to discuss proposals on how to conclude the current season. Member clubs had been consulted via email prior to the meeting, to input their ideas and suggested amendments to three basic proposals to be enacted when the league is given FA approval to restart grassroots football.

From the member club input, it was clear that there may be some appetite for possibly playing various forms of cup competitions in the event that these could be fitted in before the end of the season. The Committee were therefore asked to consider the following four options (where option 3 was added to the original ones):-

1. continue with the league programme, through to the end of June 2021
2. halt the league programme and restart it in Sept 2021; arrange cup competitions, to end by 31 May
3. null and void the entire season; arrange cup competitions, to end by 31 May
4. null and void the entire season

A general discussion then considered the possible restart, and the various merits of each option.

It has been almost 8 weeks since any football in the league has been possible, and there have only been 3 Saturday matchdays in the past 15 weeks. Indeed, several of the league's clubs could not participate in those 3 weeks, so, for some there have been no competitive games since the end of October, three and a half months on. Currently we find ourselves not knowing if grassroots adult football will be permitted to restart soon, or even at all this season. The best case scenario might be that a green light is given in early April, but due to the chaotic manner by which the UK government has handled the previous 11 months, there appears to be little prospect that a precise and workable plan will be laid before us, that a) can be delivered, and b) one that we can reasonably rely on, without the constant U-turns and late calls that have belittled every league's efforts to provide football for clubs this season.

Option 1.

If (and it does appear to be a big IF), we restart the league programme by early April, then it would in theory, in terms of time, be possible to progress the league to a point where the split division schedule could result in tables being ordered/resolved via the PPG option. It is recognised that in order for this to be achieved however, that most of the unknowns would have to be in our favour, eg enough time, teams not locked out due to the tier system again, player availability, ability to use grounds and facilities, etc.

In discussing this, we questioned whether, for the sake of a few weeks football, is it really worth it? The feedback from most (committee AND club returns/thoughts) was that this was by now becoming the biggest hurdle to any resumption. Club officials and players had become tired, and the prospect of returning to play what would be the rest of the season in a short period was not a priority. In particular, those teams not in a promotion position had little or no appetite, whereas those in prime position were keener for the season to be played out. This latter position however was smaller than expected, even some teams high up in their divisions preferred to just draw a line under the season in terms of the league schedule.

It was also agreed that we should not step on the toes of the cricket season, and to respect that many players and officials would have to choose one or the other.

Restarting for just the end of the season would also involve a lot of work from clubs, again for a very short period, and mostly for the benefit of a few clubs, rather than the majority.



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Option 2.

It has been mooted in various football forums, that it could be possible to suspend a league, as it currently is, and restart the season from the same point, in say, September. It should be pointed out that many of those pushing for this in higher leagues consider this to be a better option than just null and voiding, as per the 2019-20 season for all these leagues. This is understandable, a desire not to see another season's playing records just thrown away, but of course we were able to set our tables last season through PPG, and so had some form of closure.

In theory, just restarting the league programme in September has its merits, indeed, we are unlikely to have a "clean" season in 2021-22 anyway. Again, it will suit some teams, but it was agreed that the majority are likely to just want to start afresh. Being a grassroots league, there are significantly less effects on us just hitting the restart button, in particular the financial aspect. There is also the opportunity to "reset" the divisions more flexibly than leagues above us, notably, we could move various teams up or down divisions or change the structure to cater for teams that have been more or less competitive this current season.

A restart in Sept would also be a barrier to any new potential clubs/teams that want to join the league. The administrative effort in rolling over would potentially cause issues, would players have to be de-registered then re-registered, would the FA's IT systems be able to be worked around to facilitate this? Players come and go between teams, so would this require a whole bunch of transfers etc. There are likely to be teams who cannot operate from September due to player or club official turnover, dealing with a potentially significant number of teams dropping out at this stage would not be fair to other existing teams.

In short, the committee could not see many, if any real advantages in this option.

Options 3 & 4.

In light of the problems, issues and sense of fatigue over the current season, all of the committee members came to the conclusion that the most likely option should be to null and void the season. Some initially were in favour of using any available time to hold various cup competitions, whilst others were in favour of "knocking everything on the head" and to aim to start a brand new season in September. It was obvious that some clubs and some players would want to carry on in some format, but again, the committee thought that it would put a huge strain on clubs for the reasons already stated. Clubs have already battled through the early part of the season, sacrificing many of the most enjoyable aspects of football at this level, with the lack of facilities, eg changing rooms, showers, the after match socialising and general community-based associations that football brings. Having gone through this period, having sat through two lockdown periods, and potentially now being asked to play matches in possibly an even more restrictive environment, the committee felt that a line needs to be drawn under this season, and clubs given the message for them to regroup, refresh and have the time to reset things ahead of the 2021-22 season.

Conclusions

Having discussed the various options, the Management Committee concluded that they would propose that the 2020-21 season be declared null and void, and that there would not be any attempt to arrange cup competitions this season. A SGM vote to ratify the decision of the league would accompany this statement when sent to member clubs.

If and when the FA clear grassroots football to continue, clubs, still being GFA affiliated, would still be able to arrange their own friendly matches if they desperately wanted to provide some form of football.