

**MINISTRY**

**SPORT AND RECREATION**

## REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**MINISTER OF SPORT & RECREATION Ms TOKOZILE XASA (MP) SPEAKS AT THE LAUNCH OF THE SOFTBALL PREMIER LEAGUE, JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG.**

**FRIDAY, 26 APRIL 2019**

The President of Softball South Africa:​Mr Mashilo Matsetela

Board Member of Softball South Africa

SASCOC President: Mr Gideon Sam

Affiliates of Softball South Africa

The DG of Sport & Recreation: Alec Moemi

Ladies & Gentlemen

Today we are fulfilling the National Sport and Recreation Plan. The plan mandates us to ensure a focused approach to the development and support of sport in our country. Today we are launching the Softball Premier League to assist Softball to have a professional system of developing the sport. We hope the introduction of this league will popularize the game and present a platform through which young players would emerge. We equally hope that the league would serve as a catalyst for enhancing the profile of the Federation which will attract potential sponsors.

The Department of Sport & Recreation South Africa introduced an Intensive Support Programme to support Federations to realize the transformation and development imperatives of sport. Through this programme the identified and declared National Federations receive enhanced technical and financial support. Since the Intensive Support Programme inception in 2012 with Netball being the first beneficiary, the following National Federations followed suit: Tennis, Basketball, Amateur Boxing, Hockey, Volleyball, and now, Softball. The support has resulted in a turn-around of fortunes for most of the National Federations and consequently the introduction of various semi-professional leagues as part of a basket of products created and enhanced for the National Federations to deliver on their core mandates and to grow themselves into sustainable national sport bodies.

Softball South Africa was declared as a National Federation for the Year 2018-19. True to this attestation, it also won the prize at the 2018 National Sport Awards as a Federation of the Year. With this declaration, government committed additional resources and technical support capacity to Softball South Africa. An additional R10m was made available to the National Federation to work on the introduction of this Softball Premier League and other related products in this basket. It is indeed my pride to also announce the enhancement of the Softball National Club Championships, The Softball National Junior Championships, The Softball University Cup and the Inter-Provincial Championships as part of a full basket of seamless inter-dependent and inter-related products to ensure sustainability and to build a healthy pipeline of players for the future.

Part of the work that ought to be done is to use the Intensive Support Programme to build a National High-Performance for Male and Female, currently Softball has none. High-Performance is used to identify talent and systematically use programs to develop and maximize its potential. The high-Performance encompasses activities conducted along the talent development pathway – school, club, regional, provincial, national and international competition.

Decisions, philosophy and culture of the Federations are made at Board level, The Softball board reflects a well-transformed structure. We are mostly encouraged by the willingness of the Board to do the right thing and to ensure that the code grows exponentially. We must consciously use schools as the critical component to develop the game. Currently off 15 000 primary schools, only 198 are playing softball and off 10 000 senior schools only 226 play the game. I am glad that Softball has now been introduced in schools as a foundation for development. Because school sport is the bedrock of our entire development continuum and a necessary foundation for Sport development, it is for this reason that 40% of our Conditional Grant to all nine (9) provinces is ring-fenced for school sport initiatives including leagues and support in the form of playing equipment and attire as well as competitions. Therefore better coordination and alignment between schools and the Federations is critical. I’m also aware that Softball is being introduced to more schools on an annual basis. This investment is to be welcomed. I’m also happy to have noted that Softball has been played in the National School Sport Championships since 2014 and has continue to grow on an annual basis.

On the 23rd of April 2019, we released the Transformation report, to track where are we in transforming sport in our country, to reflect national demographics. Importantly the report serves as a strategic tool to look what the future holds for South Africa in general and sport in particular in-order for us to plan better. The report makes a compelling argument that if sport community continues to ignore 84% under 18 growing African population and continue to focus only to 16% under 18 white population, then some sport codes will soon face extinction. Therefore I am pleased to recognise that Softball is turning the corner, where in 2013 and 2014 Softball South Africa was under administration but over the years you have used the report as a strategic tool to develop the sport. We have also noted that the EPG report does indeed indicates and confirms what we have been witnessing, that Softball has indeed turned the corner. The launch of this league should not have come at a better time than now. We do acknowledge that it is indeed long overdue.

To have a World Class League we must appreciate that sport is a science that we need to establish and manage applied sport specific research programmes that will enhance the performance of teams in this new league. As a country, we are blessed that we have universities in all our provinces, which the Federations might need to partner with to provide sport science support to Provincial teams which are inclusive ofsport psychologists, sport physiotherapists, bio-kinetics, nutritionists, sport medicine practitioners and computer analysts. Young graduates can only be glad to be provided with working opportunity and experience with a stipend from CATHSSETA. Our universities are the reservoir of world class information, scientific, technological resource base, with skills, capabilities, and equipment to provide services to these provincial clubs. This will enable them to accelerate the rate of sport development and enhance the quality of performance at all competitive levels.

It is also with pride that I can announce and declare that we have allocated funds to Softball South Africa, sufficient to sustain the league for the initial period of three years. I also aware of the ongoing negotiations between the Department, Softball South Africa and broadcasters operating in our country to sign a broadcast deal for the rights of these new and enhanced properties. The department is also exploring additional means to financially and technically support this league to reach its full potential. The league itself is being launched as a semi-professional league with an intensive fixture programme. We are aware that the Northern Cape Province is yet to be represented in terms of participation in this league. The Department and Softball South Africa, have begun with the implementation of the plan to introduce Softball in the province of the Northern Cape. An interim committee has already been set-up and work is underway to establish clubs a he Sol Plaatje University in Kimberly and the establishment of community based clubs as well as an introduction into the schools system.

Globally softball is a growing sporting code. It has now internationally merged with Baseball. We are engaging both Baseball South Africa and Softball South Africa to work towards a merger. We will if necessary issue directives in this regards, to ensure unity and seamless growth of both this formats of the sport, which are almost virtually the opposite sides of the same coin. We are also pleased that beginning 1 June 2019, an initial allocation will be made to Polokwane Municipality, which will be the future home of Softball in South Africa to build old class sporting facilities for Softball. These will include a world class new purpose build stadium for softball, competition diamonds fields, practice fields, club houses, player facilities and spectator facilities. These new softball facilities, will be incorporated into the Peter Mokaba Sport Precinct.

It is with the greatest of pride to note that the investment and hard work that the department and Softball South Africa are putting into the development and growth of Softball is beginning to pay off. I’m most excited by the fact that this league is being launched on the basis of gender parity. The league has fully integrated both men and women teams from eight of our nine provinces, excluding the Northern Cape. The integrated league model has been borrowed from the model implemented by Hockey South Africa in the Premier Hockey League. We challenge other codes to follow this model, particularly the big federations such as Rugby, Football and Cricket.

The Inaugural launch of Softball Premier League has as its theme and pay-off line The Ball of Fire.   This is a three-pronged representation of the powerful and symbolical personification of the work done in growing the sport because -

1. Firstly, the idiom “ball of fire” means a person who is especially [hard-working](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hard-working), [high](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/high)[-](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/-)[achieving](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/achieving), [ambitious](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/ambitious), or [active](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/active). These qualities are truly representative of the talented athletic pool which will be participating in the competitions as their impressive hard working, sporting efforts and zealous as well as competitive spirit to be active and committed to a fit regime of exercise schedule is the reason why they excelled and were chosen to be part of the League’s competitions.

2. Secondly, the softball sporting code itself is a ball of fire because it is a highly charged, heated and explosive game demanding the best of the athletes on the fields as well as of us the audience watching the games as we voice our passionate boisterously during the games.

3. Lastly, this ball of fire is a symbol of the financial power injected into the sport by the department - just as the speed and impact of the softball is driven by the power of the athlete throwing, so too the speed and impact of transformation of the sport is driven by the commitment and investment of the department towards the sport.

This game is heated, the players and the ball are on fire and that is why our hashtag #GoTlaFisa, meaning it’s going to be hot in the Sepedi Language.

In conclusion let me congratulate Softball South Africa on this great achievement and a leap forward to the development of the game. Let me also wish them well as they will be hosting the African Region Olympic Qualifiers from the 10-11 May 2019 at the Crawford Stadium in Pretoria.  We also take this opportunity to congratulate them for having hosted the National Inter-Provincial Championships in East London recently. It is with the greatest of pride for us to declare that softball is indeed back.

I now take the opportunity to announce to you the new Softball Premier League. May the best teams win.

I thank you

[**ENDS**]