Open Letter from the BVF President

It has been a very interesting and challenging eight months for the BVF Board.

We have had a significant Board restructure with three new independent directors joining in addition to my election as the new Chair/President to replace Richard Callicott OBE, who held the position for two previous terms.

I would like to thank Richard for his continuing support of the BVF as a co-opted member of the Board, as his experience and guidance will provide valuable continuity. This is particularly important as we have lost two other very experienced members of the Board: Gordon Neale OBE, who retired after a lifelong involvement with volleyball; and Wayne Coyle, President of Volleyball England, who resigned for personal reasons in June. Both were a great help in the first few months of my presidency and I am grateful for their inputs into the BVF Strategy. I would like to welcome Geoff Allen, the new Volleyball England President who replaced Wayne on the BVF Board.

Lastly I wanted to thank Margaret Anne Fleming for her time on the Board until January 2014 and for continued assistance behind the scene, especially in international matters where her experience and perspective are most valuable.

Given the lack of Government funding from UK Sport for any of the performance volleyball programmes, we are operating in a very challenging environment. I would like to thank Volleyball England, its Chief Executive, Lisa Wainwright, who is also the BVF Company Secretary for her and her team’s support, particularly for keeping the GB Sitting Volleyball programme alive.

Despite the challenges the sport is facing, we can be proud of our many achievements on the volleyball court. The GB Women Sitting team finished 11th in the World Championship in Poland in June, winning one extra game compared to last year and retaining their 8th ranking in the world. Their true ‘Brit grit’ is to be applauded and the squad is firm and fixed in their vision for Brazil. A talent identification initiative to widen the pool of talent available for GB selection and enhance the team’s chances qualifying for Rio and beyond is key focus at the moment.

We are looking at all possibilities – Paralympic athletes from other sports who can be inspired by volleyball, injured military personnel and former indoor volleyball players who have injuries.

The Men’s Sitting team is currently slightly behind the Women’s team in the world ranking (10th) but with a new coach Branislav Kovac and new players coming in through the Talent ID initiative, we are hoping that they have a better chance of qualifying for Rio now.

Some of our GB volleyball athletes took part in the Invictus Games, organised by HRH Prince Harry in September. The event saw wounded, injured and sick service personnel from around the world competing and our GB Sitting Volleyball team 3:0 win over the US team was a tremendous achievement! This win is a great opportunity to promote our sport and hopefully would help develop new commercial relationships. We are also pleased that the forthcoming movie about Martine Wright, the women’s GB sitting volleyball team captain and a survivor a 7/7, will help to raise awareness of volleyball, its benefits to individuals and society.

Another highlight of the year was the win by our Volleyball England men’s beach team (Jake Sheaf and Chris Gregory) in the first round of the 2014-2016 CEV Beach Volleyball Continental Cup in Bournemouth, which is also the beginning of Europe’s qualification route to the 2016 Olympics. We are optimistic and excited about their chances of qualifying for Rio.

Volleyball England’s women’s beach team narrowly missed going through to the next stage of the
Continental Cup, having lost the last game to Slovakia but they have another chance of qualifying for the next round at the end of September along with the Scottish and Irish beach teams up in Scotland.

In the Small Countries Division, the formidable efforts of the Scottish, Irish and Welsh indoor teams surprised many in the established European hierarchy, and particularly the determination of players, coaches and volunteers to keep our sport alive in the absence of any performance funding.

On the management side, the focus this year has been on rebuilding the BVF leadership team (five new Board members joined the BVF Board this year). We have started the process of developing a new BVF vision and strategy and laid foundations for a new operational/ governance model for 2014/15 with the Agreement between Nations (Memorandum of Understanding- MOU).

One of our key strategic priorities for BVF is to develop a more sustainable organisation to support high-performance volleyball. We must do this by reducing the total dependency on grant aid (government funding).

It will not be easy to create new revenue streams outside of formal /funded GB performance programmes. Our success will depend on our ability to create a more positive, collaborative and innovative culture – i.e. working collaboratively and creatively, form relevant alliances and partnerships and harness the power of social media.

Our resolve and determination can be seen in a newly established Fundraising Committee working in close collaboration with Volleyball England Sitting Volleyball Programme managed by Richard Stacey-Chapman given that Sitting Volleyball is currently the only GB programme that we have in operation. Strong persuasive communication across a variety of media, including social media, is key and that has been our focus so far. We are in the process of launching a crowd-funding site, initially for the GB Sitting Programme to help them on their Road to Rio, 2016.

We are also starting to engage with the British Olympic Association (BOA), their commercial team, to try to identify potential sponsors and partners for our sport. I am delighted with the ongoing support from the British Paralympic Association and look forward to working with them towards Rio.

BVF is also in the dialog with other team sports discussing how we can collectively lobby the government promoting the importance of team sports for society, and to trying to influence their funding policy for the performance aspect of team sports.

I look forward to building on the foundations that the BVF has laid in the first few months of this year trying to create a viable platform helping British athletes to reach their full potential providing an inspiration for future Olympians/Paralympians.

Alla Main
President, British Volleyball Federation

September 2014
Annual Report 2013-14

Performance Results

**Sitting Volleyball**


GB Men Sitting – reached the quarter finals of the 2013 European Championship in September 2013 for the first time in their history where they then finished 8th. World ranking 10th. With a new enthusiastic coach, Branislav Kovac and recent talent ID initiative, they will be working hard trying to qualify for Rio in the next few months.

**Beach Volleyball**

Men beach team - Jake Sheaf and Chris Gregory qualified for the 3rd round of the Continental Cup hosted in Bournemouth, our center of excellence, through Volleyball England. They are playing at European, World and NEVZA competitions trying to progress in their ranking. Current ranking is in mid 30s needs to be within 24 by the end of the year to qualify for Rio. Jake and Chris are supported by another beach pair - Greg Weaver and Phil Smith.

Women beach pairs from England, Scotland (also men) and Ireland did not manage to go through to the 3rd round of the Continental Cup but have another chance at the end of September in Scotland.

**Indoor Volleyball**

Extremely encouraging results for junior age group at NEVZA, SCD, CEV and FIVB level competitions – England came 9th at the world level competition.

Young senior programme for under 23 is being established to help extend the pathway.

**The New Board**

At the end of 2013, the BVF Board underwent significant changes. Three independent directors – Kevin Carpenter, Vishaal Singhal and Alla Main – joined the Board. The new appointments added more depth in legal, commercial and finance skills. Mel Coutts replaced Margaret Ann Fleming as Scottish Volleyball Association representative.

The first Board meeting in January 2014 elected one new independent director, Alla Main, the new Chair of the Board (the President of the BVF). Alla replaced Richard Callicott OBE, who held the position for two previous terms.

It was confirmed that the BVF will continue to focus on the performance aspect of the sport and represent the home nations in their dialogue with the BOA, BPA and UK Sport. It was agreed that the new strategy and operational and governance models need to be developed in coming months.

**UK Sport Funding Withdrawal**

At the end of the 2013, on behalf of the BVF, Volleyball England presented a business case to the UK Sport investment review panel for continued funding of the GB Women Beach Programme. The aim was to replace the two beach women athletes with two talented indoor players. The former
Olympians Lucy Boulton and Zara Dampney had decided to retire from the performance sport for personal reasons.

The meeting with UK Sport was very positive. They commented on how impressed they with the quality of the evidence-based submission document and the dialogue during the meeting with the performance lead, Audrey Cooper and the support team. However, in early February UK Sport informed us that it was unable to award the GB Women’s Beach Volleyball programme with further funding because in the end they concluded that it did meet the very strict selection criteria – namely, a guaranteed 4th-8th place finish at Rio 2016 or a clear and credible medal potential in Tokyo. UK Sport acknowledged that it was a difficult decision, given the strength and the quality of the case submitted by Volleyball England, which showed the strong programme that we have in place to deliver high performance results.

BVF and Volleyball England considered appealing but we decided that we would not be able to generate any additional evidence to support our case and it would not be worthwhile spending more time or money to try to reverse the decision.

Therefore, regrettably, there is no GB volleyball performance programme in any discipline currently funded by UK Sport.

BVF New Strategy

The second Board meeting in April focused on a new strategy development – i.e. SWOT analysis and prioritisation of options. Prior to the meeting a consultation process took place allowing all nations to provide their input and views. Other NGBs were also consulted, to ensure that we are aware of best practice governance models in other sports.

As a result, we identified the following BVF strategic priorities for 2014-2015:

- Given limited resources, focus the immediate support on the most promising teams /programmes in the current Olympic/Paralympic cycle (Sitting Women and potentially Beach Men)
- Delegate operational responsibility for selected GB performance programmes to a nominated nation
- Develop a communication strategy and assets, including a credible, up-to-date BVF web/social media presence to support BVF communications, fundraising and lobbying
- Develop new funding sources and revenue streams to reduce total dependency on government funding
- Help Home Nations to coordinate and cultivate a cohesive talent pathway and international events strategy

In the longer term, the overall mission and vision of the BVF is to provide a clear path for UK volleyball athletes to achieve their full potential, and ultimately to achieve Olympic and Paralympic success/medals by 2024.

In terms of governance, Great Britain Hockey Limited (GBHL) was identified as the most relevant governance model for the BVF to follow. The Board agreed to look at the model more closely and decide whether it could be adapted for British Volleyball governance.
Strategic Programmes

Following the Board meeting in April, a number programmes were initiated in line with the agreed strategy.

A new Operational and Governance Model

We have drafted a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the home nations and the BVF, which sets out the principles of the BVF operation in the current circumstances of zero funding and zero staffing. The MOU enables BVF to appoint a nominated country in each Olympic cycle that would have full and complete responsibility to lead the delivery of the Great Britain Volleyball teams’ business operations and performance objectives, preparing the teams for the Olympic/Paralympic Games and ensuring the primacy of Great Britain Volleyball. Other nations and the BVF would assist the nominated country to perform its obligations under the MOU.

The MOU is being considered by all parties, and it will be further discussed at the AGM in September along with the roadmap for signing up.

Commercial: Fundraising and Events

A fundraising committee has been established to create new revenue streams using traditional fundraising methods (e.g. sponsorship) as well as innovative methods (e.g. crowdfunding).

The initial funding focus is on the existing GB performance programmes – namely the GB Sitting Volleyball Programme which is currently managed by Volleyball England. We need to create marketing digital assets to communicate our story in a compelling way to generate commercial backing. That has been our focus so far.

We are in the process of launching a crowdfunding site for the GB Sitting Programme to leverage GB Sitting Volleyball team impressive victory with one of the biggest sporting events this year: the Invictus Games organised by HRH Prince Harry. The event saw wounded, injured and sick service personnel from around the world, competing. This victory is a great opportunity to promote volleyball, as one of the most exciting team sports, its social benefits. We hope this would assist raising funds for our GB Sitting teams to help them on their Road to Rio.

The teamwork between BVF and Volleyball England, which manages the GB Sitting Volleyball Programme, has been critical in our fundraising efforts as has the involvement and commitment of the GB Sitting athletes themselves.

Further ahead, we are planning to use London’s status as a centre of excellence for international sport events and consider bidding for a world beach event and a world sitting event in 2016 to potentially help our team with the qualification for Rio and for generating commercial revenues for the sport.
Communications and Relationships Management

Developing a more positive, evidence-based communications strategy is vital for promoting volleyball and for building relationships. Other sports are starting to adopt this approach and are learning from countries that use research data on the social benefits of team sports. BVF nations must work together, to collect data such as participation numbers and socio-demographics information (age, gender, region, social classification group, etc). We must also engage and motivate the whole volleyball community, particularly key influencers, to lobby their local MPs, especially in places where we have teams and facilities (e.g. Kettering and Bournemouth). The aim is to raise awareness of the sport at the highest levels of Government, and to ensure that the sport is actively supported and properly funded.

A credible, up-to-date BVF web/social media presence is also critical to support BVF communications. The existing BVF website contains out-of-date content threatening the credibility of the BVF brand and negatively impacting our chances of fundraising and forming relevant partnerships. It is difficult to maintain a credible and compelling online presence without adequate resources – both staff and funding. The new MOU assumes that the BVF website would be integrated with the nominated nation’s website, thus minimising running costs and ensuring we have up-to-date content.

In terms of key relationships, we will continue to build on our positive relationships with UK Sport and BOA, soliciting their support for British Volleyball in any way possible – including funding, grants, and help with governance and commercial sponsorship.

Alla Main, the BVF President, has been nominated as a BVF representative to BOA, with Rob Richardson as a BVF representative to BPA (tbc)

The Board had reviewed the BVF international strategy in relation to Indoor and Beach volleyball and agreed that in the short term, in the absence of formal GB performance programmes funded by UK Sport, individual Nations should remain aligned with international bodies – FIVB and CEV. At the same time the BVF would communicate their longer term intention of aligning as GB in the future as our teams progress in their international performance and ranking enabling them to qualify for the Olympics. We continue to be represented at WorldParaVolley as GB.

GB Performance Plans and Talent Pathway

We have agreed that the role of BVF is to assist home nations coordinate and develop a cohesive talent pathway in all three disciplines.

The BVF will work with the home nations to review their individual and collective performance plans for all disciplines: indoor, beach, sitting and the talent pathway.

Our immediate priority is to find additional athletes for the GB Sitting teams, to widen the pool of talent available for GB selection and enhance their chances of qualifying for Rio and beyond.