

New format announced for Scottish League Cup

✘ The SPFL has announced a new format for the Scottish League Cup, including competitive group football in July, a bonus point system, a new broadcast partner bringing more live TV games and increased revenues for clubs, and the re-introduction of a winter break.

Taking effect from summer 2016, the new format will see eight groups of five teams play each other once each in a round-robin format across five July dates (16th, 20th, 23th, 27th & 30th).

New broadcast partner BT Sport will show six group stage games live, within a total of 13 matches to be broadcast from next season. This new 80-game group stage will involve all 38 teams not involved in UEFA qualifiers plus winners of this season's Highland League and Lowland League.

The group stage uses the traditional three points for a win and one point for a draw model however, in another innovation, all drawn matches will go straight to a penalty shoot-out whereby the winner of the shoot-out will be awarded a bonus point, believed to be a first in world football.

The bonus-point system is designed to create greater excitement around every match as well as providing more points variations to increase the number of meaningful games throughout the group stages. The eight group winners and four best runners-up progress to the second round, when they are joined by the four UEFA qualifying clubs and the competition reverts to traditional knock-out format.

The SPFL is delighted to announce that BT Sport will become the exclusive live TV broadcaster of the League Cup from summer 2016. BT Sport will screen six games from the group

stage in July and a further seven games from the knock-out rounds for each of Seasons 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20. BT Sport's new contract will increase the money available for all the clubs significantly.

Another benefit of the new format will be that it allows the re-introduction of a two-weekend winter break for Ladbrokes Premiership clubs during January 2017.

SPFL Chief Executive Neil Doncaster said: "The new format of the Scottish League Cup marks an exciting new chapter for the competition and sees Scottish football leading the way with a number of innovations.

"Fans, the media and clubs alike have expressed a desire for competitive summer football which will be delivered from next July while the ground-breaking bonus point system should add incentive to teams and excitement for supporters.

"We are delighted to welcome BT Sport as our exclusive League Cup TV broadcast partner and to have their support for the new format. Our agreement with BT Sport delivers a huge increase in the number of games being shown live as well as providing increased competition prizemoney for clubs.

"The new format has also enabled the re-introduction of a winter break for Ladbrokes Premiership clubs. We are consulting with Ladbrokes Championship, League 1 and League 2 clubs to establish whether they also favour a winter break in their respective divisions."

Simon Green, head of BT Sport, said: "BT Sport is thrilled to deepen its connection to Scottish football through this new long-term deal. Our team looks forward to bringing fans an exciting and innovative new competition from July 2016. Today's agreement expands our summer programming line-up while also giving Scottish football fans an exciting new summer football competition."

The current Scottish League Cup format involves six rounds; the new format, scheduled to kick off on Saturday 16 July, 2015, involves four rounds plus the new group stage.