

Only Premiership football to resume in August pending COVID-19 status

Scottish football's Joint Response Group [JRG] yesterday presented its plan for the resumption of the professional game to the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing, Joe FitzPatrick, and the National Clinical Director for Scotland, Professor Jason Leitch.

The presentation was made by the chief executives of the Scottish FA and Scottish Professional Football League, Ian Maxwell and Neil Doncaster. The Return to Football strategy is in line with the Scottish Government's route map for moving out of lockdown and based on a three-step approach: Return to Training, Return to Playing, Return to Supporting.

A detailed and robust plan was outlined to return to training in time to begin SPFL Scottish Premiership season 2020-21 on schedule on the weekend of August 1 and 2. To achieve this it was recommended lifting the Scottish FA's suspension of football, for the Scottish Premiership only, from June 11.



This will enable Premiership clubs to begin preparations to ensure their training grounds and stadia are equipped to deal with the increased safety measures necessary to create biosecure environments for players and staff, including the ability to undertake the necessary testing procedures and observing stringent training and matchday protocols.

Ian Maxwell, Scottish FA Chief Executive: "I would like to thank the minister and the National Clinical Director for Scotland for their receptiveness to our proposal. Return to professional football has been the culmination of weeks of hard work from across the game from people whose workloads and demands have already been increased to cope with the impact of COVID-19 on their clubs or areas of work within Scottish football.

"In particular, I would like to thank our Chief Medical Consultant, Dr John MacLean, for his invaluable input throughout this process. As a JRG member and co-chair of the medical sub group, he has overseen creation of a comprehensive strategy for testing procedures and safe 'return to training' and 'return to playing' protocols that have given confidence that the Scottish Premiership can kick-off in August.

"As the governing body, we will continue to engage with government and key stakeholders to provide a similar plan for the return of the game at all levels of Scottish football. While acknowledging that the current testing regime required to be observed will be prohibitive for most clubs out with the Premiership at this time, we are aware that there are hundreds of thousands of players across the Scottish football landscape looking for clarity on when they can return to action.

"In particular, the paused Scottish Women's Premier League is keen to restart and we will be discussing with stakeholders the process to restart the women's senior game in line with the government's route map out of lockdown.

"Conversations will continue in the coming weeks to outline a pragmatic approach for the whole game and we will communicate those developments at the appropriate time."

Neil Doncaster, SPFL Chief Executive: "We are delighted that the Scottish Government have given the green light to the resumption of football training in June.

“We now have a firm target of starting the 2020/21 Premiership season on the weekend of August 1 and that’s a major step forward. We will continue working with the Championship, League 1 and League 2 to gauge their ability to start the season and if so, when – which may vary hugely between clubs.

“We clearly welcome the prospect of resuming matches, but we have to take all necessary steps to ensure we can have a sustainable league campaign. That means a safety-first approach, with games initially played behind closed doors and a range of measures to protect players and staff.

“The return of crowds is something we all want to see and we will be working with clubs, Government and medical professionals to return safely to playing in front of fans as soon as we can.”