

# **SPFL secretary warns of 'enormous pressure' on the forthcoming fixture calendar**

**The SPFL's long-serving secretary Iain Blair has warned of 'enormous pressure' on the forthcoming fixture calendar to accommodate an increasing number of matches.**

Blair is working towards publishing match schedules in the first week of July with top-flight football scheduled to start on the first weekend in August and Championship games due to start in mid-October.

Scotland's winter could also cause havoc and all this of course depends on Hearts' legal action against the SPFL.



Ladbrokes Scottish Premiership – Hibernian v Livingston.  
Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK.  
22/02/2020.

Pic shows: A hard fought 1-1 draw as Hibs play host to Livingston in the Scottish Premiership at Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh.

Credit: Ian Jacobs

Blair said: “The stress on the SPFL fixture calendar next season is going to be enormous, with a real risk that some clubs will be forced to play four games in eight days, which we always try to avoid. And that’s even before we consider the impact of the Scottish winter and the high risk of cancelled matches due to adverse weather.

“We have already been obliged to cancel the winter break next season because we absolutely needed those extra three potential match dates, but even with that, I think it is going to be tighter than at any time in my 22 years working for the SPFL.”

With the Premiership 2020/21 Season scheduled to start on 1st August, there are 71 potential weekend and midweek fixture dates available before the Scottish Premiership split at Round 33.

12 of those potential dates are taken by FIFA and UEFA for international matches

16 have been reserved by UEFA for its European club competitions

Two dates will be required for the completion of the 2019/20 Scottish Cup competition

Three further dates will be set aside for the 2020/21 Scottish Cup rounds 4, 5 and 6

Four dates are also needed for the Betfred Cup

Iain Blair explained: "With 37 of the 71 dates therefore ruled out, that leaves us a maximum of 34 fixture dates to fit in the required 33 rounds of pre-split SPFL matches. It is already incredibly tight, and that is before we consider how many games we will inevitably lose to bad winter weather, Scottish Cup replays and further potential postponements caused by Covid-19.

"There is a very real risk that several SPFL teams will be forced to play four matches in eight days – and perhaps more than once – which would be a nightmare for players and fans alike.

"I'm afraid to say there are real and justified fears over the resilience of the forthcoming current fixture schedule, given everything the game is dealing with currently. I will be writing to clubs shortly to explain the various factors we are balancing and I know from my discussions with club secretaries that they understand our shared predicament.

"It goes without saying, we will all be keeping our fingers

crossed for a very mild winter.

“We’ve been in discussion with the SFA. They understandably want to have the two rounds of matches postponed before the Nations League play-offs in early October and early November. If there was any slack at all in the schedule we would obviously be very keen to deliver that. Unfortunately it’s simply not possible, given the restrictions we are working within.

“We have committed to liaising with Sky Sports to encourage them to avoid scheduling live matches on the Sunday before the Scotland games, unless that fixture has been shifted to the Sunday because of UEFA Europa League commitments the previous midweek.”