

NOTES ON ROLLING MEMBERSHIP

This paper is produced at the request of the Chief Executive of the Federation.

At present the ECF operates a fixed-term membership scheme, in which all memberships expire on 31st August following the date on which they are taken out, with the exception that memberships taken out after 1st July in any year run until 31st August of the following year. This results in new members joining late in the season getting poor value for money. In view of this the Board are contemplating moving to a rolling membership.

There are two problems which need to be addressed if such a change is to be made. The first is the question of handling members who do not renew immediately their membership expires, and the second is the current policy that for the purposes of League Game Fee any membership taken out prior to 1st July is regarded as backdated to 1st September.

In many ways the ideal solution to the problem of existing members who allow their membership to lapse would be to backdate the renewal of such members to the expiry date of their previous membership. Unfortunately JustGo (formerly Azolve, alias GoMembership), who are contracted to provide our membership system, cannot support such a model. While in principle they could be asked to extend the functionality of their system to permit it this would be chargeable work, the cost of which would be considerable. This may not be such bad news as it sounds, since adopting that model might well turn out to be storing up trouble for ourselves; one of our biggest problems is players who take out a new membership instead of renewing their existing one. At present this only involves us in the administrative hassle of merging the memberships; if we adopted a system where such people had obtained a membership with the wrong expiry date the situation might become unmanageable.

Apart from our present arrangement of a fixed term, the JustGo system allows memberships dated from either:

1. the exact anniversary of their being taken out,
2. the first day of the month in which they are taken out, or
3. the first day of the month after they are taken out.

The first of these options would unnecessarily complicate the accruals calculations, and the third would make it impossible for congress organisers to ensure that competitors were members; in the Board's opinion the second option (memberships expire on the first day of the month in which they are taken out) is the only one which is viable for us.

On the second of the issues, the point the policy was addressing was the barrier which requiring ECF membership to play one game in a rated event would place on a casual player being persuaded to turn out in the occasional club match. This could be addressed by requiring any member claiming exemption from Game Fee to be a member at the end of the season in question. To avoid the complication of a spread of eligibility dates, and to tie in with the recommendation in the previous point, the proposal is that exemption from Game Fee applies to players who are members on 1st June at the end of the season in question. This does not in any way affect the exemption from Game Fee of players who play less than the stipulated

minimum number of games, and means in practice that, as at present, players would have until 30th June to get their memberships in order.

This model would permit players to gain a one-off advantage by deferring renewal until late in the season, but as the accompanying summary paper explains the Board feels that there is little risk even in the unlikely event that this happens, and any such risk is greatly outweighed by the advantages of the proposed system.

JustGo have assured us that reconfiguring their system from a fixed membership period to a rolling one would be a relatively simple task which would not require them to do any paid development work.

Dave Thomas

ECF Membership Support