



## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **TO THE SENATE**

**BY DR. THE HONOURABLE ERNEST G. PEETS, JP**

**MINISTER OF YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT**

**Sport “Return to Play” Guidance during Phase 2 of Reopening**

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Madam President,** I want to open today by stating that this Government and my Ministry are deeply committed to sport in the country. Sport is considered one of the bedrocks of our community and we fully recognize and embrace the critical role that sport plays in the social, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing in Bermuda.

Likewise, we understand that the necessary restrictions and limits imposed by COVID-19 have been a blow to the sporting community and we appreciate everyone’s patience and collaboration as Bermuda battles through this pandemic to keep our people safe and our economy open.

Although the setback from the most recent outbreak was a blow to all of us, I understand the pain and frustration it caused the sporting community. We must remember that people have lost their livelihoods and, indeed, some have lost their lives in this outbreak. So we have to keep suffering in perspective. However, it is absolutely clear that sport and cultural activities have felt the pain too – physically, mentally and financially.

During these difficult times most of our normal activities have been curtailed or suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including recreational sport and national sporting events. Sporting events bring us together in a spirit of comradeship and unity to cheer on and support our favourite teams, our family members and our friends. They also allow us a personal outlet for stress and anxiety which is important for our overall wellbeing, and needed more than ever at this time.

Admittedly we have missed the routine of attending and engaging in regularly scheduled sporting activities during this time. Perhaps this has been made harder when we see more sport taking place in other countries in ways that Bermuda has not been able to practice.

However, we have to remember that Bermuda has charted its own course in the management of covid and we have largely done spectacularly well – with a lot less infections, illness and death than countries with less effective approaches. Bermuda’s approach to covid has been successful and the public’s cooperation has been instrumental in that success. Sacrifices by sport, the arts, education, hospitality and many other sectors cannot be overstated.

Consequently, it was a relief to all of us when the country entered Phase 2 of our reopening plan, which allowed my Ministry to re-open sports on Stage 2 of the “Return to Play” Guidance. As before, individual sports can apply to operate at Stage 3, and the Department of Youth Sport and Recreation welcomes applications and operational plans to allow as much sport to take place as can be done safely while the country still has community transmission.

Stage 2 of the Return to Play Guidance allows for team training within the requirements permitted by the Emergency Regulations: Groups of 10, No contact, 6 feet between

participants, Masks except during physical exertion, 30 minutes between groups to allow for cleaning, and No fans.

While Stage 2 activities are permitted, we remind the athletes and their families that household mixing raises the risk of covid spread and is discouraged and should be kept to a minimum while Bermuda continues to have community transmission. Sporting groups are not a bubble and all precautions should be practiced during Stage 2 activities, as with all our day to day activities. Avoid the 3 C's: closed spaces, crowded places and close contact.

As I said earlier, individual, non-contact sports may apply to the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation with their operational plan to progress to Stage 3. As before, adults entering Stage 3 require a covid-19 saliva test, which has to be repeated monthly. Tests can be booked online at the public test sites. However, immunised athletes don't need to be tested for Stage 3 purposes. And Individual NSGBs can require more testing for adults, immunised and children according to their needs and standards. As a reminder, sports approved for Stage 3 must still operate within the group size permitted by the public

health emergency regulations – currently 10 persons. To gather in larger numbers approval first needs to be obtained from the Minister of National Security.

**Madam President,** I'm pleased that as we progress through our reopening plan, we can return to the very thing that bring us mental and physical wellbeing during such trying times: sport and exercise. I ask our athletes to please cooperate and follow the guidance to keep themselves, their teams and Bermuda safe. Limit household mixing as much as possible. We want to get to the next reopening Phase in June and it will take diligence on all our parts to keep the covid numbers going down and prevent another wave of illness and deaths.

This is Heritage Month which this year reminds us that we are a resilient people. We got through this before and have learned a lot from it. We can get through this Phase too. Sport is an important part of the Bermudian spirit and identity, and we will adapt to the new norms whilst a pandemic rages globally and locally. Let's stick to the guidance and stay safe as we return to sport.

Thank you, **Madam President.**