

Pro-Am Events

The concept of a Pro-Am event is, of course, taken from golf, where such events have been held since at least the 1930's. In bridge it is quite simply a duplicate session in which the club's more experienced players (the Pros) partner the Club's novices (the Ams) or perhaps novices from classes held by a teacher associated with the Club. It is a way to help integrate relative novices into the Club. 'Am' status may be defined by the length of time a person has been playing bridge or by their Master Point rank (making allowance for more experienced players who have not registered all their Master Points).

Pro-Am events are usually pairs duplicates, but Pro-Am teams events can also be organised along similar lines. Pro pairs can team up with Am pairs or the pairs can be mixed.

It is often more practical to ask players to sign up in advance for the event in order to give the organisers a chance to balance numbers of Pros and Ams. The organisers may have to actively encourage Pros to take part but should emphasize that this is a fun event for all. However, it is best to avoid ending up with having two Pros playing together. If unavoidable, that pair should be given a big handicap or play 'without standing'.

Pro-Am events can also be organised at County or District level, of course. In some areas they are known as 'Play with an Expert', although this designation may lead to confusion with another type of event commonly known as 'Play with the Experts' (see separate section).

Some more suggestions:

- The Ams should be players with less than two/three years experience and/or players with an EBU rank lower than District Master. (These parameters can be adapted to suit your Club/County.)
- The aim is to make it not only an enjoyable event for the Novice but also one which enlightens and encourages.
- The event should be restricted to Simple Systems. Pros should not ask their Am partners to learn any new conventions or gadgets.
- Pros are asked to refrain from tuition/lecturing before or during the event and play unless advice on a particular point is requested by their partner.

- It should be a one-session event of circa 20-24 boards.
- Participants should pay a small entrance fee. The rest should be funded by the Club/County.
- The organisers may contact novices directly but should also liaise with teachers to encourage them to send students to the event. Help may be needed with confidence boosting, encouragement and entry forms. This may involve some chasing.
- For larger events, e.g. county-wide, it is good to have another organiser responsible for contacting the Pros. These can be contacted via email and/or phone and advised of the format and event date. On this list identify commitment with 'Definite', 'Maybe', 'Depends' and 'No'. If necessary, encourage the not-so-sure ones to make up the numbers. Thus covering the novice numbers. It may be advisable to have one or two players on standby.
- For more major events, there should be a break for refreshments half-way through. These can include small snacks, sandwiches, cakes, biscuits, fruit, tea, coffee, etc. Normally, two non-playing members help with refreshment purchases and preparation.
- Teachers are actively encouraged to attend and participate. This is found to help, but during the draw it is better to try to ensure that teachers are not paired with one of their own students. Students can often be particularly nervous of 'partnering teacher'.
- Rather than allow Ams and Pros to pair up themselves, it is best to draw for partners on the day, although some clubs prefer to make the draw a week or so in advance.
- If scoring in real time, e.g. using wireless scoring, allow participants to see the positions at half-time.
- In addition to prizes for the first three places, if the field is large enough, you can also provide prizes for, say, the top novice who has been playing for less than a year, as well as things such as the first Am to bid, play and make one of the following: 3NT, 4H, 4S, 5C, 5D, a Small Slam and a Grand Slam. The claim is made as soon as the hand is played and announced to the room that the prize has been won.
- Results should be published on the Club/County web site.

- The Pro players are asked to be especially tolerant of Ams' perceived transgressions. They may not be familiar with some of the more technical rules.

EBBU