



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLAND COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

AT West Midlands Bridge Club

ON Thursday 15th January 2015 at 10.30am

Midlands Regional County Representatives

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Derbyshire	Arnold Chandler	Gloucestershire	Alan Wearmouth	Leicestershire	Dean Benton Dave Pollard
Nottinghamshire	Graham Brindley	Staffs+Shrops	John Withers	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter
Worcestershire	David Thomas	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley		

Invited Members:

County	Name
EBU Board	Darren Evetts

Apologies:

County	Name	County	Name
Northants	Nicky Bainbridge	Staffs & Shrops	Linda Curtis
Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby	Warwickshire	Judith Currie

Midlands Regional County League Secretaries/Representatives:

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Derbyshire	Andy Wells	Gloucestershire	David Simons	Leicestershire	Dick Pathan
Nottinghamshire	Keith Rodgers	Oxfordshire	John Slater	Staffs+Shrops	John Withers
Worcestershire	Paul Hammond	Warwickshire	Adrian Knight		

Invited Member:

Name	Role
Robert Northage	League Secretary

Co-Chairmen: Rob Procter and Alan Wearmouth

1. Apologies for Absence and Attendance

Apologies had been received from Nicky Bainbridge, Linda Curtis, Judith Currie and Mike Willoughby. Representatives of all teams playing in the Midland Counties League were in attendance, together with the league secretary, Robert Northage.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting are on the EBU website: these had been approved by e-mail.

It was noted that the minutes of the National Group were also available there. Matters arising which were not on the agenda were as follows.

At the meeting Nicky Bainbridge had commented that the EBU national grading system was incompatible with scoring systems used by some clubs. She had been asked to write a brief document on this matter, which had been emailed to the committee members. The chairman outlined the salient points of this document. The main one being that an EBU systems user group be set up, bringing together the relevant people. This group would try and ensure that all parties understand the current systems' capabilities, agree priorities for future development and ensure all opportunities to use technology to promote and enhance bridge are fully exploited. The committee strongly backed the setting up of such a user group.

Arnold Chandler stated that Derbyshire had had problems linking the results of multiple teams events to the NGS. Darren Evetts suggested that Derbyshire contacted the EBU, and that the problem could be due to an incorrect club code being used.

3. The Midland Counties League

Alan Wearmouth thanked the county league captains/secretaries/ representatives, together with Robert Northage, the Midland Counties League Secretary, for attending the meeting and for their efforts over many years. At the previous meeting it had been decided that the present system needed looking at, and that the county league secretaries should be invited to the present meeting. Email correspondence had taken place earlier to ascertain the different counties opinions.

Before asking for the individual counties suggestions for improvements, Alan wondered if regular meeting between the league secretaries should take place to discuss the "nuts and bolts" of the league operations. The problem of Lincolnshire withdrawing from the league at a late stage was mentioned, and whether or not they should be allowed to re-enter at some future date.

Representatives of the counties were asked to give their opinions of the future structure of the league:

Staffs & Shropshire

John Withers reported that Staffs & Shropshire were happy with the present set-up, but thought that improvements to the administration side could be improved with the use of the EBU league management system. Robert Northage reported that, following correspondence with the league secretaries, this would be implemented from the 2015/16 season. Eligibility to play for a county was raised and it was agreed that the rules needed clarifying. Robert also stated that most counties were in favour of a September to March season.

Oxfordshire

John Slater stated that Oxfordshire were happy with the status quo, but had minor problems with the present starting point and would prefer a September start. He reported that wherever possible the dates of the matches should not clash with premier national events such as the Portland Pairs. The possibility of restricting members of the third team to players below a certain rank was raised. Other counties thought that this could cause problems.

With the introduction of the use of the EBU league management system, a suggestion was made that the same boards be played in all of the matches on the same day. This could enable the best North/South and East/West pairs across the counties to be ascertained.

Derbyshire

Andy Wells reported that the county has discussed matters with many of the county players and the overall majority were in favour of keeping things as they are.

Leicestershire

Dick Pathan stated that a consultation had taken place with county players.

There had been little response from participants in the lower teams, but the consensus was to maintain the present format, as players enjoyed the head to head matches over thirty two boards.

Dick welcomed the introduction of the EBU league management system.

He thought that the regulations regarding replacement of a late player for part of a match should be made clear, and that rules concerning postponement of matches should be clarified.

Leicestershire would look favourably on Lincolnshire's return to the league.

The rationale for selection of the Markham team was raised. Should it be used as a training ground for improving players, and give them a chance to play at county level? Should there be restrictions on the rank of players eligible to play for the third team? Given that Leicestershire had no difficulty in raising the three teams, it was suggested that for certain matches, a fourth team of improvers should be introduced.

Worcestershire

Paul Hammond reported that Worcestershire had raised the issue of restructuring of the league with its players. The general opinion was that Lincolnshire should not be allowed to return.

The majority were against the suggestion that the league be split into two. However around half of the players would like to see the number of weekends of matches reduced. This would entail organising round robin events involving six or seven board matches.

Gloucestershire

David Simons welcomed the introduction of the EBU league management system and a modified season, and was pleased that rules regarding eligibility and other matters were to be clarified. After discussions with players, some would prefer the Midlands League to be split in two, others prefer the present situation. Very few wanted round robin matches involving far fewer boards. It had been suggested that matches could start at 12 noon rather than 2.30 pm. It was pointed out that the start times were only suggestions and that, if both counties were agreeable, an earlier start time was possible.

Warwickshire

Adrian Knight stated that Warwickshire were keen to keep things as they are, but welcomed the proposed September- March season and introduction of the EBU league management system.

Nottinghamshire

Keith Rodgers reported that, in view of the reluctance of certain members of the county squad to travel long distances, the Midlands League be split into two. The teams in the two halves would play each other home and away, with the two winners having a play off to decide the overall winner. The county players like the head to head format and would be against round robin events, which are catered for elsewhere. If the present format is to be continued, the county would like some leeway regarding postponements.

Arnold Chandler enquired if it was true that in other leagues a county or region could enter two teams. Darren Evetts confirmed that both Yorkshire and Manchester entered two teams in their league.

Alan Wearmouth suggested that it was always possible in the case of long distance matches for the match to take place at a midway venue.

A general discussion ensued about the role of the Markham team. Different counties had different philosophies about whom to pick. Some chose the strongest team possible; others used it as an introduction to county level bridge for up-and-coming players.

Darren Evetts remarked that Warwickshire had a player development policy and suggested that an extra division be introduced for improvers/non-expert players, the matches to take place on the same dates as the other league matches where possible.

It was thought a good idea to instigate inter-county events for improving beginners, but these need not be a formal league, but simply friendly matches.

Given that the time set aside to discuss the Midlands League had passed, it was agreed that the League representatives should continue their discussions in a nearby room, and if time allowed report back their suggestions to the committee.

The Dawes Trophy had been brought to the meeting by Derbyshire, who suggested that the names of the winners should be brought up to date.

4. National Working Party Meeting

Darren Evetts reminded the committee that minutes of the second meeting of the National Working Group were available on the EBU web-site and he hoped that members had had the opportunity to have read them. In the minutes, the EBED representative had focused on:

- The introduction of bridge into primary schools;
- Accelerated learning courses;
- The benefits of bridge to players' overall mental health.

The hot topics which the Midlands committee had put forward were:

- The Value Proposition.
What advantages does membership of the EBU bring to clubs and the average player? Clearly the EBU organises competitions and has overall control of the laws governing the game. The problem arises in convincing the thousands of new members, who joined after universal membership started, of the benefits of the EBU.
- Progression Strategy
Although much of the teaching of beginners is instigated by the counties, as is the training of top players for such events as the Tollemache, there is a gap in the middle as to what could be done for improving players. It was suggested that the EBU could organise seminars for people in this category.
- Composition and Structure of County/Club Organisations
It was thought that counties should give more thought to succession planning regarding committee membership. Role descriptors should be drawn up for different jobs without county committees, in order that prospective candidates would know what was expected of them. It was noted that committees can become too large to function efficiently.

Rob Procter started a discussion regarding the structure and governance of the various committees. The local working parties decided on topics to be raised at the national working committee. This in turn fed its recommendations and findings to the EBU board. He wondered if papers he had

received due to his membership of the national working group should be circulated to members of the Midlands Working Group, particularly if there were any contentious items. After some debate, it was decided that, to avoid too much consultation, Rob should sit on this information, given that the minutes of the national working party were available.

It was thought that any action points generated by the NWG should be such that they could be carried out quickly, as the NWG needed to show results from their deliberations.

Rob Procter asked the committee if its members should be more proactive in writing discussion papers on topics of interest.

A lengthy discussion took place on how to engage with players who had joined the EBU through universal membership. Questionnaires were regarded as impersonal. Warwickshire had a committee member, Judith Currie, whose role was to play at many of the clubs in the county, and gather thoughts of newer EBU members, regarding what they would like to be done. The personal touch was important. Other counties were urged to try a similar approach. It was recognised that contacting unaffiliated clubs was important and on occasions needed a lot of effort.

It was thought that progression planning for players relatively new to the game was important. Competitions had to be at the right level. Gloucestershire mentioned that they had instigated a trial Swiss Teams event with mentors. Warwickshire had organised improvers' team matches. Cross county collaboration in how to organise such events was recommended.

Derbyshire stated that several teams of improvers had entered the Summer Swiss event which ran fortnightly for several weeks over the summer. The Swiss nature of the tournament meant that the weaker teams tended to play amongst themselves and new players thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Warwickshire suggested that beginners are not taught for too long before playing suitable competitive bridge, as playing in a different environment causes their confidence to grow.

5. Matters for the next National Working Party Management Group

The two co-chairmen suggested that the topics to be taken to the National Work Group were as follows:

1. An EBU IT user group should be set up;
2. Counties should nominate someone to visit local clubs and gather new members opinions;
3. We recommend that a document be drawn up explaining the roles of rules, tournament directors and best behaviour guides in providing an environment where

bridge players with different levels of experience and different reasons for playing (e.g. Competitive or social) can play together at a duplicate bridge club in harmony.

A discussion took place regarding the role of tournament directors, and the importance of newcomers realising that no offence should be taken if the opponents call the TD. It was stated that experience as a tournament director was as important as the training course they undertake. In order to increase the number of qualified tournament directors, the EBU was offering two places for the price of one at an upcoming training session. Another briefing document, summarising material in the White Book, regarding the role of Tournament Directors was suggested.

AOB

Derbyshire was under the impression that the secretary of DCBA had not been notified about the changes to the National Pairs scheduled for next year. Given that other counties had been notified, it was thought the contact details of the new secretary had not been sent to the EBU.

Darren Evetts reiterated that problems regarding communications with the EBU headquarters had to be specific.

Given that the time allotted for the meeting was coming to a close, it was decided that the outcomes of the County League representatives meeting would be emailed out to members.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place in May/June. The exact date would be agreed by email.