



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY CHAIRMAN'S CONFERENCE
HELD AT IMPERIAL HOTEL, RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON WC1
ON TUESDAY 16TH FEBRUARY 2010**

1. Attendance EBU representatives

Board Members		Board Members			
Sally Bugden	Chairman	Jeremy Dhondy		Suzanne Gill	Education Committee
Andrew Petrie	Vice Chairman	Graham Jepson		Max Bavin	Tournament Manager
Michael Hill	Treasurer	Alan Nelson		Karen Durrell	EBU Reception
Barry Capal	General Manager			John Pain	Secretary

County Attendance

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Avon	Larry Bennett	Leicestershire	Dick Pathan	Somerset	Michael Whittaker
Bedfordshire	Valerie Lawson	Lincolnshire	Stuart Knox	Staffs and Shrops	Geoff Davis
Berks and Bucks	Nigel Thompson	London	Roger Morton	Suffolk	Andrew Moore
Cambs and Hunts	Chris Jagger	Manchester	Kevin Comrie	Surrey	Shirley Pritchard
Channel Islands	Martin Jones	Merseyside and Cheshire	Liz Stevenson	Sussex	Jackie Clinton
Dorset	Ron Heath	Middlesex	Jill Feldman	Warwickshire	Colin Lang
Essex	Dick Green	Norfolk	Gerard Faulkner	Wiltshire	Colin Webb
Herefordshire	Bob Underhill	Northamptonshire	Trevor Thrower	Worcestershire	Nick Forward
Hertfordshire	Bernard Eddleston	North East	Ken Spragg	Yorkshire	Philip Mason
Kent	Mike de Winter	Oxfordshire	John Briggs		

Apologies

Board Members	John Carter	Jeff Morris	Malcolm Oliver	Martin Pool	
Cumbria	David Sheppard	Hants & IOW	Helen Carter	Westmorland	Peter Jeffreys
Gloucestershire	Paul Denning	Lancashire	Austin Barnes		

Absence – no apologies

Cornwall	Geoffrey Warren	Devon	Amos Bridgman	Nottinghamshire	Keith Rodgers
Derbyshire	John Sowter	Isle of Man	John Large		

2 Introduction and Welcome

Sally Bugden opened the meeting and welcomed all County Chairmen or their representatives. It was the first such conference since 2005.

She stated that they had been invited to discuss the progress that has been made with the EBU's Business Strategy, Bidding for the Future which was launched at the AGM in October 2008.

Much of the strategy has a direct impact on the counties. She reminded those present that this was a forum for discussion and exchange of views.

Sally thanked those counties who had submitted written questions, which it was hoped would be dealt with today and in the following months during the various consultations that would be taking place.

Before moving on to the first item she thanked Andrew Petrie for the hours of work he had put into redrafting the Master Point handbook and the licensing regulations which were now to be found in one booklet.

3 Master Point and Licensing Regulations 2010

Andrew Petrie introduced the topic by giving the background. Rewriting the handbook had been the result of 18 months consultation but there were no fundamental changes. It was just bringing the booklet up to date. He thanked Max Bavin, Brian Crack and the Tournament Committee for their hard work in assisting the redraft. It is a complex document with 56 pages of detail. He acknowledged there were likely to be some errors, but with this booklet being an online publication any changes could be made easily.

There would be a review of regulations by April 2011 to coincide with the end of the first year of Universal Membership.

The principles in the new handbook could be summarised as

- a) protect the EBU membership
- b) all who play in either club, county or national events should contribute a small amount to the EBU
- c) protect the benefits to members by restricting the number of events where non-EBU members could play.
- d) Licensing of events which did allow some non-EBU members to participate and also gave jurisdiction over disciplinary matters. He acknowledged that significantly more disciplinary problems were now being referred to the EBU.

He reminded delegates of the definitions of Open and Closed events.

Open – a club or county event open to all EBU members

Closed – a club or county event open to members of that club or county with a small number of visitors.

He outlined the main new regulations:

- a) affiliated clubs can now run up to 3 open events annually without the need to obtain a licence.
- b) District associations no longer recognised.
- c) Definition of minor championship removed
- d) Only affiliated clubs could enter county or EBU events for which entry is made as a club (e.g. NICKO, Garden Cities Q, County Sims)

- e) There would be a new master-point reward and recognition system.

The only simultaneous pairs that non-affiliated clubs could enter would be the Children in Need and BGB events.

Questions received in advance

Andrew then covered some questions received in advance:

1. Primary/secondary allegiance

It would be up to counties to decide which events were open only to primary members of the county and which were open to both primary and secondary members. Some counties also allowed near neighbours not strictly secondary members to play in their events – mostly because of geographical considerations.

This gave rise to some discussion as to the concept of an 'Open' event which appeared to be misunderstood by some delegates. Some understood Open to mean 'open to all whether EBU member or not'. Mr Petrie confirmed this was NOT the case and in fact the definitions were unaltered from earlier editions of the handbook. He confirmed that some county events were open to non-EBU members such as the lowest division of the county league and this remained unchanged in the new edition. However he was adamant that we should not be giving away members benefits to non-EBU members.

It was suggested that a definition of 'Special Event' would help as it was some of that allocation together with the allocation of 'No Fear' events which could be used to attempt to involve non-EBU members. Andrew reminded counties that they could run (n+1) No Fear events and (n+1) Special Events. (n is the number of shareholders a county has). Similarly Charity events (other than Simultaneous Pairs) could also come out of the Special Event allocation.

Andrew said the definition of Special Events was deliberately vague – Counties could use them in any way they thought fit.

A number of counties admitted flouting the regulations in the past with regard to numbers of events held. Andrew acknowledged this and encouraged counties to come into line as soon as practicable.

The question of the Pay to Play contribution in Knock Out events was raised. Most counties used their KO event as the Pachabo qualifier and such events should not be liable to P2P contributions. Andrew said that the drafting committee had carefully noted a shareholders decision in April 2008 not to exempt such events so the fee would be charged in the first year. However, all of these issues will be reviewed in the first year of Pay to Play.

Some counties run a qualifying round before reaching the KO stage. It was confirmed that the QR would not be liable for P2P but the KQ stage would be.

It was confirmed that County Leagues and County major KO teams events were subject to P2P in the first year.

Andrew made it clear that no changes had been made to the final MDAG document but that all decisions would be reviewed after the first year.

It was confirmed that a KO event with a secondary Plate tournament would attract only one P2P fee. Some members queried the fact that the £5 charge was the same for a league series (perhaps 7 matches) and also for a KO event which might be only one match. It was confirmed this was the current position.

It was confirmed that a County event taking place on April 4th might take place before a club event. By April 1st all clubs should have sent their file of members and would be members from that date regardless of whether they had yet played in a club.

It was confirmed that the qualification to receive the Diary or English Bridge was 12 playing sessions per year. This could be 12 times in a club or an EBU event (4 sessions of the Brighton congress counts as 4 qualifying sessions). However 8 or 9 league matches in a season do not count towards the 12 playing sessions.

One county reported a problem whereby EBU members felt the year run from September, when the competition calendar started rather than April. It was confirmed that the Membership year had always been from April.

It was confirmed that events which were already under way before April 1st and which carried on after April 1st would complete under the current arrangements.

2. Charity events

Sally outlined the EBU's position on charitable giving. It had been decided that the Children in Need Simultaneous Pairs would be the EBU's nominated charity and sessions would not be liable to P2P charges. Any future move to change the charity would be membership driven.

A club could include a charity event as its one exempt session.

Charity events held in clubs would be subject to P2P charges and non-EBU members could count as visitors. A county asked for more lenient treatment towards registered charities. Sally said that P2P contributions were the EBUs main source of income and that charitable giving at club and county level should be down to the individuals concerned and should not involve the total membership donating part of their annual income to the chosen charity.

It was confirmed that the £1 per person surcharge that was proposed to be levied for BGB Sim Pairs non-EBU members was part of the significant administration costs involved in running the Sim Pairs. It was an EBU-levy but it was still the subject of discussion. It was also confirmed there would be no master points for non-members playing in non-affiliated clubs.

It was confirmed that paper master points issued for county leagues finishing after April 1st would be accepted, but counties were urged to make use of a spreadsheet that was available from Ian Mitchell at the Aylesbury office.

Regarding the £5 per person charge for county leagues, it was confirmed that clubs should have sent a file of members in advance but in reality there might be some catching up at the end of the league season.

A county mentioned a Charity Simultaneous Pairs event in which 26 counties took part. Each county then designates its own charity to donate to. It was confirmed that this event had previously needed a licence and would continue to do so. But in future only affiliated clubs would be able to take part.

In answer to a question about the changes to reward and recognition it was confirmed that the change would be cost neutral.

One delegate queried the award for the club player who had won most black points. It was confirmed that this was an additional award to promote interest in the scheme amongst the new members. The current annual county awards were unchanged.

One county congratulated Andrew and his team – the new handbook had been well received.

4 Pay to Play administration for counties

Barry Capal introduced this item. He highlighted several points;

- a) The P2P payment was the subscription payment and includes the county part. If a member plays in another county event, the county part goes to that county.
- b) The first payment of County affiliations fees money would probably be paid towards the end of May and then as intervals thereafter.
- c) Club affiliation fees are a separate payment to the P2P charges.
- d) County of Allegiance – no change to the current arrangements.
 - a. New members – the first club to report a result would determine the new member's county of prime allegiance.
 - b. Direct members. In the first year they would have to actively join a county by paying the appropriate sub to that county.

- c. You can change county of allegiance once during the year.
- d. All members would receive a unique password to allow access to the members are where change of allegiance would be one of the items available. Also the ability to look at the members master point record and their account status.
- e) County membership records were still available through the access mechanism.
- f) Payments to counties would be by BACS transfer only. Counties were urged to supply bank details if they hadn't already done so.

It was confirmed that the current arrangements for students registering under *Bridge for All* were unchanged.

5 Constitutional changes

a) Number of votes

Sally Bugden introduced this item. The Board had undertaken a substantial amount of research to try to make the governance of the EBU fit for the 21st century.

Andrew Petrie said that several different organisations had been looked at – Charity Commissioners, National Trust, English Netball Assn, Institute of Chartered Accountants etc, together with the National Regional Sporting Assn of Australia.

He said that universal membership would bring in far more club players than before and that the new organization needed to be seen to be representative. The board had thoroughly investigated One Member One Vote (OMOV) and come to the conclusion that it would be too expensive to administer. The preferred method was to keep the number of votes for counties the same as now but to give each club one vote. This would be tabled to shareholders at the March meeting for them to undertake a consultation with their clubs on the best way forward.

Counties offered views:

- a) A county of 30 clubs would have 30 votes, whereas the county would still only have its 3 votes – this could be seen as freezing the county out.
- b) OMOV not a good way forward. One vote for each club irrespective of size was not a good idea. Suggest a scale of votes dependant on membership of the club.
- c) Money to support the EBU comes from clubs – bigger clubs should have more say.
- d) Important to keep the county element of votes as most of the actual work is done by the county committee.
- e) How would the club votes be counted? What about the AGM? Could clubs delegate their votes to shareholders..
- f) It would not be necessary for every club to have to vote on everything.
- g) Clubs can attend county management meetings. Some counties could come armed with lots of proxy votes in order to force through something the board didn't like.
- h) Democracy was a fine thing but it needed to get to the lowest level. Much of the information did not currently get through to the grass roots – would that change? Lots of clubs were probably not interested. Current structure allowed counties to involve clubs. Maintain the status quo.

Sally said that OMOV does operate at county level. There would be consultation after March. If nothing else it was an opportunity to expose the current structure to clubs.

- i) Was the role of the county association to be diminished in future – to just another 'club' running events.
- j) Need clear reporting structure. AGM once a year; meetings during the year. Ways and means exist through website and through Club Focus, County Focus etc.

- k) Clubs and counties would likely be only asked to vote once a year.
- l) Most clubs were interested in tea and biscuits and the alerting regulations and to play bridge to enjoy it – they were not interested in this level of issue.

Both Sally and Barry reported that they had received many criticisms that the EBU was not democratic and had asked about representation. This was an attempt to address the issue.

b) Board elections

Sally introduced this item. It was suggested that the way the Board was formulated should be changed. The EBU was a large organization with a need for a cross-section of skills. The current board had a number of skills gaps. It would therefore be beneficial to be able to appoint specific expertise when needed. The suggestion was to have 6 elected and 5 nominated. The current method of electing the Board annually was now thought to be archaic – members should be elected for a 3-year period – new members hardly got to know the job in just a year.

This would be tabled to the March shareholders meeting for consultation among counties; to consider it in July and change in October.

Members thought this a good idea although the split might not be correct – perhaps 8 elected and 3 nominated might be better. It should also include the power to co-opt additional members if thought necessary.

The 3 Standing Committee chairmen should be Board members and if not on the Board could be nominated.

c) Bye Law changes

A member was unhappy with the proposal that the Shareholders would not have to vote on bye-law changes. The safety valve was there that the Shareholders could vote to refer it back. Nevertheless it might lead to muddle if a change was made to the Bye-Laws only for the Shareholders to refer it back for it to be ultimately changed back.

d) Charitable status

Sally outlined the current position. EBU representatives had met with senior members of the charities commission to discuss the EBU's application for charitable status. Those present were not aware of any other umbrella sports organization has applied so we are seen very much as trail blazers.

No decision had yet been reached and detailed work on preparing the application would only be embarked upon when we know that the application has a good chance of success. We were in a unique position and we were being taken seriously.

6. Education

Sally introduced this item. The Education policy was part of the Universal Membership strategy with the aim of getting more people playing in affiliated clubs. In 2008 Rob Lawy had conducted a review of all educational provision and produced a report. He had identified 3 cohorts (<26 years, 26 to 50, 50+) where work was needed. As a result of the review a new Education Working Group comprising Suzanne Gill (chair), June Booty, Sally Bugden and John Pain (secretary) would be having its first meeting shortly to produce the strategy plan. Their first priority was to identify County education officers, and then to meet with them.

She pointed out that the EBU Education department consisted of 2 people although one had other duties not related to education so it was planned to recruit a new Education Officer in 2011 once the EWG had identified the criteria for the post.

There was clearly a need to feed new learners into clubs in cohorts 2 and 3 and the Club teacher Training programme (CTTP) was designed to help with this. The EBU would provide the tutor and materials to clubs, but the costing arrangements within the club once the courses had been set up was up to the clubs themselves – whether to pay the teacher, how much to charge students etc.

One teacher said that many teachers were in it to provide income for themselves and it was confirmed that the ordinary Partner Teacher courses would continue for teachers who wished to go down that route.

Where a club already has a teacher registered with the EBU it would be up to the club how much of the CTTTP they wished to join in with.

It was noted that many do learn bridge for social reasons. The idea of the programme was to introduce players to clubs and hope that they stay. It was acknowledged that players come and go and it was not an exact science.

One delegate who was also a teacher had 32 students, but they didn't want to go on to a club – however he would try to encourage them to move on.

Sally stated that the CTTTP was geared towards clubs welcoming new students into a new social community and that the CTTTP pack contained a great deal of information to assist clubs in this way.

Another delegate said that their teaching programme had two qualified teachers and now the club was full – so successful teaching programmes did work to swell numbers.

Other initiatives were also mentioned – the MinibrIDGE in Schools project was well under way and would continue to be funded until at least September 2011; the All Party Parliamentary Group had also generated much interest with both Lords and Commons involved.

The question of bridge at university level was mentioned. Times were different and where a university used to have a club or even more than one it was now very dependant on the students. Where students arrived with a history of playing bridge at school the university often thrived, but it was very seasonal with universities coming and going.

7. Formulation of the Club Committee

Graham Jepson introduced this item. The current interim Club Committee was formed in 2008 and would be replaced by an elected committee at the October AGM. The current committee had met five times in just over two years.

Graham reported that 555 clubs had affiliated with 64 clubs still to reply. There were eight counties with more than 20 clubs.

Graham produced a schedule of how the proposed split of counties into regions for the purposes of the new committee would work. It was roughly drawn to have a similar number of clubs in each region. However it was not set in stone and it was suggested that Berks and Bucks be in the South-East region rather than the Midlands.

The new committee would be a Sub Committee of the Board (not a standing committee like the Tournament Committee).

One delegate asked how the new committee would be elected. It was a constitutional problem not covered in the bye-laws or Articles. Graham said it would be marvelous to have such a problem and if a region needed to have an election it would have to be considered. He said he would be surprised if that turned out to be the case.

One delegate reminded the meeting of the need for clubs to have a proper disciplinary procedure in place through suitable constitutions. It was noted that almost all the disciplinary problems that had come to the Laws and Ethics Committee had been due to clubs having no procedure at all or an inadequate one.

8 Any other business

There was no other business.

Sally Bugden thanked all for coming and wished them a safe journey home.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm