

## **Organising tournaments for less experienced players.**

In the past some Counties – and large Clubs – organised tournaments for their less experienced players and since the introduction of the NGS rankings, it was usual to make the requirement for players to be a Jack or below. Although this obviously excluded the top players, people new to the game would still find the “Jacks” and “Tens” far more experienced.

When online duplicate sessions became “the only game in town”, many organisers found that setting the bar at “Nines” was a more satisfactory group of players. Another option is to restrict the players to those that have only been playing bridge for a limited time – say 3 or 4 years. However you decide to classify the less experienced players, make sure you keep to “the rules” and are not persuaded to take players who do not fit the classification.

When planning a competition for a less experienced group, it is not enough to just advertise it and sit back and expect them to enter. They may not know their NGS grading, they will not know where to find their NGS. Many players new to the game will have no idea what for instance a “Swiss Teams” is. They will not realise that these games are meant for them!

I have found the one thing that makes the most difference to the success of these events is to ensure that the players realise that this event is for them and that they are confident that they will fit-in. I have found that for the first time that they enter these events it is often necessary to phone them or speak with them in person.

You also need to engage the support of their teachers, those that mentor them, the Club Directors – and ask them to personally contact the newer players and explain that these games have been introduced to give them their own games – and that the players “who always come top” will be missing. Consider using incentives – eg free/reduced entry if you get a ‘new’ pair to join your team or for new teams.

When planning a 9 High, it is best to restrict the number of boards to about 25. A Swiss Teams of 5 x 5 board matches is ideal. If playing a straight duplicate session, then 24 boards is usually enough. You need an even number of teams (or have either a team on standby or enough ‘helpers’ available to make up a team).

If you are going to be playing online, it is a good idea to have a few experienced players able to “sub in” if any players have technical problems and to also go to the tables and talk them through how the scoring works. Most new players will have no idea what an IMP is – or what converting to VP’s mean. Using Realbridge you can join an individual table and talk them through their scores.

Try to get photos / screenshots of the players and put them on the County or Club website. Get permission, preferable to agreement when they signing up (which could put them off). This will encourage others to enter the next time you run an Under 9’s. When you look at most Bridge Club or Counties websites you find the same people being mentioned in most “news” and this gives the newer players their chance to get some recognition.

Once you have run a couple of Under 9’s, try restricting the entry even further to an Under 6 or 7.

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26<sup>th</sup> June 2021