



THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION
Broadfields, Bicester Road
Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 8AZ

Telephone 01296 317200

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For immediate release

Judicial Review considering whether bridge is a sport – decision expected in a few weeks

The Judicial Review into Sport England's position that bridge should not be considered a 'sport' concluded on Wednesday.

English Bridge Union Chairman, Jeremy Dhondy said "The proceedings, which took a day and a half, were very fair and comprehensive and we ended the case feeling optimistic that the right result would be achieved"

The legal representation for the English Bridge Union (EBU), who brought the case, have argued that the definitions of sport established by parliament are sufficiently broad as to include activities such as Mind Sports. The Charities Act, updated by Parliament in 2011, specifically included Mind Sports in the definition of sport, stating that sports are "activities which promote health or wellbeing through physical or mental skill or exertion". If Sport England were to adopt this definition, and be in line with the most recent intentions of Parliament, it would give them scope to recognise the five Mind Sports recognised by Sport Accord, the worldwide organisation for sporting governing bodies. This would bring the UK in line many other European countries, and the International Olympic Committee, in recognising bridge as a sport.

At present Sport England state that their remit is to recognise only sports which promote 'physical fitness', and yet they recognise as 'sports' activities such as model aircraft flying, and snooker, which the EBU's counsel argue contribute little to the physical fitness of the nation. The EBU believes the exclusion of bridge has therefore been reached arbitrarily and unfairly. It also emphasises that Sport England should take a broader view of the benefits of sport to public health, and not focus solely on sports which benefit the 'limbs and lungs'. Playing bridge is widely acknowledged as having positive benefits for the health of the brain ⁽¹⁾, and with declining cognitive skills becoming of increasing concern in the country's aging population the EBU believes that recognising and supporting bridge should be an important step in the drive towards a healthier nation.

Sport England have expressed concern that there is only a finite amount of money for it to spend on 'sporting' activities, this despite the fact that the EBU has repeatedly stated that is not seeking funding from Sport England, only recognition – an issue which has been repeatedly misreported in the press. In defence of their recognition of other more sedate pastimes as sports, Sport England

emphasise they only recognise them, but do not fund them, and yet that seems to be an approach which they are unwilling to adopt with regard to bridge. The EBU seeks recognition as it believes this will enable bridge to be made available to a wider audience, so more people can enjoy not only the benefits to cognitive health, but also the educational opportunities that come from engaging in a mentally challenging activity ⁽²⁾, and the social opportunities it offers. For many older people their bridge club is their only opportunity for social engagement, this at a time when isolation is becoming an increasing problem amongst elderly people.

The EBU has also argued that Sport England's position discriminates against the older, or less physically able, members of society. By restricting 'sport' only to those who are more physically able, the EBU believes Sport England is not acting inclusively, and a publicly funded body should not seek to act in a way which is exclusive and alienates sectors of the population. Bridge is an activity which can be played by everyone, regardless of age, or their physical condition.

It is expected that a ruling will be made in the next few weeks.

1 - Bridge is seen as an excellent way of improving mental acuity and delaying the onset of dementia, and the social and partnership aspects of bridge are of great benefit to those who may otherwise become isolated (see: [Participation in cognitively-stimulating activities is associated with brain structure and cognitive function in preclinical Alzheimer's disease, Schultz et al, 2014](#); Annals of Internal Medicine, American College of Physicians and the Washington Post, 2003 reporting on: Verghese, J. 2003. The effects of mind games on Alzheimer's and dementia. Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, USA.)

2 - [The educational implications of bridge](#)

What is Bridge?

Bridge is a card-based mind sport, played in pairs against other pairs (the pairs are sometimes combined into teams of four or eight); The partners sit opposite each other at a table. There is an auction (often called bidding) and then the play, after which the hand is scored. The more tricks a partnership correctly predicts they will make the better their score - but if they do not make as many as they predict their opponents score points instead. In competitions the same hands are played at each table so you can compare your scores with the other partnerships and work out who did best with what they were dealt, thus almost eliminating the 'luck' aspect that exists in card games such as poker.

Playing bridge is one of the most enduring and popular pastimes in the world and for over 100 years it has fascinated people of all types and from all walks of life. It is one of the most popular leisure activities in Britain, with around 300,000 people believed to play on a regular basis. Famous players include Bill Gates, Martina Navratilova and members of the bands Blur and Radiohead.

About the English Bridge Union

The English Bridge Union (EBU) was formed on 23 May 1936 and is a non-profit making membership-funded organisation committed to promoting the game of duplicate bridge. It is also a National Bridge Organisation, affiliated to the European Bridge League and the World Bridge Federation.

The national headquarters of the EBU are in Aylesbury where around 20 professional people support and advise the committees, serve the membership, and help implement policy.

There are around 55,000 members of the EBU, playing in around 620 affiliated bridge clubs in England.

For any further information please contact:

Peter Stockdale
English Bridge Union
Communications Officer
01296 317215
peter.stockdale@ebu.co.uk