



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Northern CWG	Lesley Millet (LM)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)		

**Apologies:** Dean Benton (Leicestershire), John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Kiat Huang (Lincolnshire), Malcolm Pryor (Suffolk), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Mike Willoughby (Worcestershire).

**CHAIR:** Patrick Shields

## ITEM 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 5<sup>th</sup> November meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website. It was noted that
  - a. The management of the MC Online League has been passed to the nine Team Managers.
  - b. Giorgio Provenza has been approached about visiting this group, but no date has yet been set.

## ITEM 3 : Report from the Northern Counties WG (meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> Nov)

2. **PS** reported hearing from some counties a drop off in attendance at their online events, as more clubs became active and players migrated to the club games. **LM** confirmed that the Yorkshire League was running with 120 teams and about 800 people involved (2 matches per month, Sep-Dec, mostly at a fixed day/time which allows for a TD to be on call).
3. Other issues were picked up on the relevant agenda item below.

## ITEM 4a Active Topics : Online vs Face-to-face Bridge

4. **PS** reported being at some of the Nicky Bainbridge meeting the previous day, where he felt the expectation of those present was a return to face-to-face which saw online bridge disappear. In other quarters, positive advantages of online bridge are seen and a number of groups are preparing for its long-term continuation. It was suggested at that meeting, and endorsed by this meeting, that the EBU ought to take an active role in helping clubs (and others) prepare for a world where there was a mix of online and face-to-face games, and possibly some hybrids (eg lovebridge.com).
5. We discussed differences between the two forms of the game:
  - a. It was noted that as many problems exist with inappropriate behaviour (c---g) in both forms of the game.

- b. There was a suggestion for a separate NGS record for the two forms of the game, and it was noted that serious statistical differences in performance between online and face-to-face games had helped identify some cheats.

#### **ITEM 4b Active Topics : Experiences with Online Platforms**

6. **PS** reported that Gloucestershire had run a trial event on RealBridge, a multiple teams game with 16 teams. Apart from one person who could not recover from connection problems, it went very well. **JP** reported that he had signed up to RealBridge for the British Rail BC but had not run any games yet. The “Players” tab on the realbridge.online website shows an enormous list of organisations now playing on this platform. **KT** noted that Team-of-8 scoring (of which there are variants) is coming to RealBridge, and that Oxfordshire have done a seminar (starting on Zoom) helping people to use RealBridge.

#### **ITEM 4c: Active Topics : Midlands Online Cross County Teams (MOCCT)**

7. **PS** reminded the audience that we were planning for this to happen in late January. He had consulted with RealBridge who said that if we subscribed we could choose any date we liked, and we agreed that the date would be Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> January. We had agreed on restricting entries to NGS-8-high partnerships, and that the format would be Swiss Teams, and that it would be an open entry but that each foursome would represent its county. We failed to discuss then (or now) which counties were invited (topic for next meeting) but did cover
  - a. Many players would not be familiar with RealBridge, so we need to offer some familiarisation sessions in advance.
  - b. We agreed that 25 boards was a maximum and we recommend 5 matches of 5 boards each.
  - c. There will be some expenses (RealBridge, UMS) and the event justified a non-playing paid TD; we agreed that each county would be responsible for paying £8 per team that represents them. It was up to the county whether to collect that money from the players or use other sources. It was suggested that any profit could become a donation to EBED.
  - d. We agreed to consult appropriate people we know about taking on the job of running the event, and that this should include management of entries as well as acting as TD for the event on the day – and agree the candidate at the next meeting.
  - e. We discussed advertising, and **LM** offered a contact who could create a flyer for a small charge; with no communal funds to hand, we decided to look for volunteer effort first.
  - f. We still need a snappy title for this event.

#### **ITEM 4d: What would create a mass attendance at a weekend event?**

8. **PS** posed this question which had arisen in a recent EBU Board discussion. The feedback was
  - a. The perception of Value-for-Money is important, but this disappears from view of the event is for a “good cause”. A bridge club survival fund might be a sufficient cause.
  - b. For the Great Northern Pairs (a recent massive success) the advertising was seen as key.
  - c. **FD** suggested that the idea of a surprise guest (a Bridge “name” or a famous person who plays bridge) turning up at an online event would make it very special.

## ITEM 5: Preparations for the EBU AGM (due 25<sup>th</sup> Nov)

9. From the discussion at the NCWG, the one controversy was around the changes to the Bye Laws, with the concern that an interim player suspension when a charge was brought - if it turned out that the charges were unfounded or unproven - could do a lot of reputational damage. **PS** explained that by the time a charge is made, all the investigations are complete and no advertising of the charge takes place, and so the risk was deemed as outweighed by the extent to which the continued presence of the accused at events (which could be dragged out by the accused) discouraged others from participating. There was some uncertainty as to whether as strict a timeline was being imposed on the Prosecution Panel as on the accused. **MT** pointed out that these issues are as relevant for bad face-to-face behaviour as they are for online cheating.

## ITEM 6: Round Robin Catchup from Counties

10. We had offline confirmation of nothing to report from Hampshire and Leicestershire.

11. Two reports were received offline

- a. Derbyshire: **JP** reported that games on BBO for the county continue to go well, and that inter-club team-of-4 matches are now running on BBO. DCBA will run another extra competition next week - the County Swiss Pairs being hosted by an EBU-arranged TD. The use of UNDO's on BBO is causing much debate in Derbyshire.
- b. Lincolnshire: **KH** reported that the Club chairs' meeting for both affiliated and non-affiliated was well received (getting nearly 100% attendance) and is the first brick in foundations for collaboration between them. Clubs are starting to use RealBridge as a viable alternative to BBO.

12. At the meeting we heard from

- a. Northamptonshire: **FD** reported on many discussions on how face-to-face bridge has been working, and an emphasis growing on bringing more people online. It is proving difficult to get the non-affiliated clubs engaged in these discussions.
- b. Warwickshire: **MT** reported that the county would not field a Tollemache team as too many top players were not willing to play – some perhaps had not fully appreciated that online bridge is here to stay.
- c. Staffs & Shrops: **PC** reported that the county No Fear game was finding itself in competition with a new club start-up, but apart from that, the spread means that across the county a game was available every day except Sunday.
- d. Worcestershire: **MV** reported that the county night on BCL continues to thrive. Some clubs were looking at RealBridge but subs (perhaps annual) already paid to Bridge Club Live were a disincentive to move. He reported that the WCBA had handled a Children-in-Need game by opening a Just Giving page for donations and this generated £1500 (twice their usual amount).
- e. Oxfordshire: **KT** reported that the county's 9-high game was currently suffering low numbers and they were considering a move to RealBridge. Others are encouraged to advertise the 9-high game (see <https://www.bridgewebs.com/oba/>) .

- f. Gloucestershire : **PS** reported that the three series of Monday night games continued but that there was a re-think underway for the New Year when RealBridge could be an option and the Swiss Teams option on BBO might or might not vanish.

#### **ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

13. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

14. After that our meetings will be on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December and then Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

END OF MINUTES