



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 04th June 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Toni Smith (TS)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Hampshire+	John Fairhurst (JF)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (BD)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes of the meetings of 14th and 28th May.
2. KH pointed out that the next inter-county match planned is just 9 days away and there are currently only 14 confirmed teams. Herefordshire & Nottinghamshire quickly stepped forward to claim the vacant spots; a number of counties noted the difficult sometime in getting A/K players to turn out, while at other times it was difficult to get those players to engage on the necessary administrative tasks.

ITEM 2: Update from EBU Board Gatherings

3. There have been no formal Board meetings but the Board members get together by Zoom and by email many times each week. **KH** and **PS** reported that
 - a. The Board gets involved in the plans for online bridge and were responsible for the introduction of the 9-High game just started by the EBU (1100 daily).
 - b. They are working with EBED on plans for the future but the pace of learning in the EBED world is still the pace we are accustomed to for face-to-face learning, and this needs to transform for the online world.
 - c. The discussion this week moved onto the need to support social bridge where the EBU can, but the identification of gaps there (i.e. not filled by clubs currently) was in short supply.
 - d. The TD sets the mood music for any game and that is equally true in the online world; there are useful ready-prepared messages for that context circulating around the EBU's TD squad, and Gordon will organize their wider circulation.
4. **DT** noted that he, as county shareholder, had received no correspondence from the Board and was disappointed in this.

ITEM 3: Round Robin on News/Plans/Problems

5. **PS** asked that reports be brief this week and started by issuing a “pass” from **Gloucestershire**. **MT** from **Warwickshire** told us nothing has changed there. From **Herefordshire** **KS** reported that a first Virtual Club had now started. For **Staffs & Shrops**, **PC** reported that one club has held its AGM by Zoom and the first County game is next week. And **DT** from **Worcestershire** who said that Worcester BC had finished its first Pairs League and was now planning some different events (Mens’ Pairs, Ladies Pairs, Mixed Pairs). For **Leicestershire** **DB** reported that the first Virtual Club (VC) starts on 10th June with another following on 20th, and this should encompass about a third of the players in the county.
6. In **Northamptonshire** **FD** reminded us that the three top clubs were all active and said that interest was growing from learners but there was a shortage of teachers. Positive help from EBED and its various Advisory Groups would be welcome. **KH** reminded us of some relevant history
 - a. EBED was split off from the EBU for tax reasons, and its independence is a necessary part of that. EBED has some trustees from EBU, and has just over 1 full time equivalent staff at this time.
 - b. The main worry for EBED is loss of revenue from book sales, and digitising their books has been a priority. **KH** has put man weeks of effort recently into helping EBED adapt to the available technology.
 - c. The relationship between EBU and EBED management has not always been smooth; it has improved recently but remains delicate.
7. We heard from **JF** about **Hampshire** who are running one game/week and have just started to advertise online teaching, about **Dorset** who have now run two online games with 8 tables each time, and about **Surrey** who (despite Caterham BC and Camberlay BC being active early) are only now getting started with training BBO TDs and are running a County Pairs on 20th June and an NGS-7 Pairs the week after.
8. From **Nottinghamshire** **TS** reported that their first successful county event was last week and (at 7T) it exceeded their recent face to face turnouts. The clubs who had started online early are running big free sessions and the largest of them is asking players for a donation to cover costs and this is being well received.
9. Nottinghamshire has been exploring the TD training issues but had not appreciated that the plan was for counties to cascade this training to their clubs and the charge of £100 per go was only for the time spent by a professional TD doing the first level of training. Others indicated they too had mis-interpreted the original offering. Some TD training documents had been developed and **KT** was happy to share these. **PS** will provide ideas offline on how best to do that.
10. From **Oxfordshire**, **KT** indicated that their Virtual Clubs were paying either £25 or £35 to TDs and that these TDs were all Oxfordshire people. The recent Oxfordshire Junior event went well and will be repeated; the NGS-5-High event was small but successful.
11. For **Lincolnshire**, **KH** reported on the success of the Lincolnshire Towns League which had just completed, and on the creation of the Anglo Roman Towns League (with participants across the country eg Bath).

12. For **Derbyshire**, **JP** reported that the County sessions continue to be well supported, we have around 30% more players on a two-week average than last year. There are now 4 clubs running VC events on line (Allestree are running at 90% of normal numbers, Belper are at 125%, Ripley at about 40% and East Midlands at 100%), there are 8 clubs not doing anything, and one club running free events (and they have offered to pay a monthly UMS fee to the EBU). Roger Mallinson has not attended the MCWG for some time (even before Covid-18) and has agreed to step down; a replacement is being sought.
13. From **Suffolk**, we had an offline report from Malcolm Pryor that their AGM is going ahead via Zoom on 21st June (non-verbal voting, “prize giving” online using a picture of the cup, and an online pairs event to follow for AGM attendees), and that plans are being made with the EBU to run their annual green pointed congress (Felixstowe) as online green pointed event.

ITEM 4: EBU FUTURES

14. A specific agenda item had been “Consideration of what if anything to do as a follow up to the discussion of last week on the RP statements”¹ and the first question was why the words “if anything were included”. **PS** replied by pointing out that this group had no authority ([click here for its TOR](#)), but did help counties develop their thinking and that the AGM and the Shareholders’ meeting were the formal channel for addressing messages to the EBU Board. There was a clear consensus that the intent was that the thoughts being expressed were taken seriously by the EBU Board as it planned the future. The options for doing that included them ideas being taken to the board by PS & KH, by asking Ian Payn to attend an MCWG discussion on the topic, or by making a written representation to the Board.
15. **RP** expressed the view that the three statements discussed last time have been the MCWG consensus for some years; **MT** had documented some of the history of MCWG and EBU Board engagement and this will be circulated to ensure all new MCWG attendees understand what has happened in the past. It was suggested that the EBU had lost touch with many bridge players when P2P was introduced. **PS** suggested that there were three separate groups with whom EBU needs to engage (a) unaffiliated club members, (b) unaffiliated club management, and (c) top players to whom others would look for guidance.
16. The suggestion was made that with the disruption to face-to-face bridge this was an ideal time to engage with Unaffiliated Clubs. At the same time, there is a strong commitment on the current EBU management to UMS and with the turmoil of online bridge generating change, further fundamental change might or might not be opportune. **PS** postulated that our first two steps need to be confirmation from the EBU Board of the need to be a national authority for all bridge players, and secondly to agree we need to engage non-EBU-members in planning the future.
17. It was suggested that a county-led initiative to engage with non-Affiliated clubs was a necessary and useful step. This would be best done with endorsement of the EBU Board and in cooperation with counties in other Regional WGs. It was proposed that a record of the history and of the recent discussion be circulated to all county CBAs. The best approach to this will be investigated by KH and PS and a recommendation made at the next MCWG meeting.

¹ The statements were “that the EBU should aspire to be the national body for all bridge players”, that “we would need a balance of input from members and non-members to design the shape of the future national body”, and that “the one-size-fits-all charging approach might need to be adjusted if we are to attract players needing differing services from the game’s national body”.

ITEM 5: FUTURE PLANS

18. We agreed to meet again at the same time next week. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES

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