



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 4th February at 10.30am

PRESENT:

| | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Avon | Sue O'Hara (SO) | Oxfordshire | Kathy Talbot (KT) |
| Essex | Cath Fox (CF) | Suffolk | Malcolm Pryor (MP) |
| Gloucestershire | Patrick Shields (PS) | Staffs & Shrops | Paul Cutler (PC) |
| Herefordshire | Keith Stait (KS) | Warwickshire | Mike Thorley (MT) |
| Leicestershire | Dean Benton (DB) | Worcestershire | Mike Vetch (MV) |
| Lincolnshire | Kiat Huang (KH) | Worcestershire | Mike Willoughby (MW) |
| Northamptonshire | Fred Davis (FD) | | |

Apologies: John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Rob Procter (Oxfordshire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 21st January meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3a: Experiences with Online Platforms

2. There was not a lot of news to report. We noted that
 - a. Numbers playing online continued to increase slowly and some organisations were providing a mix of BBO events and RealBridge events to their players. RealBridge is the fastest growing platform at this time, at the same time as being the most agile in implementation of new features.
 - b. On the handling of full disclosure during a game, the RealBridge groups are splitting between those who mirror face-to-face practices (alert/announce your partners' actions, take up by the less competitive groups) and those who prefer the use of screens and self-announcing (the more competitive). There are prospects some day of registering your system in advance and announcements being made automatically for you.

ITEM 3b: Returning to Face-to-Face Bridge

3. **DB** kicked us off with a question about succession planning in Club/County committees and the thought that lack of face-to-face contact was making this even more difficult than usual. At the County level many reported that success depends on continued engagement with the clubs to provide a source of volunteers, but others reported that clubs have not always responded to attempts by the CBA to engage.
4. On the question of re-opening, a number of clubs are working through the issues; **PS** reported in a re-start sub-committee at Cheltenham BC, and **FD** told of a plan of action already prepared by Stamford BC. **MW** pointed out that (unfortunately?) the more attractive we make the online offerings, the more difficult it will be to get people back into bridge clubs when they do open.

5. **MV** reported that Worcester BC last week had discussed the introduction of hybrid games when re-starting, and whether there would be a need for the online game to subsidise the face-to-face players. **KH** postulated that clubs below a certain size would never get back to the footfall they need and would inevitably close. **PS** pointed out that the need was to support the members of those clubs (who might play elsewhere) rather than the clubs per se. The willingness of existing members to act as mentors for new players was identified as vital to continued growth. It was agreed that a large scale advertising campaign would benefit clubs everywhere and the game itself.

ITEM 3c: The Future of Teaching

6. In lockdown, **FD** pointed out, a key issue was the comfort level of a newcomer to the use of the computer. The importance of practice for newcomers was mentioned and it was suggested that having more teams' games available made such practice easier to organise. The discussion noted that:
- a. Ease of organisation has led to an increase in the use of teams games, and this is particularly so for newcomers.
 - b. The hassle of organising a foursome, and fear of letting down team-mates have in the past been discouragements for some players from entering teams competitions. One remedy used by some has been to enter as a pair, but draw (sometimes with seeding) for team-mates. Another discouraging factor is high probability that strong teams will score far better than anyone else (something we could address with handicaps, although this is rarely done).
 - c. The need for variety in any club's programme was noted.
 - d. Before the current crisis, club bridge was dominated enormously by match-pointed pairs while top level bridge is dominated seriously by teams scoring. This mis-match (sometimes balanced in County-level games) cannot be a Good Thing.

ITEM 3d: The Midlands 8-High Swiss Teams

7. **PS** reported on last weekend's event as follows:
- a. It was great to get as many as 45 teams from 10 different counties – it is clear there is an appetite for these games. We had 25 tables at the taster sessions beforehand.
 - b. It was very helpful having Sue O'Hara there as a second TD and able to answer people's queries.
 - c. The expense for the event is about £3.20 per table, so there is a sizeable profit and we can afford a professional director next time. Or do we donate it to EBED?
 - d. It was suggested that feedback was via County POCs, and I have received some (basically favourable, but etiquette might need addressing).
 - e. Subjectively, it seemed as if there were more connection problems than on BBO, but maybe that was just the persistence of one or two problems.
8. It was agreed that there was an appetite for games of this nature and we should have more. We debated changing the NGS limits but decided to do another run of 8-High before making any changes. We agreed to run the next event on Saturday 27th March, and that we would approach a professional TD to take charge. **MW** and **SO** agreed to lead in making these arrangements (and have since approached Sarah Amos).

ITEM 3e: The Midlands Bowl and the Edgar Foster Cup

9. **KS** reported that Herefordshire have agreed to manage the Midlands Bowl, and consultation is underway before the date is finalised. Every county consulted looks set to deliver two teams into this event.
10. **PC** reported that Staffs & Shrops will take on management of the Edgar Foster Cup. Since that runs later in the year and there is a possibility of face-to-face bridge by then, planning will be delayed until the June timeframe.

ITEM 4: Round-Robin from Counties

11. We received responses of “no change” from most counties, the exceptions being:
- a. Northamptonshire : **FD** reported that the CBA had been approached by the local U3A for help on bridge.
 - b. Essex: **CF** reported that a number of Essex clubs have re-opened since the New Year, and that the ECBA has approved the suggestion of setting up a Youth Bridge site.
 - c. Lincolnshire: **KH** reported that the LCBA has migrated its (increasing number of) county events from BBO to RealBridge, and within the county another group of clubs has joined together for a shared online presence.
 - d. Leicestershire : from **DB** we learned (offline) that the county Online Sub-Committee have organised another Stanley (NGS10+), a gentle duplicate (NGS up to and including 9) on the Saturday third Wednesday of each month, and another lockdown Swiss Teams. There will be a RealBridge Teams event (Non-Expert, teams-of-4). LCBA will be running a Men’s pairs and Ladies pairs on BBO on Wednesday 14th April, a Clubs Pairs Championship and a Student Pairs event on 11th May.
 - e. Worcestershire : from **MW** we learned (offline) that club and county competitions continue to be well-supported. WCBA has one beginners course half way through (Bewdley Bridge Club) using Realbridge and are starting another one, on BCL, in just over a week. There are still a few places available if anyone has potential players very keen to start learning now to take advantage (!!) of lockdown.
 - f. Gloucestershire : **PS** reported that a new Virtual Club has started in the county in January, and more bridge is being played in Cheltenham BC now than was the case in pre-lockdown days – albeit by just 70% of the membership.
 - g. Norfolk : Robert Smith reported offline that the NCBA held its AGM online although not many attended. NCBA are now arranging a joint Congress in March with Cumbria who would normally hold their Congress the same weekend - a good opportunity to play against their players as distance would normally preclude such travel. Cumbria will provide the prizes one day and NCBA will provide them the other day. NCBA has just had a successful event against Manchester with three teams taking part.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

12. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks’ time, on Thursday 18th February. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES