

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 1st December at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
PLUS: Shireen Mohandes (SM, RealBridge)			
Apologies: John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Ian Sidgwick (Gloucestershire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 3rd November 2022 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. We discussed the extent to which EBU Daily Games competed with club games and concluded that the combination of the price point and the session length was enough to avoid any conflict.
3. **SM** reminded us about:
 - a. The New South Wales game every Monday morning (our time) is offering one of the strongest games available. Anyone can contact SM if interested in playing.
 - b. The “Up Over / Down Under” cross hemisphere match coming next Monday evening and Tuesday morning has over 1000 participants currently, and will run with multiple sections reflecting different standards and experience of play. The 0800 start on Tuesday has about 40% of the participants.
 - c. There will be more Bridge Composer Training (did you know there was a [Bridge Composer Youtube channel](#)), done very ably, in December and January. Details of the timetable will be sent to RealBridge account holders.
 - d. The Middlesex “pop up” Sunday afternoon of Assisted Play is being well supported and some other counties are considering the same.
4. **SM** told us of the new:
 - a. Andrew Robson contribution of 4 deals with commentary on the 5-card majors theme, along the lines of the event in April 2021.
 - b. Feature coming to RealBridge which allows a teacher to show just one hand during a deal review session with students.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

5. Reports suggested a continued small increase in the amount of face-to-face club bridge being played; **JS** reported a successful 9-high venture in Nottingham and **MV** reported on successful café bridge. It was suggested that it was proving easier to get the long-established club players back into routine face-to-face games, than was the case with those who had learned only recently.
6. **GW** reported that planning was underway for the Wiltshire Green Point face-to-face weekend to be at the University in Bath again in March, and some entries had already been received.
7. Holiday events continue to be popular, and it was suggested it would be useful to have some venue providers (hotels etc) brief bridge clubs on the process, and perhaps some regular organisers too might brief on the pitfalls to avoid in organising these events. **PS** will raise this idea within the EBU for a potential club seminar next year.

ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING

8. Teaching continues in the same pattern as recent months; **MV & MW** reported planning for next year with a mix of face-to-face teaching with online practice sessions. **GW** reported on success in finishing with a duplicate session for a recent learn-in-a-weekend group in Wiltshire, but that more planning was needed for the next stage - Assisted Play sessions and further (online) lessons. The difficulty of commitment – even to just ten consecutive evenings – was being noticed, and single day or weekend sessions are proving more attractive because of this.
9. **PS** reported a recent briefing from Sue Johnson who has been organising schools bridge in North London. There are six primary schools currently involved; it starts with a taster session in class time and then an after-school club for those interested. The keenest from those sessions have been attending a Saturday afternoon session at the Acol Bridge Club, and when external events cut numbers occasionally, the remainder wanted an online session instead. Having several schools in local proximity was key to success here. The need for DBS checks (which schools can do) was highlighted, and **SM** pointed out how the structure of RealBridge made it safer for children than other platforms were.

ITEM 6: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES LEAGUE

10. It had recently come to light that kibitzing had been allowed in some recent BBO MCL matches. It was suggested that there were potential security issues in doing this and that we should update the MCL rules to disallow this. The position on RealBridge matches is slightly different; the organiser can enable “watching” or (and this is a preferred approach) the event can be streamed on the kibitz server and viewed from there – and in this case no board can be seen until an organiser-specified time interval has passed after all tables have finished playing the board. We agreed that our rules would henceforth be

- No kibitzers allowed on any BBO match.
- If the organiser wanted to, then the RealBridge kibitzing service could be used but with a minimum 1-hour delay on the viewing of the event.

ACTION : **PS** will inform the Team Managers and will update the website.

ITEM 7: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES NO FEAR SWISS EVENTS

11. There were 22 pairs played in the 26 November event and there were 5 counties represented, and, of those, Worcestershire took top place (based on the sum of their three best scores) with Staffs & Shrops in second place. The only hiccup was one player who disappeared at the start of the last round, thinking it was all over. We agreed that the next event would also be 9-high, that the entry fee would remain £6 per pair, that we would keep the county representation angle, and that we would run it on Saturday 27th January 2023. MW will prepare a flyer for us all to use in advertising. We have raised about £500 so far from this series of events.
12. **SM** suggested that there might be a useful service we could offer along the lines of the commentary provided by Andrew Robson for the recent Children-in-Needs Sims Pairs. We might want to consider paying a bridge professional to do the same, or to host a discussion session following the event. Some names were put forward and **PS** will investigate.

ITEM 8: OTHER TOPICS

13. **PS** point out that the EBU was now offering an [in-year Master Points listing](#) which could be sorted on any of total points, local points, Blue Points or Green Points. This aims to highlight recent rather than lifetime performance (the function of the ranks) and provides a measure and a target for those who have reached a certain rank and plateaued. Every County will be able to identify four winners from these lists. The totals to the end of October 2022 are published, and there is still a month in which players can earn more to move themselves up the list. CBAs are encouraged to advertise these on their websites.
14. **PS** asked whether there would be any appetite for either an inter-County Ladies Teams event, or an inter-County Mixed Teams event. There was a suggestion that some counties might struggle with numbers on these, but we agreed to consult and discuss this again in January. There is a danger, noted, that we generate an over-supply of events for our players. Offline, we heard that:
- Derbyshire do not get enough interest in their Annual Ladies Pairs event to warrant supporting an Inter-County Ladies Teams event, but do get enough interest in a mixed pairs event to support one division of an Inter-County Mixed Teams league. This is a good time to remind all there is a Midlands Counties Mixed Pairs event that Derbyshire are running F2F on Sunday 30th April at Spondon for the Mixed Pairs (EMBA Plate) and Flitch (Flitch Cup).
15. **PS** and **GW** had attended the EBU AGM the day before, and reported that all those present were very pleased to return to a face-to-face meeting, the first since 2019.
16. **SM** described a recent [Hackathon organised by the French NBO](#) (FFB) which engaged a number of teams young people (we do call aged 18-35 young, don't we?) to look at how to make the game of bridge more attractive to newcomers and to younger age groups. There was a serious prize available for the most attractive ideas and some very innovative things came forward. The EBU and in due course the EBL will be briefed on the outcomes. A regular theme which came out was the desire to start playing immediately, and to get instant feedback on how well one was doing.

17. We did not have time for a round-robin from counties, but we had our faithful reporter Jim Parker email us from Derbyshire to say

- a. The situation here is still full calendar F2F and we are well into our F2F inter-club teams-of-8 League (13 teams) and will reach halfway at the start of January. DCBA has no County on-line sessions (other than MCL). The next MCL match is being played F2F and it is also very likely the home game against Notts in January will also be played F2F. At Spondon, the building management are increasing table fees by 20% from 1st Dec as their response to cost of living crisis – which is effectively 50p per player session.

ITEM 9: NEXT MEETING

18. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, on 5th January 2023, again at 1030. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES