

# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)		
<b>PLUS: Shireen Mohandes (SM, RealBridge)</b>			
<b>Apologies:</b> Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Ian Sidgwick (Gloucestershire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Fred Davis (Northamptonshire)			

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

## ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. **SM** identified two new features of interest coming in future releases of RealBridge:
  - a. Pre-loading a hand with a pattern of bidding and play, so that viewers/players/teachers can jump in at a specific point for discussion, without having to step through the action up to that point. This feature also supports par contests, which were a popular feature of the bridge world decades ago.
  - b. RealBridge has arranged with BridgeComposer for presentations to happen at two levels – one for experienced users and one for novice users. These will happen at 2200 hrs UK time in order to accommodate attendees in all parts of the world.
3. **SM** reported that there are some world-wide broadcasts coming on RealBridge which might be of interest to our players: [Andrew Robson did a board review for Sylvester's Auckland Bridge Club recently](#), and is going to repeat this approach with the hands of the Monday of the Children's in Need week (7<sup>th</sup> November): it runs at 2200 hrs in order to accommodate both sides of the world.
4. It was noted that RealBridge these days has a (further) price advantage over BBO due to the exchange rate, but that Derbyshire CBA is not yet willing to use RealBridge for inter-county matches.

#### **ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE**

5. The most recent face-to-face congress was the Great Northern Swiss Pairs with a reasonable 18 tables. The next face-to-face congress is the West-of-England at Weston and it is expecting 35 tables on each of the main days (about half its pre-Covid numbers, but up on last year). The Malvern Congress at the end of October is expecting 50% of pre-Covid numbers – and unfortunately is running in competition with some other county online events. [LATER NOTE: some analysis of EBU-wide registered results suggests that face-to-face might be over 70% of the total player sessions in September 2022, and Cheltenham BC shows the same pattern]
6. **PS** reported a Gloucestershire Saturday event last week which achieved almost double the numbers of one year earlier. **JS** reported a RealBridge event which had to be postponed when drop-outs made it unviable – so numbers can be an issue anywhere. The difficulty of clubs facing increased rental costs while their players face increased petrol costs was highlighted as making survival uncertain for these clubs. Merging of clubs might be an answer for some.
7. **JF** asked about the drivers behind the proposed change to One Day Green Point events; **PS** explained that the intent was to retain, for the EBU, the awarding of National (Green) Point for online games, which are intrinsically nation-wide offerings. As well as protecting face-to-face games by limiting the proliferation of ODGP events, the proposal offers a new and interesting competition. It was noted that the recent Surrey Green Point weekend saw 42 tables in the online Swiss Pairs but only 12 table in the face-to-face Swiss Teams. No explanation of the wide difference was forthcoming, but it has been reported that in that Swiss Pairs event, more than two thirds of attendees were from outside Surrey. How this compares with pre-Covid days is not clear.

#### **ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING**

8. Some updates to the EBU website were noticed, including the teachers' directory into which any EBU members can add themselves. Searches return available teachers in order of distance from the supplied postcode. There is also a list of teachers to be found on the NoFearBridge website. **SM** told us that the experimental Supervised Play introduced by the Scottish Bridge Union last summer is being continued, by popular demand, into the winter. In addition to that, RealBridge is piloting some ideas for "pop-up" supervised play sessions on a Sunday afternoon.
9. **RP** highlighted that Oxford BC was starting a Friday evening session where 24 boards are played very quickly, and this is followed by a one hour talk about the hands. **SM** noted that in such contexts the speaker must be very sensitive in highlighting any one participant's actions.

#### **ITEMS 6: The Midlands Counties League**

10. The MCL is now underway. **JS** enquired as to whether a break of 30 minutes was necessary as some players in the first match had expressed a wish for no break. After discussion, it was deemed that declaring a 1630 start remained a good policy, although the two captains can agree otherwise if that suits their teams.
11. **PC** asked about the NGS processing of results; **PS** replied that when results across matches could be combined this gave a fairer score, and reminded us that when NGS processing takes place, it takes account of the fact that your opponents at the table might have been stronger than the remainder of the field. We discussed whether results should be submitted for NGS processing and decided it was correct to do so, and we should aim to process all the results this season, including the match just completed. **PS** will send details of the process to the team captains.

12. There was a discussion also about the extent to which extreme scores affected the cross-imp and therefore the NGS results, and it was suggested that more use should be made of VPs.

### **ITEMS 7: The Midlands Counties Online League & No Fear Swiss Events**

13. The September event was cancelled because of lack of entries (under four tables). We discussed the reasons for this and concluded that:

- a. A stronger focus on representing one's county would encourage attendance, so we want to label this as an inter-County restricted-NGS championship. A strong drive from an individual within a county (which is how Worcestershire has done well on this) is the most effective way to gain support; this is easier to generate when it becomes a question of representing the county.
- b. Making this competition run across a series was more likely to attract consistent attendance, but possibly once a quarter is sufficient - at least to start with. We shall aim for the first round at the end of November to maximise the time to drive up entries.

14. **SM** offered help in creating suitable posters for the event. She also reported on the practice in some countries to offer some (or all) of the table money from such events to the clubs from which the players come; this avoids the clubs feeling that in advertising the event they are losing revenue from their own games.

15. **PS** will update the Midlands CC website with the new plan. All counties are to take action to engage their County Team managers in generating interest in this event.

### **ITEM 8: ROUND ROBIN OF NEWS**

16. From those present, in aspects not already covered, we had

- a. **MT** reported that many clubs are still struggling with numbers attending face-to-face sessions. The County is striving to reintroduce and encourage face-to-face events: Seniors' Teams and Pairs events are two examples. Unfortunately, the number of higher-ranked players attending face-to-face has not increased a great deal.
- b. **RM** reported that teaching in Lincolnshire continues to go well. **PS** commented that the demands from beginners seems to vary a lot across the country.
- c. **DB** reported that the Leicestershire AGM was held live, but future committee meetings will be on Zoom. Teaching at three centres is going well. Since Covid two clubs have folded but one more has affiliated. The local team-of-8 competition has switched to team-of-4 recently to encourage entries.

17. And by email we had one report:

- a. Jim Parker from Derbyshire reported that DCBA are running no on-line events and their MCL matches are being played on BBO (despite offering face-to-face to all). Every effort is being made to get a Tollemache team, where having a F2F final seems a good carrot. Confidence in face-to-face Green Point events is low. A new teacher ran a "play bridge in a day" the other weekend and has started a new Friday night class. An invitation has been received from a Derby School to teach bridge to their school children. A new casual bridge county session is starting up on a Thursday evening which will offer players time to discuss hands after completion.

## **ITEMs 9: NEXT MEETING**

18. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, again at 1030. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES