

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 2nd February 2023 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Anne Wright (AW)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)	REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
Apologies: John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We welcomed Anne Wright who has just taken over as Chair of the Leicestershire CBA. We approved the minutes from the 5th January 2023 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. **SM** gave us an update on recent RealBridge activity:
 - a. In January the Camrose Vugraph worked well with up to seven video commentators at the same time; Bridge Composer training is complete (4 sessions, about 300 attendees), and facilitated talks for EBTA were well received. The EBL organised women's coaching session had 58 tables.
 - b. Coming up soon will be the Vugraph for the Junior Camrose taking place in Manchester and a set of teacher and club manager talks.
 - c. A long-awaited Double Dummy Solver capability has been implemented in RealBridge and is about to be released. It is "super-fast" and it allows easy tracking of if, and when, a particular choice of card changes the potential outcome on the deal. It also allows other contracts to be investigated.
3. There were some reports of numbers at online sessions dwindling, as face-to-face numbers creep upwards – and a few clubs have cut back on their online sessions. (Numbers for the online Midlands Congress in January were slightly down.) But the demand for both forms of the game does continue, and the question is how best to coordinate that to avoid unnecessary duplication. **KT** reported on an attempt to coordinate within Oxfordshire, but with little progress yet.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

4. The return to face-to-face continues slowly. **MT** reported an unchanged picture from Warwickshire – large clubs doing OK, but small clubs struggling. Staffs is running its County Pairs face-to-face in March, and a face-to-face No Fear Pairs in February. **RM** reported that Lincolnshire CBA is only doing face-to-face events. Unlike the others, **MW** reports that online continues to dominate in (the widespread county of) Worcestershire.

ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING

5. **RM** reported on a new initiative, “Bridge Beyond the Basics” in Lincolnshire with one-day sessions aimed at improvers. **PS** reported that in Gloucestershire, the Cheltenham Bridge Club was running “Tweak to Transform” sessions for the same audience and had to switch to two instances of the seminar each day following a strong demand. **JS** reported a Nottinghamshire session for intermediate players which had 24 who signed up; this had used Realbridge to play hands followed by Zoom to discuss them – but some found the switch of technology awkward and the plan is to try the full session on RealBridge next. **KT** reported that Oxford BC has just introduced a “Next Steps” programme for the same audience.
6. **SM** pointed out that for any such sessions, the Eddie Kantar archive of 200 deals was available and could be very useful (available from [here](#) and [here](#)). **AW** reported that several clubs had purchased individual lessons from Paul Bowyer and were using those.
7. **IS** suggested that the EBED emphasis on the books covering two years was the wrong approach to learning bridge – but there were also reports of people who find the fact of a two year long course attractive. **SM** described an approach whereby the learning is broken into 7-week modules, and learners sign up for each segment in turn. With multiple segments running in parallel, this makes it easier for a newcomer to stop and later continue a course. It was noted that for most players, the process of learning how to play better never stops.
8. The value of “learn in a weekend” courses was discussed, and it was suggested that the main objective of such events is to get people hooked – and they can come back and learn properly in the months which follow. There seems little doubt that from a marketing perspective the idea of “learn in a weekend” wins hands down over a two-year course – and people will sign up for the shorter version on the basis of how it is advertised, rather than what it delivers.
9. It was suggested that lack of a single strategy for newcomers was a handicap – but there was also support for the idea that there is no single answer which suits everyone.
10. **SB** pointed out [some children’s bridge quizzes](#) prepared by the French Bridge Federation as an illustration of a different approach to learning that would be appropriate in some contexts.

ITEM 6: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES LEAGUE

11. We currently have a mix of online and face-to-face matches, although in some quarters the appetite for face-to-face is low. We agreed that **PS** would organise a (virtual) get together for the MCL Team Managers to discuss the options for next season, before we discuss it here at the MCWG.

ITEM 7: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES NO FEAR SWISS EVENTS

12. From the last event, **MW** reported

Once again, thanks to the hard work of the individual county representatives, the 9-High Pairs event was successful and enjoyed by all. On this occasion one of our young international players, Ben Norton, delivered a Q&A session for half an hour immediately after the event. This was a very lively session which was attended by a significant number of the players and was enjoyed by all. It was both entertaining and educational and we would encourage county representatives to “spread the word” that both the event and the post-event Q&A session are excellent value and well worth participating in.

13. It was agreed that we would continue with next event on Saturday 25th March and we again expect an expert Q&A session after the game – please start publicising the event as soon as possible both on your website and by word-of-mouth. In the past a few Counties have been excellent at generating a turn-out for this event – others should take heart.
14. We noted that there was currently about a £500 surplus from this series of events, and we agreed that we would donate £350 of this to the funding of the junior squad/internationals. Action on **MW**.

ITEM 8: OTHER TOPICS

15. **PS** asked if we were making adequate use of county success in representative matches to promote the game within our county. Nobody could report any success in doing this. **SM** pointed out that regional press was often keen to get stories, and this was an opportunity we were not taking – and she offered to help liaise on their behalf for anyone wanting to follow this up.
16. **TR** asked for any thoughts as to topics for the next County Chairs meeting which is due in late May.
17. The question was raised – is there any standard available to measure one’s progression as a bridge player? There was a time when the concept of “O-level bridge” existed, but today all that can be found is the [Junior Award Scheme](#) developed by Alan Sillitoe and used by EBED with its junior squads.

ITEM 9: NEXT MEETING

18. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, on 2nd March 2023, again at 1030. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES