



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EBU TOURNAMENT COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE IMPERIAL HOTEL ON WEDNESDAY 13th SEPTEMBER 2006**

Present:	Alan Nelson	Chairman
	Heather Dhondy	Vice-Chairman
	Max Bavin	Chief Tournament Director
	Barry Capal	EBU General Manager
	Brian Crack	
	Margaret Curtis	
	Paul Hackett	
	Philip Mason	EBU Vice-Chairman
	John Neville	EBU Treasurer
	Addis Page	
	Paul Spencer	
	Ian Mitchell	Secretary

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** None

2. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (4th MAY 2006)**

2.1 **Accuracy**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

2.2 **Matters arising**

2.2.1 *Changes to the Calendar*

(see item 12.1)

2.2.2 *Tournament Directors' Announcements*

Mr Page apologised for not yet having prepared draft announcements for TDs to make at the start and conclusion of events, but said that he would do so in time for the next meeting.

It was discussed briefly whether or not the issue of mobile phones was a priority in TD announcements. Mr Hackett observed that, in his experience, such announcements were very effective in reminding players to switch off mobile phones.

2.2.3 Kent CBA Bracketed Teams

Mr Crack reported that good progress had been made in developing the details of this event. The format and Master Point scales had been agreed with Mr Bavin. Mr Crack agreed to write an article for English Bridge on the subject.

Mr Bavin reported that he had contacted the ACBL to compare notes on the subject, and found that the 'Bracketed Teams' that they ran were, in fact, all knockout events.

The question was raised about making available online a database of EBU members, including their ranks, to facilitate the bracketing of teams. The secretary reported that there is already such a file available, which is used by scoring programmes such as "Scorebridge".

3. TOURNAMENT ACCOUNTS

Mr Bavin tabled a paper with the financial reports from the first 12 events of the financial year. In general the figures were above budget.

In the case of the Garden Cities Trophy, the financial loss was greater because Kettering had been used as a venue for both regional and national finals.

For the Northern Seniors Congress, the surplus was well below budget, but this was because Mr Bavin, in the first year of the event, had overestimated the expected surplus at 75% of the surplus of the equivalent event at Eastbourne. The event, nevertheless, had been a financial success.

The Chairman congratulated Mr Bavin on the success of the tournaments in general.

4. TOURNAMENT REPORTS

Mr Bavin made a verbal report on the twenty events from March to August. In most cases there were no matters arising, except for events already singled out for discussion.

4.1 Ranked Masters Pairs

The committee noted that the format would be changed next year.

i) There will be a new category – the Premier Grand Masters, open not only to those who have achieved this rank, but also the top 20 players in the Gold Point ranking list.

ii) The cut-off date for qualification (in terms of MPs earned and Gold Point rankings) will be the 31st December.

4.1.1 *The Premier Grand Masters*

Mr Hackett expressed concern that there were not enough eligible players to make the new category viable. There are currently 52 PGMs, and some of these will obviously also appear at the top of the Gold Point list. Not many of these had actually participated in the Grand Masters in 2006, and those that did often were not playing with partners eligible for the new category. He asked what the minimum number of pairs should be to make the event viable.

Mr Bavin said that the length of the rounds was the key issue – a maximum of 8- or 9-board rounds would suggest that the minimum number of tables would be six or seven.

Mr Spencer suggested that PGMs should be allowed to compete with GMs in the top category. It was noted that although it was generally allowed in the lower categories for an eligible player to compete with a partner of the next lower rank, the GMs and PLMs had always been strictly closed to partnerships both members of which had reached the appropriate rank. The 'purity' of the top events was thus protected.

The alternative suggestion was made that, should there not be sufficient entries, then willing pairs could be promoted from the GM category, in order strictly according to their MP totals. Because the PGM category was based on Green Points alone, it was suggested that the combined total of the partnership's green points only should be taken into consideration. This proposal was accepted; Mr Bavin to decide on the actual minimum number of tables.

4.1.2 *The four lowest categories*

It had previously been suggested that Butler scoring should be adopted in all categories, and not just the top two. This was agreed, on the understanding that the EBU now had scoring software that could cope with this.

Mr Capal questioned whether the general membership, as opposed to the top players, understood what was meant by 'Butler scoring'. The committee believed that most did, but that even if this were not the case, this should not be a reason for not implementing the change.

4.2 National Newcomers Pairs

4.2.1 *Eligibility*

A letter from the Worcestershire CBA had been circulated, expressing concern about the eligibility regulation based on Master Points. In the WCBA heat some participants had been playing for 12 or more years, including two club secretaries, who both happened to be eligible according to the 'below-district-master' regulation. Mr Bavin said that although this was the only written 'complaint', the views expressed matched verbal reports from other counties.

The committee discussed other possible eligibility requirements, such as 'having played for less than five years', but concluded that there was no good solution, and that current regulations should stand for next year, with potential participants expected to 'enter into the spirit' of the event.

4.2.2 Format

Mr Bavin reported that the attempt to run the event with two distinct categories had failed owing to lack of numbers. No heat had been able to run two separate sections. The surcharge for non-members had also been left to the discretion of the counties. It was agreed that both should be dropped for next year's event.

Numbers had still been poor. Mr Hackett noted that the successful heats were where certain individual teachers had been actively encouraging students to participate. Mrs Dhondy wondered whether we could introduce an incentive for teachers.

Mr Bavin suggested that the event could be run in clubs, along the lines of standard Simultaneous Pairs events, with the same cap on Master Point ranking

Mr Capal suggested that further discussions be deferred until after the Board Meeting, when other related issues would be discussed.

4.3 The Hubert Phillips Bowl

The final of the 2005-2006 event had recently taken place, Frances Hinden's team defeating that of Paul Brereton by about 3000 aggregate points.

The participants had reported favourably on the venue, Peterborough B.C., but had suggested the presence of a TD.

Until a few years ago, it was normal to have a dedicated TD, but the committee had decided that this was a waste of resources. As this suggestion apparently arose only because players were slow to restart after breaks, it was not deemed necessary to review this policy.

The final had been played late, partly because one of the semi-finals had been late, but also because members of both teams were expecting babies.

A discussion arose about matches in general being allowed to be played late in KO events. The committee concluded that much less discretion should be allowed by the Aylesbury staff in such circumstances.

4.4 The Pachabo Cup

Mr Bavin reported that the event was a success, in no small part due to the scoring using software that Chris Dixon had developed to be used with "Bridgemates".

Mrs Curtis suggested that, since software was available, more events should now be run (e.g. ODJVs) using the same format, i.e. Hybrid Scoring.

Mr Bavin replied that although Chris Dixon had developed the software, it was not yet in a format which could be used by others without significant training.

The committee, however, agreed that a greater variety in types of events was a good thing, and suggested other alternatives to the specific Hybrid format that is used in the Pachabo.

4.5 The Northern Seniors Congress

This was described as a 'good first effort', and the chairman congratulated Mr Mason on pushing the idea through despite reluctance from the committee.

4.6 The Scarborough Summer Festival

This was reported as having been extremely unsatisfactory. The Spa being unavailable this year, the event was held mainly in the St Nicholas Hotel, with an overflow (on the Saturday only) into the nearby Royal Hotel. Neither hotel adequately coped with the hot weather. Mr Mason had, at the venue, dealt with many complaints from members, and the volume of complaints to Aylesbury afterwards was probably much smaller than it might have been as a consequence of this. Mr Mason thanked for his efforts in this regard.

The committee asked for it to be recorded that it regretted the unfortunate circumstances that led to the problems.

Despite some problems with the scoring, the event was otherwise successful.

4.7 The Torquay 'Riviera Congress'

Although numbers were similar to last year, Mr Bavin expressed disappointment that they had not increased, as the date of the event had moved to one which had been assumed to be more convenient.

In a letter circulated to the committee, Mrs Curtis expressed some concern about the move to the earlier starting time on the Saturday. She suggested that this might be more appropriate at 'Winter Events', but that players appreciated Saturday morning as free time available at a seaside resort.

The committee decided that a conclusion could not be reached until the new format had been tested, and that specific feedback from next year's event was essential.

4.8 The Brighton Congress

4.8.1 The Venue

Mr Capal reported that, whereas from the bridge point of view the congress had been successful in almost all aspects, the venue itself had been dire.

The air-conditioning is a perennial problem, but other issues, such as the cleanliness of the toilets and the "duplimating area", the lighting, and staffing of the bars, had been raised with the hotel, but they had done nothing to rectify the problems, despite constant requests by the Congress Manager.

The General Manager also had a meeting with the Hotel Manager on the Tuesday of the event, and was assured that the Hotel was grateful for the EBU's custom. Nevertheless, the service from the Hotel had not improved by the end of the tournament.

Possibilities of changing venues were raised, but there was only one alternative within Brighton – the 'Brighton Centre' – which, despite some beating down in price, would still

be significantly more expensive than the Hilton Metropole, and was therefore not a viable option.

All agreed that Brighton as a location was excellent, being very accessible for the bridge population concentrated in the South-East. Restaurants, accommodation and shops were available for all budgets. Torquay, for example, was not suitable as an alternative for anybody wishing to attend just for the two weekends, or indeed for individual midweek events.

The question was raised whether our management had been strong enough in dealing with the hotel, and also that the hotel had been in breach of their contract. Mr Capal assured the committee that both he and the Congress Manager had done all that they possibly could under the circumstances, but that this had had little effect. Although the EBU might have a case for 'breach of contract', pursuing this line would almost certainly mean the end of the relationship between the EBU and the Hotel, and would therefore be self-defeating in the absence of an alternative venue.

In summary, the committee concluded that they had no choice but to continue with the current arrangements, but that we could only lower our expectations to avoid disappointment.

4.8.2 Knockout Teams

Mr Hackett raised the point that he had asked two members of the Aylesbury staff to arrange to produce a leaflet publicising the new format of next year's midweek Knockout, but that they had failed to do so. Mr Bavin undertook to ensure that this would be done.

4.8.2 Starting Times

The Chairman suggested changing the starting times on the Saturdays to a morning start. Mrs Curtis claimed that the Saturday morning was, for most people, the best opportunity for enjoying the facilities that Brighton had to offer. It was agreed to make no changes until we had received further feedback.

4.8.4 Really Easy Congress

A letter from Richard Fleet was read out to the committee. Mr Fleet was concerned about the event being cancelled due to lack of numbers, and wondered whether we could improve the format.

Suggestions were made, although it was acknowledged that the 'No-Fear Pairs', as the event had previously been called, had been through different formats, without ever catching on. The event was, in any case, the remit of the Education Department, and not the Tournament Committee, and so it was agreed that the letter would be passed on to John Pain as Education Manager.

5. ENTRIES FOR KNOCKOUT EVENTS

The Secretary reported that whilst entries for the Hubert Phillips and Gerard Faulkner Salver had maintained their levels, Crockfords had had a slightly disappointing entry, about 8% down on last year.

6. CORRESPONDENCE FROM MEMBERS

6.1 Letter from David Stevenson regarding Bridgemates

Mr Stevenson wrote to the committee regarding the settings on “Bridgemates” when they are used at EBU events. When entering results, they can be set either to receive the total number of tricks made, or a result relative to the contract (e.g. ‘=’ or “+1”). Whereas the default setting is the latter, and is used in most clubs, the former setting has been used at EBU events.

The secretary reported that apart from Mr Stevenson, he had received no more than one or two similar verbal ‘complaints’ from players in six months of using “Bridgemates”.

Messrs Page and Crack felt that it would be preferable to use in EBU events the setting commonly in use in clubs, so as to eliminate yet another difficulty in making the transition to national competitions. Other members said that they were quite happy to use whatever setting was prescribed. The committee decided that there was no compelling reason to change the present arrangements.

6.2 Letter from David Stevenson regarding Crockfords seeding

In addition to the eight teams that contest the previous final, eight additional teams are normally seeded. Last year it was agreed that this seeding should be based on Gold Points. The unfortunate effect of this was that Mr Stevenson’s team had been seeded last year (and therefore not guaranteed a second match), despite not having won any matches over the last four years in either Crockfords or the Crockfords Plate events.

Mr Hackett also pointed out (although he was not personally complaining) that this year his team had not been seeded, despite including Tony Waterlow and Irish internationals Tommy Garvey & Hugh McGann, the latter two presumably having no EBU Gold Points.

The committee reminded itself that the purpose of seeding was as much for the benefit of the poorer teams being allowed at least one match before having to meet very strong teams, as it was for giving strong teams an advantage in the event. Strong teams should be seeded regardless of their form in the particular event.

It was agreed that there was no reason to review the basic method of determining the additional eight teams to be seeded. However, discretion should be allowed to be exercised by Aylesbury staff in the case of obvious anomalies, in particular in the case of members whose Master Point records are held by other NBOs.

6.3 e-mail correspondence regarding Garden Cities Trophy eligibility

Many counties use their principal inter-club league, or knockout, as their qualifying event, and players frequently take part in such events in more than one county, just for the sake of competing in that event, rather than with any intention of playing in the Garden Cities. The current eligibility regulations exist as they are to allow players to do so.

It was acknowledged that anomalous situations arise from this regulation. The correspondent, for example, had eliminated certain players in his own county knockout,

only to find himself playing against the same players in the regional final of the Garden Cities.

However, the committee felt that to change the regulations would be detrimental to participation in the county-level events. It noted, though, that counties were entitled, should they wish, to restrict their qualifying event to primary members only, although this might not resolve the problem described unless other counties were to do the same.

6.4 e-mail correspondence from Michael Bell on various subjects

The committee thanks Mr Bell for his observations and comments. There was no further action suggested.

7. STAFFS & SHROPS CBA 'SHREWSBURY CONGRESS'

The committee approved the application to incorporate a second green-pointed event into their county congress in April.

It also confirmed that the county was entitled to choose whether to allow 'level 3' or 'level 4' agreements.

8. MASTER POINTS FOR LICENSED SIMULTANEOUS PAIRS EVENTS

8.1 Local Point scales

David Stevenson and Anna Gudge had queried the scales to be used in licensed events, as they appeared large compared to those used for the EBU's own events.

The committee agreed that the discrepancy was undesirable, and that the scale for licensed events should be reduced to 'Club Level'. There was some concern as to whether this change would discourage players from competing in these events, but the committee felt that players would still be drawn by the fact that awards would be significantly larger than that for their ordinary club evening.

8.2 Green Points for selected events

Anna Gudge requested the right to award Green Points for some international simultaneous events in addition to the EBU & BGB events. The committee endorsed Mr Bavin's emphatic 'No' in reply.

9. MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ACTION GROUP

The committee considered a letter from this organisation, requesting suggestions as to what the committee could do to help in developing membership.

The committee recognised the need to give more consideration to those members that don't normally play in tournaments, as well as non-members. It was suggested that the biggest opportunity for development would be through the clubs, and that more tournaments should be run at club level (but not just simultaneous pairs).

It was also suggested that events for less experienced players should be run alongside principal events at all major tournaments, regardless of the size of entry. Mrs Curtis suggested that daytime events would be popular local club and county level.

It was decided that it was not appropriate for the committee to take any action at present.

10. PRIZE VOUCHERS

In an e-mail circulated to members, Mr Capal suggested that he would like to abolish the issue of prize vouchers, in favour of crediting members' accounts.

The Treasure reported that, although there were some modest overheads associated with the administration of scheme, these were more than compensated for by those vouchers that were never redeemed.

Mrs Curtis suggested that winners of small prizes often used their vouchers to enter local events – ODJVs or county events – but wouldn't be able to do so if their winnings were credited to their EBU account.

Mr Crack thought that a profit from the scheme was not a sufficient reason to decline to change procedures if it would otherwise be of benefit to our members. He suggested that if vouchers were not to be presented, then some other form of presentation should be made at venues. It was acknowledged that there could be new problems associated with such a scheme; for example, whether to credit the team captain or the individual team members.

The committee decided to defer further discussion.

11. NEW MASTER POINT RANKS

An article by Colin Porch, due to appear in English Bridge, was tabled. The issues arising had already been discussed as item 4.1.

12. CHANGES TO THE CALENDAR

12.1 National Women's Pairs, National Men's Pairs, and National Women's Teams

Mr Bavin reported that the above events would all be moved to the Paramount Hinckley Island Hotel, Hinckley.

He also reported that alternative venues were unavailable on the dates originally set for the Men's and Women's Pairs. It was therefore agreed that these events would move to the weekend originally scheduled for the Women's Teams (viz. 17th – 18th February 2007), but that the events would revert to their normal January weekend in subsequent years.

The Women's Teams was rescheduled for 7th – 9th September 2007 in accordance with the policy established at the previous meeting; the intention is that this now becomes a permanent fixture.

The committee approved these changes.

12.2 *Other changes*

Other changes were noted, involving county congresses, ODJVs and Trials dates.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13.1 *Overseas Congress*

The Chairman tabled a paper listing possible venues for the 2008 Overseas Congress. Many committee members spoke highly of the Mare Nostrum Hotel in Tenerife. Some concern had been raised about the non-carpeted (marble) floor, but The Chairman considered this not to be a problem.

13.2 *ACBL Master Points*

Mr Hackett raised the issue of reciprocity with other NBOs (in particular the ACBL). Although English Master Points can be registered on ACBL accounts, we do not accept ACBL Master Points. The EBU has reciprocal arrangements with the other Home Unions, Ireland, Australia and Malta. Other NBOs have Master Point schemes that are considered not compatible, although an 'exchange rate' has been devised for ACBL points, in order to determine appropriate ranks for 'stratified' events in North America. Mr Bavin was asked to write a report with a view to reconsidering our stance on ACBL points.

13.3 *'BridgeBaseOnline' coverage of English teams at International Events*

Mr Hackett suggested that when our teams were playing in events such as the European Championship at the same time as an EBU congress, coverage should be shown on screens at the EBU venue. All that would be required was a laptop, projector, screen, and a good internet connection. The secretary observed that the latter might be a problem at Brighton, but the committee approved of the suggestion in principle.

13.4 *Direct crediting of Master Points*

Mr Crack expressed concern about the 'four weeks' that might pass before the direct crediting of Master Points following EBU congresses. It was agreed to defer discussion until the following meeting.

13.5 *Overhearing conversations at adjacent tables*

This is not a new problem, although some members thought that the problem was nevertheless increasing. Mrs Dhondy wondered whether warnings and fines should be imposed; Mr Bavin confirmed that this was already the case.

13.6 *Clashes of Licensed county events*

Mr Crack pointed out that three counties (Kent, Middlesex and Worcestershire) had all arranged to hold their county congresses on the last weekend in October. In the case of Middlesex, this was a change of date. The committee noted that in the case of green-pointed county congresses, it was a requirement that the county should contact

neighbouring counties for approval, but that Kent and Middlesex were not, technically, neighbouring counties. The Chairman expressed his faith in Aylesbury staff exercising their discretion in such matters.

13.7 Deceased & lapsed members on Master Point lists.

Mrs Curtis reported that several members had been upset by the inclusion, in the annual Master Point reports, of deceased members and other players who had not been members for some time. Mr Capal reported that Aylesbury staff had already been subjected to an unnecessary level of abuse by some of our members over this matter.

It was agreed that it was appropriate that past members should appear in the list of 'all time earners', but not in the lists for each individual county.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date for the next meeting was provisionally set for Wednesday 13th December, at a London venue to be confirmed.