



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EBU TOURNAMENT COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE McALPINE OFFICES ON WEDNESDAY 13th JUNE 2007**

Present:	Alan Nelson	Chairman
	Heather Dhondy	Vice-Chairman
	Brian Crack	Vice-Chairman
	Max Bavin	Chief Tournament Director
	Sally Bugden	EBU Vice-Chairman
	Margaret Curtis	
	Paul Hackett	
	Mike Hill	
	Barry Capal	EBU General Manager
	Ian Mitchell	Secretary

- 1. Apologies for Absence** Peter Stocken EBU Chairman
John Neville
Addis Page
Paul Spencer

1.1

The Chairman reported with regret that Paul Spencer had offered his resignation from the Committee.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting (13th December 2006)

2.1 Accuracy

The secretary reported the following inaccuracies and omission that had been brought to his attention since circulation of draft minutes:

Item 3.1 should have referred to the Budget, not Accounts, for EBU Tournaments. The budget had been approved by the board.

Item 4, paragraph 3: Following the suggestion that questionnaires be put on tables at the start of tournaments, it was agreed that it would be more constructive to put them out at the start of the last day.

Item 8, paragraph 2: The current format of the Swiss Teams is 7-board, not 8-board, matches.

2.2. Matters arising

2.2.1 Mr Bavin (initially as a matter of accuracy) raised the issue of whether we had made a positive decision (as opposed to a suggestion, as the minutes imply) to change the format of the National Swiss Teams with immediate effect. The Committee confirmed that it was indeed decided that next year's event would be a Bracketed Teams.

There was concern about communication with the members about the change to this event and also to the Ranked Masters, since the diary had already gone to print assuming the old format. The committee agreed that the website and calendars should be immediately changed to reflect the new formats, and that brochures should be produced and circulated much earlier than is normally the case. Since players might enter without having seen the website or brochures, clarification of the changes should be included with all acknowledgements.

The name of the event needed to be changed, and it was agreed after a brief discussion that the 'National Bracketed Teams' would suffice.

With regard to the bracketing, The Committee acknowledged the need to allow discretion to be exercised by tournament staff in terms of the ranking of players from abroad, or other home unions, and any other anomalies that may arise. In the case of teams with a mixture of English and foreign players, it is likely to be fair to assume that the foreigners were of the same rank as the English.

2.2.2 Mr Bavin also questioned the wisdom of the changes to the Ranked Masters events;

Firstly, he observed that the committee appeared to have reversed their policy in terms of the size of sections; in the past they had felt it was desirable to avoid small sections and longer rounds, whereas now this is what they are specifically advocating.

Secondly, he felt that the event would lose much of its identity, as, other than in the top flights, the different categories would have no titles.

The committee felt that changes were necessary, and should go ahead as decided.

While on the subject of the Ranked Masters, Mr Nelson suggested the re-opening of 'The Prize Room' for the top three pairs in each category. Mr Hackett proposed that wine should be given as prizes, rather than vouchers, and that the wine should be of good quality. Even non-drinkers, he suggested, would not object to receiving wine as a prize. The budget for prizes would comfortably cover the cost of good quality wine, and leave a significant amount left over for hospitality.

3. Tournament Accounts

3.1 Mr Crack reported that the only accounts currently available to him from Aylesbury included 2007/2008 accruals, and hence there was nothing meaningful to report at this time.

3.2. He also expressed concern about the role of the Tournament Committee with respect to the budget – the Committee has an obligation to meet a budget into which it has no input.

Mr Hill observed that whilst it was ultimately a board decision to set an overall budget for tournaments, the Committee has the scope to decide which tournaments should be expected to make significant profits, and which would break even.

Mr Crack expressed his opinion, shared by the Committee in general, that there are currently too many tournaments on the calendar. If the number of tournaments were to be reduced, overall attendance, and therefore profits, would naturally drop in the short term, but it would be expected that in the long term greater attendance at fewer tournaments would result in a larger profit margin. Should the Committee wish to adopt this approach, it would be vital to be able to ask the board to lower the budget for a few years, with a view to gain in the long term.

Mr Hill & Mrs Bugden both suggested that it was in order for the Committee to present a strategy proposal to the Board.

4. Tournament Reports

Mr Bavin made a verbal report on events that had taken place since the previous meeting.

Attendance at most events had remained at similar levels to last year. The Portland Pairs and Simultaneous Pairs events had shown small increases, as had the Easter Festival in London, but attendances at both the Easter Festival in Blackpool and the Spring Bank Holiday Congress in Bournemouth had been worryingly low. The figures for the GolfPrint Trophy were also down a little. It was agreed that the GolfPrint should be the subject of discussion at a later date.

5. Tournament Analysis

5.1 With reference to the tournament reports, Mr Hackett cited the venue for the Bournemouth congress as a significant contributory factor to the decline in numbers there. He felt that the hotel is among the worst that we use, and the congress is towards the top of his list for recommended relocation.

5.2 As for the Blackpool Easter Congress, he felt that there was a general decline in tournament activity in the North West. Although originally attractive, prices at the Blackpool hotel have risen considerably since we started holding tournaments there. Many of the better players from the North were tending to prefer the London venue to Blackpool.

The committee recognised that there was a need to provide a service for Northern bridge players, but also to continue to make a meaningful contribution towards overheads. The question was raised as to whether it was still viable to run events concurrently in the North and the South. This question was also relevant to the Northern Seniors Congress, which, due to calendar congestion and venue availability, is scheduled for the same weekend as the Eastbourne Seniors in 2008. Some felt it was positively desirable to have two 'regional' events at the same time. However, there would undoubtedly be players that would have played in both events if on separate weekends. The secretary agreed to examine the figures with regard to numbers of players playing in both Seniors events.

5.3 Mr Hackett continued his report by turning to the Brighton Congress. He admitted that there was little that could be done about the principal problem – the venue. In addition to the hotel problems, it was also pointed out about the prohibitive costs of parking in Brighton, and the committee wondered whether we could approach the council to arrange for some sort of concessionary rate. Mr Capal agreed to look into this, but believed that there would be almost no chance of success.

Mr Hackett suggested that there should be a midweek reception to be hosted by the Chairman, either in between sessions (5:30) or at the end of the evening session (11:30). Opinion was divided as to which was the better time slot; the former potentially impinging on eating time, whereas the later time would not suit those that were commuting.

It was felt that it would be best to hold receptions on four separate days during the week, for selected players each day, to include those 'loyal' customers that were booked in for the whole 10 days, as well as first time attendees. It was calculated that the cost would run to about £2000, and it was discussed how this should be funded. Whereas the committee agreed in principle that the cost of hospitality should be taken out of the prize fund, the Chairman felt strongly that the prize fund could not be reduced with such short notice for this year's event, and so the committee agreed to defer the introduction of these receptions until 2008.

The Chairman recommended that, with effect from the 1st January 2008, the terms of reference for EBU Tournaments state that '20% of entry fees (after deduction of VAT) should go towards a combination of hospitality and prizes'.

5.4 Hosts. The introduction of hosts at the Easter festivals and the Spring Bank Holiday appeared to have been successful, though the choice of hosts had been questioned. Mr Hackett repeated that the host should not necessarily be a top player, but should be somebody that the players could easily approach.

Clarification was needed about the precise role of the host. The Chairman had prepared a draft paper, and asked the secretary to formalise it and circulate to the potential hosts.

Some discretion was required by the hosts as to the balance between their duties and their own personal social life. With regards to remuneration, Mr Hackett felt that free entry was the minimum requirement to compensate for the hours of duty required outside of normal playing time. The Chairman agreed, but suggested that there need not be a host at every tournament.

Mrs Bugden suggested that the long term aim should be to have 'trained' hosts. Mr Hackett stated that he wished to go one stage further still, and have a 'Congress Convener', as they do, for example, at Peebles.

6. Tournament Directors

A paper from Mrs Dhondy had been circulated, and a discussion ensued about how the performance of TDs could be improved, with a view to enhancing the experience of bridge players at EBU tournaments.

The general consensus was that English TDs, whilst being well trained in the understanding of laws and giving rulings, were sometimes found lacking in interpersonal skills and general appearance.

Mrs Dhondy cited the system in the U.S.A., where there are three categories of tournament personnel:

- 1) Caddies, whose sole purpose was the collection and distribution of boards & paperwork;
- 2) Floor-walkers, junior TDs that deal with routine rulings, and collect facts for more complex rulings;
- 3) Senior directors, who give advice on matters of judgement, but who do not normally approach the table.

The committee felt that although caddies were used at many tournaments, the training required meant that extensive use would be impractical at all but the Brighton Congress. By the nature of our training, most panel directors would fall into the third category.

The chairman endorsed Mrs Dhondy's recommendation that TDs should undergo courses in 'customer relations' as part of their regular training.

The committee was informed that the board has set up an Assessment Panel for TDs, with a view to improving their 'overall presentation'.

Further recommendations were made regarding tournament staff in general:

- that there should be a Tournament Director on 'front of house' duty from half an hour before the start of all sessions (Mr Bavin believed that this was already the case in general)
- that name badges should be provided for everybody in connection with bridge organisation: not only TDs and EBU staff, but also Hosts, Appeals Chairmen & Consultants, members of the standing committees and Vice-Presidents
- that floor-walkers should be dressed more informally, though uniformity was still recommended

As an aside to the second point, the Chairman reported that he had received a suggestion that 'L-plate'-style badges should be worn by relative newcomers to bridge tournaments. The committee felt that the effect of this was more likely to be detrimental than positive.

Mr Hill made another observation that there had been a lot of discussion about opening tournaments, either by TDs or other personnel, but that there had been little discussed about closure.

7. Overseas Congresses

Concern had been expressed at the previous meeting about the benefit of running Overseas Congresses. Statistics had been provided for this meeting, showing that there were about 80 players for whom the Overseas Congresses were the only EBU events that they attend. The committee felt, therefore, that we were providing a valuable service for these players. However, there was still concern about the resources that were being used not only in running the events themselves, but also in advance reconnoitring.

The Chairman put forward a recommendation that, after our current sponsorship commitments have concluded, we reduce to one overseas event per year, and that we use only two or three venues that we have previously used, on a strict rotational basis. We should also alternate our partner package operators.

Most of the committee felt that two or three venues would be far too few, but agreed to limit the choice of venues to those with which we are familiar.

9. Knockout Regulations

Correspondence had been circulated regarding an unplayed match in the National Inter-Club Knockout. Difficulties in arranging the match had arisen following an unfortunate misunderstanding over which date had been agreed.

The Chief Tournament Director, after consulting the Committee Chairman, had awarded the match to the home team, despite the fact that the away team appeared to have made much more effort in trying to re-arrange the match. The decision had been made in accordance with the regulations, on the grounds that the away team had failed to make an offer of four valid dates.

A member of the away team not only disputed some of the facts, but also questioned the Chief TD's interpretation of the regulations. He also put forward some suggested amendments/additions to the regulations.

One such suggestion was that captains should be required to confirm in writing the details of match arrangements. Mr Hackett considered this suggestion to be unnecessary, and would cause much more hassle than it would save.

The Committee endorsed Mr Bavin's decision, and his interpretation of the regulations. They agreed that the regulations did not need to be changed, but they acknowledged that the wording of the regulations could be amended to reduce the possibility that they could be misinterpreted.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The committee considered a letter from Bob Rowlands, addressed to various parties, including the Laws & Ethics Committee. The issue raised was the use of a system of transfer openings and responses by a pair competing in the National Pairs Final. The pair was also the subject of previous similar correspondence regarding the National Inter-Club Knockout.

Mr Rowlands felt it was totally inappropriate that such a system should be allowed in events involving short rounds, when opponents have little chance to prepare themselves, and also in events such as the NICKO, which should be used to encourage club players to participate in national tournaments. If the EBU should stand by its decision to run all events at level 4, then this system should not be allowed at that level.

The committee unanimously agreed with Mr Rowlands' sentiments, and wished to strongly recommend to the L&E that they reconsider their stance.

9.2 Mr Capal reported that he had recently received much correspondence about clashes of licensed events, and also about one incidence of a clash of One-Day Green-Pointed events.

The committee repeated their view that there were too many tournaments. Whilst acknowledging that the EBU has some responsibility to avoid clashes of licensed events, often such clashes were

out of the EBU's control, as they involved internal County events, of which the EBU frequently has no knowledge. The committee wished it recorded that:

'Counties and Clubs have their own responsibility to check that their events don't clash with other events in their own and neighbouring counties.'

10. Any Other Business

Mr Hackett suggested that all national finals of EBU Knockouts should be covered on the internet via BridgeBaseOnline. The Chairman questioned that we had the resources to do so; this would involve providing computers, appropriate access to the internet, and the staff to operate them. It was observed that frequently volunteers were available to perform this function, so the committee agreed to the suggestion subject to feasibility and availability of volunteers.