

COMBINING ONLINE AND FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

There are multiple interpretations of the word, but the most commonly used word in this context is HYBRID. This note intends to capture the primary options, so allow easy consideration of them all. It also defined some ambiguous terms.

Why Hybrid?

It is important before you start to understand why you are intent on running an event of which some parts are online and some parts are face-to-face. If you cannot find a reason, you need to ask whether it is worth the extra effort to do this; as well as the effort it takes from the organisers, in some contexts the players might find the mixed mode of operation is not to their liking. Here are some of the reasons you might want to combine online and face-to-face

1. It helps to build and/or maintain a sense of one community across the players in the two contexts if people can compare scores with each other on hands they have both played. The sense of community is important as it is from the sense of community that we get volunteers and we need volunteers to organise the games.
2. Running events for one group or the other will lack a critical mass to give people meaningful results. Here scoring across a larger field gives a more respected result.
3. It is important from a competitive perspective to have results across the field; this might be true if there is a single trophy to be assigned and we want to give both groups of players the chance to win.
4. For a competition spread over time, conditions might favour online during some months and face-to-face during others. The hybrid approach might give the flexibility needed to cope with that.

Hybrid Competitions

These are the cases where some rounds of a competition (eg early rounds of Crockfords) take place online, but the other rounds (eg the final of Crockfords) take place face-to-face. The various rounds are scored independently of each other. This is the use of the word "hybrid" in the context of Poker Tournaments.

Hybrid Sessions

This is where there are independent sections playing in the same session (usually simultaneously) with the same boards, and the event is scored across the field. There can be multiple face-to-face sections, and there can be multiple online sessions, even on different platforms. In this structure online players will play only against online players (ditto for face-to-face).

The issues which have to be addressed are

- (a) Ensuring that all sections play the same deals, which is done by generating them in advance, and uploading them (in the form of LIN or PBN file) to the online platform in advance, and using then generated hands as input to the dealing device where physical cards are in use.
- (b) Combining the results after the event, which can be done either in EBUScore software (load each as separate sections and use "combine sections") or by loading them into BBOtoXML (using the input/merge CSV option).

One variation on this (on offer from Oliver Cowan's Bridge Club) is for a number of clubs to combine for a larger hybrid session - multiple physical games at different clubs, plus a shared online game for members of any of those clubs not attending in person.

Another is the hybrid option from Pianola, which allows a session run under Pianola Play to be combined with a session scored (using Bridgemates) at a physical club.

Hybrid Games

This is where some players in the same section are online and some are physically present and using cards. Limited or no control over the way in which the movements work on current online systems makes this very tricky - one particular aspect of which being that online games have all tables playing the same board at the same time. Playing boards (from B1) in ascending order is a requirement of all tables involved at any time with an online section.

This type of hybrid might be an attractive option in two cases:

- Where there is a half-table in an online section and a face-to-face section (thus applies to a desire just to use robots to fill out an otherwise purely face-to-face game).
- Where there are insufficient numbers of pairs to play against sensibly in one or other of the sections.

One option is this

1. For every table needed online, create a Teaching Table on BBO and load the relevant boards. This table must have one stationary pair.
2. One pair at the Teaching Table are playing from home, the other pair will be the pair in the physical bridge club who reach the corresponding physical table. At that point they must use the club devices assigned to the seats in which they are sitting - and play electronically for this round.
3. The results from this table are captured in the bridge club (using Bridgemates perhaps) and the final outcome is a single bridge section.

There are complications in this approach that have still to be resolved, primarily because of the incompatibility between online movements (which have everyone playing the same boards at the same time) and movements used in bridge clubs.,

One variation not characterised above, is for all players to be present in the same room - enabling them to socialise as they would at a bridge club - but all playing on electronic devices. In terms of organising the game, this is just like any online session.