

# **The Nottingham Bridge Club**

## **Wednesday Gentle Acol Drive**

### **Helpers - Elizabeth**

It is a major strength for us that we have lots of members involved in running the Gentle Drive. We talk about Directors and Willing Helpers – although when off rota both will turn up to play. (You need a Minimum 4 Directors on the rota, and 4 helpers) We have 6 Directors on the rota, and 5 helpers.

That way no-one feels overwhelmed, and we have options for subs as people's diaries change.

We are especially lucky that all involved are enthusiastic, friendly and relaxed. All of us have been playing for around 5 or 6 years, long enough to know the basics, but still remembering how it feels to be starting off playing in drives.

Directors (4 qualified, 2 not) encourage Director calls – trying to make the Director the player's friend.

The “willing helper” assists with mundane jobs & runs the bar – letting the Director focus on the play.

Directors and Helpers frequently turn up willing to play with anyone, even when not on the rota.

Helpers will often partner new or less (shall we say) “easy” players (Free game for helper) – keeping a positive attitude no matter how frustrating the person they are playing with. (You have to remember you are there to help and encourage, not to win)

It's also important to rotate helpers supporting the more challenging players.

The drive runs as an EBU drive but does not award NGS or Master points.

We aim to always have at least 1 roving “helper” - even if it's only the Director. (who has a printout of the hands – and spare packs of cards for the quicker players)

“Helpers will also offer advice as they play, and explain the why when it comes to etiquette, not just the what. They will help with hand evaluation, bidding and playing as appropriate, but taking care that better players do not feel disadvantaged.

### **Role of the Director - Gerry**

As usual the Director runs the drive - plus – this is a multiple role – and requires some positive personal traits. The Director must be friendly, helpful and approachable. Many of your players will be nervous, so being seen as an authority figure doesn't help.

We do have some Directors who are not formally qualified - this is not a problem – for the trickier rulings there is usually at least one qualified Director present if needed. In many ways it is the personal attributes that are more important than being formally qualified. It is also a great training ground for people interested in becoming Directors, or who are newly qualified, and want some experience before taking on a full-blown club drive.

The director must:

- sort out appropriate partners when required Not everyone will have a partner but if they know one will be available, they won't be discouraged from coming.
  - and will occasionally consider splitting up partnerships as a one off and putting them with more experienced players to help them develop
  - and encourage partnerships to develop.
- Encourage players to call them for help on bidding and playing, not just sorting out infractions. even sorting out problems with the scoring tablets.
- Consider mobility when setting the seating/movements.
- Apply the Laws of the game - beginners have to learn - but do not be draconian about it.
- As with other aspects - Explain the why.... So they understand why a particular ruling is appropriate – and why NOT calling the Director goes against their best interests.
- Ensure that the rules on bidding systems (i.e., basic Acol) are adhered to – (We use the standard sheet from our beginners' classes.)- we don't want beginners being confused by more advanced bidding systems
- Recognise beginners' fears, relate to them – talk about your own fears as a beginner.
- When they ask for help, get them to propose a course of action before you advise, and then explain why it is correct, or could be done differently (sometimes code for “better” but language used is important)
- Avoid doing all the thinking for them, or they won't learn.
- Don't pretend to be better than you are - I have noticed when I have been asked for advice, and said there's not an easy solution, it actually makes them feel better.

Directors have to accept play will be slow – 12 to 16 boards only in 3 hours is common – might be even slower using travellers – (I dread to think!), and keep the balance between moving people on between rounds, and supporting the slower players. (I often start moving the boards while the final tables are still playing to keep things moving)

Directors also need to understand that the conversation levels will often be higher than they would tolerate in a standard club drive. So they need to exercise tolerance – but still keep control.

Anyone complaining about slow play should be diplomatically and subtly encouraged to consider moving on to the other club drives. Offering to introduce them, or even play with them.

Recognise that sit outs are not helpful, and if they cannot be avoided, Director/Helper should look in on the sit out pair, ask if they have anything they need help on. With such slow play anything more than a 2 board sit-out is a disaster.

... and...I should add that watching people you have helped grow in confidence and ability, is personally very rewarding. So it's not all one way traffic.

## **Other Initiatives – Elizabeth**

There are a few “non-standard” things which we have introduced and seem to work well.

- An occasional 15 minute presentation at the start of the drive – maybe on a quick topic (eg what is the barrier?), some table etiquette or a review of an interesting hand from the previous week
- Table etiquette reminders on the table – theme of the week! Eg always count your cards face down before looking at them. We encourage players to police each other on that one.
- Encourage players to take responsibilities in the club – several have become committee members, deal boards, help with catering. This helps integration with the established club members.

*Happy to answer questions.*

*Invite you to visit us in Nottingham on a Wednesday evening*