



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 9th April 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Nottinghamshire	Toni Smith (TS)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

in addition, we had attempts to connect which didn't succeed from a few, and apologies from some others

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Plans

1. We had a false start but succeeded on the second try, and the conference call was limited to 40 minutes. We agreed to work just the one issue – sharing ideas and experiences of bridge activities on-line during the crisis.

ITEM 2: Online Bridge Activities

2. PS gave some background on the running of Pairs Tournaments on BBO.
 - The privilege to run tournaments has existed for most of 20 years, and has been given to applicants whom the BBO authorities were willing to trust. There was a run of new applicants at the start of the crisis and BBO stopped giving out the privilege.
 - If you have the privilege you can create a pairs tournament of various types and you can restrict entry to these by various means, of which the most common is an “include list” which contains all the acceptable BBO names.
 - When a tournament has been created it is advertised through “Competitive” and then “Free Tournaments” for two hours before it starts. Players who register are asked to name their partner, and if accepted then when the game starts the two are whisked into the game.
 - The EBU has a number of accounts with the TD privilege (5 plus the main account which runs the advertised games, were in use the past week) and these are used by (EBU-) approved people to run games either for the EBU or on behalf of others. The game organiser must collect and manage the Include List.

- BBO has arrangements with long term organisers (including the EBU) on charging for games, but it negotiates each of these on a case by case basis and there is a long queue.
3. **TR** reported from **Somerset** that they (or rather Richard Banbury - a TD with an EBU account privilege) had been running a county-wide pairs event on BBO for two weeks with most of 20 tables at each session. The sessions had been free so far but Somerset CBA were intending to collect (offline) £1 per player per session from now on. Currently BBO (due to loading as America wakes up) are insisting that the games finish by 1500 hrs and so Somerset run one (UK) morning game and three afternoon games weekly.
 4. **KT** reported from **Oxfordshire** that the county had not taken action but that some bridge club had. Some bridge clubs do not even acknowledge Covid-19 on their websites, while others do point their members to the EBU website for online guidance and Wallingford has masses of information. A number of teachers are delivering online. Oxford Bridge Club is organising an online league, with two/three 8-board matches a week (defaulting to start at 1100 hrs), and they are encouraging the social aspects and suggest running a video conference call alongside the match. They have an entry of 19 teams. **RP** reported that he had produced a tutorial video and uploaded it to Facebook successfully, and that OBA were investigating use of Facebook as a better means of communication during this period.
 5. **FD** reported from **Northamptonshire** that the initial interest in online bridge had been slow but it was now rushing forward. He told us that all teaching was on hold. He pointed out that we need to think of the formation of an online community as a Good Thing.
 6. **TS** reported that some **Nottinghamshire** clubs had got in early with BBO, but that the focus was on the social element, allowing 12 minutes / board to give lots of chat time. County level players had shown little interest so far.
 7. **MW** reported from **Worcestershire** that Mike Vetch had got in early with Bridge Club Live, and now has a (12-table or so) Swiss Pairs game organised where players can organise their own timetable during the week and the matchpoint scores on the Drop-In-Drop-Out boards that they play get VP-ed offline to give a match score (Leeds BC is doing much the same but on BBO). **MW** is doing his teaching online using Zoom, BBO, Handplay and videos on Youtube.
 8. **KH** reported that in **Lincolnshire** many things had shut down, but that the key is communications and he had set up a Lincolnshire Facebook presence (independently of LCBA) and it was proving popular. A major challenge he suggested is catching those who have never been online before, and we need to help club secretaries etc to help their club members to get online. He was also looking at a North Lincolnshire vs South Lincolnshire match, and made the point that county boundaries mean (little anyway but) nothing in the current situation. He also remarked on the expected overlap between players in the online EBU games and players who travel to congresses.
 9. [Added later] **PS** ran out of time to report that in **Gloucestershire** he has been able to run a couple of BBO games for Cheltenham Bridge Club (from permissions given him along ago) and was setting up an on-line Swiss Teams game (one 16-board match per week, to be arranged at the players' convenience). The creation of the CBC games had brought a lot of players to online play for the first time, but hadn't yet hit the limit on 40 pairs per tournament.

10. The main point to think about – which emerged a number of times during these reports – was that a community of online players is developing, and some will want to play online after the crisis is over (convenience, short sessions, etc). We as CBAs (and the EBU as a whole) needs to recognise that this is a community which deserves our support and we need to uncover a way of doing that, while avoiding the creation of two disjoint bridge communities.

ITEM 3 : LATE NEWS

These items arose after the meeting but this seems the best chance to disseminate them ...

11. **First for Bridge** has just announced regular BBO “club” sessions three times a week, using a BBO supplied director and issuing Master Points. They warn that they need 150+ to sign up to make this viable, and will charge £25 for entitlement to play until the end of May.
12. There are reports that BBO is developing a capability for “Virtual Bridge Clubs” within BBO, and that an announcement is expected imminently. Gordon Rainsford is expecting to pilot this with a few willing clubs before embarking on a wider rollout.
13. EBU-central has a group (of which **PS** is a member) looking at what happens to bridge during and after the crisis; they are very in tune with the concerns expressed in paragraph 10 above, and are supporting Gordon Rainsford’s initiatives for EBU online bridge. An awareness raising and fund raising (possibly for NHS) special event (possible a Sims Pairs) for the timetable when bridge clubs re-open is being considered.

ITEM 4 : FUTURE PLANS

14. We agreed that we would meet again in one weeks’ time, and continue with 1030 on Thursdays for the near future. All are welcome to participate and if we can get organised we will record the session, so that those who miss the session can “read between the lines” of these notes more confidently. The invite will be issues the day before.

END OF MINUTES