

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Minutes for the GCBA committee meeting held at Cheltenham Bridge Club on Thursday 21st June 2018.

In attendance were Patrick Shields (President), Andrew Bull (Secretary), Paul Denning, Richard Harris, Richard Butland (Observer).

Before the meeting, Paul reported that some of the trophies would need to be expanded if the new winners were to be engraved on them, and there was discussion as to whether this was a worthwhile expenditure. It was agreed that Paul and Andrew should devise a strategy for dealing with this issue from now on.

GCBA Strategy

1. The discussion was based around version 5 of the Strategy, which is currently available via the GCBA website.
2. Patrick noted that the Strategy (which has now existed for just over a year) should be considered in the context of the EBU's new strategic aims, and the strategy of the Midlands region. He observed that the EBU's aims overlap with our Strategy principally in three of their strategic strands:
 - *Sustaining and increasing Membership levels*, which is the first of their strategic strands, and on which we (via the Midlands region) had an impact
 - *Tournaments and Regulations*
 - *Volunteers*
3. Some (though not all) of the counties in the region foresee a crisis due to the age demographic of bridge players, and so need to encourage new and younger members.
4. Other problems across the region include getting people to progress from learning to play the game to being regular Duplicate players; and then from being regular club players to playing more widely.
5. There is also the issue of clubs which are not affiliated to the EBU. Since our Constitution states that the GCBA is here to "promote Duplicate Contract Bridge", not to "promote EBU Bridge", we should be concerned with players at these clubs as well. Also, we should presumably be encouraging those who play other forms of the game to continue, as they are the most likely people to take up Duplicate Bridge.
6. Richard H noted that he had spoken to the organisers of the bridge club at Minchinhampton Golf Club, but they had shown no interest in playing beyond their club. There was discussion about how hard we should push people to move out of their comfort zone. It was felt that it would be easier to encourage them to take part in the Cleverly League, and noted that it only takes one bad experience at a club to put people off.
7. It was agreed that the five points of the GCBA's enduring mission were appropriate. We discussed the goals for 2017-18:
 - O1.1 (improve the accessibility of the Cleverly Teams League): this was agreed to have been successfully achieved. It was agreed that, with the Ace of Clubs, Rank Xerox and Bredon Vale there are enough GCBA events aimed at the "average club" level.
 - O1.2 (making weekend events more accessible) has had some progress, thanks to a lot of work put in by Alan Sanis (see also later discussion under "Programme for next year")
 - O1.4 (more general material in the newsletter) has been achieved.
8. It was noted that Cheltenham Bridge Club had run successful "cafe bridge" events, with about 20 tables taking part, and that other clubs should be encouraged to try running such an event -

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maybe jointly. It was suggested that we encourage the committee members of other clubs to try playing at a CBC cafe bridge event (after consulting with the CBC organisers).

9. Monday night will continue to be aimed at the strongest teams. The evidence suggests that average club players don't enjoy competing against strong teams and losing repeatedly, so handicapped events have been suggested.
 - 02.1 (continuing the County Team training programme): achieved
 - 02.2 (arranging friendly matches with other counties): achieved
 - 02.3 (offer to give seminars to clubs): no response from the clubs - this may require people to play at the club a few times first., which means extra effort on our part.
 - 03.2 (financial support for struggling clubs): No clubs have actually asked for help, but this doesn't necessarily mean that none are in need of help. Patrick noted that Yorkshire (via Ron Millett) have been very active in helping clubs which were struggling - could we do the same in Gloucestershire?
 - 04.1 (online advertising): It was noted that Yorkshire and Northamptonshire had had success via advertising on Facebook - at £20 per month, Northamptonshire reported one new member per month. It was agreed that this was worth trying.
 - 04.2 (promoting the game via Radio Gloucestershire): Little progress has been made with promoting the game to non-players, and it is not clear how best to do so. It was felt that continuing visibility, not just an isolated mention, is important to encourage people to take up the game. We have a contact with BBC Gloucestershire, but need to work out how to spark interest. Could we push for a bridge column in the Echo (as there had been a few decades ago) or other local papers?
 - 05.1: Patrick and Mark Rogers have been trying to find all the local bridge teachers, but this is difficult. Teaching of bridge is taking place successfully at CBC, advertising by word-of-mouth, and to some extent at Gloucester, Wootton, Newent and Bourton, but there is (as far as we know) very little in the rest of the county. Our website lists the teachers we know of; it was agreed that their accreditation (if any) should also be given.
 - 05.3: Youth bridge is continuing at CBC, with a dozen or so volunteers visiting two schools weekly, with two more in the pipeline. The aim was to get the children playing at CBC at the weekend, as this is much easier to run; Patrick noted that Nigel Pitel will be bringing a group along from Gloucester. The aim is to establish a County Youth bridge team.
10. In summary, we felt that we should continue to pursue the strategy as it stands.

Representation of bridge players' interests to the EBU

11. Patrick noted that for all Gloucestershire players, we are their representative at the EBU and so should reflect their interests, and that it could help to persuade non-affiliated clubs to affiliate if they felt we were making a difference. No-one had heard any suggestion that we should be doing more, and it was felt that local players were probably satisfied that we provided financial backing to the clubs, and provided less expensive events (than the EBU) for them to compete in.

GCBA Programme for next year, including the Stanley Shield

12. We aim to provide more options for the non-Monday night players, and Patrick noted that he is intending to get such players onto the tournament sub-committee. He suggested that we could try having some weekend events on Saturdays instead of Sundays - this idea had had some support in our recent survey - although it was felt that this would also put some people off. There was also some support for the idea of holding a "weekend" event on a Wednesday daytime, though it was acknowledged that this would basically be for retired people only. It was agreed that we should try each of these ideas as a one-off to see how popular they proved to be.

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13. The format of the current weekend events is generally popular. Patrick reported that Alan Sanis has volunteered to do the work for a second such event.
14. The Monday night calendar was agreed (4 sessions for the Winter Swiss Teams, 5 for the Winter Pairs, 6 for the Summer Pairs, 7 for the Summer Teams), except we need to arrange a date for the Individual.
15. Some Monday night players would prefer that the game finished earlier. It was agreed that, rather than reduce the number of boards, Directors should encourage people to play faster, and that possibly the mid-session break should be shortened.
16. It was noted that the overall entry in the Open Teams and Swiss Pairs has reduced. Patrick reported that Nottinghamshire had reported similar issues, with teams trying the competition once, feeling out of their depth and not coming back. The idea of handicapping was discussed. Patrick felt that the handicapping should only reduce the chance of the stronger team winning - it was agreed that reducing their advantage by about 50% was reasonable.
17. Patrick noted that the 8/6/4/2 scoring system for the Open Teams had resulted in an exciting finish, though Paul and Richard B felt it had been confusing for some people. Patrick said that the scoring would be made clearer in the future. It was also suggested that the event should be called the "Spring Teams" so it was clearer when it was taking place.
18. Patrick suggested that the League season (10 sessions) could be split into 2 halves, with promotion/relegation after 5 sessions, since the previous run had been won with a session to spare, but this idea met with little enthusiasm.
19. A "pro-am" style Pairs event had been suggested, but the "pros" had shown no enthusiasm for the idea.
20. The Rank Xerox consists of 2 sessions for teams of 4, with one session restricted to "below National Master". It was uncertain whether such restrictions encouraged people to take part, though there have been complaints recently about too many strong Cheltenham teams being involved in events.
21. Keith Stanley has offered to sponsor the Stanley Shield, and we want this to reflect the interests of non-Monday players. Patrick will be meeting with John Fairclough of CBC and Mark Browne of Newent to discuss the best way to do this, and intends to get input from Stroud as well. The current thought is that it will be along the lines of cafe bridge.

New Treasurer

22. James Hastie has had to step down from being Treasurer due to health reasons. Jim Simons has agreed to stand in as Treasurer for the rest of the year, with the proviso that we have a shadow in place fairly soon, ready to take over next year.