

GCBA Committee Meeting 28 September 2017

1. Apologies had been received from David Simons, James Hastie, Peter Waggett and Ashok Kwatra. Jim Simons, Patrek Shields, Anne Swannell, Richard Harris, Tony Hill, Paul Denning and Peter Swales were in attendance.
2. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.
3. President's report. Jim presented his reports on the recent meeting of the Midlands Counties Working Group and the County Chairmen's meeting (both attached). Jim's bottom line was that Graham Smith's proposals for reforming the county working groups looked likely to get the show back on the road after a long period of very serious dissatisfaction with the way the EBU was handling them.
4. Treasurer's report. In James's absence, Jim reported that the finances of the Association were healthy, and that after a long period of struggling to get his bank access working, James was now up and running.
5. CTD's report. Paul reported verbally that the winter season had got under way satisfactorily. He also reported that the participants in the women's pairs, of which there had been only 3 tables, had agreed to each try to find someone new to partner next year. There was a discussion about the Everett Cup. It was agreed that it should be a teams event, entered by pairs who would be teamed up by lot. It was also decided that free entry should be offered to pairs who were nominated as part of a regional Cleverly League team. (However, subsequent discussion about how the publicity would look led to a change of heart – ditching the free entry but having special prizes for the best and second best performance by a pair from the regional divisions of the CTL.)
6. CBC representative's report. Ashok had submitted no report.
7. Recorder process. There were some helpful suggestions. Key points were that the process could be used for bad behaviour as well as suspicions of rule-breaking, that alternatives are available, of which the first would be reporting to the TD, and that information held by the recorder is not evidence in any legal sense, but intelligence that might lead to evidence collection. Advertising should be low-key, emphasising that the process is a last resort. Patrick undertook to redraft one last time.
8. Strategy - Vice President's report. Patrick presented his latest version (attached). He distributed a flier for the youth taster sessions, asking us all to distribute them wherever we could. Engaging with teachers across the county would be a problem, and it was suggested that a teacher be found who might lead on that. NOTE: I intend that at the next meeting we should discuss the strategy as a whole, leading to adopting an agreed version.

Patrick mentioned the trial of the Bridge+More machines that had taken place at Cheltenham Bridge Club recently and described their functionality. Some notes by him are attached. There are many attractive features, but there is a sticking

point for English Clubs that they do not integrate with Bridgewebs. Jim undertook to enquire of Ro what the club's thinking on them was.

9. AOB Nothing was raised.
10. Dates of next meetings. 6pm at the club on 30 November and 1 Feb. However, Patrick suggested a different approach based on experience from visiting one of our clubs. We could meet at 6pm on a Monday before bridge, and then if we run out of time, simply reconvene the next Monday. How do other committee members feel about this idea?

President's Report

County Chairmens Meeting 5 July 2017

Jeremy Dhondy opened the meeting by announcing that Darren Evetts had just resigned from his position as board lead for the county working groups, but that no replacement had yet been appointed.

The object of the meeting was to prioritise the issues raised by the survey that had been sent out, in order to inform Gordon Smith's work on the future of the county working groups.

It became clear that counties have very different ideas about what they were for. At one extreme, the Middlesex chairman declared that their only purpose is to organise tournaments and representative teams. Most though felt that they had at least some role in the development of bridge, but this varied quite widely. The lack of agreement about purpose was exemplified in discussion about unaffiliated clubs. For some they were irrelevant; for some, the fact that they were not affiliated was regarded as part of the problem; for others, at least some of them were part of the solution as a place where bridge is flourishing. Given all this, there is very little chance of getting any agreement what success would look like.

Most of the time was spent chewing over the obvious issues that we all, to a greater or lesser extent, face – the aging demographic of bridge players, finding volunteers to run things, teaching and youth bridge, encouraging players to move through the stages from pupil to master.

Towards the end there was a discussion about the county working groups, though not their governance. People from the Northern and Midlands groups talked about how they had found the meetings useful. I made two suggestions, both of which seemed to resonate. One was to encourage the regions that had not got going to have another go, because we know that success is possible. The other was that the big issues we all share might not be the ones to concentrate on, because there is a danger that we all just end up crying on one another's others' shoulders. Better, I suggested, to start with sharing success. Take some issues that only some of the counties regard as important, because there is probably some success to share from those that do not. Getting a few wins under the belt is the best way to strengthen people's resolve to tackle the harder issues.

Along the way I did pick up some useful ideas mainly from Yorkshire. Yorkshire has evidently made quite a success of several aspects of development, and we should examine their website to learn more. The Yorkshire Improvers' Pairs, for example, gets 24 tables and has to turn people away. They also have something I didn't really catch about linking up teachers and clubs, which we should look into. They have done surveys amongst unaffiliated clubs, and know quite a lot about them.

Some beginners care quite a lot about master points. How about offering a free entry to county event on promotion to county master?

Midland Counties Working Group

Meetings on 27 July and 22 September 2017-09-27

You will be aware that this group has been running for some years. The counties involved are those that play in the Midland Counties League. There has been some modest success from sharing ideas and best practice, but there has been discontent from some participants at what they perceive as the EBU's high handed approach to them. The Northern Counties WG has also been successful, but the others have folded.

Much of the time and energy at the last two meetings, and at the EBU County Chairmen's meeting (see separate report) has been devoted to try to reformulate the governance of these meetings and resurrecting the ones that failed. At the last meeting Graham Smith, the EBU Board member recently appointed to lead this work nationally, presented his ideas and they were discussed. He intimated that there is a change of approach on the EBU board, and certainly his proposals seem to address everyone's complaints, by, for example, making the county WGs autonomous, with non-voting ex officio members from the EBU and EBED. Personally I think this is promising, and will allow us to get back to doing useful work.

The EBU has a 5-year strategy that will run out next year, so presumably there will be a new one. Patrick and I had proposed as part of the process of deciding what county WG's should be working on, that we should engage in the development of this strategy. I took the opportunity to mention this to Gordon, who appeared initially surprised, but quickly agreed that this would be good.

GCBA STRATEGY (v5)

The GCBA bases its strategy around the declaration in the Constitution that it is here “to promote Duplicate Contract Bridge in the County of GLOUCESTERSHIRE”.

Those who do play bridge fall into a long continuum from at one end those who are vastly experienced players with a strong competitive instinct and a desire to play bridge in new places, to those who are newcomers to the game and play it socially and locally, with little interest in expanding their skill base or the variety of bridge which they experience. Each individuals will have a different combination of the attributes mentioned, and for any one person these can change over time. It is the GCBA's remit to support all of these bridge players.

The words of the Constitution also give the GCBA a responsibility to those who do not play bridge – to ensure that they are aware of the game and its attributes, and that they have the opportunity to learn. This responsibility is shared with the national organisations (the EBU and EBED), and as clubs seek new members the clubs too share an interest in this aspect.

In support of those who do play bridge, the GCBA's enduring mission is

- To ensure that the all bridge players in the County have easy access to a variety of bridge games which they enjoy.
- To maintain and develop the quality of competitive bridge in the County and to support those representing Gloucestershire in national events.
- To ensure that the bridge clubs of the County are able to provide playing facilities and services which match the demand for playing bridge in the County.

In support of non bridge players, the GCBA's enduring mission is

- To ensure that the population of the County is suitable aware of the game and its attributes, and of the benefits which playing bridge can bring.
- To ensure that all parts of the County have adequate access to good bridge teaching for newcomers, including the establishment of bridge as a game which is learned and played at schools across the County.

Within each planning year, we need to identify a set of bounded and achievable objectives which support these long term goals. Looking at each goal in turn

- To ensure that the all bridge players in the County have easy access to a variety of bridge games which they enjoy, the GCBA will in 2017-18
 - O1.1 : improve the accessibility of the Cleverly Teams League to those in the county not familiar with teams bridge. [done]
 - O1.2 : make weekend County bridge events (an exception being the County Pairs final) more accessible to less experienced

players - by appropriate selection of the structure of the events, by building up the non-competitive elements, and by marketing the events appropriately.

- O1.3 : embark on a programme of reminders about Best Behaviour at Bridge, emphasising the need to tailor the formality of Duplicate Bridge to the audience involved.
- O1.4 : include a greater proportion of general (ie not Monday night focussed) bridge material in the monthly County newsletter.
- To maintain and develop the quality of competitive bridge in the County and to support those representing Gloucestershire in national events, the GCBA will in 2017-18
 - O2.1 : continue with the County Team training programme, and the use of Hand-of-the-Day as a mechanism to improve standards amongst the more experienced players.
 - O2.2 : embark on a programme of friendly matches (probably one per year) with the neighbouring counties we do not meet in Midlands County League matches, to help build experience.
 - O2.3 : offer to clubs the services of members of the County team to provide seminars or Q&A sessions, at a place and time convenient to the club members.
- To ensure that the bridge clubs of the County are able to provide playing facilities and services which match the demand for playing bridge in the County, the GCBA will in 2017-18
 - O3.1 : introduce a series of short seminars for Tournament Directors across the county, to ensure that they are fully aware of best practice and are up to date with new developments.
 - O3.2 : to continue to financially support clubs who could not otherwise afford the preferred facilities for their members.
- To ensure that the population of the County is suitable aware of the game and its attributes, and of the benefits which playing bridge can bring, the GCBA will in 2017-18
 - O4.1 : investigate the potential for on-line advertising of bridge events in the County.
 - O4.2 : establish a relationship with Radio Gloucestershire, as a means of raising awareness of the benefits of playing bridge.
- To ensure that all parts of the County have adequate access to good bridge teaching for newcomers, including the establishment of bridge as a game which is learned and played at schools across the County, the GCBA will in 2017-18
 - O5.1 : build a register of the bridge teaching available within the

County, and from that identify where the weak spots are.

- O5.2 : organize a session where bridge teachers from across the County can get together to share experiences and contribute to the planning of teaching bridge in the County in the future.
- O5.3 : establish a Youth Bridge section within Cheltenham Bridge Club, and start to grow a County Youth bridge team.

BRIDGE + MORE

Summary :

- table top unit which deals hands
- controlled by a tablet on the table, over Bluetooth
- tablets coordinated by the B+M server in Amsterdam
 - internet connection vital
- B+M server takes instructions from the TD/Admin browser interface
- when new pack inserted, and round declared, new hands appear
- records the order of play if cards put back without shuffling
- has some flexibility on importing movements
- units need recharging every so often (after say 7 sessions) and this can take some hours – but battery status monitored and warnings given
- can provide Barometer scoring and real-time results
- has its own results management service (but no Deep Finesse yet)
- used by a number in Denmark, Norway, Iceland, US, Australia, Sweden
- can support teaching by delivering specified hands
- can support drop-in bridge by using hands from past tournaments

Assessment

- a bit bulky but acceptable on the table
- need care/practice at inserting cards but otherwise robust
- fairly expensive to buy (800 euros per unit is base) but there are discounts for bulk and for being the first in the UK
- interface to P2P not clear
- interface to Pianola/Bridgewebs for any transition not clear
- likely to be a learning curve to start with but support structure sounds good

Odd points raised

- BBS files used for specifying movements?
- Wifi Mesh technology recommended to ensure Wifi reliability
- Discussion on Bridgewinners about real time scoring – to check
- Deep Finesse – do it really go wrong on 13-13-13-13 hands?
- BWS file import?