

Hand Records for ABU Clubs

There are two reasons for using computer generated hands.....

- 1) They give truly random hands, allowing the game to be played as it was meant to be played.
- 2) Hand Records become available, allowing meaningful analysis of the few difficult hands that present themselves during a session.

Here are some comments from Ian Dalziel

The game of bridge requires random hands which are achieved by shuffling the cards - the trouble is, bridge players are not very good at shuffling and consequently the deals are not truly random. Thus each deal is still related to the previous deal in a complex but ordered fashion. The result is - more flat hands and suits which break more evenly than the statistics predict; there are fewer really long suits, freakish hands and slams than true randomness would provide.

There have been many studies which prove that computer dealt hands are truly random and anyone sufficiently interested could find this information on the internet. Any reputable dealing software needs to go through extensive testing to prove that it is 100% random otherwise it would never sell - or some anorak would find, and expose, the fault! Computer deal generators have been used by thousands of bridge clubs all over the world for many years and no-one has proved non-randomness yet.

When you play computer dealt, truly random, hands, it's like a different game. Bridge with randomly dealt hands is as the game was meant to be and it is more exciting. All district and national competitions now use computer dealt hands so, if your club shuffles manually, your members will be ill prepared for playing at a higher level.

The solution of course is computer generation - that way you get truly random hands and a printout to go with it which is a great aid to learning. If your club does not make use of computer generated hands, be aware that you will be playing two, different, games – truly random hands in tournaments and the big clubs and unrealistic, frequently flat, hands at the club.

And comment from Horst Kopleck a Senior Director for the SBU

I think much of the antipathy of some players towards computer-dealt hands stems from a fear of introducing too much technology into a game which, to many, is primarily a social pastime. This is understandable, but for me just the fact that hand records are readily available is the deciding factor. For directors, this makes it so much easier to sort out problems to do with misboardings or misplaced cards, as well as in many other situations. **And most players will also appreciate the opportunity to look at one or more of the hands after the end of play, even after social sessions.**

Many innovations in bridge have been controversial at first; just think of bidding boxes or, more recently, Bridgemates. I do not know whether the computer programs used to generate hands are 100% reliable at producing random deals, or maybe just 99%. What is certain is that they are a lot better than players shuffling cards at the table. We don't have to love computers, but we all should welcome progress.

See over

And here are some observations from David Stevenson, the EBU's Senior Director and most respected authority on The Laws of Contract Bridge

To shuffle adequately requires seven riffle shuffles. Not one pack in twenty is adequately shuffled when playing duplicate or rubber bridge in clubs or elsewhere.

Law 6A requires "thorough" shuffling. **Minimal shuffling is illegal.** Thorough shuffling means seven riffle shuffles [which happens one time in thirty or so], about twenty minutes or so of overhand shuffling [which happens once every five years or so] or computer deals.

In practice, computer-generated hands have been proved again and again and again to be fair. Hand dealt ones tend to be flatter because of insufficient shuffling.

There have been many major championships with quite boring and flat hands. However, when there is one that is freakish, people suggest the organisers have picked the hands - they do not!

It must be remembered that organisers must not reject computer-generated deals which they do not like for some reason, or the deals will then cease to be random. The only events where hands are ever picked in any way are Novice Events, and Simultaneous Pairs, where sometimes the commentators are given some choice.

Overall, you can trust computer hands to be fair: manually dealt hands are less fair, though consistently so, thus you come to know what to expect.

I am totally convinced that modern software has passed the tests set for it. That does not mean that it did so when introduced, but computer dealing has been around for many years now.

Why the ABU encourages clubs to use the Dealer 4

Combined with the benefits pointed out above – the use of hand records, for anyone trying to improve their bridge, is invaluable. With every 24+ boards played there are, almost invariably, a few hands which warrant scrutiny and analysis –

“Could we have reached a better contract?”

“How did others, playing our way, get a top there?”

For learning, improving, or just out of personal interest, it is possible, by using hand records, to revisit all boards played. These records also have the additional analysis of contracts, listing what contracts can be made on each board. The analysis can be further enhanced if the travellers, uploaded with the results, include the contract and opening lead. Both can easily be added through Scorebridge or automatically when using Bridgemates.

The arguments for computer generated hands, outlined above, are compelling. It does seem that, if these facilities are made available for those who wish to use them, the players not requiring them would not, in any way, be disadvantaged through playing computer dealt hands. There is a further twist here – the Dealer 4 facility is capable of dealing manually shuffled hands and raising Hand Records for those hands – clumsy but overcoming all objections!

There is no charge for affiliated Clubs who want to use the Dealer 4 and they are, also, free to trial the machine for any period of time.