

CHAIRMANS REPORT TO HBA AGM 13TH MAY 2018

I am pleased to be able to present this report at the end of my first year as your Chairman, and which finds the County Association in a good position, with lots of positive things happening during the year.

One of the important things for me was not to allow every task and job to fall in the Chairmans lap, and to create positive roles for all our Committee members, including setting up a couple of new subcommittees to cover areas like Communication, Website, Tournament organization etc. We all recognized that when Mike Minting retired as our Tournament Secretary, it was going to leave a big job to fill, and I am delighted that Jacqui and David Collyer, and Alan Woof have all taken on the role of tournament organization, and made positive changes to the way we advertise and accept entries to all the competitions. Susan Mount accepted the role of modernizing and changing the way we presented all the information on our website, and whilst she has now decided to stand down due to other pressures, I really appreciate the positive changes made, and I am sure this will continue to improve under our new Webmaster Dave Tookey from Harpenden. I was also really pleased that Mike agreed to continue on the committee as our Honorary President, as his advice and input is always valued.

Communication with members has also improved an enormous extent due to the efforts of Alan Woof. He has cleaned up our communications email lists, and sends out regular newsletters to all our registered members. He is also in frequent contact with our club contacts and chairmen, and we hope that all this information is feeding its way down through the clubs. He has also had to deal with the impending GDPR regulations which has taken him many hours of tedious work.

We held a Club Chairmans meeting in January, which was well supported, and proved to be a huge opportunity to exchange ideas between the County and the clubs, and also between the clubs themselves. There were a lot of ideas put forward, some of which we have already incorporated, and the Club Chairmen found it so worthwhile that they requested us to arrange similar meetings on an annual basis.

I also owe a huge debt of gratitude for the continued support and work of the remainder of our committee, Rodger Livesey and Robert Teesdale as Treasurer and Secretary, John Leake for organizing the HBA League, and also to Peter Grice, Richard Banbury and David Carter for their wise input.

On behalf of the County, I have attended the AGM and Shareholder meetings of the EBU, as well as attending a meeting to try to reestablish the Eastern Counties working group to liaise with the EBU – so far without success unfortunately, but will keep trying!

In August 2017, the WBF introduced the new 2017 Laws, which are always difficult for players and directors to take on board and understand. We arranged a number of seminars around the County for Directors to attend and help them apply the new laws in a proper and helpful way.

We have also arranged further seminars in the Autumn, two sponsored by the County, one for training on EBU Score for scorers, and one as a revision course for Club Directors to refresh and share information. We have also arranged in conjunction with EBED a further series of Club Director training courses in the Autumn here at Welwyn

We were also delighted to welcome back Letchworth Heritage Bridge club as an affiliated club, and look forward to welcoming their members to our County events.

We were also proud to support Hitchin Bridge Club in their efforts to start Bridge in schools. One such school, Highover in Hitchin was particularly successful, gained their certification in Mini Bridge, and are now playing full duplicate Bridge. The team of pupils have been invited to the House of Lords to play bridge in such prestigious surroundings. The County were pleased to give a grant to the team to cover the cost of their transportation to Parliament.

Sadly, during the year, as always, we lost a number of our members who have gone to join that great big bridge club in the sky. However, one loss in particular which cannot go without mention is that of June Ball. June was a stalwart supporter of County competitions for many years, and my memory of her will always be that despite constant health problems, she was always smiling, and facing life, and death without any moans or groans. I am really delighted to tell you that in her memory the HBA has been presented with a new trophy in her honour, the June Ball Salver. This will be held each year by the Open category winner of the Victor Ludorum awards, which June herself won only last year

On the topic of Competitions, we have almost finalised our next season programme. In this current season, we hosted 3 Really Easy events around the county, one in Hitchin, one in Watford and Bushey, and one to be held next week here at Welwyn. These proved to be really popular and all the participants enjoyed them, with 25 tables attending just the first two of these. We thought the title of these events was not great – what part of bridge is really easy?? – and so for next season these will be known as Relaxed Duplicate, and are targeted specifically at new and improving players who are not yet ready to play in more serious events. Next season, we are hoping to run these at Watford, Welwyn and Sobell.

We have moved the Cadet Teams final from a Friday evening to a Sunday afternoon at the request of some clubs with club nights on Fridays.

We have also decided to change the number of pairs who qualify for the final of the Marjorie Lukyn from the heats to 50% of the field, to standardize with our other heats competitions and to increase the numbers eligible to play in the final.

Following some criticism of the current state of the Trackside Bar here at Welwyn, we have decided whilst its future fate is not yet determined, to move the 1st qualifier of the Humble Cup and the Semi final of the Championship Pairs to Watford and Bushey in 2019. These two events attract large numbers requiring space beyond that available at Welwyn. We will reconsider these events for 2020 when the future of the Trackside Bar is determined.

On a positive note, all HBA events held here at Welwyn, now include free tea, coffee, water AND biscuits. The car parking issues at Welwyn now seem to be resolved with a system of registration in place for free parking for bridge players at all times.

In the ECL league, we had a fantastic year winning all three divisions, many thanks to Roger Edmonds for organizing such successful selections, and all three teams are now off to Coventry on June 24th to play in the Inter Counties Finals

I would also like to congratulate the team from Welwyn who won their Regional Final of the Garden Cities trophy and will represent Hertfordshire in the National Finals on June 23rd.

We also addressed a problem relating to the Green Point Weekends. Historically, we have held these in partnership with Essex. The July event is always well supported, but the September event was struggling

due to the fact that it clashed with a similar event in Surrey which was attracting the lions share of the entries. After extensive negotiations with the EBU and after jumping through a lot of hoops on the way, we succeeded in getting consent to move the date forward a week to avoid this clash. Thus our second weekend, which is now called the Herts/Essex Congress will be held on the weekend of September 15/16 when we hope to attract similar numbers to the July event. By popular request, we have also reintroduced free tea and coffee at both these weekends

All of the present committee apart from Susan Mount are standing today for reelection, and I would like to thank them once more for their hard work and support, which has made my job so much easier and will ask you to support them today when we come to the election

Gary Conrad

May 13th 2018