

Chairman's Report for the KCBA Committee Meeting

5th December 2021

The return to F2F bridge has proved to be patchy as we expected. There seem to be differing attitudes to it depending on which area of Kent we are looking at. Several clubs in my own area, NW Kent, have returned to F2F only, with attendance around 60-70% of pre-Covid levels. We have also seen people returning to bridge who, for various reasons, have not been playing online. There is an ongoing debate as to how much of our bridge should be online and there are many people who are expressing a preference for staying online at the moment, however we also have to consider the interests of those who do not or cannot play on line as well. England wide roughly 50% of active members in 2019 have not played online regularly in the last 20 months and it is a concern as to whether they will eventually return or whether we have lost them for good. It is my belief that we need to return to F2F as soon as is practicable.

Online bridge, especially on BBO is essentially a computer game, and we are competing with many other computer games in that sector. Our USP for F2F bridge is that fact that people can play and socialise with others, having fun and interacting with other human beings. Indeed I think that our most promising market for new players is the 60+ community, coming up for or recently retired. All the evidence is that people in that category are looking for a social experience in meeting new people and having fun (a slightly alien concept to some bridge players!) I myself have a beginners class running at the moment, all of whom have said that they would not be interested in learning bridge if it involved playing online alone. So it is a case of balance and cautious progress back towards F2F. We are keeping options open in regard to Kent Competitions, and making decisions on a case by case basis. The current concerns regarding the Omicron variant are obviously making this difficult in the immediate future, but fingers crossed that it will prove to be as benign as the early indications show.

Feedback from the EBU AGM

The EBU are aiming to return fully to F2F by early spring, although some competitions/qualifiers will remain online.

The following will be F2F

Easter Festival

Spring BH Congress

Summer Meeting

Autumn Congress

Year End

Scarborough Congress

Seniors Congress

Crockfords Finals

The following will be online

Point a Board Teams

National Pairs (Final F2F)

Portland Pairs

Ranked Masters and Masters Pairs

The National Handicap Pairs

Corwen Trophy

Pachabo

Tollemache Qualifiers (Final F2F)

Garden Cities Qualifiers (Final F2F)

The Ebu are going to explore the option of a County running the Riviera Congress and The Midweek Congress, both online.

The most contentious issue at the AGM was a series of motions brought forward by Middx expressing no confidence in the disciplinary process and proposing the scrapping of the Online Ethics Investigation Group, Prosecution Panel and Disciplinary Panels; returning the whole process to the Laws & Ethics Committee. They based their argument on only 2 cases, in both of which the defendants were found not guilty on appeal. There were strong opinions expressed on both sides, but, after 2 minor adjustments were accepted by the EBU, the main proposals were heavily defeated.

The EBU are going to produce a National Media Strategy for attracting new players to bridge, with materials such as leaflets, posters and social media assistance, with provision for the addition of local information. They are also offering transition courses for players who already play bridge in a social setting to be given the skills to be able to play in clubs. Counties are encouraged to contribute to the newly established EBU blog. To that end I will be recommending to the Committee that we consider establishing a new post, that of Social Media Officer for the County.

The EBU are going to produce a list of players in each County of members who have not played regularly for at least a year. This will enable us to approach them and offer any assistance that they may need to return to bridge, although this will of course have to be approached sensitively.

Yorkshire have used some of their reserves to offer restart grants to some of their clubs. We will consider that in Committee, whether that is the best way to use our potential to fund projects to enhance the participation of bridge in Kent.

Counties will be able to make entries direct onto the EBU calendar. There was some discussion that GP events online are clashing and reducing numbers for each event. The EBU are aware of this problem and are working on it. Of course if events return to F2F then geographical considerations will ensue, it is unlikely that Kent players will be travelling across the country to play in one day events.

Finally the financial situation at the EBU remains of concern. Their losses over the Covid period have not quite reached the heights that they forecast, but it continues to be a worrying situation. And it should be remembered that their cost cutting measures have included nearly a third of the staff losing their jobs. The EBU are also of the opinion that a return to F2F as soon as possible is imperative, to attract back the large number of members who are not playing on line, and to attract new members to the game. They are also cognisant of the financial advantages that online bridge organisers have over F2F, with reduced costs without physical premises and no boards to make up, and to address that they propose raising the fees for GP events online significantly. This did lead to

resistance from some Counties. My congratulations to Kay Preddy, who has been elected to the post of EBU Treasurer.

Kent News

Our annual flagship event is the Kent Congress, always held at the end of October. This year's Congress was held online, with mixed success. The pairs on Saturday attracted 16 tables, which was slightly disappointing but acceptable. Congratulations to Kay Preddy and Norman Selway who won the Pairs.

The 9 High event attracted 32 tables. Congratulations to the winners Phyllis hands and Jo Lormor (NS) and Larry Doyle and Sue Lowe (EW). Also congratulations to Jean Letley and Jo Tarling, winners of the 6 High category.

However the teams on Sunday attracted only 10 tables, and we had to, at the last minute, merge with the Malvern Congress to create a sufficient field so as to run a proper Swiss movement. No Kent players figured in the top positions, which was disappointing. Obviously we do not know what the situation will be for next year's Congress, but will keep it under review as the year progresses.

The Dyer-Smith (Mixed Pairs) was held online in October. Again congratulations to Norman and Kay for winning it, and Jeremy Willans and Jill Skinner who came second.

Congratulations to the Kent 'A' team in the Metropolitan Cup who won the 'A' flight. The team was Norman Selway, Kay Preddy, Jeremy Willans, Ian Draper, Croz Crosswell, Jon Thoresen, Steve Auchterlonie and Peter Law. Congratulations also to the 'C' side who came second in their flight, Frances Connell, Angela Treen, Val Reeves, Barrington Beavis, Dorothy Holland, John Erdos, Sue Parkins and David Stern.

We have continued to hold open pairs once a month and 9 high pairs each Saturday. The numbers for the open pairs are quite low and we will have to consider the viability of running these events. The 9 High entries have dropped a bit but are still quite healthy.

We are holding heats of the Larsky Cup in designated weeks, recently and in the near future. Any pair playing in a Kent Club in any of the designated weeks and scoring 50% or over, will receive an invitation to play in the semi-finals. The semis will be online but we have yet to make a decision about the final.

We are not holding the Corbett Cup and Plate in 2022, but will be offering the chance for clubs to put a team into a qualifier for the Garden Cities Trophy. We will be making decisions about other competitions in due course.

In the longer term we will attempt to run the membership campaign in 2022 that we had to postpone from 2020. That will include approaching unaffiliated clubs to point out the benefits of joining the wider bridge community, the EBU are offering help with that, as well as attracting new members. I am negotiating with EBED about the possibility of running a County sponsored teacher training programme, to link in with the proposed membership campaign, so that we have enough teachers available to take on people new to the game. .

I hope that all Kent members stay healthy and look forward to meeting you all at sometime (hopefully sooner rather than later) in 2022.

Norman Inniss

Chair

1st December 2021