

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Minutes for the GCBA committee meeting held online on Thursday 5th November 2020.

In attendance were Patrick Shields (President), Mike Wignall (Treasurer), Ian Sidgwick, Nigel Mortimer, Richard Butland, Roger Williams and Judith Sanis (CBC rep).

Apologies received from Andrew Bull and Jan Kinane.

Finance

1. Mike reported that little had changed since the last meeting – we are still collecting payments for the Cleverly Teams League, and we have still to refund the County UMS to the clubs from which it originated. Numbers playing online UMS games are stable, and Nigel declared that Tudor BC sees the demand for online continuing after face-to-face resumes.

GCBA programme

2. The Monday night games now have a regular following and will proceed as planned until the end of December. When quizzed about the end of the availability of the Flash interface to allow Swiss Teams on BBO, Patrick replied that he expected BBO to deliver an alternative by then, but if they didn't then RealBridge offered the option for this sort of event, and was attractive also for the League and other teams games where it offered simultaneous play of the same boards with a lot less work from the organiser.
3. Patrick has yet to organise the County Knock-Out; the request for thoughts on whether to make it single knock-out or double elimination has received no response (yet).
4. Patrick reported that Learners' Duplicate was getting very minimal support currently, and that he was running it as a free event with 1-2 tables on the Mondays in October. As the participants were quite enthusiastic about it, he planned to continue the same pattern for November. It was suggested that advertising it further via Alison Nicolson, Jan Kinane, and Ro Kaye might be productive.
5. We discussed running a special event in December and agreed that an appropriate slot would be the afternoon of Sunday 27th December, but that we would not choose the venue until we have assessed the trial of RealBridge on 15th November.

Playing online

6. Patrick reported further experiences with RealBridge, noting that the visibility of partner's face throughout is much greater than is true in face-to-face – and care must be taken to avoid giving UI to partner. The providers and the authorities are now pondering what arrangements (primarily about visibility and full disclosure) are best for the game when played online, as this might well not be a replication of the face-to-face conditions.

Survey

7. In the published summary of the responses to the survey, three strands of activity had been identified, viz
 - Making players more aware of what GCBA and EBU are doing to support the game.
 - Trying to get clubs in the county more engaged in the governance of the GCBA.
 - Helping players with the transition between club play and playing in county/national competitions

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8. It was noted that any of our media (newsletter, web, etc) were only ever read by a subset of the bridge playing population. It was suggested that a greater club focus in the newsletter might well encourage a greater readership from the non-county players. The content of the newsletter has been an even mix of news and bridge topics, and the news often replicated the website. A good case was made of devoting a chunk of the news section to club news, asking different clubs to supply the relevant material. Patrick will approach Garry (current editor) about this.
9. On the club engagement with the GCBA, we see their involvement in the newsletter as a first step, and we will come back to this later.
10. On the transition from club play to county play, it was noted that the fine line is encouraging skill development without “stealing” players from club games. Currently, online we see almost all regular county players (95% of our regulars) and there are only three noted as not present. Online bridge mixes players and ability more than we are used to, so the issue might be stronger and better tackled in the context of face-to-face bridge.

Representative Events Management

11. Richard reported there has been an active programme of inter-county matches but that lack of data for online performance made selections less clear than in the past. The extent to which we continue friendly matches into the New Year will be considered as we get closer, and Richard suggested these could focus on NGS 8-9 grades while the Midlands Counties Online League (with a monthly game) was catering for the stronger players. Patrick reported that the MCWG was planning to organise an 8-high NGS event, initially a single-day Swiss Teams at the end of January, to test out the appetite across the Midlands for cross-county games. Entry is open to any foursome, but each foursome represents the county and the event will be ranked by county based on the performance of the best three teams from each county. The target is to run this on RealBridge at the end of January.
12. We noted that we had not paid UMS for the recently flurry of online inter-county events, but that we were committed to paying our dues to the EBU. It was agreed that Mike would remit the due money to the EBU, on the basis of the number of players involved. Richard will provide a list of team numbers and dates to Mike. We agreed that the opposition in these matches were responsible for their own UMS payments, and noted that the case of a match against East Wales then the EBU would only receive a one-sided payment.
13. For the MCOL the RE Committee would continue organising teams from its slightly smaller pool (only a handful of players have dropped out). Roger pointed out that the MCOL now had a League structure within the EBU League system – but it was still under-populated as it had only been available for a few days.

Teaching Issues

14. Roger & Patrick (and three others) had met online to discuss teaching issues. Roger reported on a good exchange of views, from which the idea had emerged of doing a trial of online teaching of some non-players from scratch – because this is something current county teachers have shied away from (while a number of Year-2 classes as proceeding). Patrick is progressing this.
15. There was also discussion about getting feedback from the U3A about latent demand for learning how to play bridge, and Patrick had obtained feedback from the Cheltenham U3A Chair who was happy to investigate in their December magazine and with the U3A committee. Judy noted that Cheltenham BC was hosting a U3A game every Friday afternoon (the day and time they played face-to-face).
16. Patrick reported that all junior/schools bridge was on hold during the crisis, and that this was the case all across the country. There is a once-a-month Junior game organised by Oxford BC (usually a parent-child game).

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EBU AGM Preparations

17. As our shareholder Ian Sidgwick will attend the AGM on 25th; the paperwork for the event had not yet appeared but when it does he will consult the committee. Patrick warned that there are some changes to the Bye Laws coming, to help make management of Disciplinary Cases (particularly online cheating allegations) more slick. He reported also that the proposal coming was for no rise in UMS this year (it normally rises by 1p), but for permission for the EBU Board to raise it by 1p if necessary during the year. Two of the four candidates for the three EBU Board places have approach the county asking for support.
18. Roger commented that the EBU Constitution seemed “archaic” and asked about the status of the EBU. Patrick explained that the EBU had not gone for charitable status because if it did then it would not be allowed to finance international teams, and that the EBU had given up on its earlier (and failed) attempts to have bridge recognised as a sport because of the cost and low prospects of success. The EBU is however affiliated to the national Sports & Recreation Alliance, and that body has been used in sorting out advice on the return to face-to-face play.

Other business

19. Patrick reminded the committee that a number of members/officers need to stand down next year because the GCBA Constitution limits membership of the committee to six consecutive years, and holding an office is limited to three consecutive year – and so we must be on the lookout for new people to get involved in this committee next year.
20. The next meeting will be on Thursday 3rd December.