

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Minutes for the GCBA committee meeting held at Cheltenham Bridge Club on Wednesday 19th June 2019.

In attendance were Patrick Shields (President), Andrew Bull (Secretary), Mike Wignall (Treasurer), Richard Harris, Ian Sidgwick, Roger Williams, Judy Sanis (Observer) and Richard Butland (REC chair).

GCBA Programme

1. Patrick had prepared a draft calendar of events for the season (September 2019 to August 2020), based on that for the previous season with a few minor changes. No date changes were suggested except as noted below.
2. Richard Butland noted that the Midlands County League match at home to Leicestershire would clash with the Wessex Youth training on April 5th, and that as this is the end of the season, it cannot be moved to a later date. He had tried unsuccessfully to persuade Leicestershire to move the match to March 29th. It was agreed that he will suggest moving to another date earlier in March. It was also noted that we should inform the MCL organisers for future reference that Cheltenham Bridge Club will usually be unavailable for matches on the first weekend in April.
3. For the weekend sessions, it was agreed that, as Allan Sanis has been successful in attracting entries to the Everett Cup and Cotswold Cup, their format should remain unchanged. We would like more clubs to be involved in the Bredon Vale and Rank Xerox competitions, but requests often get lost, and directly e-mailing the whole membership tends to be counter-productive. We will work harder to persuade the clubs' committees to encourage their members to enter at the appropriate time.
4. For the Monday night sessions, we have a fairly even split between Pairs and Teams bridge, which seems to fit with what people want. It was agreed that we should make it clearer that pairs/teams do not have to play in every session of the seasonal pairs/teams events, and it was suggested that dropping the season from the names might help (e.g. changing from "Summer Pairs" to simply "Pairs"). It was also felt that we should try to improve the descriptions of how these contests work on the GCBA website. On a more general note, it was suggested that we should try to encourage clubs to include easy access to our website on their own websites (in the way that CBC does).
5. Apart from this clarification, it was agreed that the formats for the Monday night seasonal pairs/teams events should be kept as they are.
6. We have in the past had an occasional evening specifically designed to welcome newcomers to GCBA Monday night bridge, by (for example) pairing up newcomers with regular players. It was suggested that we could try to join up with the CBC Monday night players for such an evening, and Judy offered to canvass the opinion of the CBC committee regarding this idea. It was felt that the Monday between Christmas and New Year (30th December) would be a good date to try a special event, incorporating this and encouraging members of other clubs to come along as well. (If such an event takes place, the GCBA Individual would be moved to the second Monday in May). As this would be an attempt to publicise the GCBA, we would be willing to fund the event according to CBC's preference.
7. As of last season there were 13 teams in the League (attendance has been relatively stable for the last few years, though it used to be much higher). The 10-session format makes it a large commitment for less regular players, and attempts to encourage them by splitting into two sets of 5 a few years ago had not made any difference. Patrick proposed having promotion and relegation after 5 sessions to increase interest through the season, but other people said they preferred to have a consistent event running through the 10 weeks. Richard Butland stressed

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the importance of the top division of the League being one of two serious GCBA events to help with deciding county selection (the other being the County Knock Out).

8. There had also been some contention regarding larger teams, and players only being involved in a small number of sessions. It was agreed that we should encourage teams to have 4 players (though we will accept teams of 5), while allowing substitutions where necessary, and that only people who had played in more than half of the sessions will be eligible for the Honours Board and Cup engraving. Since some teams might find this difficult, it was agreed that we would help teams to find substitutes when required. It was also agreed that team members (i.e. the 4/5 players named for each team) would not be allowed to substitute for other teams (but that other people could substitute for multiple teams). The changes described here will need to be publicised clearly and promptly.
9. In restricted events, the definition of "expert" needs to be clear. We currently define an expert to be anyone at or above the rank of National Master, and the county currently has 15 Grand Masters, 23 Life Masters and 19 National Masters; so 57 experts in total. Considering the names both included and excluded, it was agreed that this was a fair definition. Mike suggested that we should go by the official list published by EBU on the previous 31 December, and this was agreed.
10. On a related matter, it was proposed that we should do more to celebrate local players' advancements to new levels.

GCBA Strategy

11. Patrick had made a few changes to the existing GCBA Strategy document, but the main themes remain the same, and it was agreed that this was appropriate. He observed that we are responsible both to bridge players (ensuring they have opportunities to play at the level they enjoy) and to non-players (advertising the game, opportunities to learn, etc). It was noted that GCBA events tend to cater more for the top 20% of regular players, while local clubs cater more for the rest.
12. Regarding the amount of bridge currently played: there are about 900 EBU members with Gloucestershire as their main county – most are regular players, though significant numbers play less than once a month (one old set of figures showed 15% had not played in the last year and another 17% had played less than 12 times in that year – quite close to the national average). We know of about 30 non-affiliated clubs in the county, and we estimate that there is at least as much bridge played at these clubs as at the affiliated clubs.
13. Patrick and Judy had visited the Tudor club in Chipping Sodbury, as planned. They reported that the committee there were very active and very welcoming, and keen to show us what they were doing. They had switched from Avon to Gloucestershire because they felt that Avon was "too Bristol-oriented" for their members. It was agreed that this visit has boosted the awareness of GCBA at the club. It was proposed that we should also arrange a visit to the Cam & Dursley U3A club which has recently affiliated.
14. We discussed how we could best support clubs and club members, noting that larger club attendance tends to line up with greater efficiency of operation (effort per player-session) and with greater enjoyment for the participants. Suggestions included:
 - advertising clubs in the county newsletter – and maybe have a short section on the website dedicated to advertising a different club each month
 - an interactive map of all the clubs on the main web page
 - offering to hold a GCBA event at a club

Regarding the second point, Roger and Ian have been putting together a map of bridge clubs in Gloucestershire.

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It was also suggested that it would be helpful if we had a separate list on the web pages for U3A clubs.

15. It was also noted that it would help to consider clubs within local groups, as then we could
 - ensure clubs were aware of the other clubs in their vicinity, and of the nights they played (so they could try to reduce clashes)
 - encourage inter-club competition within regions of the county
 - suggest monthly meetings with multiple nearby clubs "merging" for a session
 - assist with sharing dealing machines/Bridgemates with other clubsAlso, a local group of clubs might feel more inclined to ask for assistance, or to work together.
16. Patrick noted that you can divide the county into 7 or 8 natural areas of roughly equal population, and that the amount of bridge and teaching of bridge in each areas varies a lot. He noted that we should encourage better co-ordination of teaching, as the best way to boost the membership of a club is by teaching new players.
17. It was suggested that a properly co-ordinated programme of visiting clubs was needed to ensure that the GCBA was doing as much as possible to help the "rest" of players (i.e. those outside the top 20%). Patrick also proposed that each strand of the Strategy should have an "owner" on the committee, and asked people to volunteer for this.
18. Patrick will revise the strategy on the basis of this discussion and circulate it out of committee for consideration.

AOB

19. GCBA Training sessions have moved back from Thursday to Wednesday, as the CBC premises are no longer available on Thursday.
20. It was agreed that we should the cancel the July committee meeting.