

Chairman's Report for the KCBA AGM 2021

What a year, where do I start? This time last year we were all hopeful of a return to some form of normality, with no idea what was going to hit us in late autumn and winter. We can now again hope for a return to something approaching normality, albeit with a number of caveats, as a result of a stunningly successful national vaccine programme. Given that the average age of an EBU member is 72, the vast majority of our members will have already received 2 doses of the vaccine!

Sadly this year we have lost a number of members who have passed away from Covid and other illnesses. Our thoughts go out to all their families and friends.

There have been numerous successes for the County representative teams this year, as well as some notable success by individual members in other County and EBU events. I have documented these in my reports for the Committee meetings throughout the year, and they have been posted on the website. Kent continues to be one of the strongest Counties in terms of playing strength, as well as one of the larger ones in terms of numbers.

The EBU have struggled financially during this year and the coming year will be particularly challenging for them as many payments have been deferred from last year. This is not an abstract problem, they are the organising body for bridge in England and we need them to survive. The cuts they have had to make include staff losing their jobs, as well as a reduced service in many areas. We decided to make a significant contribution of £5000 to them this financial year, which was very gratefully received, despite this the County remains in a very healthy financial position.

During the last year we have continued to offer as much of a service to our members as we could in the circumstances. We are fortunate that we live in the digital age, online bridge has been a lifesaver in bridge terms. In addition to most of our regular County Competitions, we have offered Saturday morning games, open to all our members and associate members, and Saturday afternoon games to those who are 9 or less on the NGS. The numbers have dropped somewhat since the easing of Covid restrictions and the arrival of summer, but we will continue to offer them as long as numbers make it viable, and we hope

that entries pick up when we head towards autumn and winter. I am particularly proud of the 9 High competition, which has been an outstanding success, and my thanks to all who have contributed to this, especially Paul Gibbons, Stephen Brown, Sharon Bayne and Chris Lohan. Stephen has also been working very hard on organising and advertising our County events, as well as running the website, a workload far in excess of the norm for the Competitions Secretary. We have also organised 9 High competitions for the EBU at the Easter and Spring BH Congresses, events which attracted impressive numbers of entries.

Chris Lohan is retiring as Adult Education Officer, and leaving the Committee, and my thanks to her on behalf of the membership for all her hard work in promoting the teaching of bridge in Kent over the years. I am delighted that Pat Welsh has agreed to take over the role of AEO. Pat has collaborated with Chris for some while and will provide continuity of service, as well as bringing her own ideas to the role. I am pleased that the rest of the Committee have agreed to continue, subject of course to the approval of the membership!, and also that Malcolm Lewis, as Vice Chair, and Charles Scott, as Membership Secretary, have joined the Committee during the year and are standing for election at the AGM.

We await with some trepidation to see how many of our clubs will resume face to face bridge in the weeks and months to come, especially those who have not been operating online in the last 16 months. The EBU are planning on running the Summer Meeting at Eastbourne as a F2F event, it will be interesting to see how the numbers stack up compared to other years. It is certain that online bridge is here to stay and many clubs will continue to offer online sessions as well as F2F. We did send a survey to all our clubs regarding their future plans for F2F re-opening and any plans for continued online sessions, it was disappointing that a number of clubs did not reply to this. As a County we are keen to offer whatever support that we can to clubs in these difficult times, and the EBU are also offering support, in particular help in organising online and hybrid sessions. As a County we will consider the best way to run our Competitions and it may well be that some of them will continue to be run exclusively online, or as hybrid events with F2F and online sections.

Looking to the future, it is our overwhelming priority to look for new members, people who are new to bridge. To that end we will be planning a recruitment initiative in 2022 and we are hoping that all County members will do whatever they can to assist us in this venture. We had of course planned to run the initial 'taster day' in April last year, we hope to reschedule that for next year, probably in conjunction with an online event. We hope that these will attract a considerable number of people who want to learn bridge, and to service this we will be looking for more people to train as teachers. While I appreciate that individual teachers have their own pupils and clubs to consider, most players play in more than one club and there is therefore a knock on effect for all in teaching more beginners. I feel that we will be so much stronger and successful if we all work together.

So the future is uncertain but we can only hope that we are over the worst, both as a country as a whole and as a bridge community. I look forward to seeing you all in person at future County and other events in due course.

Norman Inniss

Chair KCBA

July 2021.