

Larsky Report

The new structure for the Larsky was designed to increase participation in the competition, including ensuring a full 13-table final, increase the green-point awards in the final and get new players to enter a KCBA competition for the first time. I think in all these aims it succeeded. This report looks at how this happened and considers how it can be sustained.

The first step was in ensuring that all clubs held heats. I believe that the major reasons clubs did not hold heats previously was the administrative effort involved and the influx of 'pot-hunters'. The new format needed to overcome this resistance. This was achieved by checking on the days on which each club held pairs events and allocating a date for each of these days trying to avoid local competitions and simultaneous pairs events. They were also spread out so that on most days there was only one heat anywhere and where a club had multiple heats these were in different weeks. Each club was then sent an email advising them of these dates, making clear that the club was welcome to change the dates, to publicise them as little or as much as they liked and that they needed to nothing else, KCBA would take over from there. There was therefore a default position that if the club did nothing the events on the days specified would be treated as heats and the qualifiers notified by KCBA. This initial work took a few hours of effort.

Four semi-final venues were booked geographically and temporally spread around the middle of February. Again this took a few hours of effort, including by the Treasurer.

As expected in many clubs no action was taken as a result of the email and so the default position applied. This resulted in all clubs apart from Thursday Evening Bridge Club holding heats. All clubs post their results online so the names of those who were qualified were easily obtained, except from Chislehurst where only first name appear in the online results. However this was followed by the most time consuming part of the new format, searching the Kent members file downloaded from the EBU to obtain their email addresses. There was then another smaller but still significant effort involved in sending personalised emails to all the qualifiers. Where possible emails were sent to both members of a partnership but where only one could be notified in this way no further action was taken. Where no email for either player was available or emails to those addresses available bounced a hard copy letter was produced. These were distributed by giving them to a member of the club concerned and asking them to pass them on. A few such letters were never given to a member of the club concerned and I cannot be certain that all letters were passed on within clubs so between 5 and 10 pairs probably never received notification that they had qualified for the semi-finals. I should have recorded the time taken in this process and in dealing with responses but it is of the order of 50 hours

Replies to these emails were recorded so that we knew the entrants for each semi-final and those who had declined. Lists of entrants were provided to the director of each event but it was left open that qualifiers could just turn up. Arrangements were made for boards to be dealt for each semi-final and for them and the scoring equipment to be transported to the venues.

Initially the Bekesbourne semi-final had filled up much more quickly than any of the others so part way through the process it was at 75% of capacity while the others were at less than 25%. It is still not clear to me why this was. My back-up plan if we had too many entrants was to have a second heat at Bekesbourne on the Sunday. I therefore decided to activate this so that those who had already entered had time to change their plans to

earlier or later. This move proved to be an error. From halfway through the qualification period onwards very few more entries came for Bekesbourne while the others especially Maidstone grew quickly. With non-shows we could have had 3 semi-finals of about 12-14 tables and one of 7 tables.

Mike/Liz then took over allocating places in the final in the same way as previous years.

In all 94 pairs took part in the semi-finals, the full 26 in the final with a top Green Point award of 7, the maximum allowed.

An email survey was carried out of those who entered the semi-finals. 65 people responded. Unfortunately I phrased the question about the importance of the personal email badly so the response on that is not as clear as it might be.

58 people enjoyed the semi-final and 56 would play again next year if they qualified.

Less than 20 would definitely travel to another club to qualify if their own club did not hold a heat.

27 thought the personal email was important and for 25 this was the first Kent event in which they had played. There was a very large overlap in these two groups.

There was also a significant minority complaining about Tunbridge Wells as a venue principally the travel time from other parts of the county.

If we keep the same format for next year I think almost all clubs will hold heats again next year although more will choose their own dates.

With all clubs using bridgewebs to post their results to the internet it is relatively easy to compile lists of qualifiers but automating matching them to the EBU database is difficult so that producing personalised emails is likely to remain labour intensive and probably beyond what can be sustained by purely voluntary effort.

We should consider the location of the semi-finals. Tunbridge Wells was significantly less popular than the other venues and perhaps we should consider using a venue more convenient to our members.

We should definitely consider moving the final. As we know this will be a maximum of 13 tables there are a number of more central possible venues.

As for the costs, the loss on the 5 semi-finals was just over £250 but if I had not split the Bekesbourne semi-final the loss would have been just over £80 and almost exactly the same as the profit on the final.

We need to decide on:

1. Do we wish to keep the same format next year?
2. What financial commitment do we want to make
3. What semi-final venues do we want?
4. What venue for the final do we want?

I would also like Kent to propose that the EBU hold a similar national event something which I will expand upon at the meeting.