

BridgeMate Demo - 16th January 2018 – A Report

Introduction

A demonstration of the BridgeMate electronic scoring system was organised for the playing membership of Seaford Bridge Club on 16 January 2018. The demonstration encompassed the regular Tuesday afternoon playing session at the Waves Leisure Centre and table fees were waived for the day. The demonstration was provided by Nigel Lancaster of BridgeMate who had travelled from Maidenhead, Berks.

55 members attended the session which, with the addition of Nigel himself, formed fourteen full tables. This was an approximate increase of 50% on the regular Tuesday attendance and indicated that there was indeed enthusiasm within the membership for learning more about electronic scoring systems of which BridgeMate is just one.

It was very much a 'mixed bag' of attendees comprising some who had prior experience of BridgeMate; some who hadn't; some who were keen to learn and some who were quite evidently not.

The Play

The afternoon got under way with the Chairman introducing Nigel and outlining the purpose of the afternoon. Nigel then explained how the afternoon would pan out and how he would be available to resolve issues while at the same time ensuring as far as possible that play ran smoothly. Finally Leslie Fowle who was directing announced a two boards per table, 14 table Skip Mitchell movement with the hope of playing as many boards as possible. Members of the committee had provided all of those attending with a unique three digit player number extracted from the ScoreBridge system and therefore also available to BridgeMate,

Initially there were some problems with entering player numbers and recording the early playing contracts and outcomes. These were resolved by Nigel. As the afternoon progressed and players become more familiar with the handsets these diminished to the extent that towards the end of the afternoon play was proceeding largely uninterrupted.

At the end of the session Nigel was able to display immediate final results on his laptop (a rather small display) and projected onto the wall. Results were uploaded to the Seaford Bridge Club BridgeWebs site. Nigel remained behind for some time afterwards to answer questions from individual members.

Additional Information

It was clear that many of the membership arrived expecting to be trained in BridgeMate. This was never the intention or the basis of any agreement with BridgeMate. The aim of the afternoon was to demonstrate how a bridge session was run. Therefore any expectations that, when an input error occurred and had to be corrected, players would be involved in the correction process, was never going to be met. To have done so could have significantly impacted upon the progress of the session overall.

Some participants were unhappy with the number of players and the 'crush' in the hall. A large attendance had been expected given the nature of the event and possibly even because participation was free. It is unlikely in the foreseeable future that such an attendance will be repeated whether scoring is manual or electronic. Casting a positive spin the Club should be delighted that such a largely enthusiastic number of players actually turned out.

Again several participants expressed the view that a weakness of electronic scoring was that the system was only as good as the data input by the player operating the handset. This is true but the argument can be countered as follows:

- incorrect entries can be made on paper travellers. There have been instances where I, as a scorer, have witnessed an error being corrected and then being subsequently changed back to the original incorrect entry.

- there is adequate opportunity for the opposition pair to challenge a handset entry before it is submitted. If an incorrect entry is not challenged then one of the pairs will suffer a penalising score just as is the case now. It is in their interests to ensure any entry is correct or suffer the consequence
- even after an incorrect entry has been made it can be changed

Conclusion

Positives

- a session using electronic scoring was, for the first time, completed at Seaford Bridge Club
- timely results were produced and uploaded to the Club website. This in spite of a negative attitude displayed by a small number of the participants
- the Waves Leisure wifi was successfully used
- many of the membership were, for the first time, exposed to electronically scored bridge
- no scorer was required to enter the results
- the person running the session was able to fully participate in the session – finishing 2nd!
- some of the participants, new to BridgeMate, were by the end of the session very comfortable using it.
- Nigel advised that it was possible during the course of a playing session to enter the hands that had been played into the BridgeMate handset and that many clubs already do this. It would take some thought about how to achieve this but it is an interesting possibility. It would if implemented negate one of the benefits of procuring a dealing machine.

Negatives

- the session ran slowly with only 22 boards completed. This was inevitable given the general unfamiliarity with the system
- there were some incorrect entries one of which it was thought may have prejudiced the final overall positions. This however was proved not to be the case. In a demonstration event it was inevitable that some incorrect entries may have occurred. In spite of this a set of results reasonably accurately reflecting playing outcomes was produced.
- the hall was crowded and cramped but this situation is unlikely to be repeated.
- a negative attitude on behalf a small number of participants, given the effort that had been put in to organising the event, was disappointing. However overall the majority appeared to have enjoyed the afternoon
- there was a small crush in the corner to see the final results. Again this was inevitable given the numbers in the hall and the novelty of the situation
- many participants were unhappy with the display times on the handset and the inability in some instances to go back to a previous display. Nigel confirmed afterwards that timings could be altered and past screens made available by using the customisation options available to users.

The Last Words

Only time will tell if this effort towards modernising the Club will be judged a success. What is clear – especially given the numbers attending – is that despite the naysayers there is an appetite within the membership for learning about new ways of doing things and possibly even for adopting them. The membership will, at the upcoming AGM in February 2018, have an opportunity to decide whether or not to go down the road of electronic scoring. We live, for better or worse, in an electronic world where people are now becoming used to things happening instantly. Will we be the ones to continue with pen, paper and illegible handwriting not to mention reluctant Friday night scorers.

John Gillespie
Seaford Bridge Club