



As we start down what we hope will be the road to normality, I am sure that we are all asking ourselves where that road will lead. The mass migration from face-2-face bridge to virtual bridge set an unprecedented adventure for many into a world they had never before experienced, not to mention getting to grips with new technology and even, for some, email! I say well done to all those who had to overcome some really tough challenges to get through not only a worldwide pandemic, but also a very steep learning curve to get themselves online playing the game they love.

Many of us have lost friends and loved ones - and not just because of the pandemic, during lockdown, bringing some of the toughest times many of us will have experienced during our lifetimes, particularly those who were not around for the Second World War. I am sure that we all value, and thank, the many organisations and individuals who were able to mobilise and make available to us the one thing we can rely on to take us away, at least for a short time each day, from the many trials and tribulations of everyday life. Of course, every time we play our wonderful game, we experience new trials and tribulations, but that is what keeps us going back for more!

As you know the 2019-2020 Warwickshire season ended abruptly when we entered lockdown in March 2020, with no sign of what was to come. Warwickshire's Online Club was set up and ran, on Bridgebase Online, from September 2020, in the form of the Online Teams League, the monthly Online Pairs League (WPLO), County Pairs and Gentle Pairs. The National Swiss Teams did not run in 2020 but, as I write this, the 2021 event is well under way. The 2021 Midland Counties Congress ran online and was a huge success. I would particularly like to thank Elayne, Myra, Derek, Lin, Liz, and George for their efforts in launching and running Warwickshire Online Club, WOC, and all other members who have supported either in its setup, operation, or as a player, thank you!

A recent survey of players in Warwickshire's larger events (Warwickshire Pairs League, Midlands Counties Congress, and National Swiss Teams), certainly showed an appetite for these events to continue online, and thank you to those of you who participate in these events, and who were, therefore, invited to take part in the survey.

Warwickshire's Annual General Meeting was also held online and was well attended. We recognised, with Life Membership of Warwickshire CBA, David Jones, for his lifetime support of Bridge and Elayne Meakin who received the EBU's Dimmie Fleming award for her services to Warwickshire CBA (full details may be found in the AGM minutes on the Warwickshire Website). Warwickshire's Executive Committee meetings have also continued online.

The Executive Committee unanimously agreed that for the period 1 April 2020-31 March 2021 and 1 April 2021-31 March 2022 100% of County Universal Membership Fees (UMF), payable whenever a player plays at a Warwickshire affiliated Club session, will be rebated to Clubs. Whilst the respective sums will not be substantial - it is 7p out of the 47p Warwickshire Clubs pay per player per session to the EBU, it is hoped that Clubs will find the rebated sums of some assistance.

Unfortunately, we were unable to run our Charity Simultaneous Pairs in Aid of Warwickshire Air Ambulance during 2020. As you may be aware, Warwickshire Air Ambulance is now The Air Ambulance Service, and covers three services: Warwickshire & Northamptonshire Air Ambulance; Derbyshire, Leicestershire & Rutland Air Ambulance and Children's Air Ambulance. Having considered how we might approach the event this year, we were unable to come up with a format that would generate the interest and financial yield for the charity, as we have in previous years, without placing a great onus on Clubs during a time when they have other huge challenges to deal with. To that end, I confirmed with the Warwickshire Executive Committee at their recent meeting that I would personally not be claiming any Tournament Directing fees for the 2020-21 season and instead asked that Warwickshire donates, on behalf of the Members and Clubs of Warwickshire CBA, in that amount to The Air Ambulance Service. A number of Warwickshire Executive Committee members have also asked that their annual Honoraria also be donated to the Charity. If any Clubs, or Members, would like to add to this donation, please do contact [Peter Abbott](#), WCBA Treasurer. The final amount will be announced on the website towards the end of August when the donation is made.

As the 2020-21 season draws to a close, and with the prospect of yet more uncertain times ahead, we shall continue with WOC events over July and August with:

- County Match Pointed Pairs session on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday
- Gentle Pairs (continuing) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday
- County Cross-imp Pairs session on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday.

The County Pairs sessions will be independent events open to all. Remember you have to be a member of WOC (see website [www.warwickshirebridge.co.uk](http://www.warwickshirebridge.co.uk)) and each session is 4BBO\$. In light of the continuing uncertainty of when face2face bridge will be a viable option, we shall remain with WOC (ie online) for certainly the first half of the 2021-22 season (Sept to Jan). Information about WOC's programme for September will be on the website during July/August. Please also watch your SPAM folders for emails from our Competition team, as we are aware a number are ending up there!

The road to normality... I think the new 'normality' will vary depending on whether it is local (club), county, or national, bridge. Our unexpected experiences of online bridge highlighted that some events online can be as, if not more so, successful as face-2-face bridge. I think that this is definitely the case for national events, less so for county events, and even less so for club events.

The major benefits of online bridge are the absence of travelling and the much lower costs involved. Not only are fees lower, for many players, travel (also reducing our carbon footprint!), meals and, for events of more than one day, overnight accommodation costs can be almost eliminated. These are a huge plus for participating in national and county events, but not so much of an issue for local club bridge.

Club events are very different. The term 'Club' suggests a group of people coming together for a common interest and forming an organisation to operate within. This provides what, for many, is

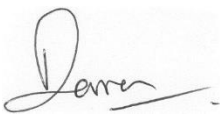
a very valuable opportunity to interact socially and convivially – most of the time! – with other players, with very positive benefits to a person's wellbeing, something which online bridge can never replace, so the importance of maintaining our physical clubs is, wherever possible, paramount. We thank all those people who have worked, and are working, tirelessly to ensure that our Clubs can reopen at the appropriate times with, undoubtedly, many new health and safety regulations and requirements on those attending.

One huge drawback in bridge, just as in life, are those that seek to gain an advantage through dishonesty. Whilst this is not by any means absent in the face-2-face environment, it is far less of a problem and much more difficult to perpetrate, unlike playing online. We have all, I am sure, seen or heard of a number of cases worldwide where individuals and partnerships have been prosecuted for online cheating, and we particularly commend our own National body, the English Bridge Union, for stepping up their efforts to deal with such abhorrent actions that damage the reputation of the game. Online platform development has also seen an increase in features to combat and detect cheating, and I am sure we shall see further improvement there too, especially in the development of algorithms to analyse results and identify interesting and concerning patterns.

I personally think that the future of bridge events is destined to be a mix of face-2-face and online. Perhaps, even, a mix in the same event, with players playing at the venue, with others joining online, but time will tell.

I thank you all for your support and commitment to the game in whatever aspect that might be, whether as national/county/club administrator, tournament organiser/director, or player, you are all important to the game and its future. Please do keep yourselves safe and well.

With my very best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darren', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Darren Evetts  
Chairman  
May 2021