

Face to face Bridge

The EBU ran their Summer Congress 6th to 15th August in Eastbourne.

The Pairs ran over the first weekend, and had about half or less than the usual number of pairs. There were a variety of midweek events, also not overly well supported. There were only 20 Teams the second weekend. All that played thoroughly enjoyed being back playing proper bridge.

It is, however, clear that a significant number of bridge players remain nervous about resuming face to face bridge, understandable when they are daily bombarded with details of deaths and cases of Covid-19, despite the figures for these and hospitalisations being dramatically lower than some months ago.

There is also the issue of cost, it being substantially cheaper to play online at home, rather than fund a hotel bill and eat out.

The EBU venue was quite large, with two rooms in use at times. The tables were widely spaced out. Other than these no other social distancing and hygiene precautions were deemed necessary, except that the directors donned a mask when they came to a table to make a ruling. Virtually none of the players wore a mask. Players were asked to carry a mask, and don if asked to do so by their opponents. I was never asked. The option to carry one's own bidding box, rather than use the table's, was offered. Someone took up this option.

Of course, we are dealing with a group who self-selected by being prepared to play face to face, so this may not be a representative sample, as alluded to in the opening paragraphs.

Several of the EBU staff played in the event. One was discovered to be a Covid contact after the first weekend (his father, who remained well), and was sent home. One other member of the EBU staff was also e-mailed by the NHS, being a contact of this contact, and ordered to self-isolate. The authorities ignored all other contacts of the contact, the player remains well, and nobody at the event developed symptoms.

The issue of transfer of virus transmission by inanimate objects (fomites) has occupied the population since the start of the pandemic, with hand washing advice to the fore. This is despite the evidence for said transmission being skimpy in the extreme. But it makes a fortune for antiseptic manufacturers.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00251-4>

Covid-19 is a respiratory virus, similar to the influenza one. It is passed by micro-droplets in the air, exhaled by infected persons, and potentially inhaled by those in proximity.

The bridge playing population is predominantly elderly. The older you are the greater risk of morbidity or death should you contract Covid. This is particularly so should you have significant health issues such as diabetes, respiratory disease (asthma/bronchitis), or your immune system compromised, such as those with organ transplants.

Happily, the vast majority of players will by now be doubly vaccinated (89% of the UK population). This substantially reduces the risk of catching Covid and its variants, plus greatly reduces the severity of the illness on the rare occasions when it is nonetheless contracted.

It is clear that the world is going to have to learn to live with Covid, as it is liable to continue to be an issue for the immediately foreseeable future, albeit a manageable one, with an incidence of cases and deaths currently broadly on a par with those of road accidents.

The EBU has taken the commendable step of trying to normalise bridge under its stewardship, and quite a few English clubs have already re-opened.

I see no reason why NIBU clubs could not also do so. They may wish to run both online and face to face competitions. It is possible to combine these using Bridgemates Play, so that players can choose to play online or at the venue, the scores being amalgamated.

They should probably try to space their tables more than normal, and try to improve ventilation, if possible. I do not feel any further precautions to be either useful or necessary.

Nor do I see any reason why the NIBU could not run face to face events, including Trials. Doubtless, entries will initially be reduced, but will slowly pick up.

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