

# Bridge Behaviour

**Background:** A recurring theme in Welsh bridge is that people's enjoyment of the game can be compromised by the poor behaviour of a minority of other players. This has often been mentioned in the questionnaires which our members completed in 2010-11.

The WBU Management Committee set up a working party to look at these issues. The members were Adrian Thomas (chairman), Alan Lightbody, Laurie Delmonte, June Jones, Graham Shaw and Kate Craven, all chosen to represent club players within their area. Alan was the principal author of their report. This paper is that report adjusted by Alan, Adrian and Mike Tedd to respond to feedback received.

The paper discusses a number of issues concerning what we should expect of our players' bridge behaviour and what could be done to improve matters.

The paper is being published on the WBU website for discussion and comment at this stage. Revised in the light of comments then received, it is likely to be adopted as WBU policy on bridge behaviour.

**Introduction:** Bridge is a game and like all games it depends on a set of rules to be agreed between those playing the game. This can range from "house rules" (i.e. what we do in our house) to the Laws of Duplicate Bridge. In common with most games there is frequent need for an arbiter over the interpretation and implementation of the rules. Players who play in tournaments develop in time an intimate knowledge, not only of the rules of the game but what constitutes good behaviour at the card table. This knowledge is gained initially at club level then extended at tournament events.

Initially the information flow would only be one way. Better players pass on their knowhow to the beginner, and as the player gains an expertise in the bidding and play of the hand, and takes part in higher standards of the game, the peer pressure to improve etiquette will also increase. Indeed no one but his partner will bother if a contract fails, but many will be bothered by failure to follow etiquette.

As good players' age and younger players' aspire to capture their trophies, it seems correct that these good players pass on their knowledge in play and etiquette to the inexperienced, just as they received advice. The obvious place to do this is at club level.

But unfortunately there are some players who, at club level, tend to use their knowledge to act with excessive authority, direct, give opinion and act condescendingly. New players, in today's climate, will be intimidated and shy away from clubs with players like that. With no new members the club will slowly die.

***We need our experienced players to do the right things by less expert members.***

## 1. The Vision:

*We will promote a climate which harnesses everyone's commitment to and involvement with improving attitudes and behaviour at Bridge.*

## 2. The Mission: Simply recognising the need to build improvement into attitudes and behaviour at Club and Tournament levels will not make it happen.

*We will translate our intentions into actions throughout the Clubs and Tournaments. It must be a continuous process, not a short term initiative. It will be an ongoing drive that ensures a change in attitudes and improvement in behaviours, and is part of the culture of each individual, at every level of play.*

All the rules and interpretations suggest that bridge is a very serious game, which it is for some, but probably not the majority of WBU members.

The intellectual challenge of gaining competitive advantage by novel bidding and signalling methods, followed by novel counter-measures is clearly a compelling pursuit to top players.

**But this is not something that the majority of WBU members will aspire to.**

So, as the game of bridge has developed at the top tournament level, it has made it less interesting for many WBU members to try to participate at tournament level. They see bridge as a pastime, which they take seriously, but not passionately.

There have in effect become two kinds of members within the WBU – Club Players and Tournament Players. Both have valid interests and need support.

Equally important for the ongoing vitality of the game is the category of beginners/learners, although they may not be WBU members when they start.

They need encouragement and support to improve to become members and Club Players. Similarly some Club Players will want to improve and become Tournament Players, but they will need help and support to do so.

We need to distinguish between the Beginners, Club and Tournament players, and using appropriate techniques for improvement will help ensure alignment.

### 3. The Process:

**Summary** We start with the **Beginners** – before they officially join the club. They should be given some instruction on what is expected of them when they sit down at the table. Not just a system of bidding and playing, but the behaviour expected of them. Clubs should ask beginners to sign up to a code of behaviour before accepting them into the Club.

The **Club member** is there to enjoy the game.

The Club **Director** plays a key role in ensuring this enjoyment; see 3.3 below.

The **Tournament player's** enjoyment of the game is pitting his bidding and playing skills against the opponents. Any deviations from the rules may be punished and therefore it is important that this player faces up to that discipline prior to the first event. This can only be done with mentoring at Club level.

#### 3.1 The Beginners:

We are not talking about skill here, but people wishing to join a Club and play Bridge. They will be keen to play but because they are in a new environment (even those who are members in another club) they will make up for uncertainty about procedures and rules by throwing themselves with vigour into the first event. We don't want to curb this enthusiasm with rigid procedures, and we certainly don't want to be causing embarrassment by continually saying "we don't do that here, or the Laws of Bridge say you can't do that".

*Give our Beginners clear guidelines on behaviour so that everyone understands and is committed to them.*

The Beginner should be given by the Club:

- A booklet/leaflet with local rules (e.g. Play starts at ..., Dress minimum is ..., etc.)
- The Club Constitution which should contain a section on Conduct
- A formal acceptance of the Club's rules on conduct, which can be signed by the Beginner and kept by the Club.
- A Membership secretary who can create a supportive and comfortable atmosphere where Beginners can relax and where their comments and questions can be received openly, examined and resolved.

#### 3.2 The Club Member:

It is generally true that people in Clubs make their best contributions when they know what the Club's aims are, and why they have the processes they have, on Club nights, during Sims and other events.

It's fun to belong to a Club – people enjoy themselves and can relax with each other.

*The average Club Member just wants to play cards and socialise.*

However, that will not happen if they are fearful of being brought to task, for minor misdemeanours, by Tournament standard players.

Some pairs sit some way to avoid pairs who make them feel uncomfortable when they play against them.

Yet it must be the players' responsibility to confront bad behaviour with opponents. After a hand or set of hands one can use comments like:

- **"I was disappointed you didn't welcome us to your table"**
- **"I understand it was a difficult hand but I thought your play was excessively slow,"**
- **"I felt you hesitated too long before passing, indicating some strength to your partner"**
- **"I would be happier if you always play out the hand rather than claiming the rest"**
- **"Why is it that I always feel very tense and end up making errors at *your* table?"**

There will be times when the member feels impelled to call for the director or report an incident based on bad behaviour or deviation from rules. Tackling a behaviour problem without being drawn into a similar unconstructive behaviour can be difficult. The Director can act as counsellor and listen and may resolve the issue quicker and better. Tackling a deviation from the rules is always the Director's role and that is the way to proceed.

There is a wise saying: ***do as you would be done by.***

*By choosing to behave well towards the people you play with or against, you can influence them to behave in the same spirit.*

Here are a few behaviours that cause offense, and some that could even lead to someone being accused of cheating:

- Criticising opponents or offering advice without being asked.
- Claiming when playing against beginners or weaker club members. It is sensible to play out the hand against such opponents
- Holding post-mortems before the end of the round (and not then if you have no time left). You should avoid delaying other people, and keep any discussion quiet- you don't want the next table to hear do you?
- Taking advantage of any information gained inadvertently from other tables or from your partner's actions. You must tell the director if you gain any information inadvertently and he or she will ensure equity.
- Hesitating between bids, while touching the bidding cards. This is bad practice and partner could be liable to penalty if advantage was taken of any unauthorised information coming from such behaviour. The player is expected to make up his mind before he touches any bidding card in the box.

- Failing to inform the opposition if you play an unusual system that is allowed by the WBU. It is polite to do this when you first meet.
- Failing to alert or announce conventional bids. Most such bids are to be alerted using the “Alert Card” although a few such as Stayman should be announced, in each case only by the partner of the bidder.
- Giving explanation incorrectly. This is only given to be given by the alerter, and only if requested by the opponents at their turn.
- Misuse of the “Stop Card” procedures. Jump bids should be preceded by placing the “Stop Card” on the table, when the following player must pause for a standard period of 10 seconds before making any call, including pass. A longer pause is bad practice and can give unauthorised information to partner.
- Asking questions about opponents’ understandings at the wrong times. You should only ask when it is your turn to bid or play a card (or when your partner has led face down and not yet turned the card over). At your turn, you may ask questions (to the partner of the opponent who made the bid or play) but unless it affects your action, it is recommended that you wait until the end of the auction. Questions about bidding should be about the whole auction and not a particular bid. If a bid is not alerted it is taken as natural and you should not ask if an unalerted bid is natural. By following this advice you reduce the chance of giving unauthorised information to your partner.

### 3.3 The Club Director:

The **Director** on Club nights acts as host to make sure that everything goes smoothly and everyone enjoys themselves. He or she manages the evening and steers by example and influence. An important role at Club level is to act as counsellor in the event of a dispute, limiting the annoyance or embarrassment to players that might spoil the enjoyment of the evening.

If anything untoward, however small, happens at the table, the Director should be called. Players should not be embarrassed by the need to do this, or if their opponents do – it is just like the football referee or cricket umpire, keeping control and ensuring that everything continues properly.

Infringement of the rules of the game regarding a revoke, playing out of turn etc, is dealt with by the Director at the table and apart from a slight embarrassment soon forgotten. A good Director knows his people and will know whether the member is intentionally guilty or not.

The Director has the authority to assess and apply disciplinary penalties on any Club night. The club member has the right to appeal in writing to the Club’s committee.

*It must become a discipline for the Director to report on any behaviour issues at a Club event in a confidential report. If the same player’s name keeps appearing on this report, the Club committee must take action.*

The following are some examples of behaviour which **will not** be tolerated by any Club player, no matter what their standing is at the Club, and must be reported:

Angry gestures; badgering; rudeness; insinuations; intimidation; profanity; threats or violence; negative comments concerning opponent's or partner's bidding; gloating over good results; constant and gratuitous lessons and analyses at the table; arguing with the director's ruling.

*All these instances should lead to a penalty imposed by the Director. See 4 below.*

We should end this section on a positive note. Most Club events go smoothly and without incident. Sometimes the Director is even thanked for their part in the procedure, but does the Director ever thank the members for giving him an easy time?

*The Club Director can motivate the members by saying "Thank you" for making it easy to direct.*

### 3.4 The Tournament Player

We all want to win but some players desire success even if it compromises their enjoyment of the game. Tournament Bridge is all about winning or doing well, with enjoyment of the event being a bonus.

Tournament Players:

- desire success more than they fear failure – if you don't try you certainly won't get any better.
- have systems that work for them and they have practised them at Club level but want to test them at a higher level
- have a strong belief in themselves – an inner confidence
- look for ways to improve – by learning from every experience
- take responsibility for their play rather than criticising, blaming or complaining.

*Before the potential Tournament player takes part in events outside their clubs, it would be beneficial for the Club to hold an event where these players can play against other experienced Tournament Players.*

In this instance, comments like "you can't do that" and "you hesitated for too long" etc would be **acceptable** in this "teaching" occasion.

After this, the potential Tournament player knows what is expected in a Tournament event. The Club Tournament Secretary would then hopefully be able to record that the Player is capable of taking care of himself under the more hostile environment of a Tournament. Any behaviour problems might be addressed at this stage.

*The behaviour of Tournament Players reflects on the Club to which they are affiliated. Players should ensure that their clubs are aware they are taking part in Tournament events.*

#### 4. Penalties for bad behaviour

*In clubs*, Directors should be guided by club policy, but should realise that they are expected to deal carefully and firmly with bad behaviour. While sympathetic counselling will deal with minor problems, club directors should be prepared to apply penalties for significant and/or repeated bad behaviour.

The EBU has been considering what penalties are appropriate for bad behaviour *in tournaments*, and should publish their recommendations soon. The WBU expects to follow the EBU in this.

#### 5. Conclusion:

There is no single right way of dealing with people. Everyone in our Clubs and Tournaments will respond best to different forms of approach in different situations. Even the best of us will make errors in behaviour for a reason.

To implement this policy on Bridge Behaviour, we must now:

- Make our clubs and members aware of the policy
- Gain support by stating the advantages it holds for everyone
- Explain and go on to discuss it with Directors etc
- Amend the above based on constructive feedback received.
- Break down any barriers to the effective working of the policy.
- Delegate implementation to the Directors in Clubs and Tournaments
- Review the Director's reports in Club and Tournament to ensure implementation.

*Our Behaviour is powerful. We can use it to influence the responses people give as we play in Club and Tournament level. By heightening the awareness of our own and others' behavioural traits, we will be able to judge how best to handle them, so that everyone gets more pleasure from the game*