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Newsletter No: 4 for 2020

The move from Alert level 3 to Alert Level 2 is a positive step towards some normality. Regrettably, we could not in all consciousness recommend that Clubs open. Like everyone we will continue to monitor the situation and will provide a further advisory following the Government's next update.

In the meantime, we hope online bridge is filling the void. It is clear people are becoming more comfortable with online bridge. You may have seen the interview with Sybil Cornell on Breakfast TV (TV1). It showed we can all master technology no matter our age. Online bridge is however quite different to playing face to face as there is a need to self-alert the meaning of bids, avoid mis-clicks and minimize distractions.

The increase in use of online bridge has created new opportunities for players to act in a manner not consistent with the code of conduct or the intended values of the game we love so much. Online bridge is a new area for the regulation of the game and an area where changes occur, and understandings grow.

There is a new section in the NZ Bridge Manual, which is repeated below:

Clubs and Regions within New Zealand are increasingly organizing bridge online using platforms such as Bridge Base Online. All bridge sessions organised by Clubs and Regions including online bridge, come under the auspices of NZ Bridge. The Laws of Duplicate Bridge 2017 and the Regulations in this manual including the Code of Conduct apply to online bridge but with any modifications that are necessary due to the differences between online bridge and face to face bridge. In addition, and for the avoidance of doubt the following regulations also apply to online bridge:

- a) The obtaining of any information about any hand, other than information obtained by proper means during the hand is prohibited. (Law16)
- b) Communication during play between partners, by any means other than via the online platform is prohibited.
- c) Logging onto the online platform under more than one account simultaneously, during play, is prohibited.
- d) Any breaches of a), b) or c) above is a serious transgression of the proprieties of bridge.



Over the last few weeks we have been working with our counterparts, the ABF in Australia to develop a response to the WBF's decision to postpone the World Bridge Games until February/March next year plus proceed with the Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup and other events later in the year. All putting significant pressure on National Bridge Organisations to support and fund these events in these unusual times. Interestingly our letter was picked up by the International Bridge Press Association with the editor supporting our representations. We will see what happens next week when the management committee of the WBF meets.

COVID-19 for some clubs is causing hardship. Pleasingly however the majority are managing and not in need of help. We have received a call for the organisation to suspend, reduce or cancel the annual levy paid to NZ Bridge. There seems to be a misconception that the annual levy collected by the Clubs belongs to the Clubs. Think of it like GST, businesses collect the GST and pay it onto the Government. In our case Clubs collect the levy on our behalf and pay it to us in quarterly instalments. If we were going to offer relief the money would have to be returned to the players. In real terms we are talking about \$1.67 a month. For those who do not separate the funds from Club revenue we suggest the affiliation fee collected on behalf of NZ Bridge is maintained in a separate account and not used to cover usual operating costs. COVID-19 highlights the need to plan for a rainy day. Clubs need to think about what level their annual subscription should be pitched and the level of table money. We are not necessarily advocating increasing the cost of the game but a need to be realistic.

We understand the challenges clubs are encountering. We derive our revenue from the affiliation fee and from masterpoints. With no club sessions or tournaments our revenue has also dried up. We will be issuing invoices for the present quarter but have said to clubs we will consider relief on an individual basis, based on application.

The other significant request for help relates to resuming bridge and health and safety guidelines. The latter we have prepared and is presently being peer reviewed. Once complete detail will be released to clubs. Health and Safety will be part of the requirement of returning to bridge. Clubs will need to set up a COVID-19 prevention structure with protocols and rules which follow the best medical advice. We are working on guidelines for clubs to adopt. We will get these published as soon as possible to allow clubs plenty of preparation time. One of the things clubs can do is to stay in touch with their membership. When the time comes players might require support to return to the table.

Lockdown has allowed us to finish drafting of the NZ Bridge manual. The new manual will be on the website very shortly.

Over the last few months, we have been working on a top-level marketing plan to form part of an overarching strategy for rejuvenating the game, and more importantly to build club membership and increase player participation. We are in the infancy of this project and best described as work in progress.

The largest marketing tool currently is the website; however, it is largely an operational platform, not a consumer-friendly advertising mechanism to reach out to bridge players. Do not get us wrong there is a huge repository of information on the platform and the platform delivers significant value- e.g. Masterpoints and tournament entry.

There is no publicity plan to share the stories of the players, a tool that brings the game to life. All public facing channels need to be as polished as they can be, particularly those used by the key target audience.

Part of the work we need to do is look at our website and ensure it is consumer facing. The information and much of the functionality is great but as indicated above is focused towards existing players not set up to entice new players.

We are keen to hear from anyone out there who might be able and are willing to help us. If you are interested can you contact Alister.

One of the casualties of COVID-19 has been cancelation of several of our tournaments. To date 95 Club Tournaments, 7 Regional Congress's, and the Interprovincial trials have been cancelled. Many clubs have approached us to see if there is a window in the tournament calendar to reinstate these events when we are back playing. The Tournament calendar is congested and finding space that does not conflict with a neighbouring region is a challenge. We should satisfy ourselves there will be plenty of face to face bridge when we return.

Cheers Allan