



## **Bridge in the Time of Covid-19**

From April through to November 2020, 134 bridge players, organisers and teachers responded to our call for reflections and thoughts on how their bridging lives had changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At present we have received nearly 300 diary entries and one-off accounts from the United Kingdom, USA, Ireland, Norway, France, Japan, China, Poland, Germany, Canada, Spain, Greece, the Netherlands, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Some accounts were short and brief whilst others were detailed and extensive as well as a series of accounts sent throughout lockdown and beyond.

We are still in the process of carefully analysing and coding the data received thus far, however, we wanted to share with you, our participants, some of the emerging themes that are present in the data.

### **‘Online is better than nothing.’**

The move to online bridge has been broadly welcomed as a way to still play and connect with bridge partners, clubs and the wider bridge community. However, participants vary in their love of online bridge. Teachers and organisers are commended and praised for the hard work in teaching and helping players move online, but many participants miss the social face to face element of bridge. Indeed, some players commented that the move online had made them realise what they value most about bridge – namely the social interaction at the club more than the playing of the game. For others, online has meant less hassle commuting and travelling to clubs/tournaments whilst also providing the possibility to develop better technical bridge skills without the ‘distracting chatter’ at the table. Many participants also mentioned that online removed the element of ‘touching’ and ‘holding’ the cards, something they missed. Overall though, the majority of participants want to see a return to face-to-face bridge as soon as is safe and practical to do so.

### **A Divisive Pandemic**

Lockdowns, easing of restrictions and then further lockdowns have been present in most countries around the world. This has meant that for some countries, face-to-face bridge playing returned briefly and was then halted when further restrictions were re-imposed. As a result, participants spoke about how the pandemic, the restrictions and the loss of regular bridge playing in a face-to-face capacity had impacted their mental and physical health. Some participants were ‘exhausted’ by everything that was going on around them and playing

bridge often did little to alleviate that exhaustion. Other participants wrote about how lonely and cut off they were from regular social contact and expressed their concern for bridge partners who could not make the move online and who they had not seen or properly communicated with for months. In contrast, other participants wrote about how the pandemic meant they were playing more bridge than ever before. This meant they were busy learning new technological and bridge skills as well as helping and supporting others to make the transition to online bridge. The pandemic has therefore enabled some players to play more bridge, whilst limiting bridge playing opportunities for others.

### **Bridge Knowledge and Expertise**

Despite the challenges around playing bridge during a pandemic, where bridge playing occurred (whether online or face-to-face), participants' accounts were filled with precise observations and analyses of bridge games. Hands played and mistakes made were written about in great detail including the emotions experienced, such as feeling 'humiliated' at the table when errors were made or pointed out. Alongside this, the joy of doing well and going through the bridge hands afterwards was frequently commented on. The skill required to play well was discussed when watching professionals play online, but also when describing bridge events at the local club. Alongside this, some accounts provided insight into the challenges of teaching bridge, the constant questions asked by newcomers, alongside the technical issues of teaching people how to play online. It was clear that many of our participants had deep and extensive knowledge of bridge, but also that everyone was continually learning and adapting to the changing environment imposed by the pandemic.

### **Thanks**

As Covid is still very much with us and our lives continue to be affected by the ways in which our respective countries manage the pandemic, we would like to invite you to share any further thoughts and reflections on how your bridging lives continue to be shaped and changed by the pandemic. Please email these accounts to [bamsa@stir.ac.uk](mailto:bamsa@stir.ac.uk).

Finally, we at *BAMSA*, want to thank each and every one of you for so kindly sharing your thoughts with us. The data we have gathered demonstrates the challenge of playing bridge during a pandemic - the hard work, effort and dedication of many to moving entire clubs online and crucially, the vitally important role bridge plays in the lives of so many. We wish you all a safe and happy start to 2021.

Miriam & Sam

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