

Is Bridge a Sport? E.U. Court Says No



By [LIAM STACK](#) OCT. 26, 2017

Bad news, bridge fans. The European Court of Justice [ruled on Thursday](#) that the card game is not a sport, even when played by multiple competing teams.

Like many disappointments, this one traces its roots to a dispute on taxes.

The court's decision came in response to a case filed by the [English Bridge Union](#), based in Aylesbury, which organizes team-based bridge matches. The organization had argued that it should not have to charge tax on entry fees to its tournaments because bridge is "a card-based mind sport."

Entry fees for many sports competitions are exempt from value-added tax, or VAT, in Britain. But the British tax authority said bridge did not qualify because it did not involve much physical exertion.

The European Court heard the bridge union's arguments against the tax authority, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, in Luxembourg in March, the group said. On Thursday, the court sided with the tax authorities and said in a statement that bridge was not a sport because it was "characterized by a physical element that appears to be negligible."

The bridge union promotes a form known as [duplicate bridge](#), which minimizes the role of chance by having teams score points based on how well each plays the same hands. The court agreed that this "involves logic, memory and planning and may constitute an activity beneficial to the mental and physical health of regular participants."

But, the court said, that does not automatically make it a sport and certainly not for tax purposes.

The bridge union said in a statement that it was "very disappointed that the VAT burden which makes it harder to get more people playing

The group has long rejected arguments like the one made by the court and said on Thursday that its game had "many of the attributes of more recognized 'sports,' such as organized competition, training, and exertion." Bridge was also "an excellent way of improving mental acuity and delaying the onset of dementia," it added.

The organization said that most European Union member states allowed tax exemptions for "bridge activities" and that it feared the court's decision could result in new taxes being levied on bridge players across Europe.

But the ruling did contain one potential bright spot for bridge players. The court said its decision should have no impact on whether the national authorities considered bridge to be eligible for a tax exemption as a “cultural service,” or as an activity that “holds such a place in the social and cultural heritage of a country” that it deserved to be protected in some way.

The English Bridge Union said that it was “pleased by the court’s suggestion, and welcomes the possibility that bridge activities may yet be exempted from VAT,” but that it would have to “consider the implications of the suggestion.”

(Here is another interesting article on bridge.)

[In Bridge, Schools See Mental and Social Benefits](#)
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