



**WBF Officers Meeting  
Lausanne, 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2012**

**Agenda – Point 12  
Development of Youth Bridge, plans and programs,  
Report by the President**

Dear Friends,

One of the topic points of our legislature is to start a solid and well managed policy of bridge development, with a particular emphasis on youth bridge everywhere in the world as well as bridge in the poor and not-developed areas. This could have a great potential. We have labeled this initiative as “Youth and Solidarity”.

I am pleased to submit to you some thoughts and ideas that I have developed with Ata Aydin and David Stern. It is my fond wish that we can transform them into concrete programs, plans and initiatives.

Our NBOs around the world are facing a series of problems which threaten the future of the game as we know it. We must help them to solve these problems, because they are also our problems and, through helping them we are indeed help ourselves- WBF.

Summarizing those problems, we can see:

An aging bridge community:

The average age of NBO's is increasing year on year as a result of a combination of:

- Limited number of Younger Players (up to 25 years old) taking up the game
- Limited numbers of Young Adults (between 25 and 45) taking up the game
- Even in the Older Player category there is a limited uptake in the game.

In summary our core constituency of 60+ year old players are not being replaced as the older players pass away.

Every NBO knows that the problem exists. Every NBO knows that without some Youth and Young Adults being drawn into the game the future is bleak.

Limited Funding:

For some reason best known to the administrators, bridge is one of the cheapest pastimes available. It is cheaper than movies, most sporting activities, golf, tennis or just about anything else we can think of. Clubs provide supervision and enjoyment for a three hour period and prices are generally less than ten US Dollars (\$US10) and in many parts of the world much less. In general, in every field, if you offer a service too cheaply people do not value what you are offering as being valuable and worth it. It just isn't clear to us exactly why bridge has to be offered as cheaply as it is.

This is the situation, but I hope that, offering of course a good service and being aware of this, bridge around the world should be slowly, gradually and in a controlled manner be increasing the general cost of the game.

This will provide many struggling NBO's to eliminate funding constraints as an impediment to their commitment to grow the game.

#### Lack of a Business Plan:

The problem with NBO's, and perhaps in common with most amateur sports is that they are administered by, and I do mean this politely, good meaning amateurs. These are people who have a passion for the sport, some time to spare and a desire to improve the sport and its standing in the community.

With a limited skill-set it may be that these organizations need some guidance and it is here that the International Federation needs to take a leadership role. Of course it is always difficult to help organizations unless they recognize that they need some help and in fact the offer of help can many times be rejected as interference.

Clearly there is a vast difference in NBO's with some having less than 200 members and others having more than 5,000. This makes the following discussion somewhat problematic but I assume that the reader will be able to interpret what arguments apply to which NBOs.

The reality is that an NBO is just like any other business, needing a business plan, a financial plan and a way forward. They need to properly understand the regulatory, competitive and commercial environment and have a plan which caters all of these. Where funds are available it would be better for NBOs to have paid full-time administrators rather than continually relying on an ever changing group of unpaid workers.

This lack of professional day to day management, in part if not entirely a result of the limited funding, that is very much holding back progress in building the future of the game.

So the future of bridge in any country is usually dependent on a group of people sitting in a room and making decisions as to how to grow the game. People, usually with limited marketing, public relations or business experience, are being relied upon to promote and grow the game.

### Youth and Youth Adults Players:

The game of bridge was developed in an era when there were no:

- Computers
- Televisions
- Satellite choices of 200 channels
- Movies on demand
- Internet
- Wii, PSP and other video games

and none of the many other distractions that attract youth today.

There is a strong argument that younger people do not have the desire or perhaps even ability to commit and concentrate on an activity for a four hour period. Three hours for the bridge and 30 minutes transport getting to and from the game.

The very first thing that has to happen is that the WBF needs to assess whether bridge is past its use by date, whether the game is current, interesting and stimulating enough for us to hope that the young people could be induced to learn and play.

Because the game attracted us in a different time and age does not necessarily mean it will attract people today and we need to recognize this fact.

We all think the game of bridge should be appealing but the reality is that it is a long time since most bridge administrators (me certainly included) were young enough to realistically assess this.

And then the critical and key question what happens if the game simply isn't marketable – where do we go from there.

With this background we will be able to consider the issues more realistically.

### The future of Youth Bridge and Bridge in general

As noted above every NBO knows that they have to do something to increase Youth and Young Adult participation.

NBO's invariably cite lack of funds as the reason that they are unable to do more for bringing young people into the game while others simply don't know how to do it.

It is here that I strongly believe that the WBF has a duty and must definitively take a leadership role through:

- assessment the game of bridge and its relevance to youth today
- paying more attention to the online, via internet, game
- development a universal marketing plan which can be used by the majority of NBOs
- development a proof of concept to that marketing plan
- getting a buy in from NBO's to pursue the plan within their world of influence

The first cry we hear whenever we suggest that something needs to be done is “where are the funds”. The answer to this could be easier than people think. If the WBF can develop a plan to increase youth participation we are confident that funding will be forthcoming. What happens at this time is that the leadership don't want to develop a plan without funds while the exact opposite should be the undertaking.

We have already introduced the Simultaneous Tournament and in brief we will start the Internet Tournaments pro youth and solidarity to earn resources to devote to the initiative, but it's not enough.

If a solid plan is developed then the WBF could re-approach players/sponsors who have been identified as potentially having an interest in expanding youth bridge. Some of these prospects have previously contributed a lot of money towards bridge (up today only for their own pleasure and amusement which benefits just for some players, but without any direct benefit for the game at large). In addition we should expect some of the wealthier NBO's to contribute to the execution of the plan provided that the plan is solid enough and one in which they can be confident of success – after all increasing their numbers increases their revenue base!

### The plan

The stakeholders in a well-developed plan would include:

- NBOs
- Those interested in the future of youth bridge
- Educators
- Sport Authorities and Governments

The best way to advance youth bridge is to get a buy-in from educators and government into bridge being an important pathway to better developed youth and that participation in bridge improves social and cognitive skills.

We think that the recipients of this document would accept this as fact. However, approaching educators and authorities with this notion without any tangible evidence will clearly result in pathway to the exit doorway.

In our opinion the two actions in increasing youth participation in bridge are for the WBF

1. to fund a study that proves what we all know and believe – learning bridge has a positive effect on the social and cognitive skills of participants and in particular on the education of the youth in the delicate moments of their growth.

We have already collected many documents from the operators in this sector, but a highly credible academic study (a doctorate thesis) must surely be useful to prove this fact.. It is impossible to believe that any single NBO could initiate and fund such

an undertaking and it is the WBF which must take the leadership in this undertaking.

2. To obtain the highly anticipated result, the WBF should employ a well-credentialed marketing executive to be armed with such an academic study and to travel the world for 12 to 18 months assisting NBOs in achieving results with educators and government. Simply sending documents to NBOs will prove fruitless as, even armed with this perfect ammunition, NBOs will not be well placed to take the steps necessary to get bridge into schools and other educational institutions.

A totally trained and skilled person visiting NBO's and educators directly will certainly achieve a more positive outcome. Personally in Italy, when we start with the "Bridge at school" program, I successfully experienced the importance of such a marketing action which gave the Italian Federation an impressive return in terms of schools and pupils participating the program.

Of course this program will have a remarkable cost, but we have to accept and support it as an indispensable investment for the future of bridge and consequently of the WBF itself.

If you share the initiative, my idea is to appoint and chair a Work Commission to collect the necessary documentation, to study the feasibility of the project and submit a complete proposal to the next meeting.