

WESTERN CAPE BRIDGE UNION PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2019

During my short two years in office, I hope you will agree that a lot of positive changes have been made to improve the enjoyment of the game for all players who fall under the auspices of the Western Cape Bridge Union.

Our annual Pairs and Teams championships were well attended and the new formats provided fun for all whilst also ensuring a strong level of competition for our top players. We welcome your constructive ideas on how to improve these tournaments still further within the confines (four sessions over two Sundays) preferred by the majority of our players.

In the Pairs, our congratulations go to Gail and Selwyn Gersowsky in first place finishing a whisker ahead of Andrew Cruise and Tim Cope, while James Smith and John van Niekerk were the highest ranked B-grade pair finishing 7th overall in a field of 34 pairs. Well done to all!

In the Teams, for the second consecutive year, the Cruise team (Andrew Cruise, Tim Cope, Rob Sulcas, Malcolm Siegel, Glen Holman and Brian Pincus) outshone the other 15 teams but were given a run for their money in the head-to-head final by the Hayward team (Neil Hayward, Cary Roberts, Jocelyn Ashberg and Shirley Kaminer).

Both teams went on to represent us nationally in the Interprovincials where the Cruise team brought home the Medwin Trophy and the Hayward team did us proud by finishing second in the Berkowitz. This was all done via BBO from the comfort of the Bridge Centre with the aid of computers and table screens, perhaps a little smoke on occasions but absolutely no mirrors, as our able invigilator, Andre Truter, can testify!

The Festival of Bridge continues to attract players not just from all over South Africa, but also from overseas – notably, in no order other than alphabetical, England, Germany and Sweden. It must be remembered that the Festival continues to be a major source of income for the WCBU and whatever profit we are able to extract is immediately ploughed back into bridge development in general and our schools teaching programme in particular.

Thirty-two teams pitted their wits in a six-round Swiss (Danish) event where SA's national pride was at stake because, in the previous two years, the (mostly) Swedish Bjerregaard team (Sven Bjerregaard, Alon Apteker, Martin Lofgren and Carl Ragnarsson) lifted the trophy. Would they make it a hat trick? Almost, but not quite! They finished in 2nd place behind our very own Capetonian team of Maureen Narunsky, Imtiaz Kaprey, Rob Sulcas and Malcom Siegel. This was almost as popular a win as the outcome of some rugby event that briefly disrupted bridge proceedings (spot the Engelsman!).

The fun continued in the Festival Pairs where the Swedish partnership of Martin Lofgren and Carl Ragnarsson (respectively, President and Vice-President of the Swedish Bridge Federation) took the top spot just 0.03% ahead of Malcolm and Rob. So, the Swedes had the last laugh – or did they? No, the Dutch had the last laugh when the KLM flight to Amsterdam was grounded due to engine problems and the Swedish VIPs (and yours truly and his wife) were forced to disembark at 4.30am and check into a hotel on the Foreshore. Carl had previously joked about not being permitted back into the country if they managed the hat trick, but not being allowed to leave was not so funny, ja!

The Festival was significant for a number of other reasons – some good, some less so. First, the good... Ann Sturrock became the worthy recipient of the 2019 Tim Cope Award for Excellence in Bridge. As Tim so eloquently put it while presenting the award: "Ann changed the face of bridge in the Western Cape and nationally. We can all remember the time when we had to wait to see today's results on the club's noticeboard in a week's time; now the results are posted on the web site before we get home!" Thank you Ann, richly deserved.

More good news... the Festival saw Harold Bernstein become a Grand Master. As he said to me over a drink at an outdoor café: "It only took me... [*a passing motor bike drowned out his words*] ...years!". Awesome!

The less good... The quality and quantity of mid-session catering needs to improve and it will. The convention card (on the back of the scoring booklets) is outdated and a more relevant alternative will be implemented in due course. Teams scoring and seat assignments, especially for Swiss movements, need to take place much more quickly and efficiently. In this regard, we are already evaluating another scoring program (*Magic Contest*, developed in Sweden and widely used at international tournaments) and we will be using it for the Teams as well as the Pairs events at the SABF National Congress which takes place at the Italian Club in Cape Town from 9th to 16th March 2020. Check out the flier on noticeboards and the web. Enter online without delay!

During the year, we also hosted the Ladies Trials and the annual SABF Interclub Teams Championships where the best placed Capetonian team (Nancy & Diniar Minwalla, Paul Mestern and Julian Gruff) finished third in a field of 24 teams. As promised, two further workshops were expertly hosted by Tim Cope and Glen Holman in January on the subject of "Counting" and by Tim and Diniar in November on the subject of "Signalling". More workshops are being planned and will make it onto the calendar shortly.

Under the excellent editorship of Shirley Kaminer (voted Sports Journalist of the Year by the Cape Town Sports Council), the quarterly WCBU Newsletter goes from strength to strength. Edition 1 (June 2018) had ten pages whereas the most recent edition (no. 7, December 2019) has 24. At this rate, and with the enormous help of Kathryn and Eckhard, we should hit 36 pages by the end of 2020. Just joking... though why not? Seriously, we are indebted to both of them and to all our regular contributors who continue to share their wisdom, knowledge and expertise to the benefit of us all.

We continued to expand our teaching programme at schools – more about this from Kitty Cruise in due course – and with Duncan Keet's invaluable assistance, we received a total of R70,000 in grants from the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sports (DCAS) for the 2019/2020 government year. We are planning more schools and aiming to motivate more grants this year.

At the time of writing, we are still waiting for the City of Cape Town to give us a new lease for the Bridge Centre. It is long overdue but, when it arrives, it will be for a minimum term of two years and eleven months commencing on the first day of the month after signature. Effectively, we can expect the existing Bridge Centre's doors to remain open for at least the next three years and, as soon as the ink dries, we will be able to invest a sensible portion of our cash reserves to effect overdue improvements (e.g. kitchen upgrade, enclosing the veranda, a new coat of paint). We will also then be able to evaluate and potentially move forward with a proposal to bolster our income through billboard advertising, safe in the knowledge that any such discussions with council will not jeopardise our being granted a new lease.

I would like to thank all of my fellow Committee members for their hard work and achievements over the past 12 months. Shirley Phillips continues to attend to staffing and other daily matters at the Bridge Centre for which we are all very grateful. Andre Truter continues to ensure we all get our pre-dealt boards and hand records in time and deserves a special vote of thanks for organising and directing the events so admirably at the Festival of Bridge.

Hilary Nick continues to keep tabs on our money, takes entries for events, chases outstanding payments and maintains membership status (via the SABF Online system). She is ably assisted by Cary Roberts, our bookkeeper, and by various spreadsheets designed to lighten their burdens considerably. Last, but by no means least, I am grateful to Andrew Cruise for his invaluable input on all bridge matters and for recording the minutes of our meetings.

In the past two years, I have done all that I can to set us on a course for future growth and success. Whilst bricks and mortar are important, they are worth nothing if there's nobody left playing bridge. Our top priority is **to keep bridge alive**. Teaching bridge at schools is a good start and “no fear” sessions and supervised bridge equally so, but we need to bump heads and devise a plan to promulgate the game as far and wide as possible to players (and newcomers to the game) of all ages. Rome was not built in a day and the first step is to get everybody's ideas – yes, your ideas and suggestions – on how we are going to achieve this. It will take money; it will take commitment; and it will take time. Money we have! Committed, we should be. Time is running out.

Yours in bridge,
Steve Bunker
WCBU President
1st February 2020

P.S. This year's Western Cape Pairs Championships – Sundays 5th and 19th April.