

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

I come to the end of my 2 year's role as President, delighted to have been given this opportunity by first the EWBA and then by the WWBA

I have undoubtedly enjoyed the majority of this time but can confess I have had short periods of frustration, revolving around the administrative side. Individually I have felt able to work with everybody but as a collective whole I can only compare WBU to my experience of Local Government

As a tournament player myself it has taken me some time to appreciate that the WBU seems primarily set up to cater for this group, yet this group is a minority within the WBU. They do speak the loudest and most frequently and thus get WBU's attention. I constantly hear " what does WBU do for its ordinary members". Stock answers can be given but my conclusion is same as most, not enough.

Any solution to be found is not helped by clubs themselves not knowing what they want from WBU.

Going back to well intentioned advice, telling WBU of its failings,individually constructive criticism is healthy for any organisation but it does have collective effect of causing volunteers to un-volunteer. It could soon reach stage when we have no volunteers left. I have done 2 years as a volunteer and admit at the moment this is enough, I need a break.

If I use selection as an example of trying to illustrate what I mean

At start of my presidency Council asked me to identify a group of new selectors and this was a mix of past selectors plus 2 new ones, Julian Pottage and Alan Stephenson, joined after a further year by Alan Jones.

This group have developed systems involving not just picking 1,2 and 3 from trials but also developed training. Other home unions are now envious of Wales as we have won Camrose and Seniors Camrose for first time ever and also had an increased number of lady trialists than for some years followed by an excellent Lady Milne performance. We have a junior co-ordinator who is actively working with developing those juniors we have and identifying new ones

They have undoubtedly done more than any group of selectors I have known yet still face a barrage of criticism/ questions, often from unsuccessful trialists who if they put as much effort into their bridge as to their e mails might get nearer making teams!

I personally thank the selector's for sticking at it and I have certainly learnt to trust their collective judgement and try hard(not quite there) now not to interfere, give an opinion if asked otherwise shut up.

Back to WBU matters I find it somewhat startling that of our 53 clubs only about half of them really take part or are interested in WBU matters and too many of our clubs see themselves as separate entities, running their affairs on a sort of "we need x number of members to become affiliated to WBU". Once we have got these no encouragement is given to belong to and improve WBU for the benefit of all bridge players, tournament, social, beginners novices.

For comparison I use the work I have started for Bridge Overseas, with a goal of offering bridge holidays, home and overseas, for ALL types of bridge players, tournament, kitchen bridge, golf clubs. unaffiliated clubs, U3A, rubber bridge players. Yes they are a profit run business and thus attract their share of complaints /criticism but are far more responsive to new ideas, able to change more quickly and have a much greater team feel than WBU. And let me reiterate **WBU has a lot of great individuals doing lots of good work** but it does not have a collective feel/direction. Instead individuals, including myself, pull in different directions and fight to assert their views so there is no real vision, collective goal . Is this because we do not have a leader?

Do we spend too much time on firefighting, day to day issues and which group looks at long term planning in sufficient depth. Nobody seems to have the time.

So what have I helped with over last 2 years?

IMPROVEMENTS

- *To international training- led by selectors*
- *Yearly competition review group instigating small changes to our competitions but committee nature of WBU prevents radical upheavals*
- *Club Visits- very popularly received and the part of role I have found most fulfilling and different to what past presidents have attempted*
- *Management group- instigated by previous president and led to improvement in managing WBU*
- *3 new congresses- Abereoron mid week, Fishguard, Swiss pairs in Western area*
- *Encouragement of novice events both at congresses and at area level*

- *Talking to people at a personal level at congresses- far better than an EBU type questionnaire.*
- *Improver training where required, sometimes short talks whilst visiting clubs, half day sessions or series of talks*
- *First ever questionnaire- even if took me too long to collate answers WBU now has data to work on in the future*
- *President's cup, a third tier event to Perry/Spickett*
- *An automatic masterpoint system, however slow going it has been it is getting there and expected to advance still further after a change in masterpoint secretary*

FEWER IN- ROADS THAN WOULD HAVE WANTED

- Junior bridge
- New members
- Integration of social and tournament players, a bridge for all approach and change of membership structure(resistance to this from management as a group)
- Bad behaviour- too ambitious a task and biggest area where infighting dampened my enthusiasm to push through change so falling back partly on an EBU model
- Out of date rules and people's delight in enforcing them

MEMORIES FROM VISITS

- Lots of Dolgellau for mainly non bridge reasons but including a break in to their bridge cupboard
- Cake/biscuit refreshment award goes to Sully
- Chimes award goes to Pontyclun
- Some clubs charging me a visitor fee to play, whilst others paying for an evening meal
- Cheese and wine interludes held during my visit
- Noisiest partnership set up by club goes to Arthur Orme and myself at Mold.
- The result of playing with one clubs resident expert- 43%.
- The older members I played with still going strong and keen recent members
- Teaching sessions at start of duplicates well received
- Belinda Davies winked redouble- probably illegal but great fun

SEEMINGLY NEVER ENDING E MAILS ON TOPICS

- *Player eligibility for an area*
- *How does Council fit in to new structure*
- *Results of trials/ team selection*
- *Funding of international teams*
- *New selector's*
- *Smoking*
- *Venues*
- *Dates and clashes*
- *Simultaneous scoring events*
- *Rows between groups/ individuals*
- *Selection/training*

So having gained a wealth of experience I have no regrets in for moment leaving WBU admin and obtaining much needed full time paid employment in the bridge world, with the aim of trying to provide for all levels of bridge players, recognising that improvements can always be made and using my experience and expertise where it can have a quicker impact .

I wish Paddy / Management/ Council all the best for the future and hope I will be asked to be re-involved at some stage in future