

In taking over the role of President of the WBU I must first thank our outgoing President Adrian Thomas for his tireless work over the last 24 months. Truly a journeyman president he has touched base with more bridge players and bridge clubs than probably any previous president and has made a significant impact on our union. I would like to also thank the NWBA for putting me forward as their representative and the WBU for accepting me. I would also like to give special thanks to Linda Greenland and to Noelle Bond for their longstanding work within the union and wish them a very happy retirement.

I was told I needed to have a mission for my year in office and spent some time pondering what this should be. On due reflection I decided to tackle the problem of getting people back into bridge in general and back to tournament bridge specifically.

I believe there is a popular misconception that bridge is a dying game, this is not true. Every night tens of thousands of people play bridge online on BBO and OKBridge and social bridge events abound at bridge clubs, golf clubs, bowls clubs etc., what I do believe is suffering is tournament bridge. This might be due to several factors, including too many bridge competitions, extensive travelling and the associated expense, bad behaviour by tournament bridge players, poor prize money and poor event structure. We have to address all of these factors and probably more in a positive manner and might I say that criticism of the management of the WBU is welcomed and indeed encouraged as long as it is constructive.

In addition to these factors, the membership of the WBU is dwindling and our sister union the EBU is obviously subject to the same pressures, but has taken steps to change matters. For example they introduced P2P which was criticised by many who thought it would affect the membership unduly, however it seems to have had no effect on lowering numbers at the EBU clubs I regularly visit. In addition the advent of electronic masterpoint submission makes it now very easy to become a point collecting member of their union. Their introduction of stratified events, stratified masterpoint awards and blue points also makes for more interest across the field of an event rather than just focusing on the top end. Don't imagine I am in favour of forcing these matters on the WBU, I'm not, but I believe we need to recognise the great value for money we get from the WBU. For a small fee we get a yearly booklet, several newsletters, a repository for our hard won masterpoints, regularly organised tournaments, a website, support for the clubs in the union and much more.

What we really need is more people playing bridge. We have a duty to support our international players, our tournament players and especially our junior players, but we must also support players at all levels. I would like my mission to be to get more people playing bridge, we need to attract new people to the clubs, convert social bridge players to club bridge and bring back people who used to play but became disenfranchised with the game. Perhaps even take a leaf out of the world of poker and get online players interested in the live game. We also need to access younger players from schools and the universities by offering to help them set up teaching sessions and help to support university/school bridge clubs. In order to do this we need help in all the regions of the WBU and I hope members will help in doing this and go back to their club and area committees and really try to achieve a move forward.

However as an individual you could also help and a personal goal could be to try to bring just one non-member to your bridge club and introduce them to this great game. But even more than this we need to make sure it's apparent that we enjoy the game, I know from experience bridge is painful at times and we want to pull our hair out (or somebody else's at any rate) but remember it's the agony that makes the ecstasy so good.

Paddy Murphy (June 2012)