

Meet...



FACTFILE

- Born 1955. Lives in Warsaw.
- Married to Joanna; two sons aged 7 and 12.
- Occupation: Professional bridge player and distributor of *Lavazza* coffee machines.
- World Olympiad gold medallist 1984.
- European Individual champion 1992.

Piotr Gawrys

*Patrick Jourdain interviews
Europe's first Individual champion*

Piotr, last year, you became the first GENERALI European Individual Champion, but first please, tell us about your family life.

I was brought up in Warsaw. My father was a designer, and I have one brother who was very talented in Physics and Mathematics. I played family bridge from the age of nine.

When did you first play tournament bridge?

At the age of 15 I played at the local bridge club. It was all duplicate bridge, as rubber bridge was considered gambling, and not approved. I went to Warsaw Polytechnic to study architecture, and, unlike many of the bridge players there I finished my course and graduated. In 1976 I represented Poland in the Junior team which played in Lund, Sweden, and we came fourth. The same year I won the Junior European Pairs in Cannes in partnership with *Krzysztof Moszczyński*.

What happened after you left college?

I became a professional bridge player. In 1982 I played in the Biarritz Pairs Olympiad with *Marcin Lesniewski* who is in the same team, here in Menton. It was the first time we ever partnered each other. We came 7th and could have won the gold medal but for two disasters in the final session.

I represented Poland in the open team

for the first time in 1984 when we played in the Seattle Olympiad and became world champions. I partnered *Henrik Wolny*. Bridge did very well in Poland after that, and received support from the government.

What were your main achievements in bridge after that?

The next year I played in the Europeans in Salsomaggiore but Poland did not do well. I partnered *Lesniewski* for a few years, Poland's next medal was the bronze in Killarney in 1991 by which time I had formed a partnership with *Krzysztof Lasocki*. We went to Yokohama and won the silver medal in the Bermuda Bowl.

What did you think of the first GENERALI Individual in Paris?

Well, of course, I enjoyed it! But I think it was particularly good for bridge because the players came first. There has been a trend in bridge for the teams, and for the officials to become more important, and for the players as people to be forgotten. The public is only really interested in individuals, and if the authorities want to create extra interest in bridge they must build up the public's knowledge of particular players.

If you had a magic wand, and could change something about bridge, what would it be?

I would have the strongest players possi-

ble on Appeals Committees. I can only respect the judgment of very good players when deciding what a player would or should have done.

What is your opinion about systems? Your teammates play the highly artificial Strong Pass.

I prefer playing a natural system because it allows me more freedom to exercise my judgment. I have played *Strong Pass* and believe it is a superior method, but it has not really been allowed to develop. It did not really start until 1965, and after 10 years the administrators gave it so many restrictions that development stopped.

How is bridge in Poland?

It did very well between 1984 and a couple of years ago, but now, mainly due to the new economic situation, is going down again. Public interest is low.

You travel the world playing bridge. How do the countries differ?

I always found bridge in Italy the most pleasant because they treated the players so well. The ACBL Nationals provide the most interesting bridge, and I like the Invitation events there like the *Cavendish* because of the high standard.

Good luck in Menton Piotr, and thank you for your time.

