

Indonesian women: prepared to win

by Micke Melander



The Indonesian Venice Cup team: Lusje Olha Bojoh, Fera Damayanti, Suci Amita Dewi, Kristina Wahyu Murniati, Julita Grace Tueje and NPC Bert Toar Polii.

The Indonesian women's team in Veldhoven knocked out USA 2 from the Venice Cup after beating up the Americans in the last three segments of their quarter-final match. Was that a coincidence or a payoff of their preparations?

Pretend that you are going to a world championship and are going to represent your nation. In most sports, they have programs for their athletes, which isn't particularly common in bridge even if your national bridge organization is a member of the national Olympics federation.

"Our players have been training for this championship and the Southeast Asian Games since October 2010," says Bert Toar Polii, non-playing captain of the women's team.

Employed by the government

"In Indonesia, our selected players get their salary from the government, though they also have to sign up and undergo a special program," Polii says.

The Indonesian women's and open teams were brought together in Jakarta, and if they didn't already live there, they were accommodated in a small hotel close by where they were going to train. For more than a year, they played bridge, seven days a week and at least seven hours a day.

"Normally, they play between ten in the morning and five in the afternoon, and in the weekends they normally participate in some kind of tournaments. We also might bring in opponents in the daytime for training," says Polii.

Hell Week

"We (Hendravan, Panelewen and Polii) have been training them on different tasks every day to get the best preparation possible," Polii says.

And it wasn't only bridge on their schedule. In February 2011, they had to go to a military camp for physical training. Hard training from four in the morning to midnight every day. One day per week, they were rewarded by another six hours of free time (except from the four they had between midnight and four in the morning).

The breaks for lunch, snacks and dinner lasted for something like five minutes. Besides that it was running, climbing, walking or other things 24/7. It reminds me of watching Hell Week from SAS and SEAL troops on Discovery Channel – though this time for the national teams in bridge.

Now we might get back to the question asked in the beginning of this story: Is it by coincidence that they also beat up USA 2 in the last three segments of the quarterfinal? Probably not, because they are very well prepared to endure in a tournament for a long time under the hardest conditions. They received their payoff for good preparations and have well motivated players.

Young Team

The average age of the Indonesian Women team is about 35, but more or less all of them have been playing since they were very young. "I learned the game at home when I was 14 by my father," says Lusje Bojoh. That was in 1982 and at the same time Julita Tuelje learned bridge, and they still play together! So they might throw in an anniversary next year for a 30-year-old partnership. How many can show up with such records at a world championship, without playing in the seniors?

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Young players

"Nowadays," says Bojoh, "we have a lot of juniors. We have a program called Bridge Masuk Sekolah (Bridge got to school). That got a lot of juniors to our federation."

Bojoh is originally from a city called Manado in North Celebes, about two hours north of Jakarta by plane. "My province is one of the biggest if we look at bridge. Eddy Manoppo and Henky Lasut, for instance, come from that city." That province, one of 33 in Indonesia, once belonged to the Netherlands, and still there are today many who are able to speak Dutch there.

"We got some help from the Netherlands back in 2004, and got their program for Minibridge to attract and teach juniors. We translated it and started recruiting teachers to use the material," says Polii.

After that, they have continued to run the same program, and for the first years they had to pay the teachers, but not any longer because they have so many who are able to do the work. It does not even have to be necessary bridge players, it might be regular teachers in school who have been trained.

30,000!

"We have about 1000 juniors in each province" says Polii. Without being a rocket scientist, we then know that Indonesia has about 30,000 active juniors within their federation. That's a fantastic figure and sounds like a pipe dream for most of us.

Each year, Indonesia set up a special student championship. In the finals they have 500 juniors brought together (the top from each province) who come and participate in a tournament similar to what we see in Veldhoven. They start in teams, playing a round robin with a later knockout, and when they get knocked out they move over to the pairs.

"We are actually supported by the Education Department of the government for doing the work in the schools," says Polii. One university called Unima in Manado actually has bridge on the schedule mandatory for their students in one of the terms.

Not enough training?

Board 27. Dealer South. None Vul.

♠ 10 8 5

♥ K 7 6 5 4 2

♦ 10 8

♣ A 4

♠ A K Q 4 2

♥ -

♦ 9 6 2

♣ 9 8 7 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 6 3

♥ J

♦ A Q J 7 5

♣ K Q J 6

♠ J 9

♥ A Q 10 9 8 3

♦ K 4 3

♣ 10 5

West	North	East	South
Dhondy	Bojoh	Senior	Tueje

1♠	4♥	4♣	1♥
Pass	5♥	Dbl	Pass
			All Pass

West	North	East	South
Dewi	Brock	Murniati	Smith

Pass	2♣	All Pass	2♥
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Here Bojoh and Tueje did very well to sacrifice at the five-level. England got two down and 300 versus the cold game that probably would have scored 450. In the other room, Sally Brock for England bid a natural (psychic) 2♣ that went six down after being passed out. The only one who may act in that sequence is probably East, but knowing that partner is probably loaded with hearts doesn't make life that easy and without both majors 3NT doesn't seem like an option either. Brock found a weak spot here in the training, but we can be quite sure that Indonesia will get better and better with the program they have.

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All this is the work of a team of young men on the Netherlands Bridge Federation together with the young men working at Brainport (www.studiodiip.com).

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