

Reflections from the bottom of the pool

Having talked with others over several years, of their experiences in Canberra in January, partner and I thought it was time to put our feet in the water. The website was found to be user-friendly, enabling us to enter online, and book accommodation at Rydges Lakeside Hotel.



Bob Coker, Ian Wright, Malcolm Lavender, Ron Crick

The drive from Melbourne was fairly easy and the GPS led us directly to Rydges. Our room was of a good size, with two single beds, two chairs and a desk. We emptied the contents of the refrigerator into a drawer and replaced it with bread and lunch fillings. Our first night out was to the Ainslie Football Club, which provided a reasonable meal, and a large choice of poker machines for those so inclined. Thereafter we enjoyed dinner at many venues about London Circuit, and particularly the Thai restaurants, as they welcomed BYO wine.

Like most Swiss events, we got smashed in the early rounds of the Restricted Pairs, but wound up with five wins overall, and being in the top half of the field, we were feeling pretty good. The SWPT event was an unmitigated disaster, however, resulting in a single victory. Towards the end of each match, the noise level was like a football match, making concentration difficult. Having two team members at various times overnight in hospital, did not help. Providing cumulative Gold Points earned on the results slip and the table numbers on show would certainly benefit all.

The Celebrity Speaker program was good value, and partner and I gained much from them, as well as some new books to study. We stayed for two extra days to see the War Memorial, the National Library and the Portrait Gallery.

We do not regret having gone to Canberra, but do question the reward for our five wins in the pairs compared to the solitary teams win. We may play in the pairs again, if we consider the reward for risk makes the trip worthwhile.

*Regards,
Bob Coker and Ian Wright*

The Mental Game - the Kick Off

by Kim Frazer



Often in sport, we see very good athletes lose a match after an error made in the early stages of their competition. This is particularly true in the “target” sports like shooting, golf, archery and so on, but other events like cycling, swimming, athletics, gymnastics are not immune. A number of factors can contribute to this phenomenon, but the most obvious is anxiety, which affects the athlete’s ability to perform at their normal level. The athlete afflicted by anxiety at the beginning of an event, or indeed during an event, often makes a costly mistake from which recovery is impossible. They finish below their best, pondering what might have been if they hadn’t messed up their match.

I have also observed this quite often in bridge, where an otherwise competent player will completely misplay or misbid a board(s) in their tournament, particularly early in the event, turning a potential win into a loss. It is possible to recover from an early loss, but it is better if you don’t have to. Whilst there are many techniques to help athletes relax and deal with nervous tension and match anxiety, a good first step is to be ready to go at the kick-off with good match preparation, and I would like to focus on some techniques to assist with this in this article.

In sport you know what to expect at the start of the match or race, and it is possible to make practicing starts very close to the reality. Athletes spend many hours practising this aspect, to ensure a good start to competition. In training for my shooting events, practising starting matches included a pre-match warm-up and preparation before every training session and match. It is therefore surprising to me that many bridge players enter the competition “cold” in sporting terms. Many of us will have experienced starting a tournament with a complicated hand at Board 1. If you aren’t prepared, and haven’t got your mind into gear, before you know it, you’ve gone off, or failed to bid, a game or slam you could have made! It is impossible to predict the hand you will get on Board 1, but it is possible to manage all the other aspects, and to ensure you are prepared for “the kick-off”.

To play well from the outset, I feel bridge players could improve their chances by doing a warm up - both mentally and physically in the same way that professional athletes warm up before their events. It is hard

to imagine a professional athlete walking out onto the field of play without having done a warm-up. Waking up the mind and body before you start your bridge tournament can also help with the early match nerves that some players experience. If you walk in for the first round, having warmed up properly, then you are more likely to play at your desired level, than if you are mentally “cold”.

Waking up the central nervous system is quite simple really - walking, some yoga or stretching in your hotel room, a swim or similar activity, is enough to get the blood flowing, and physically wake up the body. Your brain needs oxygen to function properly, so activating your body physically will help to wake up the central nervous system. You can do more vigorous exercise if you are younger and/or fitter, but for many bridge players, a 15-20 minute walk before or after breakfast is enough to help wake up the body, and get ready for action. It is also worth considering a walk during the lunch break before the afternoon session as well.

Waking up the mind may be managed in many ways.

Experiment to find out what works best for you and your partner/teammates, but the point is to become mentally alert before the first round. Juggling is often used by athletes - both for waking up the mind and the eye-hand co-ordination. This might also be effective for bridge players but not everyone has the dexterity to manage it, so here are a few other more “bridgey” ideas on waking up your mind before your first session.

- Have a hand record(s) from a recent competition and plan your bidding and/or play on half a dozen hands.
- Play a few hands of bridge, if you can find some other willing participants, or online/against the computer if you can't. Remember this is a warm-up designed to get your mind in gear, so a few hands is enough!
- Do a few problems from a bridge book suitable for your skill level.

Finally at the tournament, it is important to have a routine before play, as this gets your mind into its “bridge” zone. Doing the same thing every time ensures we reach our “match ready” state for the first board. In shooting I had a pre-match day and match day routine, and I also had an equipment checklist to make sure I remembered everything I was supposed to pack for the competition. It wasn't much use arriving at the competition to find that you had left a critical piece of equipment at home, several hours away. Similarly for bridge, it is an important part of preparation to be ready when play starts. Get to the table on time. Have



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your system card, pen, water bottle, headache tablets, or whatever else you normally require with you. Give yourself some time to review the opponents' system. The point here is to create a consistent environment that enables you (and your partner) to perform at your best, not one where you or partner are stressed out before you even play a hand.

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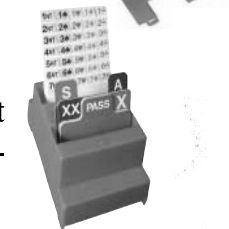
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Contr.	Ld.	Made	NS+	EW+	NS%	EW%
W 4	-2	200			96	96
W 4	-1	100			71	71
W 4	-1	100			71	71

Hand	983	T73	JT3	AK92	K7	AK42	K0754	J3
9	AQJT64							
10	96	QT654						
11	52	QJ9865						
12	A82							
13	87							

	N	S	E	W
3NT	4	4	2	3
4	4	4	2	3

Optimum result(s)
North/South 5♥ x-3, -500