

ABF NEWSLETTER

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Editor: editor@abf.com.au

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BRIDGE PROFILE: TRAIAN CHIRA

This edition's profile is of a person who, nowadays, is not so much a bridge player as an organiser of Bridge Base Online (BBO) coverage within Australia, for the World Bridge Federation and at many other international events. His video footage was also largely responsible for providing the evidence corroborating the cheating allegations against several world-class pairs in late 2015.

Neil Ewart interviewed him for the ABF Newsletter and, hence, the interview is in the third person. Thank you, Neil, for this interesting piece.

Background

Traian Chira (pronounced Try-an Kee-ra) came to Australia from Campina in Romania in the early 1990s after the revolution that saw the overthrow of Communism. His professional life is spent is writing and managing software.

What is your first memory of playing bridge?

Traian comes from a Chess background. He was looking for a pastime in Australia, so went to the VBA in 1993, where he met Dan Hohor, a fellow Romanian. They quickly became friends and bridge partners. Traian called him "The Maestro". As Traian said "I never have read a bridge book in my life. Ever! Dan, however, read books, and played, not like me by the ear, but through knowledge."

Dan, who was the same age as Traian, sadly succumbed to cancer in 2016.

Traian tells a story from Bali in 2013 that he still laughs about. He was doing an interview for Indonesian television and the interviewer asked him who his favourite bridge player in the world was, expecting some name like Meckstroth or Rodwell to be mentioned, but he responded "Dan Hohor". "Who?!!" asked the interviewer.

How did you become involved with bridge software?

In the late 1990s, Fred Gitelman was getting BBO going and, early on, Nick Fahrner got involved in doing some BBO Vugraphs in Australia. Traian saw this and said "Nick, I like this. I want to be an operator". Fred Gitelman showed Traian how to run Vugraphs and he was quickly absorbed by it. "I love kibitzing bridge. For me this was the easiest way to kibitz bridge at a high level."

"I wanted to do this properly, so I started Vugraphing a few matches in Australia. In 2010 I was invited to Philadelphia to a world event as an operator." After the event Maurizio Di Sacco (the WBF Operations Director) called Traian and said "Look, I like you and would like you to run the Vugraphs for me at WBF and EBL (European Bridge League) events."

Lille, in 2012, was the first time where he was in charge of the entire Vugraph operation and this is where he first started to design his software where you could see schedules, player information, and matches "so the spectator had a connection". Whilst he now thinks his efforts there look primitive, the WBF liked it and he has never looked back. As well as working full-time, Traian spends around 6 hours a day on his "hobby", as he calls it.

Did you realise your video footage of events would be used to expose cheats? How did you feel when that happened?

"I decided for Bali in 2013 I would do something for fun. I would bring a camera. Nobody had thought of that before. I was bored, and thought a camera would bring more spectators."

During this event Maurizio asked Traian to move his cameras to a specific match. He didn't know why at the time, and didn't want to. "It's a boring Seniors' match. Nobody will %\$@#\$ watch!"

After the event he was packing up and Maurizio asked him for a copy of the video. He wouldn't say why. Two months later Maurizio contacted him and said, "a judge will call you".

Traian's video was instrumental in finding the "coughing German doctors" guilty of using coded coughs to exchange information. The doctors claimed that Traian had doctored his video, but that was quickly dismissed and the doctors received hefty punishments.

Maurizio then asked Traian to arrange for 8 cameras for the 2014 European Championships. Traian says "this is where we caught everybody".

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Bill Gates and Traian Chira at the inaugural Online Bridge World Cup in 2016



Traian's video was used to expose an extraordinary amount of cheating at international events, and resulted in some of the "best" bridge players in the world being found guilty of cheating.

Despite this, he is quite unfazed by the outcomes; he is more interested in making the game more interesting to the spectator!

Since then, his software has become more sophisticated, with much higher resolution providing very good viewing. For future major events, there will be a small tablet computer on each side of the screen that will include a button for calling the Director (so the other side of the screen doesn't know a call has been made) and also one that will be required to be used when taking a toilet break. (A team mate at the other table won't be permitted to leave at the same time.)

Traian didn't set out to make his software a security tool, his primary interest being the viewing, but the WBF saw the power in using it to restrict the chances of cheating, and has worked with Traian to develop his software in this area as well as for our viewing pleasure. In the future, we may even see bidding done on the tablets but Traian draws the line at that. "If they take the actual cards away, I'm outta here!"

What is your most memorable bridge moment?

Ed: I'd expected him to say that meeting Bill Gates was exciting but...

Traian's moments don't come from exciting hands or play like the rest of us of course. They come from moments relating to a Vugraph. His most memorable moment was at Ostend in the 2013 European Championships when short by one operator, Andy Hung volunteered to do two tables simultaneously. Most operators struggle to keep up at one table but not only did Andy manage to operate two computers he also provided commentary! Traian was amazed. "He's the best in the world."

Have you a favourite bridge hand?

In 2003, at the ANC Butler, playing with Dan (Hohor) against Peter Gill and Martin Bloom, the auction went 1NT – 3NT. Peter led a card, and after 10 minutes' thought, Dan turned to Peter and said, "I will squeeze you out of your idle card!" Peter made Dan play it out (he had probably never come across Dan before, since he didn't play much). Dan was right and Peter was eventually squeezed.

Tell us about your favourite international bridge experience.

"Last year in Wroclaw for the first time we had 16 rooms on Vugraph. I arrived in this underground lair where they had 16 rooms. It was unbelievable. It was a memorable moment to have 16 tables on BBO."

When you hear Traian recount these stories the passion in his voice about what he does is quite evident.

What do you still want to achieve in bridge?

"In Canberra each January I try out all my new stuff. This year for the first time we had tablets attached to the table screens. Tablets are my next project. And more and more rooms on Vugraph. In Lyon we will have 24 rooms on Vugraph with the 'Director call' and 'toilet break' buttons fully functional."

What event would you like to be involved with, that you have not already attended?

Traian, apart from his introduction in Philadelphia, has done little in North America. It has been discussed, but the ACBL hasn't been able to provide the wired internet that Traian says is essential for his software to work at an acceptable level.

Talking to Traian was quite uplifting. He has an extraordinary passion for this stuff and gets so excited talking about it. The whole bridge world is so lucky to have him.



*A rare photo of Traian playing bridge.
Now we understand - he doesn't have time!*

BRIDGE SOFTWARE

JACK 6 download	\$75.00
Bridge Baron 26 CD	\$70.00
GoTo Bridge 16	\$75.00

This is highly recommended for improving players due to its extensive lessons and quick improvement hints on bidding and play.

All bridge products are on CLEARANCE SALE!
Postage is extra on all orders.

John Hardy
63 Tristan St., Carindale QLD 4152
Ph: 0417 509662
Email sales@johnhardy.com.au