

Report to the World Bridge Federation Executive Council (WBF EC)

In my 34 years with WBF EC (including 24 years of Vice Presidency) I have had the pleasure of witnessing WBF Presidents advocating important development goals. Such development goals, upon the successful implementation of their programs, will transform WBF from an organiser of World Tournaments to become a “Real World Organisation” (as named by Julius Rosenblum) of promoting bridge to be a globally popular sport (a household name). In this report, I am sharing with you how Zone 6 partnering with WBF successfully implemented the programs aiming at achieving the development goals.

Dennis Howard, Ernesto d’Orsi, Bobby Wolff era: Bridge for Youth

With the commencement of various World Youth Championships in the late ‘80s, the Promotion of Bridge for Youth was the central focus when I joined WBF EC in 1988, as the proxy of Zone 6 President. However, the most enlightening remark on the subject was the one in 1993 during the meeting between Bobby Wolff and Li Tieying. As avid bridge players, many Chinese leaders own the vision of developing bridge in the country. Mr Li Tieying was a China State Councillor, a Vice Premier level senior government official where Sport, Education, and Culture were among the ministries under his supervision.

When Li announced his vision “There are no less than 400 million card players in China and I wish to convert 30% of them to become bridge players”, Bobby’s answer was direct and easy: “Teach bridge in your primary and secondary school as an accredited course”. They then continued their exciting discussion with the formulation of action programs to fulfil Li’s vision.

Zone 6 NBOs were aware of the programs and many of them have successfully implemented them in schools and universities: -

- training students, training the teachers (who will become the trainers),
- assisting in the establishment of bridge clubs in schools and universities,
- organising inter-school/inter-university national championships,
- assisting the national youth teams in obtaining government funding for the expenses to participate in international championships.

Instead of repeating Zone 6’s success stories in promoting youth bridge, I am presenting here a picture that was taken during the 2019 Hong Kong Inter City Tournament.



A school (yes, just one school!) in Shanghai brought 38 teams to participate in the youth sessions.

Jose Damiani era: Olympic Movement

Jose's magnificent accomplishment of securing the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) recognition of bridge as an International Federation (IF) started the Olympic Movement ball rolling. Leveraging WBF's IOC recognition and IF status, Zone 6 adopted a three-pronged program aimed at achieving the goal of the Olympic Movement.

- NBOs qualified as National Sports Federations (NF) recognised by National Olympic Committees (NOC)

Zone 6 NBOs applied, appealed, and lobbied their NOCs for recognition. Today, most of the Zone 6 NBOs are NF recognised by their NOCs and are in the position to receive government benefits such as official media publicity, facilities and manpower assistance, and financial subsidies, including expenses for participating in the official international tournaments.

I would highlight the extraordinary example in Singapore. Upon receiving NOC recognition, the Singapore Government granted Singapore Contract Bridge Association its clubhouse (permanent rental free) which can accommodate the office and a 20+ tables playing area.

- Bridge be an Official Event in Olympic Games

Realising an Olympic Game sport will receive tremendous media attention as well as government and commercial sponsorship, WBF and Zone 6 exerted our utmost effort in getting bridge as an official event in the Olympic Games that were held in Zone 6. We are getting close to achieving the ultimate objective: -

- Zone 6 and China joined hands with Jose to conceptualise, plan, organise and execute the 1st Mind Sports Games which was successfully held in the Olympic city of Beijing right after the 2008 Summer Olympics. The outcome from the overwhelming publicity had propelled the sport of bridge to new heights, paving the way for bridge together with other mind sports to become an Olympic event through the organization of a Mind Sport Olympic which would be at par with the Summer and Winter Olympics,
- The diligent effort of the Japan Contract Bridge League made Bridge qualify as a final candidate to be included in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

- Bridge be an Official Event in the Continental Games

The five rings in the Olympic banner also organise their own Continental Games. Leveraging on the IF status and the relentless endeavour of the Indonesian Contract Bridge Association and the Chinese Contract Bridge Association, we have successfully made bridge an official event in the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games and 2023 (delayed from 2022) Hangzhou Asian Games.

The benefits to bridge are enormous. Not only the massive media coverage all over Asia (i.e., WBF Zone 4 and 6) but more importantly the government and commercial sponsorship in addition to the NOC recognition benefits. Take Singapore and China Hong Kong (Gold/Silver Medallist in the Men Team) for example: Both NBOs received huge amounts of awards from their NOC and the players have been qualified as elite sportsmen and are eligible to receive government subsidies. Furthermore, both China Hong Kong and Singapore Governments are willing to consider sponsoring international bridge tournaments.

Gianarrigo Rona era: Bridge for Peace

The WBF's official motto of "Bridge for Peace" has been perfectly supported by Zone 6. One notable occasion of this was when acting as the intermediary party, the Hong Kong Contract Bridge Association convinced the governments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to send their representative teams to the 1981 Hong Kong Inter City Tournament. This ground-breaking first official meeting between the two sides opened

an official line of communication and began the normalization of their relationship. Subsequently, the political situation has changed dramatically: -

- Both parties agreed and implemented the “Three Directs Policy”- i.e., Direct Transportation, Direct Communication, and Direct Trade.
- They also agreed to a format where both can co-exist in the same international organisation. An outstanding example of this is the participations of China and Chinese Taipei in 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.
- “One Country Two Systems” became China’s key strategy for peaceful unification.
- The Nationalist Chinese Party lifted Martial Law which had ruled Taiwan for 36 years.

The tournament also profoundly impacted the world of bridge: -

- In 1982, WBF accepted China as a member, while Taiwan retained its membership by changing its name to Chinese Taipei
- Soon after the tournament, Deng Xiaoping was appointed the Honorary President of the Chinese Contract Bridge Association, the title he had maintained until his passing away in 1997. This appointment triggered a sharp increase in the bridge-playing population in China and Zone 6.
- 22 years later, in 2003, upon his retirement, the Chinese Government appointed the organiser of the 1981 Hong Kong Inter City Tournament, who was then a WBF Vice President and EC member to be a member of the Upper House of the Chinese Parliament (i.e., the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference). Considering that he is a Singaporean and a top executive of an American corporation (also a Fortune 100 company), this appointment is unprecedented.

Pursuing the WBF motto of “Bridge for Peace”, tournaments such as Hong Kong Inter City, Xiamen Xiashun, and Taiwan Yeh’s Brother have been held annually. These tournaments have contributed to the successful maintenance of peace across the Taiwan strait during the past four decades.

The Future

Since early this year, the WBF has entered a new era under the leadership of Jan Kamras. Along with this change, new blood is being recruited for the WBF Executive Council and senior official positions. Zone 6 is confident that WBF new administration will perpetuate the legacies and development goals as advocated by our ex-Presidents. They will do everything they can to complete the programs which aim to transform

WBF into a “Real World Organisation” for making bridge a globally popular sport. Hopefully by 2026 WBF will achieve: -

- 40% of bridge players in the world are youth.
- 75% of its NBOs are recognised by their NOCs
- Bridge is an official event in the 2024 Paris Olympic Games and is a candidate on the shortlist for the 2028 Los Angeles Games
- Bridge is an official event in all the five Continental Games
- WBF successfully organises at least one “bridge for peace” tournament.

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