

Chairman's Report 2017

I have been doing a few calculations, and whilst I might be out by a year or two in either direction. I have worked out the following. I have been Chairman of the Western Cape for 13 years, a committed member for 21 years, a Vice President of the SABF for 5 years, and a committee member of the SABF for 9 years. Add that - a club chairman and committee member for many years and it has been a long stint. The time has now come for someone with fresh energy and innovative ideas to take over the reins and I wish the incoming Chairman and the new committee every success that benefits the game of bridge.

There are too many people to thank individually for the help they have given me, but I pay respect not only to my current committee who are here today, but also those who guided and mentored me in my early years – Maurice Joffe, Harry Berman, Peter Derriman and Harold Bernstein come quickly to mind. My current committee have tried where possible to protect me from the rigours of day to day activities – trying to pursue a full-time job and this role has not been easy at times, and apart from when controversy reared its ugly head, the committee got on with the running of bridge in the Province selflessly and efficiently.

I possibly should have stepped down earlier, but I wanted to be part of what has been the biggest year in bridge playing terms in the WC ever.

The first event all started with a chat beside a swimming pool in Egypt two years prior to the event taking place. South Africa had been selected to hold the African zonal championships and Cape Town was the preferred venue. And from then on it was two years of solid work to make the event happen. Though the plan and the budget may have come from my hand the hard work was done by others. Jocelyn Ashberg worked tirelessly as chief organiser fixing every problem head on; Steve Bunker had the invidious role as technical Director of instituting a live scoring system that had never been done before in South Africa; Shirley Kaminer was in charge of anything that needed to be presented – from the opening and closing ceremony presentations and the booklets; Hilary Nick controlled the finances and seemed to find access to any paraphernalia we needed from obscure sources; Ann Sturrock put together an amazing website, which she controlled and updated immediately the scores were in; Malcolm Siegel with assistance from Andrew Cruise organised the live BBO coverage of the event including voice commentary for four tables – another 1st for South Africa; John Bryant was the transport manager – I do not know how many hours he put in meeting and greeting but it was a lot. There were then countless volunteers who manned the hospitality desk every session, acted as caddies, looked after the line ups – my thanks to all of you who made this event special. And, I must not forget our TD and technical crew – Heidi Atkinson who did a great job as TD, whilst her husband Richard, together with initial assistance from Andre Truter also assembled all the screens and tables.

But back to Jocelyn, with her clip-board – she made sure that everything that had to be done both before and during the event was dealt with great professionalism. Possibly our greatest coup was to organise Sponsorship – that started with Jocelyn and I meeting the Department of Culture and Sport, and then with Minister Marais – from these meetings they became our main sponsors – contributing not only R70K in cash but also Minister Marais becoming the Patron of the event and being on hand to present the medals to the winners at the closing ceremony. We thank the Minister for giving up her valuable time, and the Department of Culture and Sport for their participation and assistance.

After that we scrounged what we could from wherever we could – Jocelyn got brochures and bags from the Ministry of tourism, uniforms from Spar, Steve managed to get computer equipment in

abundance from Mecer, I managed inscribed pens from my firm VanderSpuy, and twisted the arms of the people who supplied photocopiers for my firm to donate free copiers and toners (and we needed a lot as another key player in the team Ron Tacchi from England wrote and then printed thousands of pages of exquisite prose very day. Then the GBU raised some money to put into the pot, and Val Bloom made a generous donation by the JBC. Michelle Alexander got us wine for the closing banquet from Hartenburg and a donation from Richard Branson. The event was one of massive cost to put on – the costs of the overseas dignitaries being a major expense, yet even though costs rose from the initial budget of R300K to over 400K, by sourcing, scrounging and donating - the final cost to the SABF was just 84K for such a prestigious event. And it was an all Western Cape effort from start to finish – and for once it was great to see the bridge community coming together for a common purpose.

It might sound as if I have left Kitty Cruise our vice-chairman, out of the mix. But she had bigger fish to fry – virtually organising the National Congress single-handedly. She did an amazing job with assistance from Hilary Nick and Ann Sturrock with chief TD Jan van Dijken and put on a fabulous Nationals at the Kelvin Grove Club. We had larger entries than ever before and a star-studded field with (because we held the zonal and the Nationals back to back) not only some of the African contingent staying on but also superstars Sabine Auken and Roy Welland coming from Germany together with other strong players from all over the world. Quite how Kitty led the whole organisation to such good effect is staggering – but kudos to her. And on a final note, Congress made a profit of over 90K – so we had managed to put on the two biggest events in the Cape's history simultaneously and the SABF walked away with a profit.

We closed the year with another flagship event - our Cape Festival. The initial work was put together by Jocelyn again, and when she then left for overseas, it was up to Shirley Kaminer and her team to make sure the event ran smoothly under the great direction of Andre Truter. Again, we were lucky with sponsorship from Warwick Wealth and Julie Gray - so another small profit was made on another magnificent event.

So those were the highs of the year. With highs must come lows. We remain in doubt about our security of tenure at the bridge centre – a lot may depend on where the demarcated protected land starts and finishes. We owe immense thanks to Shirley Phillips for all the work she has done to protect the bridge centre which remains the hub of our affiliated clubs. In truth we can only hope.

There also seemed to be too many other arguments raging through the year – hopefully most have now been resolved. We must remember that bridge is just a game – and it is a game that we play to enjoy. These arguments detract from the enjoyment. Sometimes criticism is justified, but usually mistakes are honest – so if you choose to criticise, be constructive and come forward with helpful suggestions rather than just sounding off.

I hope I have praised my committee sufficiently for the voluntary work that they put in. But I would also like to thank the club managers, club committees and organisers who work at making the game more enjoyable for all every week of the year. Your commitment astounds me, and your membership should more often than they do show appreciation for what you have achieved. You have my personal thanks and admiration.

Some of you have served even longer than I, and your continuity is fantastic. But for me, the energy to continue has gone, and my work commitments make it impossible for me to give the time that I think is necessary to lead from the front. I am sure fresh blood will re-invigorate the process and bridge hopefully will continue to flourish.

If I had one final wish, it would be let us be nice to each other (I know I fail sometimes with the aggravation I give some of my partners). If a beginner makes a mechanical error, do not shout for the rule book – remember you were a beginner once. So, unless you have really been damaged do not invoke the Law – it intimidates and turns people off the game. (For example, I will never call for a revoke penalty or a lead or bid out of turn unless I have been genuinely damaged – I do not wish to win by someone else's mechanical error but through the fact that I have played well enough to merit victory). So be nice to your opposition, your partner, your TD, your Committee, and you will be surprised how much more you can enjoy the game yourself.

So this is me – signing off for the last time as your Chairman. I wish you all the best for the future of what is the world's greatest game.

Tim Cope

Chairman

February 2018