

Farewell, Max!

by Matt Betts

IN 1984, two interesting things happened: first it was a leap year, and secondly Max Bavin joined the EBU. One of Max's skills is his ease at mathematical formulae and bridge movements, so it seems quite apt that after twenty-eight years of service to the EBU, Max leaves us in another leap year.

Max learned to play bridge at grammar school through his teacher, Mr Wright – an enthusiastic bridge player. He started tournament directing at the local bridge club in his early twenties. Then the organisers of the local Stratford Congress (a major congress back then) found themselves to be one tournament director short and he was drafted in at short notice.

After that, Max started to TD at EBU congresses, until the EBU Secretary at the time, Peter Briggs, asked him to come on board as the new Master Points and Membership supervisor.

Two years later, Max became Chief Tournament Director of the EBU, at which point he was already tournament directing at both European and world championships. He later became manager of the Tournaments Department during the 1990s, followed by the WBF Chief TD in 2003. Amazing achievements for a man who was brought on to sort out the Master Points – but not a surprise either, considering his skills in all areas of bridge management and administration.

While Max has been working at the EBU, he has seen some major changes to bridge administration, of which he has been a part every step of the way. Here are some examples . . .

Just before Max arrived, the EBU had joined the computer age with the PDP-11 computer. In 1983, it had transferred masses of Master Point records from thousands of pieces of cardboard to this state of the art computer. However, in comparison to today's computers, it was not really practical at all, as it needed three huge 12 inch back-up discs to work, and was a very slow machine. There would certainly have been no way to administer Pay to Play with the PDP-11, and one of Max's main roles from 1984 onwards was to work with this machine, later upgrading the various computer systems to make things easier and more efficient at HQ. He managed this with

great skill and patience, and brought about a considerable improvement.

Meanwhile, in the Tournaments scene, the EBU was calculating scores using a 'comptometer' machine (try saying it!). It was the first commercially successful key-driven mechanical calculator and was extremely fast because each key adds or subtracts its value to the accumulator as soon as it is pressed. The EBU had several skilled operators and so the comptometer remained in use long into the 1980s. By this time, it was realised that the comptometer was no longer practical, so its use was discontinued. However, Max does still admire the unique skills that were required to operate one of these machines.



What of non-technical changes? One of the biggest innovations to come to the world of bridge was the bidding box. Max had seen their usefulness in various international tournaments where he had directed, and wanted to introduce them at EBU events. When they first appeared, some players were unhappy with them, but Max rode the storm and was insistent that they would be a good thing. And so they have proved to be!

Over the years, many of his colleagues will attest to Max's unique mathematical mind. He can work out complicated movements or mathematical equations

much more easily, and in a shorter space of time, than anyone else. He is also very knowledgeable about so many areas of bridge, and has a knack for explaining things thoroughly as well as in terms that a non-expert can understand.

Max's greatest EBU moments are linked to Brighton: first, when he was initially invited to be a TD at the Brighton Congress, and then when he found himself running the whole thing as the new Chief Tournament Director. As Max said: 'It was all very exciting, and is the best event for bridge!' On the world stage, Max's greatest moment was when he was first in charge of the world championships, at Monte Carlo in 2003. The whole event had gone very well, until the last board of the last day, when a ruling was sought in the Bermuda Bowl final between USA and Italy. Max managed to stay cool and collected, and his skills were appreciated by both teams. Although the outcome of a tournament being settled by a ruling is a TD's worst nightmare, Monte Carlo enabled him to settle into his role very quickly. He hasn't looked back since, and will continue as WBF Chief Tournament Director in the years to come.

Passions outside of bridge include football (Manchester United), cricket (Lancashire) and music (rock). Asked if he thought Alex Ferguson should retire as Man United Manager, Max said that as he's only been doing the job for 25 years, he still has three more years to go . . . However, Max is pleased that he'll now have a bit more time for football and cricket, though he is sad to know that he'll never be Fergie's replacement (when that time comes).

Everyone at the EBU has enjoyed working with Max over the years, and we all wish him well in his retirement after twenty-eight years of invaluable service to our organisation.

Max would like to thank all the bridge players (especially the players he has possibly ruled against!) and the staff (past and present, the Board, committees) with whom he has come into contact over the years. He would also like to thank Gordon Rainsford for taking on the important role of EBU Chief TD, and believes he is handing over exactly to the right person. □