

A day in the life of . . .

Paul Hackett

Paul Hackett is Britain's most successful professional player, with a long list of wins and titles (both home and abroad) to his name. He was Zia Mahmood's first 'serious' partner, and toured North Africa with the great Giorgio Belladonna in exhibition matches.

I AM a late riser: 10.30am is the earliest, since I never go to bed much before 2am. I play bridge most evenings and weekends, and am rarely home before 11.30pm – a lot later if I am playing away from Didsbury – and when I am back I like to relax for a couple of hours at least. I read, watch films, or talk bridge with my son Jason who lives at home with me and my wife, Olivia. Whatever I do, I will have a glass or two of red wine, and go to bed a happy man.

When I get up in the morning, I first have breakfast, usually fruit and coffee, to which I am addicted. Then I spend at least an hour on the internet. I only play bridge professionally, unless it's for charity or in invitation events, and I pride myself in giving my clients good service. Unless they want to be involved, I organise everything: hotels, flights, events, so that all they have to do is turn up. The internet is ideal for finding the best deals and the best bridge events – in England, or abroad.

Having done my homework, I spend time on a great interest of mine, genealogy. I have 4,000 names on my family tree, tracing my ancestry back in an unbroken line to 1140. I am still working on the earlier years: the first Hacketts (or de Hacket, as they called themselves then) were likely to be Normans who came to England in 960. They had settled in Ireland by 1180, and seem to have changed their name to its current spelling, Hackett, by 1212. I am the first Hackett to have been born in England and not in Ireland.

I like to have lunch at home, and then I go for a long walk. This is the only form of exercise I take, but I take it regularly and seriously – even though I always have a coffee while I am out, and often meet up

with Jeff Morris, owner of the Manchester Bridge Club, for a chat. The rest of the afternoon is spent relaxing, so that I am in good shape for the evening's bridge.

I have over forty clients, so do not lack opportunities to play. Neither I nor my sons, Jason and Justin, are worried about our clients' bridge standard so long as they are pleasant people with whom to play and travel. Travelling, besides genealogy, is my great passion, and I normally play in at least

two foreign tournaments a month in all corners of the world. My favourite place is Trinidad, not only because it is a truly multi-racial society, but also because its Carnival gives me the opportunity to pursue another hobby of mine, dancing – although the most energetic Latin American rhythms are becoming a bit of a challenge as I grow older! Bora Bora and

Mnemba (an exclusive island off the coast of Zanzibar, where I was given a holiday in lieu of payment for coaching bridge players in Tanzania) are also places where I would love to return.

Since bridge has given me such a great life, I try to give something back to the game. I am on the EBU Selection and Tournament Committees, and am also a delegate for my county, Staffs & Shropshire. The Buffett Cup, the Commonwealth Nations Cup and Jim McMahon's Scottish Invitational are among the current events in which I am heavily involved.

Free evenings are spent going out for meals with Olivia, Jason, Justin and his wife Barbara (also a bridge international). As a family, we are very close and enjoy each other's company, so our evenings out tend to finish late. Just as well my job enables me to get up late in the morning! □



Photo: Elena Ieronimidis

Paul Hackett's Top Tip

Always consider raising partner's response even if you have only three cards in his suit.

MANY will shake their heads and disagree violently with this tip, but it appears to produce winning bridge.

When and why do I recommend you give partner three-card support?

1. You should *never* have fewer than four cards if you jump the bidding; e.g. if you open 1♦ and partner responds 1♥, a rebid of 3♥ should *guarantee* at least four hearts.
2. You should not be 4-3-3-3. This is pure no-trump shape.
3. If your holding is x-x-x and you have values in your second suit or in your doubleton, you may decide another rebid is better.

Thus the two most common occasions when you would support on three cards are when you have three to an honour in partner's suit and a small doubleton, or when you are 3-5-4-1 and your four-card suit is a minor.

For example:

E/W Game. Dealer South.
System: 1NT = 15-17 HCP

♠ A J 9 3
♥ Q 4 3
♦ 8 7
♣ Q 7 6 2

♠ 7 4 2
♥ K 9 8 5 2
♦ Q 3
♣ J 10 9

♠ Q 8 6
♥ A J 10
♦ J 10 9 2
♣ A 8 3

♠ K 10 5
♥ 7 6
♦ A K 6 5 4
♣ K 5 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♦
			?

The choices are 1NT or 2♠. My recommendation is 2♠.

Here is my reasoning: partner has bypassed 1♥, so his hearts are likely to be shorter than his spades; in no-trumps we are most likely to get a heart lead, but in a suit contract we can ruff on the third round. Thus I rebid 2♠.

Looking at the two hands, you can see 1NT is likely to go off unless you find the queen of spades, while 2♠ may well make nine tricks.

What if the opponents intervene? Well, then you should play support doubles – but that's another tip!