

Bridge on the Web

Bridge Blogging

by Paul Gipson

PEOPLE have been blogging since the late 1990s. 'Blogs', or 'weblogs' as they were known for the first couple of years, are websites that typically provide a commentary on a specific subject or, increasingly, a term for keeping one's diary on the Internet.

Blogs have proliferated over the last five years as they have become much easier to run, with sites like Google and Wordpress providing a free website, templates, good editing tools, picture and video upload facilities.

And so it is no surprise to find that there are hundreds of bridge-related blogs. As with the rest of the blogosphere, they range from the unreadable to the unmissable, written by the beginner to the multiple world champion.

These blogs cover a wide range of subjects: some use them as a soapbox for their favourite system, their views on the Laws of the game and, quite frequently, their views on the national authority. Others provide a daily account of their bridge activities, including hands where they did well or poorly. Perhaps the most interesting reads are from the top players when they discuss strategy, and beginners when they talk about how their game is improving.

Then there are the blogs which allow the author to write their own amusing bridge stories. No need to find a publisher for any budding David Birds out there when you can freely blog to your heart's content, although there is no guarantee that anyone is actually reading!

The blogroll for bridge sites in the UK is quite small at the moment – you might even consider it exclusive if you are on the list. Clearly we have less to say than the Americans: their blogging is extensive and wide-ranging in both topics and usefulness.

So which UK writers are on my blogroll?

Two of our top directors, Robin Barker and David Collier, both maintain blogs where quality is clearly more important than quantity – another way of saying that they do not post (new material) frequently but it is always worth reading when they do. Robin's, <http://rmbarkerlaws.blogspot.com/>,

<http://www.drcrbridge.blogspot.com/>, focuses on the 2007 Laws and their application. David's, <http://dcrbridge.blogspot.com/>, used to cover his Polish Club system but he has recently decided to write a series on bridge laws and regulations.

John Howard Gibson, <http://www.bizarrebridgeworld.blogspot.com/>, is letting his alter ego loose with a humorous look at the world of bridge. A collection of amusing posts, including agony aunt columns, has given this new blog a good start.

Naturally, one of the blogging conglomerates is the EBU, where the General Manager, Barry Capal, posts monthly, <http://englishbridgeunion.blogspot.com/>, and most of the committees have a nominal presence.

Blogs, like most websites, gain popularity by word of mouth and by reference. Most blogs contain a blogroll with a list of the author's favourite blogs and this provides an easy way to explore the entire bridge blogging community.

There are also sites, such as Claire Bridge, <http://www.clairebridge.com/blogs.htm>, that seek to highlight the best blogs. Linda Lee, <http://linda.bridgeblogging.com/>, reviews her favourites on a regular basis. Planet Bridge, <http://bridge.df7cb.de/>, aggregates all the recent postings from over forty bridge blogs, an essential site if you are not used to using web feeds (those funny little RSS symbols that you see on web sites).

Secrets of a successful blog

So how do you create and maintain an interesting blog? Initially you must decide on a subject that you think you can write about over an extended period of time. Millions of blogs are created in the world every day and most become dormant within a month. Blogs that are regularly updated, provide insight not generally available, and involve the reader are the most successful.

My own blog, <http://thebeercard.blogspot.com/>, has been going since August 2006 and is the diary of my bridge life in

the real world and the virtual world of online bridge. My principal rule is that I only write about my own errors and not about the mistakes of others. Secondly I try to post every time I play.

I will often post and encourage comments from my audience. This post, from June 2009, is a case in point:

'Before our match last night I popped in to watch the Scottish U20s playing a team (IMPs) match. You hold:

♠	x
♥	6 x x x
♦	J 10 9 8 x x x
♣	x x

At Game All, your partner opens 1♥, playing four-card majors and 12-14 INT, and the next hand doubles.

What advice would you give the youngster at this point?

Among the fourteen responses there were answers from Australia, UK and USA and included four internationals. The advice included suggestions for every level of hearts and, like most good problems, there was no clear consensus. Not particularly helpful for this youngster then!

And my favourites around the world?

Stacy Jacobs, <http://stacyjacobs.com/>, a relatively new sponsor in American women's bridge, is unique in giving insight into the life of employing and playing with professional players. Sartaj Hans, a top Australian player, <http://theimpchimp.blogspot.com/>, looks at bridge philosophy and ponders why a country with some great players often underachieves at the highest levels. And although I disagree with him more than I agree, Bobby Wolff's blog, <http://bobbywolff.bridgeblogging.com/>, is always an entertaining and interesting read.

Bridge blogs are a relatively new phenomenon. They allow a writer to share thoughts and hands with gay abandon with the rest of the world . . . if anyone is interested in reading it. It is a ruthlessly Darwinian world: a successful blog will regularly engage its audience and be widely read; a poor blog will quickly die from lack of interest.

Have you thought of giving it a try?