

A day in the life of . . .

Colin Simpson

In the last decade, Colin Simpson has amassed a record number of wins at national and international events. He has represented England in three European Championships and a Bermuda Bowl, and reached the semi-finals at the 2000 Olympiad.

USUALLY my day starts at around 7.30am. I like pottering around in the morning – one of the luxuries of being retired.

Life was not so relaxed in my working days. I joined the London Metropolitan Police in 1971, after spending a few years at various Scottish universities where I did not learn much apart from playing bridge. In 1973, I moved to Special Branch, where I worked for almost thirty years as a detective in counter-terrorism, an activity that often involved personal danger.

In 1982 I was assigned to protect the Israeli ambassador in London, a duty that led to my becoming the only policeman ever to shoot a terrorist on English soil. On that occasion, I was shot at, but lucky not to be hit. The ambassador was not so lucky, and was seriously wounded.

When I was working, free time was short and I played almost exclusively rubber bridge for high stakes. A rare foray

into duplicate was competing in the World Pairs with Martin Hoffman in 1982. We reached the final, but it was only after I retired in 2000 that I started entering trials and forming regular partnerships – first with Gunnar Hallberg and now with David Price. I am proud that my international record with both of them is at least 0.5 IMP positive on every board.

Even though I now have more time for playing bridge, I don't overdo it. I always have lunch with my wife, Juliana, and play rubber bridge twice a week in the afternoon at TGR's near Marble Arch. Another couple of afternoons a week are spent playing golf, and that's about all the exercise I get these days. The times when I played rugby (at university and later for the police) are long gone!

Unless I am taking part in a tournament, I never play bridge in the evening,

though I might have an occasional game at the local duplicate club with my wife. Usually we do what most people do: watch television if we stay in, go out for meals (I do enjoy good food), or go to the cinema. One film we saw not long ago is the latest Indiana Jones and I must say I was a bit disappointed: Harrison Ford would cut a fine figure of a man as a bridge player, but as an action hero he looks rather past it.

One great interest I share with my wife is travelling. We have been as far away as China, Peru and the Galapagos Islands, and have recently come back from a wonderful trip to Egypt which included a short cruise on the Nile as well as a balloon trip over the Valley of the Kings. Readjusting to everyday life has not proved easy!

Still, I look forward to my next commitment: representing England in the Seniors at the Mind Sports Games in Beijing (article next month). There will be some team practice sessions for this, and I will also be honing our bidding system with David Price over the internet. Not that our system is very complicated: four-card majors, strong no-trump and weak twos. Complex bidding systems, in my view, rely on memory rather than judgment, and can therefore decrease the effectiveness of other aspects of one's game. It all saps your brain power, just like spending half an hour trying to think of a way to eke out an overtrick in a routine contract.

My philosophy – no doubt the result of having always been a rubber and teams player – is to play simple hands quickly, and conserve my energy for the really difficult deals. My partners may not always approve of the outcome, but at least they'll still be awake at the end of the session . . .

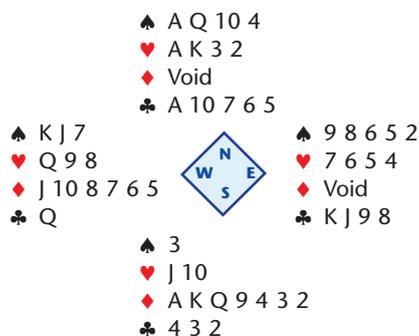


Photo: Giorgio Ieronimidis

Colin Simpson's Top Tip

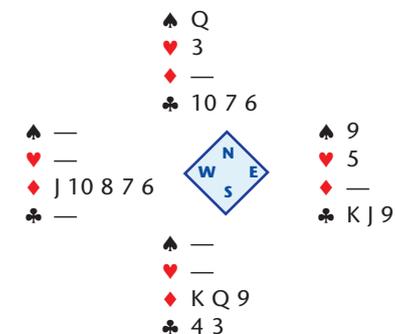
Even if a contract seems impossible to make, don't ever give up!

This is a lesson I learnt the hard way, playing high-stakes bridge. On the deal below, I was able to put it to good use:



I was South, playing in 5♦ – a contract that had seemed eminently reasonable when dummy came down. I won West's lead of the club queen, cashed dummy's ace of spades, ruffed a spade and led the ace of diamonds to get the (very!) bad news.

Nevertheless, I carried on. A heart to dummy was followed by a spade ruff, then another heart to dummy and a heart ruff gave this position:



I led a club. West had to ruff and return a diamond, so I won and repeated the process for a very gratifying result – especially since the deal occurred in a £50 Chicago game.

As I said in my tip . . . never give up!

The Hacketts'
bridge column in the
Sunday Express has moved
on-line to
www.express.co.uk