

A day in the life of . . .

Fulvio Fantoni

Fulvio Fantoni is currently ranked No. 1 in the world, and is one of only ten players in the history of the game who have held the 'Triple Crown', winning the World Pairs (with Claudio Nunes) as well as the Bermuda Bowl and the World Olympiad (with the Italian bridge team). Fulvio has won innumerable titles in Italy, Europe and the USA, and is affectionately known in the bridge world as the 'Official Gentleman of the Blue Team'.

IF I am not playing in a tournament, I am a reasonably early riser – although my partner, Iolanda, will tell you that my idea of 'early' depends on the time zone where my last tournament took place. At the moment I have just come back from playing in the Far East, so when I get up it's early . . . in Japan!

I am away playing an awful lot, so I don't spend as much time at home as I would like. I have always lived in Ostia, on the outskirts of Rome, and I think it's the best place in the world. Being situated on the sea shore gives it a holiday atmosphere that makes relaxing very easy.

Being at home means not playing bridge and therefore having the chance of doing other things. Currently I am involved with teaching the bridge module in a Masters on Games Theory run by the University of Rome and I'm really enjoying it – even though it's hard work, as the teaching is done in English.

Normally, however, my routine consists of spending mornings and early afternoons in front of my computer (which fulfils the roles of office worker, entertainer and friend). At the moment I'm trying to lose weight, so breakfast and lunch provide just short breaks away from my three monitors (yes, three – I work better that way). Mostly I'm busy organising the bridge holidays I run, but I also contribute to the company's website, www.fantonivacations.it, and my personal website which should go live soon.

In the afternoons, I pick up my son from school and take him to football practice three times a week. I also go and watch all his matches at weekends. Luca is 13, a

wonderful son and a very good football player! Of course I would say that, but I am not one of those besotted dads who make nuisances of themselves with the referee and the organisers. In fact, I have never even spoken to the officials who run Luca's team and some time ago, when he grumbled that he was in the third team, I just told him to work harder. He did, and now has the satisfaction of being in the first team on merit.

As a lad, I was just as anxious to do well – but at bridge. My father taught me to play when I was 10, and as I grew up and improved, my dream was to step on to the podium one day and hear the national anthem played for my achievements. That dream came true when Claudio

Nunes and I won the World Pairs; gaining gold as a representative of my country was a great moment in my life. I would be a lot happier if my country was not run by Silvio Berlusconi, but I suppose one cannot have everything in life!

My bridge career took a steep turn for the better when I became a bridge pro, and I have a huge debt of gratitude to my Italian sponsor, Francesco Angelini, who took a chance on me when I was still quite young. The retainer he pays me (on which, as an honest citizen, I pay tax) enabled me to stop being an accountant and concentrate on developing as a bridge player. I am also lucky that my contract gives me the freedom to play on the national team, as well as on some foreign teams or with friends like junior player Giuseppe Delle Cave. We won the Italian National Pairs together, and were both well chuffed.



Photo: Elena Ieronimidis

Fulvio's Top Tip

Make playing bridge a pleasant experience for others as well as yourself

MANNERS matter more than skill at the bridge table. A few months ago I played in a charity event at the Wimbledon Bridge Club and rejoiced in the friendly atmosphere that prevailed there. That's what bridge is all about: a game to be loved and enjoyed together with others.

Sadly, I must admit that I don't always find such a congenial ambience in many of the clubs and tournaments where I play in other parts of the world. Bad manners often come to the fore and spoil the game for everyone. Some people say that this is because bridge is a competitive game, but I don't see why being competitive should mean being rude. Rudeness is simply rudeness, and aggression does not belong in bridge – in fact it spoils it, and therefore needs to be weeded out.

Sometimes I wonder whether some players turn up at the club just so they can yell for the Director to come to their table! This does not mean that the laws must not be respected – quite the opposite. But calling the Director must not be a form of verbal assault on the opponents.

Bridge attracts both social as well as competitive players, and it behoves all of us to keep it a game that fills our hearts as well as our minds. If your behaviour puts fellow players at ease, you'll enjoy your game more.

Although on the whole I am an accommodating person, as regards partners I am quite picky: at bridge, the main thing for me is that I should enjoy playing, so given the choice between an excellent player who bores me or puts me on edge, and someone maybe less good with whom I share a sense of fun, well . . . you can guess. I also expect my partners to play quickly (to compensate for my own slowness) and to be prepared for the odd disaster – I must confess that I like taking risks.

The qualities I look for in my partner in life are obviously different, and Iolanda is as sweet and understanding as I could wish for. We tend to stay in in the evening, and watch at least one film – action movies or thrillers – on our state-of-the-art home cinema. We are also great fans of TV programmes like CSI and NCSI. Or we play games on the computer – that's where the extra monitors come in really handy! □