

A day in the life of . . .

Heather Dhondy

Heather Dhondy has been a mainstay of our national Women's Team since 1990, when she was 24. On the world stage, she has won gold in the World Mixed Teams in 1996 and in the Women's Teams at the World Mind Sports Games in 2008. In Europe, she has three gold medals in the Women series (1997, 1999 and 2001) and one in the Mixed Teams (2007). In addition, she has won a record thirteen Lady Milne trophies over the past eighteen years.

MY life, and consequently my days, changed drastically in August 2010, when I stopped working as a part-time accountant and became a full-time bridge professional. My activities are now divided between writing (for the *Glasgow Herald*, *Choice*, *English Bridge* and other bridge magazines), teaching (at the Hurlingham Club, and privately in people's homes), and playing as well as coaching (in tournaments or clubs). I like to be organised, so each day has a different pattern according to what I have to fit into it, but I tend to get up between eight and nine. I must admit that I am not the most talkative person in the universe at breakfast, so although we might make each other a cup of coffee, socialising with Jeremy, my husband, is generally postponed to the end of the working day at 6pm, when we have a drink and relax – preferably in the garden if the weather permits.

I enjoy all aspects of my bridge work, but the activity I find most rewarding is the teaching, probably because I get on so well with my pupils. They really spoil me, especially those I teach in their own home – and treat me to the most delicious cakes! These cakes are a real threat to my waistline, but I make up for it by missing the occasional lunch. Generally, though, I try to eat regularly and as healthily as I can, either at home if I work there for a half day, writing articles or preparing classes, or at Andrew Robson's Club if I am coaching in the afternoon. I have lost three stones in the last few years, and feel much better for it. It all started with a bet with friends as to who would lose the most weight in a given

period of time. I did not win the bet, but the effort started me in the right direction: I now avoid bread, and favour fresh fruit and vegetables. If it is my turn to cook in the evening, however, I tend to provide a traditional fare of meat and two veg, one of which will be potatoes – for Jeremy, who like most men is a committed carnivore who does not get very excited by greens. I also play tennis once a week, and love the exercise.

My other interests, besides tennis, include family life (I have three nieces and two nephews whom we try to see as often as possible at weekends), music and gardening. I graduated in music at York University, and my favourite instrument is the piano. It did not provide me with a career, but it has given me a life-long interest: I still play duets, especially with my dad, whenever I can. As for my gardening, it is enthusiastic, though maybe not carried out at the same professional level: I grow herbs, spinach, raspberries and butternut squash, and we have even managed to grow a little avocado tree from a stone that Jeremy stuck in a pot – a success I am very proud of! I am equally proud of my greenhouse, and love pottering in it.

Although I have turned professional, bridge is still also very much my hobby, and I do volunteer work for Middlesex CBA, where I am Vice-Chairman, and the EBU, where I am now on the Board of Directors as a result of chairing the Selection Committee. The latter is not exactly a relaxing task, because of the controversy that big egos engender, but I am not easily flustered and don't mind all the hard work that needs



Heather's Top Tip

Mens sana in corpore sano (a healthy mind in a healthy body)

We can all improve our performance at bridge by studying technical play and defence, honing systemic agreements with our partner, etc. but what about those IMPs and match-points that go astray through lapses in concentration, or fatigue? It happens to us all, and yet many players give little consideration to this.

We cannot eliminate the silly mistakes we make at bridge completely, but we can reduce them by improving our physical well-being. An improved level of fitness, coupled with dietary considerations, can increase levels of concentration for the long periods of time needed in competitive bridge.

Here are a few easy ways to increase your powers of concentration:

- Take some form of gentle exercise in your everyday life, every little helps!
- Just before play, take a few deep breaths of fresh air outside – this will oxygenate the brain.
- Avoid eating too much carbohydrate before play is over for the day, as this can make you sleepy. Fruit and protein will aid your concentration and keep you alert.

to be put in. Recently I have also become the Treasurer of the International Bridge Press Association – a throwback to my days as an accountant, which seemingly I am not able to escape fully!

In the evening, unless it's Tuesday, when I teach, or we are busy playing bridge or seeing friends, we watch the TV programmes that Jeremy has recorded. I don't mind detective series, but much prefer watching sport. Luckily, we are both cricket addicts: my own interest goes back to the days when my dad used to take us kids to the Oval and Lords. We were all so keen that when in 1981 our family went on a cycling holiday, we still managed to follow 'Botham's Ashes' by knocking on people's houses and asking to check the news on the radio. It was incredible: England were following on and managed to win against all odds. It was as exciting, in its way, as being in Sydney last January with Jeremy and watching England win in Australia. The feel-good factor was enormous! □

To read more about Heather Dhondy, visit www.ebu.co.uk/general/biographies/players