

A day in the life of . . .

Michael Byrne

Michael Byrne is the England Under-21s Squad Leader and has represented England over thirty times as a player for the U21, U25 and Open teams, as well as a captain and coach for many of our junior, schools and girls teams. Domestically he has won a whole host of competitions and finished runner-up in the Gold Cup when only a junior. His greatest achievements are leading the England Under-21s team to Silver Medals in the World Championships in Beijing in 2008 and again this year in Philadelphia.

MY typical day depends on which day of the week it is – I split my time between teaching bridge, which I do six sessions a week, and working from home on my bridge articles, lessons and seminars. On a Monday I get up late and sort through the six hundred hands I have stored in the filing cabinets in my living room, in preparation for the week's lessons. The first lesson on a Monday afternoon is by far the biggest and we often get around twenty tables, which translates to a lot of names to remember! I give the same talk five times a week, so by the Thursday morning I have it down to a fine art and have worked out which jokes to use and which to miss out!

Tuesday is an office day, so I spend it writing lessons, articles for the EBU magazine, and any seminars I am working on. Despite junior training weekends only being once every two months, I seem to be constantly looking for good hands and exercises to give to the kids.

I also have quite a lot of contact with the staff at Aylesbury, and the e-mails fly back and forth about the various international events for which I am helping to train and select teams.

In the evening I teach a supervised class at Manchester Bridge Club, which gives me a good chance to talk to people and discuss the latest bridge news or arrange matches.

Wednesdays are my busiest days as I teach in the morning, then race into town to run the University Bridge Club (which luckily only meets during term time). We started it last year, and having to teach total beginners alongside people who have

played before makes for a challenging time.

After rushing home, I gobble down dinner, which is often stir fried prawns or tuna as I don't eat meat but love fish. (Despite running all over the place, I always make sure I eat properly and get my five recommended daily portions of chocolate.)

After dinner I dash out to the Wednesday night duplicate at Manchester Bridge Club. I've been playing every week for eleven years and I never miss a Wednesday night unless I am away.

On Wednesdays I try and get an early night (no later than 1am) but with team matches to play on BBO (against past and present juniors), hands to look over,

and inane conversations to carry out online, it's not always that easy.

On Thursday I have my most traditional day, with a lesson in the morning then straight on to one in the afternoon. I get home around 5 and just have time to sort through the day's e-mails before going out to play bridge again, either with a pupil or in a local league match.

Fridays I reap the rewards of all my evening lessons as I don't work, which gives me a chance to sort things out ready for the weekend. Almost all of them are taken up with bridge, either U21 training weekends, serious bridge events such as the Premier League, or congresses when I often play with former squad mates or current members of the junior squad. One of the biggest advantages of being squad leader is watching how quickly young players improve and turn into top internationals.



Michael's Top Tip

Spades are a mighty weapon, unleash them on your foes at all opportunities!

Spades are the boss suit and you should wield their power like a broadsword, cutting down those pesky clubs, hearts and diamonds like the peasants they are.

People often don't realise just how important the spade suit is, but it's my favourite suit and it should be yours too.

Here is a hand from an exercise I was given as a junior international. The bidding at Game All goes 3♥ – Pass – 4♥ to you. What do you say? You hold:
♠A Q 8 7 4 ♥6 ♦K 6 ♣A J 7 6 4
With 14 points it isn't obvious that you have to do anything; it could be right to pass. But you will be amazed how often in competitive auctions it is right to bid 4♠ over 4♥, and here it was too. The full deal was something like this:

♠ J 10 6 2		
♥ 5		
♦ J 9 7 5 4		
♣ Q 10 3		
♠ Void		♠ K 9 5 3
♥ K 10 9 7 4 3 2	♠	♥ A Q J 8
♦ 3 2	W	♦ A Q 10 8
♣ 9 8 6 2	N	♣ K
	E	
	S	
♠ A Q 8 7 4		
♥ 6		
♦ K 6		
♣ A J 7 5 4		

You think it is a bit lucky that 4♠ makes while 5♥ does too? Perhaps it is, but moaning about luck will not save you from losing lots of IMPs when you concede –650 and team-mates record –620. Of course on a bad day you will be doubled and go down 800, but take it on the chin and move onto the next hand with northern stoicism.

This year I was knocked out of the Spring Fours by one of my first Under 21s – I wasn't sure whether to be proud or angry!

At the end of the weekend I try and remember to keep in touch with my family, particularly my sister and my nephew, Declan (*in the photo with me*), who live in Canada – Declan is only 20 months old and can already hold thirteen cards (admittedly, in his mouth). I am sure he will be a great bridge player as his mother was always much better at cards than I was, but sadly she moved to another continent to avoid learning bridge. He would be eligible to represent about four different countries, though, which might get confusing. □