

# A day in the life of . . .

## Nick Sandqvist

*Nick Sandqvist, originally from Sweden, lives in London, where he played professionally at TGR's club for ten years. Nick has won most of the national events as well as a silver medal in the Open Teams in the 2008 World Mind Sports Games.*

OK, I admit it, I like a good lie in. The alarm clock and I have never been best friends, and it's possibly one of the reasons I dropped out of school at the age of 15.

The other? I had started to play bridge!

I fell in love instantly. My mother taught me the basic bidding. She was not a great player, but she gave me a good start.

It's time to get downstairs for a coffee. If she's unlucky, I might run into my partner, Janet. I'm pure horror before breakfast. Technically, we live next door to each other, but spend most of our time together on my side.

As far as I'm concerned, there are only two kinds of days: days when you're playing bridge, and boring ones. Luckily, Janet's love for the game means we're travelling to a lot of great tournaments both at home and abroad.

Bridge is played differently in every country. It's important to get experience of other bridge cultures and learn to play against them. Poles, for example, bid unbelievably aggressively, but play the cards well enough to get away with it most of the time. They're very intense at the table, and so need to let off steam once in a while. By contrast, the French are calm and solid in the bidding, but with sublime judgment. Scandinavians are generally very friendly, Italians usually off-putting to play against, etc. This experience is vital when it comes to competing at championship level. Doing well at home doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be successful abroad.

It's about time I got some work done. If we're not away playing, I take the car down to Lewisham to work on 'my baby'. After ten years playing rubber bridge, I'd had enough, and was looking for something else to do. What did I miss most about Sweden? A proper mini-golf course! I used to compete as a teenager, but hadn't found a well maintained course in this country. So I built one. It will be put up indoors, to avoid being ruined by the weather, and should open soon.

I get back home in the late afternoon. Time to check my e-mails. Usually there will be one or two about the league. The league?

It was the summer of 2008. Janet and I, and Artur and Marilyn Malinowski, were bemoaning the lack of opportunities to practise regularly against strong opponents in the capital. There were a few local leagues, but generally quite weak, and arranging matches is a hassle. So we started the TGR's Super League. The idea is simple: we play on set weekdays, the players' interest is paramount, and no-one

should feel uncomfortable because of an opponent's behaviour, or petulant calls for rulings. It was an instant hit. We got ten teams to start with, and this season we will have twenty. It doesn't hurt that all the excess money goes straight back into prize money! This year, first-division matches will be shown on BBO.

There are still a couple of hours before Janet comes home from TGR's. With any luck, my new partner, 'Tosh' McIntosh,

will text to say he's free to do some on-line bidding practice. We're working hard on learning the new stuff. To do well in domestic events, we don't need all this system, but when it comes to taking on the mighty Italians, we do. We're simply not good enough to beat them on card play and judgment alone.

Can we compete with the best in the world? Yes, we can, but only if we change our attitude. For the serious player, bridge must be a sport rather than a game. Physical fitness, dietary planning, coaching sessions and even sport psychology should all be part of the training.

Think I'm joking? Not at all. Just look at the Dutch; they have worked very hard with their national team: coaching groups, training camps etc. Now they're reaping the rewards, being near the top in almost every championship. We can do the same.

Is it important? Yes, it is! Why?

Because, in any activity, you attract newcomers by promoting the elite. Kids are not



Photo: Ben Teachi

### Nick Sandqvist's Top Tip

#### *Bid more – bid earlier!*

YOU should try to be aggressive in the beginning of any auction, more careful near the end. Avoid taking the last guess. If you have anything to say, say it as soon as possible.

If you're first to speak; look for any excuse to open, not to pass. Try to cover a lot of hands with your systemic openings, and use them frequently.

If the enemy has opened; get your suits into the auction, especially those headed by ace-king or ace-queen. This takes away space, prepares the defence, and may uncover a big fit.

If the opponents interfere after partner has opened the bidding, incorporate ways of showing your suit even with weak hands. Weak jumps in competition are excellent, as is the idea of non-forcing two-level bids after an overcall.

Waiting and hoping for a later chance to bid is a disastrous tactic in the modern game.

Try to think about the bidding as a form of 'Musical Chairs'. The quicker you are, and the more space you take up, the harder you will be to play against – and your results will improve.

And if you get caught? Take it on the chin. If you never go for a large penalty, you're not doing enough bidding.

going to take up snooker from hearing about their uncle once making a break of 12. They're going to do it because they want to be the next Ronnie O'Sullivan. Hence it's vital for the whole existence of bridge that the successful players, whoever they are, get their time in the limelight. Add to that television time and prize money, and we'll be on the right track. Don't believe me? Then turn on any channel at night and study how poker has exploded in the last ten years. Bridge is the better game, but at the moment we have nothing to put up against eight cool-looking guys on telly competing for a huge pile of cash.

Tosh was busy, unfortunately. Instead, I went for a short run.

With any luck, Janet hasn't had enough bridge for one day, and we'll be going down to the Young Chelsea club. However late it may be when we get home, there's always enough time to squeeze in an episode of *Master Chef*.

Before I turn in, I might log on to BBO. If there's an event on Vu-graph, I might do some commentating. Bridge has been good to me, and I would like to give something back.

Rather late in life, I've discovered that nothing comes from just dreaming about it, you actually have to work at it. But if you really put your mind to it, anything is possible. □