

A day in the life of . . .

Tony Priday

Tony Priday is one of the truly great English bridge players. Among his successes are being part of the Great Britain teams which finished third in the Bermuda Bowl in 1962, third in the World Team Olympiad in 1976 and which won the European Championships in 1961. He was the bridge correspondent of the Sunday Telegraph from the newspaper's launch in 1961 until 1997.

I WAS born in 1922, so have at last earned the right to lead a leisurely life. Vivian, my wife, and I live in Marbella, where the weather is balmy most of the year. I get up, rather lazily, by 10.30 or 11, have a coffee in the sun, then exert myself with a one-mile walk to do a bit of shopping and work up an appetite. Lunch, beautifully cooked by Vivian, is followed by reading the papers and eventually walking to the bridge club for the 4.30pm session. The club has been run for the last thirty years by former Irish international Desmond Deery as a favour to the local ex-pat population (not just English players, they come from all over the world) in order to give them something to do, and the atmosphere is pleasantly cosmopolitan and relaxed. We make the most of it by carousing at the bar when the bridge has ended, and before we know it, it is time for dinner at some local, good, and cheap restaurant.

Every now and then Vivian drags me back to England – she is key in keeping me young – where we play, together or partnering old friends, in some national tournament. Brighton is a favourite with us, though sadly the barrack-room lawyers are beginning to creep even into the Seniors events.

This peaceful rhythm of life is of course a far cry from what I was used to. My father was Victorian in his belief that the day should start early – 6.30am for him, though I negotiated a more manageable 7.30am. I worked in the family timber business in the East End, and would spend my mornings at the docks, looking at and selling timber. In the afternoons I would often attend EBU Selection Committee

meetings before returning to the office and putting in a full day's work before playing bridge most evenings. It was a disciplined, but gentle way of life: unlike bankers, timber merchants deal with a live product and cherish its traditional virtues. In fact, the relationship with wood, which is quite personal, engenders loyalty – from the timber merchant to his workforce, and

from the workforce to the firm. Our employees included lots of Polish and Russian émigrés, and their children and grandchildren all stayed with us. Although bridge and the EBU proved to be quite a distraction, I was very happy in my job and my life.

I learned bridge at my prep-school in Sussex. The father of one of the boys made concave cards and he convinced the headmaster to let us boys try them out for one and a half hours a week. The cards were not a success, but the bridge was riveting. I was enthralled from the start, and was able to learn more at my father's golf club, where I reluctantly acted as his caddy, and where I joined the bridge section. Before the war, I also read lots of books on the game, and after the war I practised it enthusiastically most days of the week.

I was lucky that in the post-war years the London Jewish community was teeming with top players. Although I partnered many of them, I did not impress them all: assessing my partnership with Jeremy Flint, Boris Schapiro commented that 'Flint has a future, but Priday is a waste of time!'

In the 'sixties, Great Britain could provide at least three teams capable of winning the European Bridge Championships. After my team won in 1961, we were invited to a bridge tour of South Africa, where we did




Photo: Ron Tacchi

Tony Priday's Top Tip

Visualise the cards at trick two (if you can't manage that, then trick four will do)

YOUR declarer and defensive play will improve dramatically if you visualise as early as possible the full layout on the basis of the bidding and the play so far. Take this deal, for example:

♠ Q 9 5 4		
♥ Q 9 7 6		
♦ Q 6		
♣ Q 8 3		
♠ A J 2		♠ K 10 6 3
♥ K 5 3		♥ 10 8 2
♦ 9 8 7 2		♦ A 10 3
♣ 9 5 2		♣ J 7 6
	♠ 8 7	
	♥ A J 4	
	♦ K J 5 4	
	♣ A K 10 4	

South deals and opens the bidding with a 15-17 1NT. North tries Stayman and when South denies a four-card major, bids 3NT.

You, West, lead the ♦9 to ♦Q and East's ♦A. The ♦10 comes back, which South wins with the jack. Declarer next leads a club to the ♣Q, and a heart to his ♥J and your ♥K.

It is now tempting to play a third diamond, but if you visualise the full deal you will realise that declarer must have the ♦K (or partner would have played it at trick one) as well as the ♣A-K (or partner would have won trick three) and the ♥A (because of the play in hearts), so he cannot have the ♠K as well for his 1NT opening. A spade switch is clearly indicated and on the actual layout the lead of the ♠J (followed by ♠A and ♠2) will ensure that the contract is defeated.

our bit against Apartheid by refusing to play against all-white teams. It took an act of Parliament to legalise our stance, but after the final Test Match, the British presented South Africa with a trophy – the Pioneer Cup – for a championship for teams with no restriction to colour, creed or sex. The competition became, and still is, one of South Africa's major events.

Nowadays my representative days are over, although a few years ago I played in the Camrose with Nick Sandqvist. I read somewhere that bridge adds ten years to your life – that's bridge at any level, not necessarily at the top – so I look forward to many more years of happy playing in Marbella and England, as my wonderful wife dictates. □