

It's time for change.

Have A Go Heroes: Ordinary People Making a Difference

Few people have done more to introduce bridge to schoolchildren than Stuart Haring. Stuart is a teacher at Haberdashers' Boys School in Elstree. For 15 years he has single-handedly provided a stream of young players, many of whom have gone on to play at junior international level.

But everyone starts, not simply as a beginner, but as someone who does not even know what bridge is. How has he been so successful? Here, he tells us in his own words.

So many of his comments resonate with what we are trying to achieve.



Stuart Haring

“I've run the Bridge Club at Habs Boys for fifteen years. There was already a small club running, but there are teachers who have started clubs successfully from scratch, including recently at Cardinal Newman School in Hove.

To get started, you need to get kids through the door. A presentation in assembly or a maths lesson spent introducing the basics can work quite well, as well as a school which encourages children to take part in co-curricular activities. This is easier for teachers, but non-teachers who want to start a club in their local school can approach the school's co-curricular lead to try to start this off.

Then you need to get them to come back. I try introducing them to bridge through simpler games and move on quickly to mini-bridge and bridge, without teaching much theory. I introduce points, to give them an idea of what to open and respond with

and how many to bid game and slam and then let them play. They can get a feel for what works without being prescriptive about bidding. If they're having fun with their friends they're more likely to stay.

Once they're enjoying the game, I might watch them play, possibly using a set hand, and ask what went well or wrong or what they could have done differently. This is a way of introducing basic card-play techniques like drawing trumps and finessing without making it feel like another school lesson.

By this point, they may be enjoying it but also see how much skill is involved and be keen to learn more. When the initiative to learn is from them, they're keen to develop further.

One of the key factors to getting continued involvement is some form of competition. Even if it's not about winning, being in an environment where lots of other young people are playing is a motivator on its own, as well as the pride in representing your school. I've set up the online Inter-Schools League, which runs from October to April, and the in-person Hertfordshire Schools Cup, which takes place in November, as a way of keeping kids engaged and keen to play and this has proved popular amongst many schools and children.

The challenges for developing bridge amongst children and young adults are about numbers and a continued pathway to play. If the number of schools with clubs and young people playing is high enough and passes a threshold, it is more natural for those who learn to want to continue to play as they may make friends and have more opportunities to play. They also need events to play in, including as many face-to-face as possible. More school clubs and bridge clubs with youth sections can mean more events locally and more opportunities to play amongst their peer groups. This can lead to engagement in bridge in local clubs, competitions and congresses as they reach adulthood.”

Numbers and Trends

Based on the EBU's research, since our last message sent on 24 July, the EBU has lost:

One-and-a-half clubs and 88 members!

The average age of EBU members is 74 and the trend is upwards.

Festival – The Final Countdown

As we approach the final stages of the Festival of Bridge, it is important to pause and recognize the tremendous efforts put in by the volunteers at clubs across the country. Their hard work, creativity, and dedication have been the driving force behind the Festival's success. The sheer number of events - now reaching 300 - is a testament to their commitment. We applaud these efforts in making this happen, and the achievements deserve to be celebrated.

However, it is equally important to address some serious concerns regarding the execution and management of this Festival, particularly by the EBU leadership.

The EBU says:

The main purpose of this festival is to raise the profile of bridge nationally, encouraging clubs and counties to run special events to do this.

The Festival is seen by us to be good value in supporting a project that will advertise the game and raise the profile of bridge across the country.

EBU Chair Adrian Darnell says:

The Festival of Bridge is a fantastic idea. It is a superb opportunity for the current bridge community to showcase our wonderful game to the many who have never played the game.

While the intent behind the Festival - to raise the profile of bridge

and support the vital work of Cancer Research UK - is commendable, the manner in which resources have been allocated raises significant questions. We estimate that the investment is in the region of £40,000, much of which has been spent on a PR Consultant. The resulting mere 40 or so taster sessions, is far from justifiable. To suggest that this represents good value for money is not only misleading but also an insult to the intelligence of every EBU member.

The leadership, including EBU Chair Adrian Darnell, presents the Festival as a fantastic opportunity to showcase bridge to new audiences. Yet, the stark reality is that the returns on this considerable financial investment have been alarmingly inadequate. It is disappointing to see such a disconnect between the lofty goals set forth by the EBU and the actual outcomes.

The claim that this expenditure has effectively raised the profile of bridge across the nation is, frankly, dubious. Members deserve transparency and accountability, especially when significant sums are being spent. The volunteers, who have worked tirelessly to support this initiative, deserve better from their leadership.

In conclusion, while we congratulate all the volunteers for their outstanding contributions to the Festival, we must also hold the EBU accountable for the apparent mismanagement of resources. It is crucial that going forward, any initiatives undertaken genuinely serve the best interests of the bridge community and deliver measurable, meaningful results.

A Great New Club in Eastbourne



We congratulate Roz Wolfarth, whose brainchild this is, for establishing a fantastic new venue for bridge in Eastbourne. The splendid premises offer the perfect setting to bring the game of bridge to the whole community. The club is already looking ahead by inviting a chess club to use their space. This not only generates additional income but also presents the chance to attract new, young, bridge-playing members. Chess players, board-gamers, and others represent a rich pool of potential bridge enthusiasts. Teach them the game, and bridge can be rejuvenated. However, don't forget Stuart Haring's words above: *being in an environment where lots of other young people are playing is a motivator on its own.* It's crucial to gather a large enough group of young people. On this point, we would offer one observation. The Eastbourne Bridge Club committee has decided that most of their members don't want a bar. Perhaps they don't, but the young adults we need to attract undoubtedly will.

If you want to see change, then please pass on the message to others like you who care about bridge. Invite them to get in touch with us and join the increasing number of players who want to see change.

For more news and views, as well as updates on the EBU's successes and areas needing improvement, be sure to sign up for Nicky's newsletter. It's packed with valuable information and it's free - subscribe at: <http://eepurl.com/cZhrh1>

Regards

David and Nicky