

W B F President Gianarrigo Rona opens his mind

His biggest issue with bridge in Europe and also further afield is that NBO (**National Bridge Organisations**) attend conferences full of enthusiasm and make undertaking regarding the promotion of the game but often **leave with little or no activity taking place thereafter**. The EBL conducts Directors/Teachers and Administrator workshops in alternate years providing substantial subsidies to ensure strong participation. But GR sadly notes that only 50% of countries participate in this valuable undertaking.

His other concern is that many National Bridge Organisations focus too heavily on the top 10% of players and don't understand their role to market and promote at all levels and provide programs to ensure the continuity of the game.

The future of bridge is good but lies in the youth. We cannot allow the average age to rise every year. We must get bridge taught in schools and Universities. "I don't believe that young people will play on an ongoing basis and there is a history of them giving it up after marriage and while they have young children, but there is strong evidence that they return to the game later in life. It is this link that we must establish."

He totally rejects the notion that bridge is an old person's game and feels that we need to do everything possible to 'debunk' this myth.

On a more positive note, he proudly notes that the Italian Education Ministry now accepts bridge as a curriculum subject providing teachers and school time for youth to learn bridge. If we were able to extend this around the world, the future of the game would be fantastic but it is hard to get a buy-in from educators despite it being well known that bridge improves social and cognitive skills.

Extending the need for youth bridge, the Italian Bridge Federation holds monthly bridge clinics throughout Italy providing teachers and funding for the program. The difficulty may be to ensure the continuity of the program given the current economic climate.

He is surprised that **many of the wealthy players who sponsor teams and individual bridge professionals do little if anything to sponsor the game** (or, as he thinks of it, sport) and that some collective effort by many of these bridge sponsors could raise the profile of the game beyond its current low level