



International Sport Federation (IF) recognized by the International Olympic Committee

Jan Kamras
President

President's Report to the WBF Congress in Buenos Aires October 26, 2024

Dear delegates, dear friends

I am pleased to report to you on my main activities since taking office January 1, 2023, including during the time after my election in 2022 during which I assumed the role of Acting President. I will not bore you with minor events and routine matters, focusing on what is most important. I am grateful to my predecessor Gianarrigo Rona for allowing me to get a head start in my work. Thank you, my friend, – you really deserved your election as President Emeritus after serving the world of bridge for decades.

Meetings and Visits

August 2022

While still in Wroclaw, at the request of the Mexican Federation, I met with them and representatives from Zones 3 and 5 to discuss a possible realignment of Zones 2, 3 and 5. Mexico expressed an interest in moving to Zone 5. Ultimately, at a later stage, upon further reflection they withdrew the request.

I also met with the Laws Committee, to finalise the long-awaited changes to the Laws of Duplicate Bridge, aimed at facilitating the prosecution of alleged cheating. This was ultimately achieved.

September 2022

Together with Eric Laurant I met via Zoom with Rob Helle, the founder and CEO of an international software services group, "Objectivity". We had experienced serious issues with our servers and microsites, particularly during championships when "traffic" was heavy. Mr. Helle offered Objectivity's resources to help us identify the problems and recommend solutions, free of charge, an offer we gladly accepted. The work was done in close coordination with our own IT department and was ultimately successfully completed, with solutions implemented.

October 2022

On the kind invitation of the Jordanian Bridge Federation and the Zone 4 President I attended their Festival in Amman. Players and officials from many Zone 4 NBOs were present, and I had interesting discussions with, amongst others, the Pakistani and Egyptian BF Presidents. I was also granted an audience with HRH Prince Feisal Bin Al Hussein, President of the Jordanian Olympic Committee. We discussed how to bring bridge into schools.

The EBL President and I met, via Zoom, with our common operational and IT staff to review the status of our tables, screens, and other hardware. It was agreed to make a thorough inventory of our warehouse in Pavia. The warehouse was not well organised and lots of items needed repair or were outdated.

All of these items have since then been corrected, repaired and/or updated.



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As one of my goals in this administration was to control costs, not least the recurring ones, I spent several days at our Treasurer's house to go through all our accounts. We did this with a fine-toothed comb, to identify many areas where we could cut costs without compromising performance.

We also prepared the 2023 general budget proposals and the budget for the WNTC.

While spending time in our Lausanne office Arianna and I had a meeting at the IOC headquarters with Andrew Hofer, who was at the time responsible for IF contacts, and his assistant. We discussed ways in which they could support us.

November 2022

While still in Phoenix after our Management Committee meetings Eric Laurant and I stayed on for several meetings. For details I refer to a separate "trip report" you can request from the secretariat. We had extensive discussions on topics of common interest with ACBL Exec. Director, its President and various Board members, the owner of LoveBridge and his manager, the editor of the ACBL Daily Bulletin (with whom we made an agreement to advertise each other's main events in the other's Bulletins), and of course many players and sponsors.

December 2022

On the kind invitation of EC member and FFB President Franck Riehm, together with Eric Laurant and José Damiani we held a meeting at FFB's offices in Paris with Olivier Comte, CEO of 52Entertainment (owner of BBO, FunBridge). The main purpose was to negotiate improved conditions for the WBF in connection with broadcasts from our championships on the BBO platform. No concrete results were achieved but Olivier assured us of their cooperation with whatever we need.

February 2023

I visited Australia for the Gold Coast Congress ("GCC"). I was invited by the Zone 7 President, Ben Thompson, to attend the Zonal AGM, meeting with officials from the Australian, New Zealand and New Caledonian BFs (the latter aims to reactivate its WBF membership).

The GCC received a lot of media attention, not least thanks to its inclusion in the new WBF World Bridge Tour. The local TV station was present and broadcast interviews with the ABF as well as the WBF President.

March 2023

On invitation of the parties involved I was asked to assist in solving a logistical problem in relation to the participation of India in the BFAME championships in Lahore/Pakistan. The situation was ultimately resolved, and the Indian teams could participate.

April 2023

Together with our General Secretary, Arianna Testa, I attended a Zoom meeting with the Sports Director and the Sports Manager of FISU (the International Federation of University Sports) with which we have a Collaboration Agreement which was about to expire. The main purpose was to renew the Agreement.



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Arianna and I held an internal follow-up Zoom meeting with Gilad Ofir, Chairman of our Youth Committee, and Geert Magerman, our delegate for FISU matters. Subsequently we were able to agree on a few changes that we desired, and a renewed Agreement was signed.

Together with our Treasurer I visited Buenos Aires to investigate the possibility of staging the 2024 World Bridge Games (formerly the "Bridge Olympiad") there. We were presented with three potential venues, one was impossible, one not very suitable and one excellent one (which is also the one we agreed on). A more detailed trip report is available.

May 2023

At their request I met on Zoom with Donna and Chris Compton. They would like to investigate the possibilities of hosting a World Championship in Omaha, Nebraska, where they have good contacts. The venue was presented by a representative of the city. It looks very suitable for our purposes. Possible dates were discussed, and 2024 was out. Suitable dates may be available in 2026 or 2027.

Together with our Treasurer I visited Marrakech to inspect and secure the final arrangements for the WTC. The LOC had given all aspects of the logistics and services to a local agency, unfortunately with an arrangement that motivated the agency to supply services whether requested by us or not. This made the budget look much worse for the host federation than initially budgeted, and they asked us for substantial financial help beyond the scope of the contract. Ultimately all issues were resolved to everyone's satisfaction and the championship was extremely successful. I am mentioning this mainly as a word of caution to future hosts of WBF events.

June 2023

I visited the European Transnational Championships in Strasbourg, where I among other things was invited to participate in some EBL Executive Committee meetings for discussion of matters of common interest.

I also used the opportunity to discuss Marrakech preparations with all our operational staff. This shows one of the many advantages of sharing resources with the EBL, in addition to the obvious financial ones.

I was invited by the APBF to Hongkong on the occasion of their Zonal Championships and APBF board meetings. In addition to various formal occasions I held informal meetings with several officials. I suggested that the APBF, like other Zones, should hold its Zonal Championships earlier in the season, since it makes it very difficult to know the WTC participants so late, in particular in case the Zonal quota will not be filled in any category. If June is the only possibility for local reasons, they could do as Zone 1 and hold its WTC Qualifier the year before.

Having two days free before going to Singapore (see below) I visited Macau/China, initially organised by Mr. James Guan, in search of a potential venue for a world championship. Together with representatives from the Macau Sports Authority we visited various possible hotel venues owned by the MGM and Sands groups. Together with Mr. Abby Chiu, one of the sponsors of the APBF event, I visited the Galaxy group where he is well connected. Unlike the previous venues that consisted of halls in the hotels, Galaxy had a completely new conference centre in a separate



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building with several hotels around it, ideal for a World Championship. This later led to us signing an LOI for the 2025 WTC. Unfortunately, this summer they informed us that they could not go forward with it since the mainland Chinese authorities forced them to have the venue for a part of the Chinese Games at the time agreed for our WTC.

Together with José Damiani I visited Singapore the first ever IOC Olympic Esports Week where Bridge was invited together with 15 other sports to present its activities in the electronic and AI field. We showed Funbridge/BBO robot challenges, BBO matches between invited teams and play on Lovebridge tablets, as well as tutoring visitors in various forms of the game. This was preceded by qualification robot events which brought some income which, after deducting costs, left an amount to be shared among those participating NBOs that promoted the event. The finals were free of charge for the 600+ participants.

My thanks go to José, who has been the promoter and organiser of our participation from the beginning. The cooperation from 52Entertainment is also much appreciated.

July 2023

I visited the NABC Summer Nationals in Chicago. I had several meetings with the new ACBL Executive Director Bronia Jenkins. She is very dynamic, progressive, and eager to cooperate and interact more with the international community than has been the case at times in the past. She is positive to the new WBF World Tour and would also like to revive the "America vs Europe" (previously (mis)named the Buffet Cup) but in a more serious form.

I met with the RealBridge persons in charge for an update on the "Small Federation Championship" idea, which has in the meantime come to fruition.

Among the players there were heated discussions around the "cards or tablets" topic for top international competition. From anecdotal evidence there is a large majority that wants to continue playing with cards, but most of them liked the bidding and scoring on tablets.

August 2023

I visited the Swedish Bridge Festival for discussions with the SBF board about Youth Championships. They complain that the world youth events always collide with their festival which therefore misses a lot of their own, as well as international, youth players. Their festival is always in the same period every year, and has been "forever". I used the opportunity to suggest that they arrange a Youth Championship themselves, enabling them to choose the timing.

I attended the World Youth Teams Championships in Veldhoven, the Netherlands. It is so satisfying to see all these young players, aged 10 (I believe) to 30, engaging in tough competition while showing great camaraderie afterwards. I particularly enjoyed watching them mingle among nationalities in the evenings, playing all kinds of games (except "normal" bridge, though some played "goulash"). The atmosphere at the packed closing ceremony was also great, with lots of cheers for all receivers of awards, including the very popular Joan Gerard award for the most popular player in each category, where it is only the players themselves who vote.

September 2023

I participated in a Zoom meeting with the IMSA board. New statutes and a more structured organisational plan were adopted. Work on a new and improved website were initiated.



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October 2023

I attended the IOC Asian Games in Hangzhou/China, invited by the Organising Committee (as were all presidents of International Federations recognized by the IOC). They paid for flights, accommodation, and a designated assistant and driver!

I timed my visit to coincide with the semi-finals and finals of the Bridge competition. It was held in the Mind Sports building where also the chess competition was held.

The finals were broadcast with live commentary on TV, and I had the pleasure of acting as a co-commentator in one session.

The bridge participation was large. Some Asian NBOs to some extent prioritize the Asian Games over the WBF championships if they have to choose. They get more government support for the Asian Games.

The bridge prize giving ceremony was impressive, choreographed to the smallest detail. I was asked to award some of the medals and, while awaiting my turn, I had to stand on a specific, marked, spot on the floor! All teams on the podium were smartly dressed in their uniforms.

During my stay I also visited the largest bridge school in town and had the pleasure of playing a few exhibition hands with the pupils.

I was invited to attend a large promotion event hosted by the Japanese Olympic Committee for the 2026 Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya. I connected with some of the responsible persons on their LOC as well as the President of the Japanese Olympic Committee, lobbying for bridge to be included as one of the optional sports selected by the LOC. Unfortunately the chances look rather slim – bridge is much smaller in Japan than in China, and there are many more “domestic” sports they prefer to showcase.

I also attended the Closing Ceremony of the Asian Games, a spectacle as impressive as at any Olympic Games.

I attended the introductory (Zoom) meeting of the newly formed Marketing & Communications Committee, under the chairmanship of Ben Thompson.

November 2023

I spent a week working out of our Lausanne office and attending the ARISF General Assembly and the IF Forum (a seminar for officers of the IOC recognized International Federations) together with our General Secretary. Attending IF presidents were invited in groups of five to a half-hour meeting with IOC President Thomas Bach. He started off by addressing me “out of the blue”, saying that he met recently with his friend Argentinian ex-president Mauricio Macri, who could not stop talking about bridge! This of course resulted in bridge getting more than its fair share of those 30 minutes.

I attended a Visio meeting of a recently formed ad hoc group to discuss bridge development in general. Included in this group are the presidents of the largest NBOs, as well as the Executive Director of the ACBL. This was an initiative of the Presidents of the French and Dutch Bridge Federations. This is an ongoing project and results will obviously be shared with all NBOs.



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December 2023

I visited the ACBL NABC in Atlanta, for the usual meetings and interactions with players, officials, and other actors in the bridge world.

I held a Zoom meeting with several EC members to “brainstorm” about possible future modifications to our organisational structure in terms of efficiency, costs, and governance in general. This is an ongoing process as can be seen from the topics on the Congress Agenda.

January 2024

While in Switzerland I met with the president of the PBU together with Eric Laurant and Igor Chalupec to discuss the WBF Youth Transnationals in Wroclaw 2024.

February 2024

We held an Executive Council meeting, primarily to discuss and decide the matter of Russian and Belarusian players in light of the decisions by the IOC published in December 2023. We had a quorum participating and many who couldn't had made written submissions. By a very large majority it was decided to basically replicate the IOC by prohibiting participation in National Representative events but allowing individuals to participate in transnationals, subject to certain conditions being fulfilled.

March-May 2024

Due to my continuing medical treatments and tests I was not able to travel at all. I had to cancel my visit to Louisville for an MC meeting (which I lead via Zoom), a scheduled follow-up visit to Buenos Aires in preparation for the WBG, to Switzerland for my customary attendance at the Zurich Open while visiting our head office, and the NBO Seminar in Bangkok (although I participated in parts via Zoom) from where I had intended to make a second visit to advance the Macau project for the 2025 WTC.

I am grateful for the additional responsibilities taken on by Ben in dealing with day-to-day WBG matters and by Eric for doing the same for the WTYC in Wroclaw. “That’s what friends (here VPs) are for” as the song lyrics go!

The NBO Seminar in Bangkok was a great success. NBOs from four Zones, 4, 6, 7 and 8 took part. We used a new (for WBF, EBL has used it for years) format, in line with my mantra since I entered international bridge administration, i.e. “**sharing best practices**” rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. During plenary sessions five different NBOs presented their programs, projects, and ideas on the three main topics: Youth recruitment, International bridge – status, and Women’s bridge. Those were followed by group sessions to discuss those topics. This makes for a very interactive seminar with the NBO delegates, rather than the WBF, taking centre stage.

We held several Zoom/MSTeams meetings concerning the Small Federations Championships and the SCoC for the WBG in Buenos Aires.



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June/July 2024

I visited the European Team Championships in Herning/Denmark, for meetings with the EBL. We also took advantage of the fact that several MC members were present any, and held a MC meeting.

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the World Youth Transnationals in Wroclaw/Poland and the NABC in Toronto, due to medical treatments.

On invitation by the IOC I attended the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games.

We held an EC meeting via Zoom, mainly to discuss the matters of Governance and Annual Dues, which we are now presenting to Congress.

September 2024

Together with Eric Laurant I visited Herning/Denmark to explore the possibilities of their venue and logistical team being able to host the WTC 2025, now when the Macau host bailed out. They are prepared to do so, and we have had several discussions, and agreed on all conditions, since then. Our Operations Director Maurizio Di Sacco has visited a potential alternative venue in Hurghada/Egypt and by the time we meet in Buenos Aires, if not earlier, a decision will have been taken.

Invited by the IOC Olympic Esports team I held two MStTeams meetings with their representatives to discuss matters in preparation for our candidature for inclusion in the Olympic Esports Games in Jeddah/KSA 2025. There will be three categories of "sports", whereby we would be in the "Simulated Sports Games" category. There will probably only be 10-15 sports per category in this first edition of the OEG, so our participation is far from guaranteed. Our participation at the Olympic Esports Week in Singapore last year as one of only nineteen IFs should hopefully help, as well as José Damiani's access to the chairman of the Olympic Esports Commission.

There are separate Trip Reports available from some visits mentioned above, and any delegate interested in more details is welcome to ask the Secretariat for a copy.

Ongoing and Completed "Projects"

Rules & Regulations

The R&R committee, under the leadership of Adam Wildawsky, has undertaken and completed the task of modifying our Supplemental and General Conditions of Contest. As much as possible has been placed in the GCoC, simplifying the work on the SCoC for each event and making the SCoC more relevant to the participants.

The committee is also in the midst of reviewing and improving all other WBF Codes and Regulations, a task which is now almost completed.

Finances

We have continuously worked on reviewing and reducing costs, both recurring/administrative and variable. We are now at a stage where we cannot reduce administrative costs any further, and the only area remaining is related to our system of governance.



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Competitions

We have listened to the voices of many NBOs of all sizes, demanding that we reduce the costs for NBOs to participate in our championships. I have formed a task force to work on different formats to reduce the duration of our events, and we will already see results at the 2025 WTC where we will go from 14 to 12 days of play. At the Youth championships we have already reduced the duration from 9 to 6 or 7 days.

Without compromising the quality of the events and the service to the participants we have limited tools to achieve savings, since we cannot control travel and accommodation costs. When selecting host cities we keep costs in mind, but it is not often that we have so much choice.

We are inaugurating the 1st World Small Federation Championships in December, played online on the RealBridge platform in a controlled environment ensuring a fair event. This event was conceived to make it possible also for small federations that cannot afford to enter a national world championship when it is held far away. With two months still to go before the registration deadline, already 13 NBOs from 5 different Zones have registered. My thanks to “Kip” Rotchell, EC member and head of the Small Federations Committee, and to RealBridge for managing to set this up in a way that allows play of the same boards in spite of the wide spread of time zones.

We have started regular online events for national women teams – more on that below.

We are introducing some new formats to some of our Transnational events, aimed at allowing all participants the possibility to play “meaningful” bridge until the end of the event. We will evaluate how this is received by the participants.

We have successfully completed the trial season 2023, and 2024 is the first “live” season, of the WBF World Tour. This project was decided upon by the EC already in 2018, but was postponed during the pandemic years when many international events were cancelled. The Tour has gained a lot of “traction”, and more and more organisers of international events are applying for inclusion. This year 31 events are included.

Just as a reminder – the ranking is of Partnerships, not individuals, and the events are existing “live” events. The only “additional” event will be the Tour Final among the top partnerships at the end of the season. The first edition is planned to be held in Memphis in March 2025, just before the start of the NABC.

Technology

With the help of the software service company Objectivity our IT department has been able to solve the problems with our servers, firewalls, and websites during high traffic periods (mainly during our championships).

We have invested in cameras at each playing table. This is a great help for TDs in adjudicating cases where the parties disagree on the facts. It is also very helpful both in preventing cheating and in investigating allegations. This was a major investment but well worth it.

We have started to use LoveBridge tablets for bidding and scoring at some stages of our championships. This has many advantages over bidding boxes and bridgemates. There is a record



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of the bidding at every table, many “mechanical” mistakes (e.g. bids and leads out of turn, insufficient bids and more) are avoided, and various ways of cheating during the bidding phase are prevented since there are no bidding boxes and tray to move back and forth. This comes at a cost, and we have only signed a contract for this year. We need to make a proper cost-benefit analyses.

Women's Bridge

We have increased our efforts in this area. The Women Committee, and in particular Mary Kelly Rogers with the help of RealBridge, has organised on-line national women team events aimed at improving the quality at the top level. A recent event featured teams from 7 of our 8 Zones! They are also publishing a great Newsletter focused on women's bridge, which typically includes articles and contributions from many top international players.

Women's Bridge was also one of the three main topics at the NBO Seminar in Bangkok.

Youth Bridge

This is an area where I must admit that we have not made much progress – yet. Unfortunately the head of our Youth Committee, Gilad Ofir, has not been able to contribute for the past 12 months. I should remind everyone that we have a substantial fund earmarked for Youth development, and NBOs are encouraged to present local projects for which they seek financial support. The WBF acts as an enabler, rather than having (non-existing) “boots on the ground”.

Development in General

We are continuing to support academic research projects by Samantha Punch at the University of Sterling and scientific research by Marek Malysa.

We are also pleased to see the initiative taken by the French and Dutch NBO presidents to create a group of mainly larger NBOs to discuss and share ideas. We are looking forward to the results of these efforts, that fit well with my “sharing best practices” mantra.

The new Seminar concept is also an element in in the same direction.

Master Points

Our Master Point Committee is in the process of revamping the whole system. The previous one was quite complex and included various inconsistencies. Up till now we have created new structures event by event, but we hope to have a new, simpler, internally consistent, and easily searchable system ready during the coming winter.

Thank you all for your attention, and I wish you a fruitful Congress.

Sincerely



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