



## SBL Interviews Robert Wolff

**School Bridge LEAGUE** had the opportunity for an exclusive interview with Robert (Bobby) Wolff, author of the autobiography, "The Lone Wolff", and past president of both the ACBL and the WBF. Mr. Wolff has won 11 World Bridge Championships and has been elected to both the ACBL Bridge "Hall of Fame" and the WBF "Committee of Honour" as well as having been the only player to win World Bridge Championships in at least five categories (Bermuda Bowl, World Team Olympiad, World Open Pairs, World Senior Team, and the World Mixed Team).

Recently, Bobby Wolff joined the **School Bridge LEAGUE** Advisory Board and we are thrilled!

Here is the exclusive SBL interview with Mr. Wolff:

1. **SBL:** "How do you feel bridge in schools positively affect our youth?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "Since the playing of bridge incorporates the following skills it, by definition, will serve those who play it in so many different ways:

- A. Problem solving
- B. Arithmetical dilemmas
- C. Psychological analysis of the opponents action
- D. Getting along with one's partner, and sometimes even teammates, under stressful conditions
- E. Following ethical strictures imposed by the game itself
- F. Thinking clearly while mentally competing, and when and if competing at the very high levels, with the whole world watching.
- G. Developing a humbling approach since the game will always rule and even the greatest players ever will be wrong a rather large percentage of times,
- H. Off the charts respect among competitors in a game played around the world without the physical violence associated with most other sports. Incidentally, the motto of the World Bridge Federation (WBF) is: Bridge for Peace!
- I. In all my 65 years of playing (I started at age 12) I have never seen a top player develop who didn't start in his relative youth (at least by the time he or she turned 20 years of age)."

2. **SBL:** "If you could predict the impact that bridge in schools will have on our youth within the next 5 years, what would you envision?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "I would envision the teaching of bridge in our schools to produce:

- A. More intellectuality

- B. More respect in the ways of partners, teammates and worthy opponents as well as the teachers who are showing them how
- C. Not shying away from numbers since counting every hand becomes a necessary tool for everyone who aspires to be a top player.
- D. At the very least, to be able to adopt a game for a lifetime which DOES NOT start deteriorating, like all physical sports, when one reaches a CERTAIN AGE.
- E. A mentally healthy exercise which is always available to come back to even after a prolonged absence from the game.
- F. Another way to meet new friends and even lifelong mates because of the mutual love and commonality the game produces.

G. *Note, many of the above strengths will only start to develop after bridge in schools gets well underway and possibly after initial "growing pains" in developing the best teachers to teach and the beginning publicity which is necessary to attract interest."*

3. **SBL:** "How have you seen bridge affect students test scores, ability to think critically and strategize?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "I have spent a reasonable amount of time getting bridge into the schools in China, (they have over 200 million students) beginning in 1993 when I was President of the WBF. Chairman Mao who unfortunately was somewhat of a ruthless leader, demanded that all of his generals play bridge as a mind developer for general and military strategy. It then followed that all of the Communist Chinese leaders who followed him in order all emphasized the importance of playing bridge. China has hosted three World Bridge Championships in the last 14 years. Since this experiment has never been tried, all I can do is relate how my experience in other countries, particularly Italy (which has been teaching bridge in their primary and secondary schools for many years) has impacted their youth. Bridge, as a game, has caused the whole country to treat their bridge World Champions (and there have been many of them) as heroes and icons, similar to America's treatment of their baseball, football and basketball stars."

4. **SBL:** "What do you feel, if any, are the negative stereotypes that educators, parents, administrators have against bridge in schools? How can we get beyond those stereotypes?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "The stereotypes are worth noting and as of now, when the special services divisions of Universities have been approached they pause and say, "Oh yes, that was the game my grandparents used to play". Showing the way with youngsters playing and adoring the competitive nature of the game will overcome the negatives, but it won't happen overnight."

5. **SBL:** "Why do you like the game of bridge?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "Bridge has virtually been my life and one beauty is that I write and read about it every day and it can be truthfully said by me that I learn something new almost each day

that I live in either a different treatment or a different type of card combination or perhaps a different psychological approach."

6. **SBL:** "How has the game of bridge affected your life?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "To not overstate it and still say that it has made my life exciting in so many different ways;

- A. Competition -- I play twice a week with Judy, my wife, in local duplicate bridge tournaments.
- B. I write about it every day with a daily (7 days a week) syndicated column which appears all over the world
- C. Since I have done as much administrating the game as I have playing, I am familiar (or should be) with all the games beauties and all the games problems -- trying to make it a premier entertainment event and never forgetting, FOR A LIFETIME.
- D. I am on bridge magazine panels and also write articles on a continuing basis as well as blog on bridge blogging sites always with the idea of making bridge better. During my long career I developed and fostered an Active Ethics program which has become worldwide and, I hope, contributes to superior ethics."

7. **SBL:** "How did you get started playing bridge?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "I got started in bridge by watching my parents play another couple during a long train ride from San Antonio, Texas (my birthplace) to Chicago and back. It was not until I was almost home from the trip, and at age 12, that I realized I was already perhaps better than the four players playing."

8. **SBL:** "What advice would you give to a student (youth) new to the game?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "The advice I would give to a potential young student of the game is to be prepared for a wild ride which, above all, features uncharted excitement and the possibility of achieving total satisfaction with one self's ability to reason logically and compete fiercely and against very worthy adversaries."

9. **SBL:** "What advice would you give to a teacher new to playing the game? New to teaching the game?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "I would counsel a potential teacher that all she needs to do is stay a step or so ahead of her students and then learn the game with them and chart her own progression which should be very satisfying. It would result in the teaching of the game more like a round table discussion of all the wonders which awaits them."

10. **SBL:** "Does a specific game or match stand out in your mind? Why? What made it memorable?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "Of course, my World Championship experience stands out, especially my eleven victories and in five different categories (still the record for the most different

categories), particularly so since when I was only in my teens I dreamed of playing on center stage and in front of an unbelievably large audience and competing with other like individuals in, quite simply, the most intelligent game ever invented. Heady, undeniable, realistic challenge, exactly, worthwhile. You better believe it."

11. **SBL:** "How old were you when you learned to play, what do you love about the game why do you think it's a great game for kids and students to play? How many people read your column and what are your thoughts on the future of the game?"

**Bobby Wolff:** "I learned at age 12, described above. It's a great game for kids, since other current learning experiences for them like mathematics (really arithmetic) are used times 3 on every bridge hand played. They, at those young ages, get their learning first hand at the table, rather than later in life being taught by a very average or below player who has taken up teaching bridge for other, more practical reasons, but ones who do not make him or her more qualified. My column is in more than 100 worldwide newspapers and is estimated to be read by about 15% of the people who buy the newspaper every day and in addition is now (with a 2 week delay) shown daily on the internet probably making the daily reading of the column at least 50 million people.

The future of the game is all set in Europe and especially China (where bridge is now being taught to an estimated 200 million students in their primary and secondary schools) and while bridge is not on every European country's school curriculum -- it is in Scandinavia, Italy and France with it being promoted now more than ever.

Bridge in North America has got to change its image. Probably because of the Vietnam War and too many other options available for young people, North American youth opted to not follow their parents example and left bridge in the lurch with no one, especially the ACBL (The American Contract Bridge League, tournament bridge's parent organization) leading a crusade to not have that happen. In 1958 Charles Goren, the most popular bridge teacher ever in America was on the cover of Time Magazine and there were national TV shows and many leading magazines which featured bridge writer's (Cosmopolitan and Sports Illustrated for two) monthly columns. This has all disappeared due to apathy and lack of proper promotion. Way back in the 1930's Ely Culbertson, then our country's leading bridge authority, had a network of teachers who taught his system and challenge matches around the world which rated front page news in our leading newspapers. Still today there are at least 4 major daily bridge columns (my Aces on Bridge Column is one of them) which are widely read on a daily basis and it is estimated that there are still 10 million active bridge players throughout North America instead of perhaps 40 million in the 1940's and 1950's who were thought to be playing on a daily basis."