

**Promotion of Contract Bridge as a Mind Sport:
Learning from the World's Expert Nations**

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This Masters Thesis undertaken at the Waseda University's Graduate School for Sports Science explores the promotion of contract bridge as a mind sport. The thesis drew on information from some world expert nations: Poland, The Netherlands, England and China which have been successful amongst all the categories in the last few years. Hence they were appropriate case studies and I carried out interviews with their NBO managers or top players who have some good knowledge about the bridge environment in the country. I also conducted the same interview with JCBL for a comparison. For this exercise, I referred to the model of Smolianov & Zakus (2009) which has been popular for the studies of mass participation and high performance in physical sports and read some related thesis.

Three key research findings were:

1) Targets and accessibility:

- i) Starting early (ideally in elementary school or junior high school) is important and effective for both promotion and high performance. Promotion amongst university students does not seem to be equally effective especially for quantity (their continuity rate is not high as expected).
- ii) Senior citizens are also crucial targets. Bridge which can be played much longer than physical sports has lots of benefits to offer to the older generations.
- iii) Because of its complexity, the process of learning and texts/materials for those starting to learn should be carefully designed to minimize drop-out.
- iv) It seems to be a global challenge to recruit and retain players aged from 26 to 55. A couple of triumphs but we haven't seen a prominent success yet.

2) Integration of promotion and high performance: Similar to physical sports, an increase of the bridge populations especially from the earlier age seem to connect to the high performance of the country. A larger bridge population also brings financial benefits for the NBO and clubs and more money can be allocated for the elite level of high performance. There is a correlation.

- 3) Support of Gov/NOC etc and the attribute of bridge : The attribute of bridge as a sport or a mind sport is quite crucial to secure financial and other support (partnership/collaboration) from the national/municipal government bodies and other agencies such as their National Olympic Committee etc. (Poland and The Netherlands have succeeded in increasing some 7,000 players through the schemes in the partnership with the government bodies.) I sent out a simple/short email to other NBOs to ask the status of bridge in their respective nation and any financial support from relevant authorities. The response from 23 NBOs proved the tendency that financial support is given when bridge is categorized as a sport/mind sport.

The thesis confirmed that a good understanding of marketing is hugely important for the promotion of bridge and NBO management. It is important to understand the nature and benefit of the game (not just as an 'interesting game' from the players' point of view but for people's wellbeing and even societies/social problems), identify the right target groups and consider the best route to attract and retain them as well as obtaining support/partnership to pursue goals. These aspects were apparent in the successful case studies of Poland and The Netherlands. Of course bridge environments and social conditions are not necessarily the same and vary in different countries, however, I would like to make best use of the tips from the studies for my work as a JCBL Board member in the coming years.

COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the bridge environment. We need to look seriously into the applications of digital platforms for the future of bridge and this is probably going to be the theme of my next study.

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