

AMAZING VALUE



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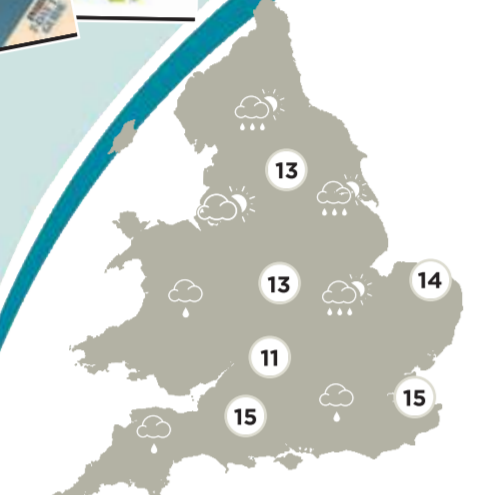
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Weather

North of England

Cloudy with mild breezes across the North. Cool morning warming to a pleasant afternoon. Winds easing by evening, turning chilly overnight. Max 11-13C.

Rest of England

Expect a cool, breezy day with temperatures rising gently, peaking in the early afternoon. Winds pick up slightly, easing by evening, with a clear, chilly night ahead. Max 13-15C.

Borders

Chilly start, warming by midday with brisk winds. Evening cools with gentle breezes, a typical Border's day with fluctuating winds. Max 9-11C.

Scotland

Scotland will see a mild start, warming by midday with breezy conditions. Expect a cooler evening as winds ease, bringing a crisp night. Max 10-12C.

Wales

Wales D+1: A crisp start, warming slightly by midday. Winds pick up, staying breezy throughout. Cooler evening ahead, with a gentle breeze to cap the day. Max 11-13C.

Outlook

Monday brings rain, with showers persisting into Tuesday. Wednesday sees rain easing. Thursday turns mostly cloudy.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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The trick to a great partnership

Samantha and Stephen play their cards right to succeed at bridge and become a couple - guess their best suit is hearts!

By Lauren Robertson
lauren.robertson@sundaypost.com

When Samantha Punch first sat across the table from Stephen Peterkin, she admits she thought he was rather full of himself.

"I'd seen him at a few competitions before," she said. "I thought he was a little arrogant, he talked a lot and had very strong opinions on what should and shouldn't happen in a game."

He stepped in to replace her bridge partner at a competition in Aviemore in 2006, then again at the same competition the following year. Now, they are celebrating nearly 20 years as a couple.

Samantha, a professor in sociology, social policy and criminology at the University of Stirling, first learned a version of bridge when she was travelling in her early 20s.

She was instantly intrigued by the fact it involved more skill than luck, differing from the other card games she enjoyed.

"It wasn't until I turned 30, after I finished my PhD, that I started thinking about the game again," she said.

"I suddenly had lots of spare time and I wanted to take up a new hobby to fill the gap; I didn't want to just watch rubbish telly or go to the pub. I phoned up Stirling Bridge Club, which said they were in the middle of lessons.

"I couldn't believe they said 'lessons' plural, I thought I'd just go down and they'd teach me in one night. But it was a series of 20 lessons. I caught up on the notes for the first 10, and as soon as I started reading, I knew I was going to enjoy it."

Joining the beginners' sessions, Samantha started playing bridge every Friday night. She didn't know there was more to it until a friend invited her to a weekend-long competition.

Samantha said: "They sorted a team for me and I went off on this weekend not really knowing what to expect, and I absolutely loved it. I saw a new side to the game with different competitions, and played with people from different regions. It was a lot more competitive than the Friday night bridge club."

More excited by the game than ever, Samantha began attending more competitions, sometimes up to three weekends a month. When her competitive partnership with Stephen grew into more after playing together for the second time in 2007, it made sense for them to form a consistent double act.

"I was a bit worried to play with him at first because I didn't want him to give me a hard time



Samantha Punch and Stephen Peterkin met playing bridge nearly 20 years ago, below.



if I did something wrong," added Samantha. "But he was actually very well behaved and easy to play with. We discussed all the boards afterwards and found that we just had this shared passion for the game. Now we mainly play together."

"There are open events, which are mostly men with some women, then the mixed category, which is relatively new. We're very strong because we play in the open category together, which is really the highest level of bridge, then when we play mixed we don't have to swap partners, so we are at a big advantage."

While Stephen and Samantha are at the same level of play, she said they have different strengths, another thing that makes them a strong partnership. "At the

beginning, there's bidding where you basically determine what the target for the game is going to be," explained Samantha.

"That's very much about communication, and I'm strong at that because I've spent a lot of time studying that both in bridge and for my job. Then Stephen is stronger at playing the hand, because that's what he enjoys and what he's read most about. You build on something that you enjoy most about the game, research it and get stronger. We've gravitated to different aspects of the game, and we've helped each other improve."

Earlier this month, the couple competed in a four-day competition. They have competed all over the world together, from San Francisco and Las Vegas to France and Italy, and will head to the

European Bridge Championships in Riga this summer. Keen to broaden the understanding of the game, Samantha set up Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA), a charitable research project.

"The first project focused on elite-level bridge, which enabled me to interview my bridge heroes and pick their brains," she said. "Then I looked at things like bridge and gender, bridge and wellbeing, bridge and Covid."

"Now we're looking at bringing bridge into schools and trying to get it more recognised, the same way that chess is. We are hosting a youth camp at the university this June to get more young people involved; most bridge players I know say their only regret is not learning sooner."

Samantha is keen to highlight the benefits of bridge and change

the way it is perceived. She said: "Every bridge hand only lasts seven or eight minutes, so you've always got this new challenging puzzle, each requiring different mental and analytical skills."

"You can't do it by yourself, so you've got to manage those emotional dynamics of working together. It's constantly challenging you and you can't take your eye off the ball, it's a game neither humans nor computers have mastered yet. It's also complete escapism."

"You can turn up stressed, really hassled by work, with loads of things buzzing around your head, but within five minutes at the bridge table it's all gone. There is community to it as well. We have met so many incredible people from all across the globe."

Between travelling to competitions

and researching new strategies, bridge is a mainstay in Samantha and Stephen's relationship. And they wouldn't have it any other way.

"One day one of you might be more on form than the other, the next day the other one might make a few more mistakes, you just have to be forgiving when it's your partner's off day," Samantha added.

"One of the benefits of having a bridge partner you live with is that you can just talk non-stop bridge, and that's what we enjoy doing."

"We're still talking about hands we played at our most recent competition, even though we discussed them in the pub afterwards."

"When we're really in the zone, we can lose all concept of time. It flies by."



King Charles at the show.

Death of soldier at royal show

A soldier died after falling from their mount at the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

The soldier was part of the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery and fell at around 7pm on Friday after exiting the arena.

Despite being given immediate medical treatment, the soldier sustained serious injuries and died at the scene, Thames Valley Police said.

King Charles was present at the show, but unaware of the severity of the incident until later.

Buckingham Palace yesterday issued a statement saying the King was "greatly shocked" and "saddened" to have learned of the death.

Charles will be in touch with the family of the victim to share his condolences.

Buckingham Palace said: "While His Majesty and other members of the royal family were present at the arena at the time the incident took place, they were not made aware of the severity of the situation until later."

"The King was greatly shocked and saddened to have learned subsequently of the troop member's death, and will be in touch with the family to share his personal condolences."

"The thoughts and most heartfelt sympathies of the whole royal family are with the victim's loved ones and military colleagues at this time of grief."

Rip tide warning

An experienced surfer was pulled out to sea off the coast of East Lothian, prompting a warning about the danger of strong currents.

The surfer was dragged away from the shore amid 10ft waves at Dunbar on Friday morning.

The inshore lifeboat David Lauder was launched from Dunbar but the surfer made it to shore after 40 minutes.

Dunbar RNLI helm Adrian Lavery said: "The conditions were very challenging but when we heard someone was in difficulty in the water we got there as quickly as the sea state allowed."

"The surfer did well to get back to shore and we're delighted he was none the worse for his ordeal."