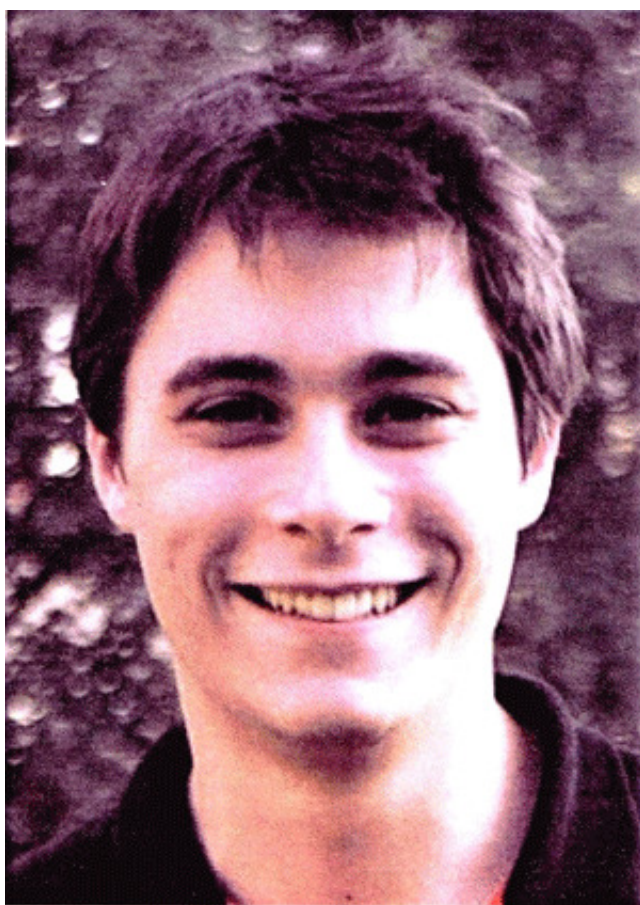


BBOer Story - Malpaluche (Thomas Bessis)

★ Malpaluche (Thomas Bessis) was born in a family of passionate bridge players. His father and regular bridge partner is [Michel Bessis](#), the mainstay of the French bridge scene. His mother is [Veronique Bessis](#), world champion and multiple European champion. Despite his young age, Thomas is already an incredibly successful player, his most recent achievement being [the Vanderbilt Cup that he just won with Team Amoils](#) this year.



Thomas in 2005,
with the French Junior Team in Sydney



Thomas at the French Open Pairs

At the beginning of 2012, Thomas and his father created the [Bridge Academy](#), a new French online bridge school. The school is a family business, ran by Michel, [Alain Levy](#) (Thomas' uncle), Thomas, Veronique, [Olivier](#) (Thomas' elder brother) and a few close family friends who are also bridge professionals. Thomas now shares his time between developing the site and traveling all over the world to attend tournaments.

All this almost didn't happen! There was a period in his youth when he was uncertain whether the life of a bridge pro is the life for him. But **Thomas** finally decided bridge is what he wants to do, he got involved in his family's "business" and began a remarkable journey for one so young.

Can you tell us about growing up in a famous bridge family?

I had a very normal childhood. Although there were a lot of card games at home and I got to understand pretty quickly what N E S W (NESO in French) meant, I grew up like any other happy child... My parents never tried to force me or my brother to play or have a career in bridge, although it was for both of them their life. It just came naturally. Around the age of 10-11, my brother and I got to ask about this game our parents were so interested in.

Was it inevitable for you to bridge?

No. I can't deny that I loved the game as soon

in February 2011



Alain Levy (Thomas' uncle), Thomas & Michel Bessis after they won the French Open League in 2012



Team Amoils, Vanderbilt Cup winner Memphis, 2012



Thomas with his mother, Veronique at the Europeans in Pau, 2008

now?

At the bridge table...

Do you have a regular partner?

Yes, I play with my father. We've started a partnership 5 years ago, and as long as our results will be good, I don't see any reason why we should split. By the way it's funny to

as I got interested in it, but it took me some time to fully understand that I wanted and I was able to become a bridge pro.

Did you manage to make friends outside of this fraternity?

Sure ! Well, for a few years now, most of the people I get to meet have some connection to bridge. But I've kept a few friends from the period I was studying, and everytime I see them I just love to tell them how my life is going.

Did you get to see your parents a lot or did their traveling mean you didn't see them much?

My parents are not exactly bridge pros. They haven't travelled that much when I was a kid, and even when they were travelling, we would sometimes go with them. Actually, compared to a more "standard" family, I would say they were maybe a bit less available on week-ends, because of the competitions, but so much more present than any other parents during the week. This has been a big plus in my childhood.

Are you a pro?

Yes I am a bridge pro, but not full time. I don't play that much bridge in Paris, say between 12 and 15 week-ends a year. During the past few years I have had the opportunity to play abroad, mainly in the US (I now play all the NABCs as a pro) but also in Italy, and wherever bridge brings me.

If you had not been a bridge expert, what do you think you would be now?

Tough question... I would say either a programmer or a trader. I find those two jobs very stimulating for the mind, and the competition spirit is I think pretty close from the one there is in a bridge tournament.

Where do you see yourself 30 years from

realize that when we play together, we both totally forget that we're father and son, we are just like two normal partners, encouraging each other, yelling at each other when we disagree...

Otherwise, as my father is not available enough to travel as much as I do, I have a different partner for the Nationals in US. Starting this summer I will be playing with my Swedish friend **Peter Bertheau**.

Do you get to do anything other than bridge when you travel to all the exciting and exotic locations for tournaments?

It depends what you consider exotic :) Most of the time, unfortunately, no. I book my flights for just the period I have to play, which means I don't see much of the cities I'm in except for the convention center I'm playing at and my hotel room.

But of course there have been some places in the past where I had planned to stay a bit longer after the tournament. Like when I first came to Brazil 10 years ago, or when we got to play the World Junior Teams in Sydney in 2005... Those trips will surely be life-long memories.

Did you make friends through bridge? Tell us about your friends.

I had better to, otherwise I would feel desperately alone !

My closest friends in Paris are all more or less sons and daughters of bridge players. For instance my first partner in juniors has been **Julien Gaviard**, who is the son of the french star **Daniele Gaviard**. We are a small group of French kids having this connection, and what links us - bridge of course - makes our friendship very strong, although I could not really explain why.

I also have to say that, now that I come to the US Nationals regularly, I've built some strong friendships there too, and I now consider all those american kids and world-wide bridge pros like my second family.

Do you have any superstitious practices before a big event? (Eg: rub your 3rd finger 3 times and finesse will work, etc.)

Not really. Although when I'm playing a Knock-out event, and I happen to keep on winning and winning, I tend to be more and more superstitious and change as few habits I got to take earlier in the tournament as possible (same way to go the playing area, same pen, same drink in the evening...)

What's your birthday, so BBOers can wish you well ?

I was born on a Friday, on the 13th of April. (Ed: [Born on 04-13 is no coincidence!](#))

Tell us about the Bridge Academy.

Bridge Academy is the website I built with my dad and a couple of friends, and we launched it at the beginning of 2012. It is a bridge-teaching website, where you can find many different ways to improve your skills at bridge : lessons, interactive exercises, quizzes, conventions... Registration is free, and we have some free content, although you need to subscribe for most of the services we propose. We now also have a weekly tournament on BBO, on Mondays at 9PM Paris time (3PM EST). The website is in French for the moment, but we would love to develop it soon in other languages.

Do you have any fun/interesting bridge stories to share?

Well, actually yes. Probably the funniest thing I've ever been asked at the bridge table. It happened at the Festival of Biarritz a few years ago.

I was declaring a hand against two opponents who seemed to be locals, as I hadn't met them before. I was cashing some winners from dummy, pitching some stuff from my hand, and at some point our lady opponent asked me: "How do you discard ?" As she saw me confused she got a bit mad and kept on insisting: "You must disclose your signalling methods, so how do you discard?" I must say it's been pretty hard not to laugh.

Do you have any advice for the starting player?

Don't ever expect to stop making mistakes, because it won't ever happen. You just have to make less of them than the opponents.

How about for the advanced players?

Be pessimistic when everything looks fine, be optimistic when the situation seems desperate.

Who is your favorite bridge player?

I don't want to idealize anybody, because if I get to play against him at the table, I want to think that I can beat him. But whoever doesn't answer [Bob Hamman](#) to this question doesn't realize how hard it is to keep being at the top.

Comments

(16 hours ago) **Anonymous** said:

I had the pleasure in the late sixties to be a team mate of Michel Bessis then playing with Plilippe Cronier.

Nobody will ever be able to have better partners. It is just a pleasure to find them out at the top of the Bridge World.

I hope to be able to meet Michel Thomas et Veronique at a future national event.
Enrico Beretta (EEB1)

(1 days ago) **Sidney Lorvan** said:

I especially liked the last 3 answers. You will never stop making mistakes. Roger Stern used to captain American teams and claimed that the average international expert makes one mistake every 3 hands. Of course, on the same three hands, the average club player would have made forty mistakes even if he made the same bids and plays. I barely know Bob Hamman. But I do know that when there was a party to say good-bye

to Doug Dang, who was dying of cancer, Bob came from Dallas to San Francisco to be there although he had very seldom played with Doug and could not have known him well. There are other examples of Bob's generosity that I know of, and, as I said, I barely know him. I think that calling Hamman one's "favorite bridge player" extends to more than ability to play bridge.

(3 days ago) **Anonymous** said:

just so so

(4 days ago) **federico** said:

I would have found 14-03 more appropriate as a birth date. Of course, then you would argue with the American who think it's 03-14 instead...

(4 days ago) **Anonymous** said:

From the left they are Thomas, Les, Darren, Ish all from the winning team, and then Harmon Edgar.

(4 days ago) **Anonymous** said:

I feel very sure that the third picture is not the Vanderbilt winners, as it has neither Jo-boo nor Curtis. It does have Les, Tomas, and maybe Is - nut who are the others?

(5 days ago) **pbundy** said:

Great interview with a most talented (and exceptionally nice) player whom I expect to see in the winner's circle many times in the future! Thomas is also most wise to appreciate just how formidable Bob Hamman is!

(5 days ago) **Anonymous** said:

Félicitations jeune homme et la meilleure des chances.

(5 days ago) **Slothy** said:

nice write-up Thomas :) Good luck now and in the future :)

Have to say, agree with you about Bob Hamman :)

Alex.

