

Pierre Zimmermann – Joie de Bridge

Patrick Jourdain interviews a newly crowned European Open Champion

PDJ: It is the lunch break during the final of the European Mixed Teams Championship in which you are playing, so the Daily Bulletin is most grateful for your time. Many of our readers are familiar with your successes in the bridge world so the idea now is to concentrate on other matters. Please tell us first something about your family life.

PZ: I am 56 years old with five children ranging in age from 21 down to 10. The two eldest are very bright (my 21-year old son has an IQ of 160) and both are studying at the Ecole Polytechnique in Lausanne. My second marriage, with Christine, is now 15 years old. Christine is an artist, a good painter.

PDJ: Did you start bridge or business first?

PZ: Bridge. I was studying Maths at the same Ecole in Lausanne that my children now attend and I founded the bridge club there. We knew so little that my partner would open INT with a void because he knew it showed 16-18 points but not that it also needed a balanced hand! I persuaded Philip Morris the tobacco company to sponsor us with bridge tuition from a professional bridge teacher, Gergely Szentes. In the Swiss League the University bridge team was in the bottom Division, the Sixth, and was steadily promoted until it reached the First Division. The University bridge club has been a big success providing quite a few of the Swiss national team in later years.

My father was a doctor-in-law but the family was not wealthy so I had to find a job to help finance my studies. Fortunately I was the top student at Maths in my second year and got work as an assistant to Professors at the University. In my last year I did something no-one else had tried and combined Maths with a course in High Commercial.

PDJ: What happened when you left University?

PZ: I immediately obtained a job with IBM in the finance department of their headquarters in Zurich. I was there for four and a half years and had worked my way up their hierarchy when I received the offer of a massive challenge from another company. Hill & Knowlton was at the time perhaps the world's leading PR company (it has since been taken over by WPP). Their European Division was losing money and, with the offer of a much increased salary over my job at IBM, they put me in charge of turning it around. That succeeded and with the money I made, in 1990, I founded my own Real Estate Company concentrating on property in Geneva. It bears my name, Regie Zimmermann, and I am the sole shareholder. We specialise in buying property that is in poor condition, refurbishing it, and then selling it but often still remaining the

manager of the building with a management fee from the new owner. The business has expanded so much that although we subcontract all work on the buildings we have 43 employees working on the buying, managing and selling. We have properties in Geneva as well as Lausanne but nothing outside that area so we are in close touch with everything.

PDJ: What about your interests outside business and bridge?

PZ: I love golf but play very badly, just enough to warrant the maximum handicap! I like opera and classical music and Geneva provides excellent opportunities to enjoy that. I also like musicals and have seen Les Miserables in four different cities.

PDJ: What are your aims for bridge?

PZ: I would like to develop bridge in Europe with new events similar to those already shown to be a success in the USA. This year in Monaco I have the Prince Cup with eight invited teams

of quality meeting before the Bermuda Bowl. I pay the cost and prizes but the teams make a contribution to a Monaco charity. In the Autumn of 2012 in Monaco I plan to have a European equivalent of the Las Vegas Cavendish, and have the blessing of Bob Hamman for this. In France I hope to support an equivalent of the American majors like the Reisinger to attract teams from around the world.

PDJ: Do you work with the bridge authorities?

PZ: Yes, indeed. Although my interest is mainly catering for the bridge professionals and the higher end of the game I am ready to assist the authorities with their events. As yet we have no World Bridge Championship announced for next year. If asked for help I am ready to do so.

PDJ: Our readers know of your new team in Monaco with three different nationalities which is hoping to represent Monaco as soon as possible in EBL and WBF national based events. Can you tell us about the eligibility problems?

PZ: I believe all six of us have fulfilled the conditions of residence necessary to represent Monaco in the 2012 WBF World Championships. We all have Monaco citizen cards beginning with residence in December 2010. There is a slight difference in wording between the EBL and WBF regulations on residence which means there is a question mark over our participation in the 2012 EBL event. Obviously we would prefer two years before 2012 to mean 2010, rather than 24 months before June 2012. The oddity is this. The 2012 Europeans are the qualifying event for the 2013 Bermuda Bowl. Can it make sense that we would be eligible for the 2012 WBF event as Monaco but not eligible for the 2013 event?

PDJ: Thank you, Pierre. By the time this is published the world will know the colour of your medal.

