



**President's Report to Congress
Montreal, Canada
Wednesday, 21st August 2002**

Presidents,
Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

My thanks to all of you who are attending this Congress today.
I am particularly grateful for your presence as we badly need strong cooperation between you, the NBO members, and we, the WBF and the Zones, to succeed in our strategy of development.

We were hoping to have Marc Hodler presiding this Congress.
You all know him. Marc is one of the most important personalities in the world of sport and has helped us enormously in our march towards Olympism. He is also one of us, as a bridge player and as former president of the Swiss Bridge Federation. All good reasons, above and beyond friendship, for the WBF Executive Council to have nominated him President of our Congress.

I am also very pleased to acknowledge the outstanding and distinguished services that Marc has rendered to the WBF. Unfortunately, he has injured his leg in an accident and may only be able to join us next week. If he does, we will present him with the WBF Honours pin.

1. IOC Matters

Let me try to update you on our actions, specially towards Olympism.
You may be aware that since Maastricht, the WBF has been officially admitted into the GAISF (General Association of International Sports Federations) with 54 votes in favour, 6 abstentions and none against. For that reason, the recognition of your peers, following President Samaranch's declaration and the elevation of the WBF to the status of International Sports Federation within the IOC, no one is entitled to dispute from now on the fact that "Bridge is a sport". Although being a sport is already an achievement, becoming an Olympic sport in another dream.
We developed this strategy because we believe that this is the one that will really help the National Bridge Organizations and the promotion of bridge.

It is the reason why we invested a great deal of money on the IOC Grand Prix in Lausanne in 1998, 1999 and 2000 and in Salt Lake City in 2002.
Thanks to Marc, we finally made it. We were present in Salt Lake City.

You have already received the World Bridge News where we reported in depth on this event but there are also copies available here if needed.

Where does this leave us?

To be honest, I do not know. I am not very optimistic.

When I met the new IOC President, Jacques Rogge, in November 2001 in Lausanne, he told me that it would be very difficult to get bridge into the games as the trend is to reduce the number of sports and, thus, the expense.

On the other hand, he confirmed what he said while he was still European President the year before in Warsaw, that is that he would encourage the National Olympic Committees to accept our NBOs.

And that is very important for you, as already more than half of our member countries are indeed members of their National Olympic Committee.

However, in order to get some real support, it is essential that we be included in the Games, which we are trying to achieve by lobbying on every occasion and despite the opposition of some people within the IOC. We met with Mark, Mr. Gian Franco Kasper – President of the Winter Olympic Sports Federations Association – to present our case. Now we have to meet with those members of the Programme Commission and others to try to convince them to show the same good support that Joao Havelange, the former president of FIFA showed.

I understand that the IOC Executive Board will examine a first report in Lausanne at the end of this month and the Mexico session will study some proposals in November this year. The final decision, however, will be taken during the Prague session in July 2003. We will let you know, in due course, of any progress but I strongly recommend that those of you who are still not members continue to knock on the door of your National Olympic Committee, reminding them that President Rogge is strongly in favour and, as far as the Europeans are concerned, that President Mario Pescante will write to them.

I personally spent a lot of time traveling and visiting many NBOs and their Ministers of Sport in order to convince them. Sometime we succeeded, as in Canada and India; other times we failed, at least for the time being, as in the US and Australia. However, we have no choice. We must be consistent and behave appropriately. We must respect the IOC rules especially with regard to the nationality of our players in our Championships, unless they are transnational of course, as well as the Anti-Doping regulations which are designed to protect our members' health as well as the fairness of the competition.

And, finally, in our own organization to respect ourselves we must give more thought to the parity between men and women as women clearly represent more than half the bridge population and are devoted to our cause.

2. Changes in WBF Constitution and By-Laws

That brings me to suggest some further changes in the WBF Constitution and By-Laws. I would remind you of what I wrote in my last report two years ago in Maastricht.

We need to give careful consideration to the purpose of having Zones: the political organization to send representatives to the WBF Executive; the geographical structure to organize zonal championships and send qualified teams to world championships; and finally, the financial melting pot.

However, we also need to pay special attention to a more democratic process for electing the members of the Executive Council of the WBF and its main officers – President, Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and Secretary.

According to other comparable international federations, the president of each zone (8 in our case) is automatically a member of the board and the other members can be elected by the Congress with a quota per zone and ensuring a minimum of parity. The President and the officers are elected by the Congress.

Personally, I would add that certain bridge VIPs could be nominated by the president and the board to add their experience and expertise.

In all of this, one might also wonder whether it would be normal for there to be a scale to the number of votes according to the number of members in any country, which incidentally is already in force in Europe.

Because we know that the Zones are unfortunately quite reluctant to make any geographical or political changes, we did not go further on this.

It remains that a consensus has now been reached to switch the WBF incorporation from New York to Lausanne, Switzerland.

For that, we have again to adopt some changes in our Constitution and By-Laws. These are set out in the attached proposal.

This is the recommendation of the Executive Council to which I hope that you will agree.

3. Our daily life, our recent past, our present and our future

It is with a certain note of sadness that I have now to continue with the third part of this report which concerns our daily life, our recent past, our present and our future.

I am sad and very pessimistic for two reasons.

One is that despite putting a great deal of effort into the promotion of the game, nothing has changed for the past eight years and, even worse, many federations have declined to make any promotional effort.

You must realize how difficult the situation is: some of you even refuse help without showing any ability to undertake effective action. I am really desperate even though I have accepted this third term, rather than take the easier and more cowardly route of quitting.

Indeed, the economical and political environment is extremely worrying.

We had to work miracles to organize the Championships in Paris instead of Bali. It shows also the financial difficulties we face.

You will recall that I brought up the need to review the dues structure six years ago in Rhodes. At that time, I had in mind a joint collaboration with the NBOs on important projects such as:

- Recognition of our NBOs by the NOCs and acceptance into the Olympic Games
- Assisting junior bridge and junior development
- Developing teaching programmes
- Introducing bridge to the school systems
- Providing Tournament Directors and teacher-training sessions
- Subsidizing bridge programmes in least-developed countries
- Helping to bring new countries into the WBF
- Providing subsidized accommodation at the tournaments
- Improving the bridge administration infrastructure

Unfortunately, I have had to face some strong opposition due to the NBOs' unwillingness to ask the players themselves to pay \$1, which I find incredible.

From 1994 to 1998, we maintained our assets of \$1 million mainly by bringing in \$2 million from sponsorship grants.

From 1999 to 2002, despite the fact that we brought in another \$1.6 million, our assets decreased dangerously as we lost \$200.000 on the MSO agreement and another \$200.000 on the Bali agreement.

In 1999 we got \$95.000 (instead of \$300.000) for the Worldwide Bridge Contest from MSO and \$220.000 from the Angelini Group for the IOC Grand Prix. We did get \$300.000 from Bermuda in 2000 (and ORBIS put another \$1 million into the Bermudian organization), \$55.000 for Maastricht, \$160.000 from Generali for the IOC Grand Prix (without cash prizes), and \$275.000 for the Generali Masters in Athens and \$25.000 from Bollore for the teaching programme. You all know, of course, what happened as a result of 11th September 2001: we received \$100.000 (instead of \$300.000) from the Lippo Bank, supplemented by a further \$80.000 from various sponsors, and finally \$160.000 for Salt Lake City from Generali and a further \$140.000 from various sources for Montreal, mainly from the City of Montreal and the Power Group.

In total, \$1.6 million instead of \$2 million while we lost \$400.000 as mentioned above.

That is to say that we received roughly the same amount but for specific programmes within our strategy that we managed to finance.

But if anything should go wrong with a sponsor, as it did with MSA and Lippo Bank, we are short of that money despite all our efforts.

We cannot continue like this.

Firstly, because it is a condition for our survival and secondly because it is unthinkable nowadays to imagine getting sponsorship and keeping it for our daily expenses which have already been cut to the minimum. Anna, Christine and Carol together do not even represent one permanent employee, compared to 80 in the ACBL, 40 in the French Bridge Federation or 25 in the Netherlands or England. Again, if we want to take pride in

ourselves and obtain sponsorship, we cannot envisage lowering the standard of our event.

So I am again asking you to give further consideration to increasing the dues to \$1, as I have been urging repeatedly since Rhodes.

To give you time to adjust your own national policy, we would only start this in 2004. If the situation were to improve greatly between now and then, or even later, we would find a way of giving you back part of this money.

The lack of solidarity and interest is, unfortunately, patently obvious. The Symmetric International playing cards are a good example. It is clear that our sport has to be free of any possible accusation. Playing with symmetric cards, avoiding any unauthorized information, is now mandatory. I put a great deal of personal effort into this and the WBF strongly recommends the use of these cards by all the Zones and NBOs. Today, only two zones are using them – Europe and Central America and the Caribbean – as well as a few federations – the Netherlands, France and England – to whom I am grateful.

It might be a good idea to think of selling one or two decks of these cards at least to the registered bridge players if not to all. The cards would have the logo of the WBF, the Zone and the NBO and would have a card inserted into the pack that would act as a membership card or for advertising NBO information.

In such a way, the players themselves would pay the \$1 while receiving something in return and it would not cost the federation anything.

I will of course still continue to try to ensure the same kind of sponsorship grants but it is becoming more and more difficult.

However, we need to carry on with our programme or it would be a dereliction of our duty.

I intend instead to ask Sabine Auken, who has accepted, and perhaps Sharon Osberg, to work with us to help all of you to introduce bridge into schools.

Again, there is not other choice.

We have to ensure, for the sake of the future of bridge, that bridge is taught in schools just to keep up the same percentage of the population that plays bridge. It is not a problem of a decline, it is a problem of life or death.

This does not exempt us from taking care of the active people and the retired seniors. Believe me, despite the competition with other sports, bridge can be very alive and attractive. It is just a shame that we are not doing enough for that.

I cannot carry the burden alone. I need you. I need your cooperation. And I am counting on you.

Before leaving the floor, I would also like to inform you that the drafting committee, that is working on the revision of the Laws of bridge, is supposed to carry on working here for a few days after the championships have finished, and later through Internet.

I am confident that they will do a good job and that we will be able to publish a new code describing the spirit and the philosophy of some of the laws within the next couple of years.

I believe that we did a good job with the Code of Practice for the appeals and I am astonished to see that, even in the major zones, the recommendations that were concluded and accepted are not being followed.

I need to insist yet again that, in the interest of your own players, you use this Code of Practice and the jurisprudence.

As usual, at the end of the President's report, we also update our calendar.

Unfortunately, here again, I have to admit that the situation is not flourishing.

For the 2003 Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup and World Transnational Open Teams we are still negotiating with Bali, Poland or Mauritius.

For 2004 we were considering Istanbul, Turkey for our Olympiad.

For 2005, I would be more than pleased to organize the Bermuda Bowl in Hong Kong where I found an excellent hotel and venue, and the Netherlands are another potential candidate.

For 2006 I am discussing with Cannes, France for the World Championships which, as you know, are made up of the Rosenblum, the McConnell, and the pairs which, as you now know, will all become transnational.

However, if you feel that you would like to be a candidate for one of these events or even another future event, please do not hesitate to come forward. At the moment, nothing has been finalized.

Thank you for your attention.

Bridge needs enthusiasm – yours. Please help us to do even better.