

WBF ZONE 6 (APBF) THE PAST AND PRESENT

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In the early years

In the fifties, a group of Rubber Bridge players came together and organized a series of inter-port tournaments in Manila, Hong Kong and Bangkok. To enhance membership participation, our forerunners not only established national Bridge organizations in their own countries, but also in 1957 inaugurated the Far East Bridge Federation (FEBF) which became the zonal management center for promoting Bridge and presiding over regional championship events.

Since then the FEBF has increased the number of NBOs substantially. In 1966, FEBF represented by its zonal champion, Thailand, made its first appearance in the Bermuda Bowl. In 1969, FEBF surprised the world when its representative, a combined Chinese Taipei (then Nationalist China)-Thai team, upended a powerful American team en route to meeting the legendary Italy Blue Team in the final of the Bermuda Bowl. With the zone rapidly expanding to include Pacific, West Asian and the Middle Eastern NBOs, the 70's was regarded as a golden era of the FEBF.

In 1980 those new FEBF NBOs in West Asia and the Middle East were granted their own zone (BFAME: WBF Zone 4) ; Australia and New Zealand together with the Pacific island states were classified as Zone 7. This WBF "re-zoning" by subtraction actually helped FEBF by allowing it to concentrate its resources and expand its influence in the East Asia region; China's entry gave its greatest impetus.

China Emerging

In 1979 a group of Hong Kong Bridge administrators and top players visited Shanghai and Beijing on a Bridge mission. During play in a friendly tournament it was suggested that the host country would consider forming a government-sanctioned national Bridge association. Only months later in 1980, the Chinese Contract Bridge Association (CCBA) was established under the Ministry of Sports; Deng Xiao Ping, the paramount leader became Honorary President of CCBA. In the same year WBF President Jaime Ortiz-Patiño visited China for the first time while, on a separate front, teams from Shanghai and Beijing came to Hong Kong to play in the Hong Kong Inter-City Tournament highlighting the first international exposure for China.

In 1981, CCBA inaugurated its first international tournament in Shanghai which was well attended by world-class players from USA, Europe and Asia. Later in the same year, the Hong Kong Inter-City Tournament caught worldwide attention when Chinese from the Mainland and Taiwan met officially for the very first time since their severance in 1949. 1982 was a landmark year: CCBA became an official member of the WBF and FEBF, confirming China's interest in competing in FEBF and WBF Championships.

As avid Bridge players, many Chinese leaders have the vision of developing Bridge in their country. The most enlightening must be the remark made by Vice Premier Li Tieying during his meeting with WBF President, Bobby Wolff in 1993: "There are no less than 400 million card players in China and I wish to convert 30% of them (i.e. 120 million) to become Bridge players." Mr Li has embraced his vision with actions: today Bridge is being taught at high schools, universities and community centers. Even though the current Bridge population is still short of Mr Li's target, the latest estimate of 24 million players is an impressive figure.

In the Nineties

In 1991, FEBF changed its name to Pacific Asia Bridge Federation (PABF) to accurately reflect the geographical parameters of the Zone (i.e. the Pacific side of Asia) standing apart from the South Pacific Zone (Zone 7); Japan hosted the World Teams Championships in Yokohama and staged an exceptional tournament that demonstrated the expertise and spirit of cooperation from a NBO of the new zone.

On the trail of Japan, China organised the 1995 World Teams Championships in Beijing. In addition to the professional management of the tournament, the 1995 Championship also demonstrated that bridge can attract substantial commercial sponsorship not only for financing of the operation of tournament but also with resources to the development of bridge. The two World Championships generated enormous publicity and support which have profound effect on the development of bridge in Zone 6.

The Early Years of the 21st Century

World Mind Sport Game

In 2005, WBF President José Damiani took the initiative for unifying other mind sports associations - i.e. Chess, Go and Draughtsatically, Chinese Chess – and was instrumental in creating the International Mind Sports Association (IMSA). Since then, Zone 6 and China have joined José in conceptualizing and bringing to fruition ambitious plans for the first World Mind Sport Games (WMSG) in the Olympic city of Beijing in 2008. The WMSG -Bridge was participated by practically the NBOs in the world with over 2,300 national bridge players. The event attracted extensive publicity which has propelled the sport of Bridge to new heights, opening the way for Bridge and the other mind sports to hopefully become fully Olympic.

Asia Game and Asia Pacific Bridge Federation (APBF)

In 2009, to facilitate Bridge to be an Asia Game event, PABF was converted into APBF to put "on paper" the Zone 4 NBOs under its wing. While Zone 4 continues to operate under its own zonal management, to signify the unity of the two zones, the Zone 4 NBOs are highly encouraged to participate in the once every four years Asia Bridge Cup. The first its kind was held in Ningpo with the generous support and sponsorship of the municipality.

For years, the WBF has been trying to win Olympic status for Bridge. Moving a giant step closer to this dream, Indonesia through its ceaseless efforts has propelled Bridge as one of the events in the premier sporting event – the Asia Games in 2018.

Different Types of NBOs in Zone 6

A caveat: unlike the club-centered Bridge environment of Zone 1 and Zone 2, Bridge activities in Zone 6 are largely staged at community centers, schools, universities and social clubs not tied to their NBOs.

NBOs under PABF can be classified into four categories:

A. The small Bridge Clubs

The NBO itself is the biggest Bridge club of the country; Bridge activities are essentially enjoyed only by relatively affluent members. With their influence the NBO may well be a member of the National Sport Federation. Unfortunately, due to the lack of popular acceptance of Bridge (principally a difficult sport to appreciate by the masses), commercial sponsorships of any significance are hard to come by. Among the 12 PABF NBOs Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, China Macau and Korea are good Category A examples.

B. The Small but Developed NBOs

Here we have Hong Kong and Singapore, both with no more than 500 registered players; yet Bridge is a relatively popular sport in both. Their major tournaments, Hong Kong's Inter-City and Singapore's Pesta Sukan, are heavily sponsored by the government and by business enterprises while attracting hundreds of international Bridge players. What is most pleasing is that, aided by government funding at the high school and university levels, Bridge is being taught to students who in turn organize Bridge clubs and run well-attended inter-school competitions. Bridge is also a popular game in community centers.

C. Large Bridge Clubs

Japan and Chinese Taipei are somewhat similar to the major European NBOs, featuring a large Bridge population that includes a significant percentage of experts and professionals. Both NBOs have the technical expertise, resources and sponsorship to host annual first-class cash-prize tournaments – the NEC Bridge Festival and Yeh Brothers Cup – and attract many of the world's leading players.

D. Large and Developed Bridge Nations

The bridge scene in both China and Indonesia stands on its own. In addition to all the characteristics of the major European NBOs, Bridge in these countries is classified as a major sport (like table tennis in China and badminton in Indonesia) and is supported by substantial government subsidies. Commercial sponsorships are also surprisingly readily available. Both NBOs have been successfully promoting Bridge at the grass root level by teaching the game and organizing games/tournament in schools, colleges and above all, community centers. State leaders, ministerial-rank officials and top executives of major corporations are keen players who for decades acted as ambassadors for the game of Bridge. China and Indonesia, with a combined population of 1.6 billion, occupy 24% of the world's population; yet their per-capita Bridge population is no more than 2%. With the resources that the governments and commerce are willing to contribute, China and Indonesia represent the highest growth potential for WBF.

The Next Few Years

The next few years will be of critical importance to the development of bridge not only to Zone 6 APBF but more over to the world at large. In September this year (2019) the World Team Championship will be held in Wuhan, in Central China. In the Olympic Year of 2020, Qingdao China will stage the WMSG. The Organization is aiming to make this event as successful if not surpassing the Beijing 2008 edition. The 2022 Asia Game will be held in Hangzhou, China and bridge is very likely to be once again an official event. This will solidify bridge position as a recognised sport.

The Amazing Zone 6

During the past 60 years, we have witnessed Zone 6 in successfully organising eight World Bridge Championships to the total satisfaction of the world bridge community. Zone 6 has won six world bridge titles and 11 Zone 6 bridge players have been awarded World Grand Master status. Zone 6 started with a small group of bridge players in the three cities to become the administration center of bridge activities for 25% of the world population; and above all bridge is becoming a household name.

Bridge has come a long way. The world is quickly recognizing and appreciating the staying power of its magic.

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