

TOP DECK

ACT MEMBER FRANCES HINDEN EXPLAINS THE APPEAL OF THE WORLD OF COMPETITIVE BRIDGE

My parents were very keen bridge players and I started to play seriously at university. I was reading Maths at Cambridge and found myself in a very small minority of women. That's true of the bridge world, too; it's a very male-dominated sport.

I met my husband playing bridge. In fact, many women who play meet their partners playing bridge. We are often on the same team, but we play with each other rather less as bridge partners. In my experience, it's often a bad idea to play with your life partner!

The first major tournament I won was the British Championship (the 'Gold Cup') in 2003. In 2011, I started playing more regularly with a new partner and we won the British Championship again. In England, bridge also has its own premier league, where teams play each other competitively and can be relegated or promoted. The top two teams get to play for England. I've won once and been second three times, including in 2017. Bridge also has a five-nations equivalent – the Home Bridge Internationals. Winners take the coveted Camrose Trophy. Earlier this year, teams from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern



Ireland and the Republic of Ireland met in Belfast.

On the world stage there are European and World Championships, including the World Bridge Games. In 2016, I went to Wrocław in Poland for the games and England reached the quarter-finals.

This month, I will be playing on the England team in the 2018 Commonwealth Nations Bridge Championship in Brisbane. Bridge playing, walking and skiing tend to dominate my leave and travel plans. As I've become more senior in my job,

it has become a little easier to manage my schedule.

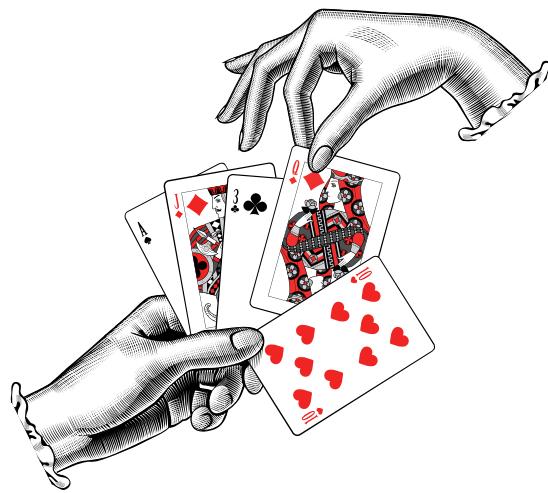
You can play bridge for money, and there are some notable professional players who operate much like golf pros, but you need a very different attitude to risk to earn your living that way. Many professional players come from the world of finance, some of them former traders. My bridge partner is a former bond trader who now sometimes plays professionally. Investment banker Jimmy Cayne, who was CEO of Bear Stearns, is famously an avid player; and Stuart Wheeler, who founded IG Index, and Warren Buffett are also keen bridge players.

There are a lot of parallels between bridge and my

professional life, particularly around assessing risk. I'm slightly unusual in the bridge-playing world in that, as a treasurer, I'm in the business of mitigating risk rather than speculating. In bridge, you must think about expected value. You think rationally about what you might get from playing certain cards and taking certain risks. If you read behavioural economics, you understand that people in general are more risk-averse than a mathematical assessment of a situation says they should be: both bridge and corporate treasury train you out of this.

The intellectual challenge appeals to me as a numbers person. Bridge has a good balance of intellectual analysis, risk taking and skilled reading of your partner – understanding what they mean by the cards they play. You do a lot of work ahead of tournaments on your partnership agreements – learning the detail of how your partner plays.

I love that combination of partnership, brain power, probability and risk. I've spent some time recently helping junior players, and you can learn the rules very quickly. You can then spend years learning to play better and working on your partnership. A lot of what's satisfying though is that it's a team sport. You compete, eat and drink together, and that social element brings a lot of enjoyment. It never gets boring.



Fun facts about: BRIDGE

- Last year, the European Court of Justice ruled bridge is not a sport, ending a long-running legal saga between the UK tax authorities and the English Bridge Union, which had been pursuing VAT-exempt status.
- Bridge is said to be excellent for wellbeing, enhancing the memory and promoting an alert brain. According to a study carried out at the University of California at Berkeley, there is strong evidence that an area in the brain used in bridge playing also stimulates the immune system.
- Other famous bridge players include Bill Gates (who plays Warren Buffett, among others), Martina Navratilova and Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke. Omar Sharif was a long-time expert player and bridge columnist.
- Warren Buffett has said: "Bridge is such a sensational game that I wouldn't mind being in jail if I had three cellmates who were decent players and who were willing to keep the game going 24 hours a day."