

Quick thinking, great memory needed for bridge

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The NZ Women's team who competed at the 2024 World Bridge Games in Buenos Aires, from left: Linda Cartner, Jenna Gibbons, Kris Wooles (NPC), Glenis Palmer, Christine Gibbons and Mindy Wu.

Bridge player Mindy Wu wants to get rid of the misconception that bridge is an “old person’s game” and is instead one that requires a great memory and quick thinking.

Wu has recently returned to Wellington from the World Bridge Games in Buenos Aires where she was a member of the New Zealand Women’s team. The games take place every four years in the same year as the Summer Olympics.

She described the game as a puzzle. “ Any time you are dealt a hand, it’s different, it presents you with a different problem, different challenge, and different ways to try to solve it.”

It was also a “game of endurance”, which required a strong level of focus and stamina to be able to play consistently the entire day.

At the world games New Zealand was represented in the women’s, mixed, open and senior categories.

The mixed team successfully qualified for the top 16, finishing in 13th place, beaten by the dominating Polish team, while the women’s team also qualifying comfortably in 14th place.

Peter Newell, also of Wellington and captain of the New Zealand mixed team, said he had been playing bridge since 1985, when friends at school introduced him to the game.

He stressed the importance of teamwork and harmony when competing in a high-stakes tournament such as the world games.



Mother and daughter duo Christine and Jenna Gibson, in concentration mode at the World Bridge Games.

The game was only officially classed as a sport by the International Olympic Committee in 1995, yet the International Bridge League, now the World Bridge Federation, held its first global competition in 1932.

The game is played by having two teams of two players partnered up, communicating through carefully chosen signals and bids, with the aim to get as many tricks as possible.

Despite bridge having an international presence, it remains a somewhat hidden gem in New Zealand, having a small but dedicated community of players in larger cities such as Wellington and Auckland.

Like any other sport, bridges have even been found to have significant health benefits for its players.

A study by Dr Christopher Shaw, a neuroscientist at the University of Auckland's Centre for Brain Research, found that primary school children who learned to play bridge had higher test scores.

A link between the game and the development of inferential thinking was established, which led to better performances in all subject areas.

The New Zealand Bridge Association was established in 1936 and oversees 110 affiliated clubs across the country.

Board member and long-time player Anna Kalma said she wished she started playing earlier and had even got her 12-year-old daughter into it.

"It's a huge opportunity for young people, particularly for those with a mathematical bent" she said, comparing it to strategic games such as chess and e-sports.
