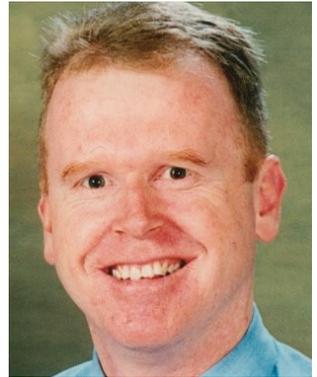


WHY ATTEND CONGRESSES?

Normal bridge sessions are the bread-and-butter of most bridge clubs. Bridge players on the Coast can choose from numerous sessions six days a week and some Clubs attract up to 30 tables to their regular sessions.

Unfortunately, only a small proportion of regular players play in bridge congresses, and I think that's unfortunate. So let me tell you why congress bridge is different (and I think better) than normal club bridge.



- Congress attendees are drawn from all over, and the fields tend to be stronger. This is good for stronger players, but it's also excellent for improving players. Also, you're going to meet players you don't meet every day at the club, and this is good for your bridge, and enhances the social aspect of the game.
- If you're avoiding congresses because you don't want to get beaten up by stronger players, don't worry. Almost all congresses are run on the "Swiss draw" principle, which means that except for the first round, you only meet opponents who are doing as well as you are. Less experienced players will, in the main, meet players of a similar standard, though if you do particularly well, you will be tested with your next draw, but of course if you're doing badly, you should end up with an easier draw.
- Many congresses are run as Teams events. This means that two pairs enter together as a team of four (they don't need to have played as a team before, but are usually of a similar standard). For each match (usually 8 boards), your team is drawn to play another team. The team mates of the pair you are playing are at the other table playing your team mates, but your team mates sit in the opposite direction to you, so that they hold the cards that your opponents at your table hold. Scoring is done solely on how your table result compares to their table result – what happens at all the other tables is irrelevant. This is a very different method of scoring from what is used at regular Club sessions, and many people believe this makes for much more enjoyable bridge. But don't worry if you don't understand how to score this way – the Bridgemates and scoring program work everything out for you.
- Pairs Congresses are either Matchpoint or Butler scored. Matchpoint scoring is the method used at club sessions, but Butler is more like teams scoring, and many people find this an enjoyable alternative to club sessions.
- Masterpoints at congresses are red or gold, and are awarded at a higher rate than normal green point club sessions. Further, the way points are commonly awarded at congresses means that it's unusual for any player to walk away empty-handed, so your Master rank promotion gets just a little bit closer with every congress you play in.

- Congresses are run by non-playing qualified directors, who will have the time to ensure issues at the table are properly dealt with, and that justice is done. This is not always possible at club sessions when playing directors need to get back to their table.

- Let's not forget the prize money. Congress fields are usually divided into categories for prize purposes, so that lesser players aren't competing with the strong players for minor prizes. And there's often a special group at the tail of the field for newer players, so everyone in the field stands a chance of getting a prize.

- Congresses represent excellent value for money. For an entry fee of usually \$30 a player per day, you get a full day's enjoyment, a very nice sandwich lunch, coffee, tea and snacks throughout the day, and a beer or wine with hot snacks at the end.

- If, as a new player, you are still a bit uncertain about all this, dip your toe in the water at one of the Novice or Graded congresses. Noosa, Sunshine Coast and Caloundra Clubs all run one or more Novice Congresses each year, which are specifically for players with fewer than 100 masterpoints. Many new players find this more enjoyable than open events, but it doesn't take long for them to want to move on. In Graded events on the other hand, the field is divided into groups at the outset, and players only play within their group. This is another way newer players can play in a congress knowing they will only meet players of a similar standard.

- In the same way that Congresses are different from normal club sessions, major gold point national congresses are different again. These are very professionally run events, and draw top players from Australia and overseas. The biggest in Australia is undoubtedly the Gold Coast Congress – it is quite something to sit in a room with over a thousand other players all focusing on the play of their hands. You could hear a pin drop! Other top events include the Barrier Reef Congress (North Queensland) and the Summer Festival in Canberra every January, but all States hold at least one gold point event each year.

And finally, let's not forget that congresses represent a way for Clubs to earn money – money that ultimately benefits their members.

Next year, there are 14 one and two day congresses on the Sunshine Coast, and many more in surrounding areas. In our immediate vicinity, clubs at Gympie and Maryborough in the north, and Brisbane, Gold Coast and the Darling Downs to the south and west, all host excellent congresses. Sunshine Coast players have been known to travel far and wide to attend congresses.

Upcoming congresses are listed on the QBA web site (www.qldbriidge.com). Entry forms for all regional congresses are also displayed on your Club's notice board. You can usually enter by email or regular mail, and most clubs will accept payment on the day.