



THE WORLD BRIDGE FEDERATION

José DAMIANI
PRESIDENT

Mr President of Congress, dear Mr Ding Guangen,
Mr President Emeritus, dear Jimmy,
Presidents and Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to you all.

I am very happy to welcome you today and thank you for joining us at this WBF Meeting of Congress.

I would first like to pay tribute to Marc Holder, former Vice President of the IOC, President of the International Ski Federation and President of the Swiss Bridge Federation and former President of our Congress who helped us so much in our Olympic destiny

And to Rao Gao Tang, former President of the Chinese Contract Bridge Association with whom we cooperated for so many years for the good of Bridge in China and worldwide as we organized several international events under his presidency.

May I ask you kindly to stand for a minute of silence in memory of these two great gentlemen.

And now let me introduce Mr Ding Guangen to you. Mr Ding has been holding posts within the party and state of China for many years. Mr Ding is also an accomplished bridge player, one whom I have personally seen on many occasions playing with the flair of a World Champion and showing remarkable skill in all aspects of the game, bidding, defence or play.

He met Mr Ortiz Patiño for the first time when the latter came to Beijing to play bridge with Mr Deng Xiao Ping. One year later I was delighted to welcome Mr Ding to France, when China came to Biarritz to participate in a World Championship for the first time. Since then our friendship has grown and deepened each time we meet.

For many years Mr Ding has devoted himself to the development of bridge in China, and to the co-operation and exchange in the bridge field between China and the other countries, as well as with the World Bridge Federation.

He has made many important contributions to the development of bridge in China and played a major role in the organization of the 1st World Mind Sport Games.

In 2006, the WBF awarded Mr Ding with its highest award. In 2007, the Executive Committee of the WBF decided to have the honour of inviting Mr Ding to be the President of the WBF Congress.

My friends, please let us warmly welcome Mr Ding Guangen, the President of the WBF Congress, as I invite him very warmly to address you.

Before anything else, I am sure you will join me in applauding and thanking very warmly our hosts, the Chinese Contract Bridge Association and its President, Mr Xiang Huai Cheng as well as the Chinese Organizing Committee of the World Mind Sports Games under the leadership of Mr Liu Si Ming and our friends from the CCBA Fan Guang Sheng and Chen Zelan.

Thank you, thank you so much for all that you did to make our dream a reality. Indeed, two years ago at our last Congress in Verona, I told you about our project to incorporate our World bridge Games (previously named Olympiads) into the World Mind Sports Games that IMSA was going to organize under the umbrella of the GAISF with the other mind sports – Chess, Draughts, Go and Xiang Gi (Chinese Chess). Frankly speaking, I did not know how difficult this would be, how much hard work it would represent from the Chinese side and from our own people, Anna, Carol, Christine, Maurizio, Tomas, Panos and everyone else in the team and I want to tell all of them how grateful I am for the magnificent job they had done especially during a time that was more than a little difficult for me personally.

But, here we are and it is marvellous to see that we succeeded in having 95 countries or regions present here in Beijing of 140 in the World Mind Sports Games with 110 Youth teams, 71 Open, 54 Women's and 34 Senior teams.

And these numbers are, of course, a huge record due to the generosity of our sponsors, especially Air China and, of course, to the Board and Card Games Administrative Centre of the Ministry of Sports of China, the Municipality of Beijing, the North Star Group and all our partners in this event.

Indeed, we kept our promise thanks to them all and were able to finance all the youth and many of the women's teams as we believe these populations deserve our attention. We could never imagine a better way to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the WBF than such a success despite all the difficulties and problems we have had to face each day.

I am sure that you understand our worries and I also would like to thank all of you for your assistance and your presence here. However, this may not be enough.

Now that you have shown more interest in bridge for the youth for which I have been praying for years, I really count on you to go ahead with an efficient plan to teach bridge in school, in Universities and high schools, to organize good events for them using special space and time as well as the Internet which is really an excellent tool for this purpose.

As I have said many times before when talking about promotion, the WBF can only show the way. It is then up to the national federation to follow up by taking advantage of our action.

We received nice forewords and messages from Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC and from Hein Verbruggen, president of the GAISF and that can help in the communication which remains the key to our future.

That is the reason why I feel that the image of the Mind Sports could be considerably improved at the end of this event as we have also got a good TV coverage. With Beijing TV, CCTV and Phoenix TV not only do we have daily reports and interviews but we are able to send all the filming worldwide via satellite giving every national TV channel the opportunity to pick up what they want.

We have worked a lot for that with the collaboration of the Chinese Organizing Committee and our agency. The written press is also very much involved in these World Mind Sports Games, as well as our best tool – our websites.

The web is definitely the best way of communication for our Mind Sports, especially when the technology will be improved with webcam and easy access for video but our Mind Sports are also the best example and use of the web.

Again, when you return home try to take the maximum benefits of all of this by making the best links with your colleagues in the other Minds Sports, perhaps by creating a national association as already exists in some countries like here in China, Russia, France, Portugal, Singapore, etc.

In such a way, we will, together, accomplish our duty towards the increasing popularity of our sports which is our common concern.

In the meantime, we have also done the technical job that we promised. You have all received the new Laws of Duplicate Bridge and many of you have already published the Laws in your own language with the preface and thanks to the Drafting Committee. If we can help in any way, please do not hesitate to ask.

We would also be very pleased if you would pay more attention to our Code of Practice for Appeals as these are, in my view, a very big improvement as shown in the World Championships where we have fewer and fewer appeals and more and more consistency for a better jurisprudence.

I would also repeat some of my advice: use all the technology at your disposal to make our game as modern and dynamic as possible with good equipment, clean symmetrical cards and duplication as much as possible, all of which are part of our game.

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Later on in this Congress you will hear the reports from Gert Magermann on the World University Championships in Lods and a presentation of the next one in Chinese Taipei in 2010 and some hopes for the Universiades.

Ata Aydin will present next year's World Youth Bridge in Istanbul and Ernesto d'Orsi will make a presentation on the 2009 World Bridge Team Championships to be held in Sao Paolo.

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The next Congress will be my last as President and I sincerely hope that we will reach an agreement for the modernisation of our Constitution that I have been requesting for years.

A special group was formed since Verona and have been exchanging ideas during the last two years.

At the time of writing this report, I am not sure that they will be able to present a true project to be accepted and voted in 2010.

Anyway, I strongly believe that we will reach a consensus at least on some of the points that I feel are very important: giving some berths (seats) to women and to high level players. And to recognize the teaching in school as a necessity and the promotion of the game to the youth, as you will see with a good example in Chess presented in a minute by my friend Léo Battesti. That does not mean forgetting the active adults and the elderly.

And maybe, get beyond the egotism since we have failed to belong to the next Asian Games in Huangzhou, while Chess and Go will be there.

And do you know why? Because the Asian Olympic Committee did not understand why we have two different zones (4 & 6) instead of one Olympic circle for the whole of Asia as it is for the other sports..

Ten years ago, I was in Bangkok and applied for bridge to be included in these Asian Games. Since then, I have asked the two zones to merge. It was like preaching in the desert. But now, my friends, you will see where it has got you and I am not sure that you will be proud of it. So please, think again, as it could still be the right time here to knock on the door again.

In America, the problem is perhaps a little more difficult but even more sensitive. Venezuela has chosen to reintegrate Zone 3 which makes sense geographically as I think that for promotion purposes it would be better to have a Pan-American Zone including – as in the IOC – North, Central and South America.

Again, I can only advise.

I am not in a position to impose my views, which I admit could be wrong from time to time but also right some time.

My aim is, of course, to leave the WBF in the best possible shape which I believe will be the case financially, as you will hear from our Treasurer, Jean-Louis Derivery, who I thank for his tremendous work. But my duty is also to put the WBF and the NBOs in the best position to ensure the participation of Bridge on the international and national scene.

I hope, my dear friends, that these World Bridge Games will be a new start after having celebrated the 50th anniversary of the WBF. Our Chinese friends have succeeded tremendously well in the organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. My sincere congratulations to them for their results also.

May Bridge get the same success from the 50th of the WBF year and onwards.

José Damiani
Beijing – China
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