

Revealing the benefits of a classic card game

How to keep the old grey matter fit and stimulated

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HOW fit is your brain?

We are all coaxed into keeping our bodies fit, through a sensible lifestyle and physical exercise, but what of our brains. Where do we go to get mental exercise? Are you worried that the occasional crossword or sudoku may not be enough?

If we could offer you a brain stimulant that was scientifically proven to work, sociable and practiced the world over (and didn't involve drugs) would you be interested?

If we said that this stimulant was also an Olympic sport, which you could play with friends around your kitchen table, would you be even more intrigued?

What are we talking about - playing bridge!

Before you dismiss the idea, thinking that bridge is a game for old people, let us put you straight; the highest ranked player in Leicestershire, in terms of international achievements, is a young mum in her 30s (yes, bridge is a global sport acknowledged by the International Olympic Committee and Eng-

land is a top playing nation); the rising star is a young Leicestershire man in this early 20s.

Perhaps you thought that bridge was a game for geeks and eggheads because it's all about memory and numbers; we don't think Ken Barlow of Coronation Street would agree - he's just started a bridge club in the Rover's Return. If you can count to 13 then you have just about cracked it!

Bridge is a game about logic, reasoning, deduction and, as a well-known sleuth would say, 'exercising those little grey cells.'

Schools are recognising the value of bridge as an aid to teaching deduction and partnership skills; in some countries (but not yet in the UK) it forms part of the school curriculum.

We have good young talent locally - Loughborough Grammar School is the holder of the prestigious British Schools Cup, which they have won eight times since it was started in 1966.

Bridge can be played socially around the kitchen table; but for those who want to take it further, there are over 30 bridge clubs throughout Leicestershire.

At these clubs you and your partner will test your skills against other pairs.

There's no luck involved, as every pair plays the same 24 hands against every other pair, so you get to see what your fellow players have achieved with the same cards. It's the removal of this element of luck in the cards that allows bridge to be treated as a pure test of skill.

Research into playing bridge has demonstrated that the social and mental benefits are huge in helping to keep the brain active and making a positive impact in delaying dementia.

Where else can you get an evening's entertainment for the cost of a cup of coffee - and get the same buzz (without the caffeine) whilst improving your mental health?

Perhaps you are interested in giving it a try.

Well, there will be a demonstration match at the Carillon Centre tomorrow (Thursday, September 12), and local clubs are running a course of 10 lessons for beginners at the Rothley Centre from October 11 - see local bridge club websites for details.

Finally, although bridge has been demonstrated to help many aspects of your life, it does come with a health warning - playing bridge can become addictive!