

Filip Kurbalija was a major force in Welsh bridge from the 1980s until he died suddenly at the end of 2021. It was in the 1980-81 season that he first appears in the records with a win in the Welsh Cup, and I think my first game with him was the Porthcawl Congress in 1985. His bridge was not confined to Wales; a crowd of South Wales players at that time played regularly in Bristol, in the (newly created) Avon County Association's league, and through that Filip earned himself a place in the Avon County team which went on to win the Tollemache in 1992. More recently he has played regularly in Gloucestershire events.

From the late 1980s onwards, Filip generated a massive collection of wins in Welsh bridge events, including at least 8 wins in the Welsh Cup, 13 wins in the Cambria Cup, and 8 wins in the Welsh Men's Teams. He notched up a number of wins in top English events as well, the most impressive being two wins in the Spring Fours (1990 and 2008) and winning the Summer meeting (Brighton) Swiss Teams in 1993 and the Swiss Pairs in 2010.

He represented Wales for over three decades, clocking up more appearances in the Welsh Camrose side than any other player apart from Patrick Jourdain. He played

- 20 matches partnering Peter Goodman from 1989 until 1994,
- 7 matches partnering Jill Casey then followed;
- 1 match with Mike Pownall in the year 2000, and then
- 22 matches partnering Tim Rees, and finally
- 5 matches with Patrick Shields.

After that he focused on his partnership with Diane and they played four times in the Seniors (Teltscher Trophy), including in the 2020 online event.

It was from 2001 that Wales was allowed to enter the European Championships in its own right, and Filip played in the Welsh Open team there five times, and followed that with one appearance for Wales in the European Seniors (playing with Diane).

Filip was an interesting partner to have; he was very keen on having a documented system, and took on the (impossible) burden of documenting all the sequences you might have and their meanings. He was playing the popular systems of today a decade or more ago. He brought to the table a determination to win and the ability to concentrate fully on the hand he held. Bad results would disappoint Filip, but however strongly he might express his views of partner's sanity, he would eventually accept that they were on his side, and he would never stop playing his best bridge. As non-playing captain of the Welsh team one year, he asked me a question I have never forgotten – "how did you plan to make 9 tricks on that 3N hand?" I had no good answer, but have been resolved in all the years since never to fail such a question again. In many ways I have felt more in tune with Filip as a partner than others with whom I have played; he will be missed by all who have come into contact with him.

Patrick Shields, January 2022