

Life story of the World Champion

By Milan Macura, Czech Youth
The 1st WORLD YOUTH CONGRESS, JAPAN-CZECH Team



[Hiroaki Miura, Noriaki Koike, Michael Kopecky, Milan Macura]

My name is Milan Macura and I was born on the 14th February 1984 in a small town in the middle of Moravia – Hranice. Since I was a small child, I played various types of card games with my parents and three years older brother. I also played handball for 10 years in the highest division of the junior national league.

My bridge career started at the age of 10 when my grandfather took me in the local bridge club where he was having lessons. During the explanation of the rules I went crying because I could not understand anything what he was talking about. But, since we started playing I knew bridge will stay in my heart forever.

First tournament I have played was against old men in Moravia. Those times there were almost no

juniors. At the age of 15, I participated at the junior championship in Prague. Except of my partner, I was the youngest player at the competition. Since that time, junior camps and also junior tournaments were organized for all young players in the Czech Republic. If we will talk in numbers, we were about 40 and this number did not increased rapidly till recent☺. I have changed several partners since I agreed with Robert Vrkoc (2 years older than me). We played together for two years and with him I went also thirist time abroad.

My first international competition was the 4th World Youth Pairs Championship held in 2001 in Stargard, Poland. One year later, I had an honor to be in the junior team at the 18th European Youth Team Championship. That was also my last tournament I have played with Robert. During next

years, I tried several partners, but no one was promising enough or did not want to sacrifice his life to bridge.

In 2004, we created a new junior team; better say a school team, because our first event was the 19th European Youth Team Championship in the schools category. The team consists of four partnerships☺. I played with Jana Jankova, who was a girlfriend of mine for more than 6 years. Second pair was Michal Kopecky with Pavla Hoderova who also started dating together and with small breaks, it lasts till now. As everyone knows, playing bridge in couples is not a good idea. That's why we have changed the pairs. Since 2006, all junior tournaments, we have played, were in the same team – Milan and Michal, Jana and Pavla (sometimes with additional third pair). With this team, we were continuously building our reputation not only in Europe, but also in the World. You can see all the tournaments we have participated in my profile at the WBF profile (<http://www.worldbridge.org/people/person.asp>).

From the early beginnings of our team, it was very difficult to find a captain for our team, who will be good enough, have the authority and who can help us to improve ourselves. Seemed so far, it was not possible to find a suitable one in the Czech Republic. In 2006, a miracle happened. We have been invited first time to the White house juniors in Amsterdam. Since our bridge league cannot cover any expenses for our team, we tried to find accommodation in a private family in Amsterdam. This was the first time we have met Ine Gielkens and her husband John Wester. They offered to stay in their house during the competition and they also covered all expenses of the drinks and food. We were enjoying the evenings together and became soon friends. Next year, they invited us for holidays to Amsterdam. I think it was there, where an excellent idea appeared. A simple question was good enough: "Would you like to be our captain?" After a small hesitation she agreed!

Since 2007, she is joining us at the championships



and she is the best what could have Czech bridge prayed for. She helped us a lot, not only to improve our bridge, but also financially. Unfortunately, we were not able to win any medal in all the tournaments we have participated even we were few times very close. Our best result in teams was 5th place at the European University Team Championships in Brugge. In pairs, we were 6th in the 9th European Youth Pairs Championship held in Wroclaw, Poland in 2008. This tournament was also the first championship where Czech Republic got a medal. Our lovely partners, Jana and Pavla became third in the girls category.

But, we were still waiting for the biggest achievement – winning a medal in teams. Since I turned 25 this year, the European Youth Team Champions in Romania seemed to be our last chance, but miracle did not happened and because of a very bad start, we finished 13th, which was far behind our expectations. It seems we were cursed – we won almost all the matches against the teams who were in the top10, but we lost against countries at the bottom of the list. Even this championship wasn't the best for us; we had several bright moments – defeating the Champions (France) with the highest difference of all teams and defeating Norway in the last round, which were playing for the silver. Pity for them, they finished 3rd.

So, everything seemed to be lost and my dream was melting away. Yes, there was one more chance, the 1st World Congress in Istanbul, Turkey, but it was very expensive for us to participate on our own.

The 1st WORLD YOUTH CONGRESS

Yeditepe University

Istanbul. Turkey 15-23 August, 2009

One nice evening, I had received a mail from Ine: "Milan, this is your last chance to get a medal in junior category, you have to go to Turkey and I have found a team for you." We have changed few emails with her and also with my new teammate Hiroaki Miura. At the begging, it seemed I will play with three Japanese players, but even it would be a nice experience I doubt we can make a good result when there was no time to make all the agreements necessary for such a big competition. So, I asked my partner Michal, if he will join me in the JAPAN-CZECH team. After a while, he agreed, so the team consists of Milan Macura – Michal Kopecky and Hiroaki Miura – Noriaki Koike with non-playing captain Ine Gielkens was ready for the adventure.



[JAPAN-CZECH Team with NPC Ine, and John]

Our long journey started in qualification in the KO swiss teams. 13 rounds of 10 boards during which we should finish in the first 8 out of 40 teams. First day was recovering after a long journey for both pairs and in last match of the day, we lost 7:23 against very experienced team from Netherlands. But, only three matches next day was enough for us to get to the top of the field where we have stayed till the end of the qualification. 2nd place gave us a chance to choose out of 4 opponents, but we had to wait for the USA team for their chose. Unfortunately, Ine came five minutes late for captains meeting and directors took us the possibility of choosing so we had to wait, which

team we will face in the Quarterfinal. The result was Poland instead of Greek, Turkey and France. We were not happy about this choice, but we couldn't do anything with it. Next day we played very concentrated first half and we won by 22imps. In the beginning of second half, our opponents gave us two gifts of 15imps whatever will happen on the other table, so everything was clear – we are going to the semifinal.



[Yeditepe University, Istanbul]

Our next opponent was Netherlands red (World and European champions) who has defeated us in the qualification. We knew this will be a very hard and it proved in the first 14 boards which we lost by 30imps. The dreamed final was far, far away. But, nothing is impossible in bridge and we never gave up. The adrenalin in the blood kept us highly concentrated and with each board we were feeling the gap is getting closer. Than the most important board came – wrong slam by the opponents at Hiroaki's and Noriaki's table – 6D on a 3-3 fit which was easily off with long trump suit and 6H at our table which was easily to make (we were trying for the grand). 16imps for us accomplished the result, but we did not know yet. Last two boards were heart breaking, but it was wonderful feeling for me to sit at the table and enjoy it. After all the tournaments we played, I discovered we are doing our best under pressure. After we saw the result on the BBO we ran to the lobby where Hiro, Nori and Ine was already waiting for us and we could have

for the second time make the team scream: “dzung kesu” (don’t know how it is written, but should be semifinal in Japanese).



After this match I had the most wonderful feeling in my entire life. In the second semifinal, Italy has beaten USA which was a little bit surprise, but we

didn’t care whom we will play in the final. At that moment, we were strong enough to beat any team in the competition.

First two sessions in the final were not the luckiest ones in this competition and we were losing by 22 imps after 32 boards. With 16 boards to go and with the saying: “Never gave up”, we started the third session. Again, it proved to be right that we are playing our best under pressure and we have defeated Italy by 15 imps different. WE BECAME WORLD CHAMPIONS!!!! That was the only thing I had in my mind and it will stay there for a long time. It is the biggest success for Czech bridge in the history and I hope it will help us to increase the number of players in our country, which is about 700 at this moment.



[2nd place:U.S.A, 1st place:JAPAN-CZECH 3rd places:ITALY]



[WORLD CHAMPION MEDAL]

Many thanks to all of you Ine, Michal, Hiroaki and Noriaki for making my dream true ...

Milan