

Bobby Richman

June 30, 1950 - June 7, 2013

BOBBY was one of the most successful bridge players this country has known. But more than that, he was an engaging man with a natural wit who was loved by everyone. He was a storyteller who would never put people down. Other than himself that is. He often made fun of himself, with his portly physique getting more than an occasional mention.

He died in his hotel room in Hong Kong, just before the start of the Asia Pacific Bridge Federation Championships. He was due to compete in the senior division with George Gaspar on the Ron Klinger team.

He was born in the USA in Cleveland, Ohio. He talked early and walked late. No surprise there!

His family was very close and he made frequent trips home. He had one sibling, his older sister Mary, who still lives in the USA. They were great pals during their childhood, and they remained close right until the end. Mary came to Australia three years ago, when Bobby turned 60. His parents,

who had owned a stall in the central market of Cleveland, died within three weeks of each other in 1999.

He was introduced to bridge in 1967 when an aunty gave him a bridge book during a short stay in hospital. He took the game up with a vengeance and quickly made his mark as one of the young guns of Cleveland, mixing with the leading young players of his day. He made a number of friendships during these days that remained relevant throughout his life.

He first came to Australia in 1969, to pursue a course in Mandarin at Melbourne University. He was interested to see the world and he would never think twice before embarking on a new adventure. This was his nature. Nevertheless, it should be noted that they were drafting young Americans to serve in Vietnam at this time. This had not escaped his attention.

His first encounter with bridge in Australia was when he approached the Melbourne university bridge club stall on orientation day. This brought him



into contact with the bright young players of the day, including Di Smart who was on the desk at the time.

As you can imagine, he was a great asset to the community. Not only was he an established bridge player with a detailed knowledge of the latest exotic methods such as Lebensohl and Drury, but he was always great company.

Di said that at first they could not understand why one of America's best would be coming to Melbourne to learn Chinese. They came to the obvious conclusion that he was a CIA spy.

He and Di soon formed a partnership using the fast and loose bidding style that would become the Richman trademark and they did very well. Their highlight was winning the Interstate teams in 1972, Bobby's first national title. The Victorian team of Richman, Smart, Ian McCance, Walter Lowen, Victor Muntz, Wally Scott, npc Eric Ramshaw, was given no chance against the might of NSW - Tim Seres, Dick Cummings, Denis Howard and Roelof Smilde so this victory brought Richman to the national stage.

After this, he made frequent trips to Double Bay in Sydney to mix with these players and play rubber bridge. By the mid 1970s he had relocated to Double Bay, where he would stay for the rest of his life, apart from a nine month stint selling steel back in the USA in 1989.



Bobby in 1979 with Mary, his sister, and Mitch, his father

Gambling on horses was very much a part of the Double Bay scene, with Tim, Dick and Roelof leading the way and Stephen Burgess coming on the scene in 1981. Bobby fitted right in. He was a regular visitor to the track in the early days and then to local pubs when they took over the TAB role, offering complete coverage of the races with good betting facilities. He never had a lot of money but whenever he hit the jackpot it was caviar and the best French Champagne all around.

His only other venture outside of bridge was trading options. In the mid 1980s he acquired a seat on the floor of the Sydney options exchange in partnership with Alan Woods, the OzOne donor. This was in the days when the traders would stand on the floor and match their wits, long before computers would take over this role. He was in the All Ords pit, surrounded by about 25 young traders, most of them not long out of university.

They called Bobby "sway." It's not easy being on your feet all day!

He did well in his new career until he was taken out by the Global Financial Crisis of 1987.

His main career was as a bridge professional and he remained as active as ever right until the end with a full book of tournament commitments and more than two regular club games per week in Double Bay.

He was always popular with women, as you would expect for someone who was such good company, but it was only when he met Deb Guthrie ten years ago, while she was directing at the Grand Slam Bridge Centre in Double Bay, that he settled down in a happy, loving relationship. His interest in horses subsided as they enjoyed doing everything together and he was very contented. They even played five sessions of bridge together during Bobby's last month.

At the bridge table, Bobby was very aggressive in the bidding and he was a fine card player. But the strength that set him apart was the way he handled his partners. He was the best.

He treated all of his partners with kindness and respect, no matter whether they were an expert or a beginner. And he never lost his sense of optimism at the table, even when bad results were coming. To quote a line he often used, "It ain't over until the fat lady sings."

This made him a formidable competitor, as his results quickly show.

On the international front, he and Zoly Nagy won the silver medal at IMP pairs at the world championship in Verona in 2006 and he won the gold medal at the Maccabiah Games in Israel in 1985 with Jim Borin. He twice won the New Zealand teams. He played in one Olympiad, reaching the round of 16. He played in four Bermuda Bowls, coming third in 1979.

He represented Australia with Andrew Reiner, Stephen Burgess, Ishmael Del'Monte, Matthew Thomson, John Lester, Dick Cummings, Tim Seres, Seamus Browne, Robert Fruewirth, and George Gaspar.

On the home front he is the greatest masterpoint winner of all time. His national titles include:

- 9 Open Team Playoffs from 1979 to 2008
- 3 Seniors Team Playoffs
- 4 Autumn National Open Teams
- Australian Open Butler 1982
- 6 Blue Ribbon Pairs
- 2 Dick Cummings Open Swiss Pairs
- 7 Gold Coast Open Pairs from 1981 to 1998
- 9 Gold Coast Open Teams from 1976 to 1997
- 3 Grand National Open Teams
- 3 Interstate Open Pairs
- 5 Interstate Open Teams from 1972 to 1985
- National Open Teams: 1975, 1976, 1991
- 5 Spring National Open Teams
- 6 Victor Champion Cups

When he got on a roll, he was a hard man to hold back. In 1994 we played the Victor Champion Cup in Melbourne, when it was a pairs event. After several sessions of qualifying, 28 pairs would advance to the final. We were the very last pair to qualify. But once in the final Bobby got cracking, as only he could, and we scored no less than 81.5% in the first session of the final. We followed it up with a modest 54% to win by the length of the straight.



Bobby the Texas rancher: "I'll give you six months to get off my land."

Bobby loved three notrumps. He made a handsome profit from applying the Bob Hamman rule. - choose 3NT whenever it is on the list.

In 2005, Bobby played the Cavendish Pairs in Las Vegas with Zoly Nagy. After two sessions, they were lying 40th out of 44. Then in the last three sessions they hauled themselves up to sixth place where they earned \$60,000. This was no small effort in what was a truly world class field. They must have enjoyed some good luck but they also made a lot of good decisions.

On the next two deals they beat virtually everyone when Bobby turned his back on good fits and chose 3NT.

N/All	♠ 10		
	♥ AK1094		
	♦ AKJ32		
	♣ 74		
♠ A765		♠ K432	
♥ -		♥ J7532	
♦ 1097		♦ 654	
♣ AK10532		♣ 6	
	♠ QJ98		
	♥ Q86		
	♦ Q8		
	♣ QJ98		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Nagy		Richman
	1♣ ¹	pass	1♠ ²
2♣	2♥	pass	3NT
all pass			

1. Moscito, 15+ any shape.
2. A balanced hand.

Bobby could see there was a fit in hearts but he didn't fancy game in hearts with all those quacks (queens and jacks!). So he backed his judgement and tried 3NT.

This produced a windfall result. Bobby made his three notrumps with ease while all the other declarers were toiling away in the ill-fated four hearts. West cashed his three top winners and played a third club, leaving declarer wrecked by the foul heart break.

E/EW ♠ K 8 7 6
 ♡ Q J 6 5 4
 ♢ K 10 4
 ♣ 6

♠ 9 2 ♠ A Q 4 3
 ♡ A 7 ♡ 10 2
 ♢ J 9 ♢ 7 6 5 3
 ♣ 10 9 8 7 5 4 2 ♣ K J 3

 ♠ J 10 5
 ♡ K 9 8 5
 ♢ A Q 8 2
 ♣ A Q

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Nagy		Richman
			1♣
2♣	2♥	pass	3NT
all pass			

This time Bobby opened 1♣ on the South cards and West overcalled 2♣. Zoly responded 2♥ and Richman figured this was another good time to eschew the proven major suit fit in favour of notrumps. He leapt to 3NT so that the club lead would come around to his ace-queen. It was a simple matter to win the club lead, drive out the ♥A and take four heart tricks, four diamonds and two clubs for an overtrick.

Meanwhile, the other declarers, who were all playing 4♥ from North, did not fare so well. East led a club, taken by the ace. Declarer played a trump but West hopped in with the ace and made a desperate switch to spades. It was West's lucky day when East could take two spade tricks and deliver a spade ruff for one down. This meant that Bobby had earned another large bundle of imps.

In 1985 and 2005 Bobby went to London to play in the big rubber bridge game. They were playing for no less than 100 pounds per hundred, about



Bobby and Deb

ten times the stake of the rubber bridge game in Double Bay, which continues on a daily basis to this day. The game had regulars like Zia Mahmood, Michael Courtney and Gunnar Halberg with regular visits from many of the best players in the world, so you had to work for your money. Bobby did pretty well and he certainly had his share of excitement.

Finding the king of trumps on this hand was worth \$6,000. You might like to try it as a problem.

♠ Q 7 3 2
 ♡ —
 ♢ A K 5 4
 ♣ Q J 8 7 2

♠ A J 10 8 4
 ♡ 4 2
 ♢ Q J 3
 ♣ A K 3

East deals, both sides vulnerable

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		3♥	3♠
4♥	6♠	dbl	pass
pass	rdbl	all pass	

West leads the ♣4. East-West are a top class partnership so you know what East's double is all about. Double of a slam is played by good players as a request for partner to find an unusual lead. Sure enough, East trumps the club lead with the ♠5, and exits ♥A.

You trump in dummy and play the ♠Q. East follows with a low spade. Do

you play low, hoping that East has the king, or do you rise with the ace, playing West to hold the bare king?

Making 6♠ redoubled is worth 2070 and two down is -1,000. At 100 pounds a hundred, that's a profit of AUS \$6,000 for getting it right, for both you and your partner. How can you tell?

There is no ironclad evidence but there are useful clues. If East held

♠ K x x ♡ A K x x x x x ♢ x x x ♣ —
 he might have opened 4♥, not 3♥. If West held

♠ x ♡ Q x x x ♢ x x x ♣ x x x x x

he might have bid more than 4♥ the first time. These indications might sway you to play West for the bare ♠K.

♠ Q 7 3 2
 ♡ —
 ♢ A K 5 4
 ♣ Q J 8 7 2

♠ K	♠ 9 6 5
♡ Q 10 9 5	♡ A K J 8 7 6 3
♢ 8 7 6	♢ 10 9 2
♣ 10 9 6 5 4	♣ —
♠ A J 10 8 4	
♡ 4 2	
♢ Q J 3	
♣ A K 3	

That's what Bobby did. He rose with the ♠A and dropped the king to make his contract. I'll bet it was a memorable dinner that night, with the best French wine!

On the next hand, Bobby was defending with Tim Seres.

W/A II ♠ 8 6 5
 ♥ J 10 8 5
 ♦ A Q 10
 ♣ K J 3

♠ K J 9 7 2 ♠ 10 4 3
 ♥ K Q ♥ A 9 7 6 2
 ♦ 8 7 ♦ 5
 ♣ A 9 6 2 ♣ Q 10 7 5

♠ A Q
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ K J 9 6 4 3 2
 ♣ 8 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Richman	Prescott	Seres	Otvosi
1♠	pass	2♠	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

Bobby kept the defensive hopes alive by leading the king of hearts. It now all came down to Tim. To beat 3NT for sure he has to overtake with the ace of hearts and shoot back a spade.

This is no easy play and it was missed at the table. When the king of hearts held, Richman shifted to a low club but Otvosi made the essential play of rising with the king to land his game.

It is worth noting that the ♥K is an excellent lead from Bobby. On a spade lead declarer has an easy nine tricks. He was helped in his decision to not lead a spade by the bidding. If Seres had held a spade honour he would no doubt have doubled 3♠.

Paul Marston

Meeting Bobby Richman

I joined my school chums in Sydney for the purpose of playing rubber bridge. They excitedly told me of the great Bobby Richman. As I understood them he liked to bid with remarkably little, and if you gave him a bridge problem he said, "Not for Juniors". Later I met Bobby at the tables and afterwards he gathered we three together. "There is a tournament at Sydney Uni on Sunday; which of you three can play Standard?"

Daniel, who had only ever played Blue Club by the book, volunteered. That night Daniel attempted to learn standard but other festivities ensued. So they want heroic bidding on nothing do they? Peter Rogers of course probably didn't but he got some anyway. It was a man's day's work, we stuck Bobby with the entry fees, delivered him into last place and afterwards in the tunnel under Broadway sang him some discordant Beatles.

With a straight face Bobby turned excitedly and said, "Can any of you three play an instrument?" Of course we couldn't, so he shook his head sadly and said, "What a waste." That evening I observed that we had finished last with their hero, and that indeed the strategy of bidding high with nothing had not turned a profit that day. "He can't be as clever as you think," I argued, "he even thinks we can sing."

Having taken his money, his master-points and finally derided him to what I presumed were his only two fans, I somewhat guiltily approached the great man the next day. He pulled away as if in terror, then he leant back and whispered. "They can't... They can't call those... bids ...canapés. Canapés are nice things, that you eat".

Then I had a real game of bridge with Bobby. Rubber bridge four handed. Allen Richardson, another record breaking overbidder, Julien Fahrer who seriously had his bid. All three, it transpired, fabulous card-players. Quite gifted penalty doublers too if I recall rightly. Certainly I lost one hundred points that night. Bobby and I shared a taxi back to our places in Mill

The Marston column in the Christchurch Star, December 26, 1979

The award for the best-played hand of 1979 must surely go to Bob Richman of Australia.

The deal came up during a rubber bridge game in Cleveland, Ohio, Bobby's old home town. Playing in four hearts, he was facing four losers but he found a clever way to reduce them to just three.

S/EW	♠ A 7 4 3		
	♥ A Q		
	♦ A 7 6 3 2		
	♣ Q 4		
♠ Q 10 5		♠ J 9 8 2	
♥ 7 5 3		♥ 9 8	
♦ K Q		♦ J 10 9	
♣ K 7 6 5 2		♣ A 9 8 3	
	♠ K 6		
	♥ K J 10 6 4 2		
	♦ 8 5 4		
	♣ J 10		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	4♥	all pass	2♥

West led the five of hearts and Bobby looked set to lose two clubs and two diamonds. Admittedly the diamond suit could be established to provide two extra tricks but the trouble was that the defenders would simply take their club tricks before the diamond suit could be used. Looking at all four hands it is hard

to see how ten tricks can be made against best defence but Bobby showed us how and he did it at the table. He took the ace of hearts and played three more rounds of trumps throwing clubs from dummy:

Bobby played	♠ A 7 4 3		
another trump.	♥ —		
West discarded	♦ A 7 6 3 2		
a club, dummy	♣ —		
a diamond and	♠ Q 10 5	♠ J 9 3 2	
East was in	♥ —	♥ —	
trouble. He	♦ K Q	♦ J 10 9	
couldn't afford	♣ K 7 6 5	♣ A 9	
to let go a	♠ K 6		
spade or de-	♥ 4 2		
clarer would	♦ 8 5 4		
	♣ J 10		

establish the fourth spade and he could not afford to let a diamond go so he threw the nine of clubs. Now the defence could not take both of their club tricks and Bobby took advantage. He ducked a diamond to West who exited with a club to East's bare ace. East played a spade.

Bobby won the king and played ace and another diamond, establishing the seven in dummy and leaving East on play. Having nothing but spades, East played a spade to dummy's ace, allowing Bobby to park the losing club on the winning diamond and make his game.



*Australian open team for Commonwealth Games and PABF in 2002:
George Gaspar, Bobby, Paul Marston and Ishmael Del'Monte*

Hill Road. Bobby observed that there was no rush to pay him my losses but that he would not play in a game with me till I did. "You promise?" I asked. I waited till he was living in Perth to surrender his forty two dollars.

Over the years I had many exciting hands against Bobby at rubber bridge. The two I best remember were very funny indeed.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	J Dalley	Courtney	Richman
	1♦	pass	1♠
pass	4♠	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	dbl	5♠
pass	6NT	dbl	all pass

At one time I used to accompany Seamus and Bobby to walks on Bronte Beach. This bridge deal was the only other time I knew Bobby to take exercise. The auction is self-explanatory, I had the AQJ105 of hearts. Two aces must be enough for a slam, so Dalley corrected to 6NT, to protect his clearly vulnerable heart king. And I led...

And as I led, Bobby leapt from his chair, bounced off one foot, pirouetted and landed kneeling, smiling, arms outstretched, "And whose lead was it?" he put his hand down. Of course Bobby had Blackwooded so he plays the notrumps too. 6NT doubled made thirteen tricks instead of eight.

Another time Mary partnering me against Tim and Bobby picked up three small spades, a singleton heart the bare club ace and KQJ10 to eight diamonds. Reasoning that the ♣A, a stopper, was just as good as the ♦A, Mary opened 3NT showing a solid mi-

nor and little else. This slightly weird stroke would work well whenever it helped partner to know that you had a river of playing tricks. Opposite I held

♠ AKQJxx ♥ Axx ♦ Axxx ♣ –

So I bid 7♣. The boys had the nerve to double that and we sat it out with 7♦ and 7NT freely available.

In Paris in 1985, we played from midnight till six in the morning. Bobby played with Sam Lev and I with Piotr Teschinski. You could have learnt to swear in Polish, but Sam is gifted and can in fact complain quite poignantly in English too. Whether the match-game was goulash I can't recall, but all the normal gambling at the Rue Alfred De Friedland club was. Upon our return to Sydney Bobby talked the afternoon cut-in into playing goulash. It was a brief and stormy game. Two months later Bobby was arguing for a return to bridge.

Of course we did. Bobby was a marvelous salesman, as long as he liked the product. I went to St. Moritz with him to discover that the bridge season was long over. He was a great enthusiast for anything that was new. Selling vegetable cutters, steel, even futures, but the things he sold best were his favourite things – bridge tournaments and food. Indeed even as an adult Bobby Richman was his own best customer. Few have played bridge in so many events, at so many levels, in so many places as he.

Although "Not for Juniors!" is Bobby's battle cry of long ago, Bobby remained

a junior at heart, always dying to bid early and "remove the slack" from the auction.

Bobby was rarely hostile, beyond mild sarcasm, but could be very funny if the need arose. Bobby came to London to join me at rubber bridge. "How do I deal with that Claude guy?" he asked, alluding to Claude Rodrigue, one of the greatest of British players. "He picks on me after every board."

"Well, he thinks he's being kind giving you advice. But if you don't like it, he's a bully – bully him back."

So I watched with interest as Bobby and Claude draw against me and Colin Simpson. After an imperfect defence Claude tells Bobby what he should have done with his cards. Bobby tells Claude what he can do with his opinions.

"I've forgotten more about defence than you will ever know," responded Claude.

Bobby agreed, "You sure have forgotten a lot."

Claude: "I played for England for over twenty years, for many of those years I was an automatic selection."

Bobby: "You don't have to tell me that, the minute you said you'd made the team I knew there would have to be selectors!"

And after that they got along fine. Claude had never seen those two cards trumped before. Since both were aggressive Acol losing-trick-count players they actually got along very well indeed, and quite directly were sharing analyses without rancour. Once again I was tempted to go into the priesthood, but two factors mitigated against it. Firstly I wasn't entirely sure that my "Always fight a bully" advice was really given in order to foment world peace. Secondly it was always fun to see what Bobby did next (even if it was to Claude). One of the things you do not forget is your first meeting with Bobby, or the resulting arrangements.

Michael Courtney