

Estonian U21 Bridge Training Program

Developing the next generation of
Estonian bridge players

Meelis Kuldkepp

Introduction



Short introduction about myself:

Entrepreneur, bridge enthusiast, chess & board games fan



My role in Estonian bridge development



Vision: build a strong foundation for young bridge players in Estonia

Key Problems

- ❖ Hard to find young players – collaboration with chess clubs helps
- ❖ Hard to find qualified coaches – mostly volunteers or ex-juniors
- ❖ Limited funding – ETBL, local governments, private donors

Starting Point

- ❧ Traditionally, kids start playing in high school or university
- ❧ Difficult to compete internationally at U26 level when starting that late
- ❧ Early talent discovery became a key focus

First Success Stories

- ♣ Found a 9-year-old who performed well in national individual championship
- ♣ Found a 10-year-old who beat me in chess
- ♣ Formed the first Estonian U16 team (Oslo 2019) – ages 10–12, less than a year of bridge experience

Estonians in Oslo 2019



Lessons Learned

- ❧ Start early – but retention is a challenge (only 2/5 continued)
- ❧ Need more than one team – larger peer group keeps interest alive
- ❧ Need more practice in higher level, more tournaments

Estonian B-league in 2020



Estonian B-league in 2020



Training Structure

- ♣ Same system for all players and pairs
- ♣ Older and experienced players mentor younger ones
- ♣ Close cooperation with nearby countries to reduce travel costs
- ♣ Encourage social interaction – bridge as a community

Social & Mental Focus

- 🎲 Most players didn't know each other before bridge – we built friendships
- 🎲 Organized social events and fun sessions outside training
- 🎲 Bridge became a lifestyle – not just a competition

U21 team training in 2023



Partnership building








U21 team training 2024



Teaching Philosophy

- 🎲 Goal: give youth something valuable, not just chase medals
- 🎲 If the process is right and the people are motivated, success follows naturally
- 🎲 Older beginners (15–16+) should ideally have a mind-sport background

Advanced Training (Pre-Worlds)

-  System changes finalized 4–5 months before tournament
-  Weekly 3–4 puzzles on declarer play and defense
-  2+ friendly team matches per week
-  CueBids, at some point 100+ deals per day
-  Tournament and situation analysis using computers




If someone was not responding



If they don't do homework



Analytical Preparation

-  Lead analysis and contract percentage calculations
-  Reviewed 65+ complex competitive bidding situations before the event in the airport
-  Used BBO challenge league for intensive practice

BBO challenge league

tit	TPs	points	nostrijs	TPs BH	points	buustujurger	TPs JD	points
LobsterWW	-290	3	MVasar	1200	2	Nostrijs	4240	2.5
Tiiduke	20	4	Nostrijs	590	0	Olinsh	4240	2.5
Mell123	-1300	1	Manglus	1520	3	Bnurkaa	4250	4
HTGriko	-2000	0	LobsterWW	2070	4	Tiiduke	3970	0
MVasar	-330	2	Olinsh	870	1	Kasaprstel	4030	1
mõngster	TPs	points	mell	TPs BH	points	jass	TPs JD	points
Raigolo	-1980	1	dst463	5500	3	Manglus	6040	1
Jass100	-770	4	Mell123	5040	2	dst463	6070	2
dst463	-1740	3	Bnurkaa	4080	0	HTGriko	6450	4
Manglus	-1870	2	HTGriko	4200	1	Poti Kunn	5900	0
Olinsh	-2920	0	Kuld pall	5560	4	Jass100	6380	3
negrūJ	TPs	points	upo	TPs BH	points	kmp	TPs JD	points
Poti Kunn	890	1	Tiiduke	3260	3	MVasar	3880	4
Bnurkaa	1070	2	Poti Kunn	2850	2	LobsterWW	3420	2
Kuld pall	1090	3	Raigolo	3920	4	Mell123	3560	3
Nostrijs	520	0	Kasaprstel	990	0	Kuld pall	2260	0
Kasaprstel	2460	4	Jass100	1720	1	Raigolo	3270	1
jass	IMPs	points	Kuld pall	IMPs BH	points	Upo	IMPs JD	points
Kasaprstel	9.75	2	Kuld pall	-32.75	0	Jass100	14	4
Kuld pall	11	3	Jass100	14.75	3	Raigolo	-11	0
Poti Kunn	-37	0	LobsterWW	31	4	Tiiduke	11.5	3
Nostrijs	19	4	Olinsh	-0.75	2	Kasaprstel	-8.5	1
Jass100	-2.75	1	Raigolo	-12.25	1	Mell123	-6	2
tit	IMPs	points	tit	IMPs BH	points	Padar	IMPs JD	points
HTGriko	-14.75	0	Poti Kunn	-6	1	LobsterWW	-9.5	0
Bnurkaa	-12.5	1	HTGriko	20	4	Poti Kunn	7	4
LobsterWW	5.75	3	Tiiduke	7.75	3	MVasar	5	3
Tiiduke	30.25	4	MVasar	0	2	Nostrijs	1.25	2
Mell123	-8.75	2	dst463	-21.75	0	Manglus	-3.75	1
manki	IMPs	points	nossu	IMPs BH	points	jürgen	IMPs JD	points
Olinsh	9.75	3	Kasaprstel	-38.25	0	Kuld pall	-4.5	0
MVasar	-4.25	2	Nostrijs	-18.5	2	Olinsh	0.5	2
Manglus	-6.25	1	Bnurkaa	-24.25	1	HTGriko	3	4
Raigolo	-23.75	0	Mell123	43.25	4	dst463	0.5	2
dst463	25	4	Manglus	37.75	3	Bnurkaa	0.5	2

name	points	rank	pts%	%rank	done
Jass100	41	1	68.33	1	15/15
Tiiduke	40	2	66.67	2	15/15
Mell123	39.5	3	65.83	3	15/15
dst463	37	4	61.67	4	15/15
LobsterWW	33	5	55.00	5	15/15
HTGriko	31	6	51.67	6	15/15
MVasar	31	7	51.67	7	15/15
Raigolo	29	8	48.33	8	15/15
Nostrijs	28.5	9	47.50	9	15/15
Olinsh	27	10	45.00	10	15/15
Manglus	25	11	41.67	11	15/15
Kuld pall	24	12	40.00	12	15/15
Poti Kunn	22	13	36.67	13	15/15
Kasaprstel	21	14	35.00	14	15/15
Bnurkaa	21	15	35.00	15	15/15

Mental & Practical Aspects

- 🎲 Team spirit and fun atmosphere are essential
- 🎲 Knowledge of math and variation helps
- 🎲 Good food, sports activities, and stress-free environment
- 🎲 Coach and captain manage logistics and provide real-time insights
- 🎲 Stay calm – no yelling, focus on constructive guidance

Spikeball 2023 Netherland



Spikeball 2025 Italy



Key Takeaways

- 🎲 Early start and structured mentorship are vital
- 🎲 Bridge must be social, engaging, and enjoyable
- 🎲 Analytical and mental training both matter
- 🎲 Right culture can create champions naturally
- 🎲 Send your youth coaches and captains to EBL youth seminars!

Friendly people and good atmosphere



Come and see yourself: Tartu Ärtu Junior Bridge
Tournament 8-10.05 2026 in Tartu, Estonia
<https://thinking.ee/turniir/tartu2026/>