

A Girl in the Open

By Christina Lund Madsen

Interview with
Magdalena
Ticha,
Netherlands
Open



19 year-old Magdalena Ticha left her family and friends in the Czech Republic to follow her heart to the Netherlands. Four years later she is the first female ever to represent the Dutch Open team at the age of 23.

11 years old Magdalena transferred to her two year older sister's school. At the school there was a professor who gave bridge lessons in his spare time as an offer to the students after school. Magdalena and her sister thought 'why not?' and started playing together.

Several years later she met the 11 year older Richard Ritmeijer during a junior event in the Czech Republic.

"He helped with the Czech Juniors, I played in the girls team. He is... 33. No, I think he is 34. I have to check it out. I am so bad with age. It doesn't really matter anyway."

They met during a couple of junior events and became friends. At a junior championship in Romania they played together in the evenings (after Magdalena had played all day) and soon they became partners in more than just bridge. Together they represent the Dutch Open team here in Opatija.

We are sitting outside on the pool terrace of the hotel. Magdalena is (obviously) wearing an orange summer dress, matching glasses and a very pretty smile. Every time I ask her a question that she feels is a little intimate, she makes a little slightly uncomfortably laugh before she replies.

What do you like about Richard?

"It is getting intimate." A small giggle. "I like his sense of humour. It may not be the most common sense of humour. But we are on the same wavelength. He is a very nice person, always cheerful, optimistic, trustworthy, reliable. And we have a lot of fun together."

After a year with a long distance relationship Magdalena and Richard had to decide where to spend their future. Richard is a Dutch lawyer, which would make it more challenging for him to move and take his profession with

him. Magdalena had just finished gymnasium, so it was easier for her. She applied for a Dutch university studying international and European law and was accepted.

Was it a difficult decision moving to the Netherlands?

A little laugh. "It was difficult to leave my family and friends behind. I didn't know anyone in the Netherlands besides Richie. It seemed the logical step, since I wanted to keep the relationship. For me it felt like fate was leading me to do this."

How did your family react when you decided to move to the Netherlands?

"My family was not very happy about it. I also applied and was accepted to a top Czech university, so they would like to see me study there. They made their priority clear to me, but said it was my decision. My family is still not very happy about it and wants me to visit as much as possible, which is not so easy with studies and bridge. I try to come to the Czech Republic two times a year."

What do you miss the most?

"I think my family. Yeah. I am quite certain. Sometimes I miss mountains. My family lived quite close to the mountains. It is really nice to go hiking in the mountains and just be close to nature. Richard and I go hiking."

Is it dangerous?

"In Slovakia the mountains can be...exciting so to say. Sometimes you have to climb with chains. But we mostly do hiking, mostly walk, sometimes you climb a bit, but with no special equipment. Climbing is with chains. We have never done any real climbing."

All of a sudden she says: "Can I correct one thing? Richard is 33. He will turn 34 in autumn. Please don't write it, I am so bad with age."

I cannot help myself. I hope Richard thinks it is as funny as I do.

What is the biggest challenge about living in the Netherlands?

"The language was for long a big obstacle. It makes it more difficult to get in contact with people. The mentality is also a bit different and the sense of humour. I think the Dutch can be very open and direct in some matters that may not always feel so comfortable." She makes her little nervous giggle.

Can you give an example?

"It is getting too personal." She answers a bit unwillingly. "For example, when I am with Richard's family they only speak Dutch together. There are times I need to leave and be a bit alone because I feel overwhelmed. They can sometimes make a comment about it as a joke, but if you are in an uncomfortable situation... In the Czech Republic you don't make such comments, you just leave people

alone. I think it is a cultural difference. They just like to make jokes also about difficult things.”

Magdalena can seem fragile as a butterfly, however, she possesses a calmness enabling her to stand the pressure of being a woman playing in top level Open events. In Bali she and Richard won the bronze in the transnational teams with Jan Jansma and Gert-Jan Paulissen, in what Magdalena describes as one of her best bridge experiences.

In the spring she and Richard made their debut at the American Nationals, playing on a sponsored team with Berend van den Bos and Joris van Lankveld, who at that time were their competitors for the Dutch Open team. The team did very well and went on to the third round of the Vanderbilt, where they faced mighty Monaco. They ended up losing the match, however, Monaco had a bit of a struggle beating them.

“Usually I get extra motivated when I play against such players. I don’t really get nervous because there are no expectations of me.”

What about here?

“So far I was not so nervous, only a bit of healthy excitement. We are very happy to play for the team. There is some pressure but I don’t think we will be really nervous.”

Do you feel that men under-rate you?

“Currently I don’t feel it so much. Some years ago it felt like the opponents were overbidding, they played against a girl, and tried to impose some pressure. In this kind of championship they are not so sure what to expect of me because the Dutch are a very good team, so if a girl is on the squad they are not so sure what will happen. Usually my experience is the better the opponents, the nicer they behave. If I am being attacked it is usually by the worst opponents.”

What is your biggest strength as a player?

“I think I have quite a good basis in bridge. In the long run I get positive results, decent declarer, defense. I don’t think I have one big strength, more I am rather solid. That can help in the long run. In our partnership it is more Richard who makes some actions, redoubles at the right moment, surprises the opponents.”

Would you like to play Women’s bridge?

“Ah... well, now that I experienced the open field I really like to play it. But for me it is more about the partnership. I really like playing with Richard. If at some point I get a really good female partner I think I would be happy to play. But I really enjoy playing in the Open. It is very challenging. I can learn a lot, so this is top priority for me at the moment.”

Would you like to become a bridge professional?

She makes her characteristic nervous giggle.

“I got this question a few times and I am thinking what exactly is it? Do you do only bridge and nothing else?

I really like bridge and would like to play for a living, but at this moment I can’t imagine bridge would be the only thing I would be doing. I could imagine part-time working with bridge. If I would be lucky enough to play full-time bridge, I would perhaps do some voluntary work. As a woman it is a little difficult to become a full-time pro. I would like to play and improve.”

How would your sister describe you?

She thinks a little. “Active. I am a Gemini, so sometimes I can be a bit two-sided. I can be very introverted and sociable. Silent and talkative. In general I am active and like to learn new things. I can never focus only on one thing. It is the same with bridge, I love it, but I cannot imagine it would be the only thing in my life.”

Championship Diary

Here are the answers to the two crossword clues we posed yesterday:

Here is a rather neat crossword clue: Entury (4,4,2,3)

The trick with a crossword is to interpret the clue. Here you have a word with a letter missing – make it century and the answer might be clearer:

long time no see.

Or this one: O hark the herald angels sing the boy’s descent which lifted up the world (5,9,7,5,6,2,5,3,6,2,3,6)

If you count up the letters in the clue and the answer you will find they are identical, which suggest it must be an anagram. the answer is:

while shepherds watched their flocks by night all seated on the ground

As is very much the norm in major championships the EBL reached an accord with our hosts that a Croatian team would usually be featured in every round. They must be delighted that Croatia qualified for the Open final.

Following the advertisement in yesterday’s Bulletin we can reveal that players from 19 countries have already registered for the Cavendish. They include Zia Mahmood, Jacek Pszczola, Boye Brogeland, Massimo Lanzarotti, Frederic Wrang, Juan-Carlos Ventin, Andrew Robson, Tony Forrester, David Gold, Krzysztof Martens, Andrei Gromov and Alexander Dubinin.

The Ladies Pairs will also be a strong event with among others Marion Michielsen, Meike Wortel & Jovi Smederevac.