

Luck and judgement

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Fantasy Portfolio Competition winner Mark Bird and his wife, Andrea, at Chester's Queens Hotel

A cricket test match lasts 'only' five days. A marathon is a mere 26 miles – just two hours or so for top distance runners. But Mark Bird's test of endurance – and his high degree of financial know-how – lasted more than seven months!

That was the duration of the Fantasy Portfolio Competition organised by leading asset management group F&C Investments in which Chester-based Mark emerged outright winner and scooped first prize of £10,000.

The nationwide game, targeted at active private investors and professional financial advisers, saw Mark, who owns and runs Chester Financial Associates with his wife, Andrea, comfortably at the top of the leaderboard ahead of several thousand rivals. His astutely positioned portfolio and shrewd adjustments over the competition period

chalked up a 9.41 per cent return – almost three per cent ahead of his nearest rival.

So was it luck, skill or a combination of the two? Mark said: 'Although luck certainly played some part, keeping abreast of market information, making bold asset allocation decisions and pure gut instinct allowed me to ride more of the ups than downs.

'Running an independent financial advice practice that works with individuals, small business owners and trustees, it is imperative that I understand the bigger picture in order to help my clients build, manage and protect their wealth.'

Originally from the Wirral – he is a former pupil of Calday Grange Grammar School – Mark studied at Aston University and started his career selling educational books in the outskirts of Chicago in America. From this educational experience sprang an

opportunity to progress to financial advice in mid-Wales, training with the Prudential from 1992. Following three years with the company he further developed his career by spending ten years as a specialist wealth adviser with Friends Provident.

He established Chester Financial Associates in Upton in 2004. The firm provides specialist wealth management advice focusing on retirement planning, investment planning and wealth protection including inheritance tax advice for individual customers, business owners and trustees. Mark has also presented regular seminars to the general public on inheritance tax planning.

Mark said he's used some of his prize to replace a 20-year-old television, take a family holiday and pay off a 'small chunk' of the mortgage. ■

MARK BIRD'S TOP TIPS

- Do not risk more than you can afford to lose, or as the legendary investor Warren Buffet once said:

Rule No. 1 – Don't lose money

Rule No.2 – Don't forget rule No.1!

- Expect the unexpected. Keep an emergency fund accessible for unforeseen events.
- Make sure you understand what you are investing in.
- Review your plan regularly, making adjustments when necessary.
- Seek advice from an Independent Financial Adviser.