What it was like at my first major event
By Sabine Aaken

Many-time world champion Sabine Aaken, now of Denmark and formerly of Germany, recalls her first major event - the World Championship in Miami in 1986. American bridge players remember Sabine for her fantastic feat of becoming an ACBL Life Master in six weeks in 1989, partnered unusually by Ron Anderson.

White beaches, luxury yachts, Miami Vice. Don Johnson, blue eyes - surely that's what was on the mind of two young German girls traveling to Miami Beach in 1986.

Nothing of the sort, try again! Aces, kings and queens, spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs and how to take as many tricks as possible constitutes the game. Somehow the German Bridge Federation had become convinced of our potential and, who knows, maybe there could be some space for the address during my stay blank. Not out of stubbornness - I simply didn't know it.

Daniela and I had agreed to share an apartment with two friends from Germany who had already been in Miami for a week's vacation. They were supposed to pick us up at the airport. What did I care where the apartment was? The immigration officer was not at all sympathetic with my situation. He almost wouldn't let me into the country. At this point I really turned stubborn - where I was going to stay was none of his business! I was coming. In the end he gave me permission to stay for the duration of the championship, and not a single day longer.

For them on everything was plain sailing. Our friends Georg Nippen and Jocelyn Burchen took us safely to our hotel for the next two weeks, the Breslauer Suited Hotel, 949 Collins Avenue, Bal Harbour, Florida. There you go, Mr. Immigration officer.

As the games began we could tell the international tournament was a success. We walked off with the Mixed Pairs, in which I played with a good friend from Augsburg, Andreas Pfeiffer. Germany's score for bestlooking bridge-playing Olympianist.

Once, after one of my usual silly mistakes, my partner seemed a bit upset. "Don't you know whom we just played against?" he asked. "That was Eric Rodwell!" I nodded knowingly, but in reality I had no clue. Who was Eric Rodwell? Two weeks later Eric Rodwell and Jeff Meckstroth became the World Pairs champions.

The only other things I remember from the mixed event were being West every single round and that we walked past an American lady who had paused spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs all over her fingernails. My mistakes were not very memorable and we finished nowhere. Still I enjoyed every single minute.

The next event was the Rosenthal Team, where Dani and I were playing with our friends Hans Gunner and Andreas and another German pair that was famous for their reliability. You never knew whether they would show up for a round or not. We got knocked out fairly easily and landed in the never-ending Swiss. There were seemingly endless battles between the matzeka, but even single one was an exciting adventure.

One round we played against a father-son combination from England. The son could not have been more than 14-15 years old and it appeared his twin brother was playing at the other table. His bridge was very impressive and he clearly was convinced that Dani and