

OUR FINEST HOUR

First of all Peter and I would like to thank everyone for their enthusiastic congratulations for our winning the Young (0-1500) Life Masters Pairs on Sunday at the Nationals. It is truly heartwarming that we have such a supportive bridge community here in the Twin Cities.

I've already had requests for tales of great hands, but alas, in three days of playing there wasn't a single squeeze, trump coup or even endplay of note. Peter did execute a nice scissor's coup for an excellent result which only could come about after what initially looked to be an unfortunate opening lead. But I thought I'd recap our week for those of you with interest.

Peter and I don't normally travel to tournaments and we only went to the summer nationals because we won the district Flight B National Teams with Peg Mitchell and Phyllis Anderson. That event began on Wednesday before the actual tournament officially begins with a Swiss team event to cut the field from 25 to 16 when the knockout portion begins. So we played eight seven-board matches in the afternoon and evening. It was a disaster to say the least. We lost by one imp, we lost by twoimps, we tied. Every round someone was making a mistake plus we seemed to get fixed on at least one hand. We ended up 1-1-6 for 20th. To say we were disappointed would be a great understatement.

So on Thursday we played in the side Swiss in the afternoon. There were 39 teams. Now we could do no wrong. Everything worked as we won every match comfortably, ending up with 82.5% of the possible victory points for an easy victory in a field that had a number of excellent teams. If we only had only won one match the previous day by any of the scores on Thursday against inferior teams we would have qualified for the knockouts of the GNTs! Yes, bridge can be an exasperating game!!

Our flight home wasn't until Monday since we planned to be in the finals of the GNT on Sunday. So the best game to enter seemed to be the Young Life Master Pairs since this would be the last time I could play in the under 1500 point event. For those of you unfamiliar with the Life Master Pairs, it is a three-day, six-session event in which the field is cut after each day.

So Friday there were 128 pairs in which the top 76 would make it to Saturday. Peter and I had a nice 60% game in the afternoon. However, the evening was another disaster. Peter would be the first to say that he had a very poor session making a number of costly mistakes that he would not normally make. I've noticed over the years that our day sessions tend to be better than our evening sessions and I expect fatigue plays a major factor, particularly with Peter who is an early riser (which is not my problem!). We ended up with 46%, which could have (and probably should have) been worse. Fortunately we had that good first session so we still easily qualified for Day 2 somewhere in the middle of the pack (33rd).

There is a percentage carryover each day, so we had work to do to move up. Saturday afternoon was a strange session in that we seemed to be spectators for the most part as the cards were running the other way. I didn't feel anything remarkable was happening the entire session and we ended up with a 55% game.

Before the evening session I asked Peter lie down for ½ hour after dinner. I too was resting but got up to make him some coffee. Then I asked Peter to splash some cold water on his face before going down. I felt we were ready for a good game until it actually started. The first board I went for 800 doubled. The next 7 boards included a down two minus 200 and a down 3 minus 300. I always feel that our strength as a partnership is our bidding judgment and in the first 8 boards it felt like one disaster after another. I estimated that after 8 boards we probably had a 30% game.

But slowly we started to right the ship on boards 9-16 with a few good results and no more disasters. The last 10 boards of the session we had 10 positive scores which included 2 slams, 3 games and two doubled contracts for 500 points (one nonvul). I thought we played those last 10 boards at over a 70% clip.

After the last board when the opponents left the table and before we checked the sheets I told Peter that I had never been prouder of us than during that session. I really had no idea how we finished, but no matter what the result we should be proud. After all it would have been very easy to get discouraged after the first 8 boards and just lose interest and concentration or try to play outside our normal game to make up for all those early bad boards. Instead we kept our heads and our cool and just played within ourselves and eventually good things happened.

We ended up with a 58.74% game Saturday evening, which boosted us up to 8th place out of the 40 pairs that made it to the final day. The first session on Sunday we actually had the best score in the field with a solid 62% game. When the sheets came out we all of a sudden were in 1st place! Now that is a good place to be, but you also have three hours to think about screwing up this opportunity! We had dinner with Peg and Phyllis who graciously allowed us to use their room (Peter and I had no room for Sunday night, but that's another story) to rest after dinner going through the same routine as the previous evening. In the second session we again led the field with a 62.5% to win the event by over two boards.

However, when I look back I won't remember the details of those Sunday sessions. We simply played rock solid on Sunday. In the 50 boards we played I don't think we had more than 2 boards with less than a 5 (out of 19). We simply made very few mistakes and took whatever gifts were given. We certainly had our share of luck (twice in the last two days I made uncharacteristic mechanical mistakes that resulted in cold tops – stories for another day).

What I will remember and carry with me is that second session on Saturday when we could so easily have folded. It was undoubtedly the best 58% game I will ever have. It was that session that was easily our finest hour.