

PARTNERS AND WINNING AT BRIDGE

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Ron takes time to describe what to look for in a partner and advice on maintaining the partnership.

What qualities should you seek when looking for a bridge partner? The most important quality is ambition. You and your partner should be equally ambitious. If you want to represent your country internationally, it is futile for that purpose to play with someone who just wants to play club bridge once a week. Most of us have several partners, some for casual games, others for serious endeavours.

As with marriage, partners are not perfect. You must be able to accept them, warts and all. If their faults are too much to bear, do not persevere. You are intent on winning, but the bridge itself must be a pleasant experience.

Some partners are constantly critical. Get rid of them. Some partners are never wrong. If you obtain a bad score, it is always your fault. Get rid of them.

It helps greatly if you and partner are good friends. You need to be able to discuss your bad results constructively after the session without partner taking offence. Where friendship exists, there is no problem. In other cases you need to tread carefully.

Time and work also come into consideration. If you want to play three times a week and partner can play only once a fortnight, you have a problem. If you want to attend events overseas, but partner cannot get time off work, you have a conflict. It is better to sort out such differences before you start playing together.

A partner with a sense of humour is to be cherished. If you and partner can accept losses philosophically and even laugh them off, the partnership will be all the stronger for it. If that is not possible, you will need to resolve your differences in a way that suits both of you. Talking calmly, courteously and respectfully is essential.

If possible, play with someone who is better than you. Your partner can then help you to improve and they will certainly want you to do that. In such a partnership, do not be afraid to ask for partner's advice. That will be helpful for you and also flattering for partner.

If thinking of playing with someone of approximately equal standard, you should have respect for the quality of their game. If you do not have that, then there will be friction and that is something that must be avoided.

If you are clearly the stronger partner, you have already made up your mind to accept partner's shortfalls. When pointing out how partner might have done better, always do it softly and kindly.

Should husbands and wives play together? The advantage is that you can easily practice your bidding and discuss your methods and results. Nevertheless it takes considerable effort to make such a partnership work if winning is your aim. At top level there are very few such successful partnerships. Emotion can cloud your judgment and the kindest of spouses can sometimes say the unkindest words. For social games, by all means play with your spouse. If you aim at county, national or international success, be warned that it is tougher to play with a spouse than a partner you do not see daily.

There are countless stories about the pitfalls of playing with your spouse. At one of my classes in England, a lady told me how she made sure that her husband always treated her with great courtesy. "Before we go out to play," she said, "I turn down the bed in the spare room. He knows what awaits him if he does not behave".