

The Prodigy

By Brent Manley

Ten-year-old Adam Kaplan is ACBL's youngest Life Master.

Going into his game with Jim Somma on March 2 at the St. George Duplicate Bridge Club in Port Richey FL, Adam Kaplan needed only 1.32 black points to become a Life Master. When Adam and Somma blitzed the field with a 67.13% game, Adam earned 3.17 black points to become the youngest Life Master in ACBL history at the age of 10 years and 43 days.

His feat eclipsed the record held by Dan Hirschman of Ann Arbor MI. Hirschman became a Life Master during the 1994 Fall NABC in Minneapolis at the age of 10 years and 81 days.

It seems likely that Adam's record will stand just as long, if not longer.

"The black points were the hardest to get," says Adam, a precocious, effervescent prodigy who loves to discuss the bidding system he and his dad, Todd Kaplan, have created.

"The best part of my game is bidding," says Adam. "We have come up with a lot of interesting conventions." Adam took up bridge at the age of five and a half while on a cruise with his family (Todd, a radiologist, and Adam's grandfather were playing). The cruise director, half in jest, asked Adam if he wanted to play. "He learned the basics over the next two days," says Todd. When the family returned from the cruise, Adam wanted more. "He did everything bridge," says Todd. "He was really into it."

Adam also showed an innate talent for the game. Here's a sample, reported by Leon Lyday of Clearwater FL from a sectional in that town in mid-January of this year. Adam, still only nine years old, was playing in a pairs game with his dad against two players with more than 12,000 masterpoints between them. Adam was defending a contract in which dummy held A-Q-J-x-x in a suit. At one point, declarer led a low card in that suit from hand, inserting the queen. Adam, holding a doubleton king, played low smoothly. When declarer repeated the finesse later, she found herself cut off from the long suit and had to go down. Somma, Adam's most regular partner after his dad, says the youngster showed an aptitude for bridge right away. Adam and Somma, 65, formed their partnership about three years ago.

Even in tough competition, says Somma, "Adam holds his own. He's a very quick learner."

Somma says he was amazed on one occasion when he and another player teamed up with Adam and his dad at a sectional in Tampa. The Kaplans returned to Somma's table to compare and Todd reported that Adam had taken 10 tricks in a spade game on one board despite a 5-0 split in trumps. "That's not possible," said Somma. Said Todd: "Adam crossruffed for 10 tricks." Says Somma: "That was a seven-year-old kid playing that way." Besides bridge, Adam is interested in academics. He is home schooled and favors math and science. He is also a champion speller. Adam had to play hard and play well to earn his place in ACBL history, but he has no regrets. "It was definitely worth the effort," he says.