

Teammates and Sponsors

Disappointment over the years is that although we have regularly won national titles we have only qualified through the Trials to represent the US once (although we came very close in both 1985 and 1987). There is some luck involved, but in general you see the same teams and sponsors consistently winning the major events. Both Nick Nickell and Richard Schwartz are fine players in their own right, and they have tended to monopolize the very top pairs too.

Of late, David Berkowitz and I have been on teams with excellent playing sponsors, but there has seldom been another 'top pair' available. Indeed, we have gone the entire 1990s without experiencing the pleasure of having Meckstroth-Rodwell, Stansby-Martel, Soloway-Goldman, or Hamman-Wolff (arguably America's top four pairs of the decade) as our teammates!

Perhaps that is about to change as right now we are fortunate to be part of a team that I think has a very real chance of winning things — myself-David, Jimmy Cayne-Chuck Berger and Mike Seamon-Mike Passell. (*Not immediately, however* — *Cohen's team lost narrowly in the June 1999 Team Trials to the eventual winners: Wolfson-Silverman, Zia-Rosenberg, and Stansby-Martel. M.S.*)

Partnerships and Style

I am often asked such questions as, "Is it best to play solid opening bids and preempts (and conservatively in general), or is it better to adopt the modern style of light openings, wild preemption (and general recklessness)? Or maybe something in between?" Even having 'lived' at both ends of the scale, it's a question I find impossible to answer. I feel that either way is fine — I have always been happy just to do things the way my partner prefers.

In the early 1980s my regular partner was Ron Gerard, and we played his style of sound openings, sound preempts, and constant discipline. Ron likes to bid slowly, cautiously, carefully, cerebrally, and I don't hold it against him. When I was his partner I was young and impressionable, so I played his way. We knew each other's style, and however stodgy that style was, it worked.

Then came Marty Bergen and my world turned completely upside down. His basic philosophy is constantly to try to make life miserable for the opponents, even when he is vulnerable. "Colors are for children," he would say. We were very aggressive bidders, and the word 'dangerous' has often been used to describe the way Marty plays the game, but his competitive bidding judgement is outstanding — in fact, I rank him as #1 in the world in that particular area.

So, from 1983-1990 I played things Marty's way. What that meant was that

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you could open the bidding just about any time you were dealt thirteen cards (points schmoits!). You could preempt with many five-card suits (and even some chunky four-baggers). One of the highlights of our partnership was when the ACBL imposed the now-defunct 'Five-and-Five' rule, which required Marty (and of course any other ACBL members) to have at least 5 HCP and at least a five-card suit to open a Weak Two-bid.

There is one memorable deal from the 1985 Team Trials final that shows Marty in action and illustrates the importance of knowing partner's style. Needless to say, not all of his adventures had such a happy ending for us.

	NORTH					
	♠ Q 6 4					
	♥ K Q J 9 4 3					
	♦ J 8 3					
	♣ J					
WEST	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	EAST	
N						
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♠ A 5 3		♠ J 10 8 7 2				
♥ A		♥ 8 7 6 5 2				
♦ A K 5 4 2		♦ Q 6				
♣ A 9 6 5		♣ 7				
	SOUTH					
	♠ K 9					
	♥ 10					
	♦ 10 9 7					
	♣ K Q 10 8 4 3 2					

N-S Vul., IMPs

In one room, Hamman (East) passed, Eddie Wold opened 3♣, and Bobby Wolff overcalled 3♦ and played there. Down one, E-W minus 50.

In our room, Bergen was East, I was West, Chip Martel was North and Lew Stansby was South. Marty opened the East hand 2♦ showing a Weak Two in spades (we played transfer preempts). Marty is so aggressive that I merely inquired with 2♥, and when he bid 2♣ to show a minimum I passed. Opposite some players I'd try for seven — opposite Marty, I passed! Granted, we missed a good non-vulnerable game, but Marty might have held as little as:

♠ x x x x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x x

And don't think he wouldn't open a Weak Two on that hand! Opposite that, we'd be lucky to make *two* spades.