

Play in the GNT, you never know where it will lead you!

Peg Mitchell, Phyllis Anderson, Paul Gutterman, and Peter Litchfield represented District 14 last summer (2009) in the Flight B (0-2,000mps) GNT finals at the Nationals in Washington, D.C. Peter & Paul's misfortune in the GNT competition gave them a different opportunity as Peter describes:

About this time last year my long-suffering partner, Paul Gutterman, and I teamed up with Peg Mitchell and Phyllis Anderson to play in the regional GNT qualifying competition. We had not played much together as a team, but we were quietly confident when we turned up for the first day's Swiss. Our confidence, for once, proved justified as we cruised through the sessions to qualify for the knock-out semi-finals. There we again won comfortably and in the other semi-final the favorites suffered a surprise defeat. In the final we were so far ahead at the start of the last session that our opponents conceded but then decided to play on. However in looking for swings they soon had a 2,000 point penalty and conceded again.

So we set off for Washington each clutching our \$370 prize [*Each team shared a \$1480 subsidy from the District 14 GNT event—Ed.*]. This was my second experience of the Nationals. In 2006 Paul and I won the District 14 Flight B North American Pairs and represented District 14 in Dallas. Bridge is one of the few sports where beginners can play in the same venue as (even against) the best players in the world. Watching Zia, Hamman and Meckwell in the flesh is an awe-inspiring experience. However Paul and I are busy people and we do not usually go to the nationals, so Washington is something that we would have missed if we had not won the local tournament and got the welcome subsidy.

The GNT [*Finals in Washington*] was a disaster. It was one of those days when everything went wrong and you lose matches that normally you would win. In the qualifying Swiss we lost match after match by the odd board, often through no fault of own, and ended up in the bottom round-robin for the last two rounds. We at last got a win, but we were well out of the qualifying for the knock-out stages, though we did manage to avoid last place. There we were with our tails between our legs, hotel rooms and airplane tickets booked for the next four days in case we got to the final and nothing to do but continue playing.

Things began to look up the next day. There was a 39 table Open International Fund Swiss in the afternoon and, while everything had gone wrong on the previous day, now we could do nothing wrong. We won ALL our matches and the event at a canter [*this in OPEN, not flighted competition!--Ed.*]. We bemoaned that if we could just have swapped a couple of today's matches back to yesterday we would have qualified easily, but then we would not have experienced what happened next.

Still needing something to fill the rest of our time in Washington Paul and I entered the three day, six session Sally Young (0-1500mp) Life Master pairs. On the first day we had a good first qualifier with a 60% game, and a poor 45% second qualifier, but still good enough to qualify for the second day. A 55% first semifinal moved us higher, but in the second semifinal we started off terribly with 3 bad boards in the first six. However we played solidly from then on, had some good boards, and finished with 58% overall. Paul has written about this and called it our finest hour in that we didn't cave in

after the initial disasters but clawed our way back into the competition.

http://moot.typepad.com/minnesota_bridge/2009/07/our-finest-hour.html#more

Going into the last day we were in 8th position. In the first final we had a 62% game and moved into first place. Dinner was a tense meal. Due to a mix-up we had lost our hotel room for the last night but Peg and Phyllis kindly lent us their room to lie down and try to relax. It must have worked because it all came good in the last session where we had another 62% game to win easily.

Having been interviewed and had our photo taken, we emerged somewhat dazed to the congratulations of the Minnesotans who thronged the hotel lobby. We had booked a hotel room a few blocks away for the night but it was very late before we tore ourselves away. The next morning we were leaving but I had to get up early to return to the tournament hotel to pick up the bulletin with our picture prominent on the front page. This produced one last new experience when we were sitting in the airport departure lounge and the people opposite exclaimed, "We know you, we are looking at your picture in the paper!".

The moral of this story is; go in for the GNT, it may not turn out as you first thought but it is bound to be an experience.