

Meet Geoff Hampson



Geoff Hampson

By Sally-Ann Rhea
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Geoff Hampson is a world class bridge player - literally, having been a member of the team that won the Rosenblum Cup (Open Knockouts) at the World Championships in Philadelphia last fall. He has numerous national titles and perennially finishes high in the Barry Crane Top 500 contest for the most masterpoints won in a year, placing fifth with 2034 in 2010.

Bobby Wolff has said that to become a player of high caliber, one has to start young, and Geoff is no exception to this observation. He learned to play bridge back in Canada while still in high school under somewhat unusual circumstances: His biology teacher was

taking a group of students on a trip to Jamaica and, being an avid bridge player and wanting partners while on the trip he gave a printout on the workings of the game to the class and about eight of them were interested. On their return Geoff heard about duplicate and thought that was a great form of the game since he would no longer lose due only to holding bad cards. He organized three-table duplicate games with his classmates, then discovered Toronto clubs, and before long was at the bridge table more than at a school desk.

Geoff's parents were more understanding about this than many others would have been, as their background was a little unusual too. His mother is in a band - Sharon, Lois [his mom], Lois & Bram - which records music for children, has sold millions of records in Canada, and has performed on television. His father was a member of the Travelers, a Canadian folk music group, and toured extensively during Geoff's childhood. Geoff enjoys music but doesn't play.

One day while driving home from a sectional, Fred Gitelman (a teammate of Geoff's in Philadelphia who was profiled in the December, 2000 *Score-Card*) told him that some people make a living playing bridge full time. Geoff was astounded, although he didn't think that was a realistic path for him; his goal was simply to become a good player, and soon enough he had climbed into ranks of better Canadian

players. Eventually he felt he had maxed out in Canada and needed to emigrate to the United States to keep improving. He was dating a woman from Michigan, so that's where he initially settled. He first got small jobs playing bridge through Eric Rodwell, Jeff Meckstroth and Lynn Deas, playing mostly for experience and expenses as one of the extras in team games. Geoff survived in Michigan for five years, making very little money before more regular and better paying jobs came his way. He doesn't advise pursuing this career because there are too many lean years and it may never pay off, but just as his musician parents had to play, so did he; Geoff doesn't really see his playing bridge as a choice.

Next stop was L.A., where he continued climbing in ability and recognition. When he decided to relocate, his friends Marc & Brenda Jacobus and Fred Gitelman & Sheri Winestock suggested he join them in Las Vegas. Geoff plays poker, and when he first arrived played as he had previously played bridge, obsessively. But poker remains a hobby while bridge has become a full-time job; Geoff enjoys his work and only plays with clients he likes, noting that it would be brutal to spend a week all day every day with an incompatible partner.

When asked for advice for those of us working on moving up to the higher

levels, he recommends counting everything on every hand. Don't just think, "I'm in three spades and it's an easy make," count even when you don't need to. Count the points and count the hand pattern to train your mind to always gather all the information you can so it's there when you do need it. He says that, as with physical exercise (which he also recommends and does nearly every day), "Muscles you don't use grow tired faster, so use them all the time."

Geoff bemoans the fact that there is no organization in the bridge world marketing the services of pros or making arrangements for clients to connect with them - to hire a pro you must do it yourself. He would like to see this change.

Geoff plays over 200 days a year and almost always as a paid player, though he played in the World Mixed Pairs last year with a peer and sometime plays with partner Eric Greco for practice. He still enjoys the surprises the game can bring, including one of the funniest from the 2009 San Diego Regional: He was playing on a Swiss team with Lou Ann O'Rourke and just as they were beginning to compare results after the fourth match, the nearby loading dock doors began to shake, rattle, and roll. Lou Ann shouted, "It's an earthquake! What'll we do?" "Compare scores," said Geoff, "plus 100 on the first board. . . ." But Lou Ann thought better of it and rushed out, with the team members following in her wake; all to play another day.

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