

A Junior Perspective

In conversation with Toby

by Kyle Lam



I caught up with Toby Nonnenmacher at the Portland Bowl finals. Toby has been playing for the Junior squads for five years competing in European and World Championships as well as numerous home internationals. Toby is just 22 years old and is an Ace of Spades (most of the time!) on the NGS. He is currently based in Manchester where he is studying physics.



How did you get into bridge?

I started playing in school, but it wasn't until I joined the Junior squads that I started to play seriously. It allowed me to learn from my peers, be coached by top players and opened doors to high-level competitions such as the Spring Fours. I owe a huge amount to people like Michael Byrne, Alan Shillitoe, Sarah O'Connor (to name just a few) who give up their time and energy to help juniors, purely because they care about the future of the game.

Tell us about being in the Junior squads?

The U21 and U26 squads have formed a huge part of my life over the last half a decade. I have loved playing with other juniors and have visited places I wouldn't have gone to. The squads are vital to the future of bridge and it's great to see the recent creation of an U16 squad.

Take me through an average competition day

I like to get up fairly early as a substantial part of my morning consists of waking up my partner. If you're sitting down to play 60 boards a day, you

really don't need any more distractions than necessary! There is a rousing team talk from the captain which normally goes along the lines of 'Stop bidding grand slams missing two aces!' or, 'Don't ever play that again!' Although competitions like the Junior Europeans are undoubtedly stressful, bridge is a game I love and I have made friends both within the squad and from other countries. After the day's play is finished, we normally go through the boards together and have a laugh at all the horror stories.

Greatest bridge achievement?

Winning the Channel Trophy two years in a row: first as an U21 then as an U26. It was a fun way to transition from one squad to the next and there's nothing better than beating the team from the other side of the Channel . . .

Greatest bridge disaster?

We played against Israel in the Europeans in Wroclaw in 2013. There were various bidding misunderstandings which led us to 7♦. This was not the optimal contract – we were missing two key cards, and -500 did not score well.

Any superstitions when you play?

I always sit North and East. I'm not too sure why but I'm fairly certain it's to do with my partner having as little responsibility as possible when he plays.

Who's your greatest bridge hero?

Boye Brogeland, for his incredible dedication to cleaning up the game. He's also knocked me out of the Spring Fours twice in the last three years. If he keeps that up I might have to look elsewhere!

Finally, what's your top tip to an improving junior?

Play as much good bridge as you can against the strongest opponents you can find. Even if you lose by 100 IMPs, as long as you take something away from the experience it is well worth doing! Make sure you go over every hand looking for mistakes, even the ones you think were fine. Above all, make sure you always enjoy playing! □