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MEET THE PLAYERS - GEIR HELGEMO



The Gold Coast Teams is extremely privileged to have two of the world's finest players, Geir Helgemo and Tor Helness playing in the Ingham team. Perhaps some of you haven't heard of Helgemo so I asked him to be interviewed for the Bulletin.

To those who compete at the elite level, Helgemo's name evokes words such as genius, psychologist, champion and yes nice guy, always with a smile and nice word for all around him. He started playing for the Norwegian Open Team at the age of 21. Some may say Norway, a country of five million how hard can it be to make the open team. Think again! Norway have won a gold, a silver and a bronze in the world championships not to mention making the podium on numerous occasions in the European Championships.

Geir has won most of the prestigious tournaments in the world including: A world Championship, European Championships, European Youth Championships, World Junior Pairs Championships, Cap Gemini Invitational, The Macallan Invitational as well as all major tournament in Norway and many US Nationals. A further testament to his sportsmanship was his winning the award of International Bridge Press Association Bridge Personality of the year in 1997.

Helgemo recently celebrated his 39th birthday and has lived in Trondheim Norway for the last 20 years. He has played bridge continuously since learning from his father at the age of 12. He disappeared from the bridge scene for a few years to pursue professional poker but as we all know you can never leave this game.

Helgemo started as an avid reader but reads very little now only reading humorous books by David Bird and Victor Mollo which he finds entertaining. He does confess to reading the 2007 World Championship Book – not surprising seeing he won the Championships!

Norwegian player Geo Tislevoll who is also playing at this tournament in 2000 authored the book Helgemo's World of Bridge – The Maestro reveals his secrets– from which I have stolen some of this material (sorry Geo).

Let's take a moment to look at Helgemo's 'most famous' hand.

Dealer: West ♠ 9 7 3
 Vul: Nil ♥ 9 7 6 2
 ♦ K 10 8 6
 ♣ 9 2
 ♠ A K 6 2
 ♥ ---
 ♦ A Q J 9 7 4 2
 ♣ A 8

West	North	East	South
	Kaplan		Helgemo
2♥	Pass	4♥	6♦!
Pass	Pass	Pass	

OK, the bidding was aggressive but that is Helgemo’s style. Bid what you think you can make and take it from there. Study the hand and see if you can find a way to make it on the ♥K lead.

Tick tick tick. Nothing coming to mind. Can’t say I blame you as the solution is so sweet it is almost as good as a fine wine. Clearly if spades are 3-3 you can throw a losing club on the thirteenth spade – this is how I would have played it but not our man!

For a number of reasons Helgemo divined how to get his discard even when spades were 2-4. It involved taking 3 finesses in the spade suit. Have you worked it out yet?

	♠ 9 7 3	
♠ 8 4		♠ Q J 10 5
	♠ A K 6 2	

Helgemo played a spade to the seven (first finesse), east put Geir to the immediate test and returned the ♠5. What influenced Geir at this point was that west had immediately played low when the spade was played towards the 9-7-3 in dummy. With either the ♠J or ♠10 west may have risen or at least considered it. He backed his judgement and ran it to the ♠9 and made the contract pitching the losing club on the last high spade. Had east switched to a club Geir would simply have crossed to dummy and played the ♠9 pinning the ♠8 and gone back and finessed the last spade honour. Truly a gem of hand.

Dealer: West	♠ 9 7 3	
Vul: Nil	♥ 9 7 6 2	
	♦ K 10 8 6	
	♣ 9 2	
♠ 8 4		♠ Q J 10 5
♥ K Q J 8 4		♥ A 10 5 3
♦ 5		♦ 3
♣ K 10 7 5 3		♣ Q J 6 4
	♠ A K 6 2	
	♥ ---	
	♦ A Q J 9 7 4 2	
	♣ A 8	

Apart from playing professionally or for Norway Geir plays little bridge outside of the major tournaments. When he does play his main motivation is the social aspects. So it seems that if you are a nice person and nice to him he may play with you – either that or a healthy bank balance.

To put professional bridge in perspective, before the GEC (Global Economic Crisis) leading professionals could expect to be paid between \$US10,000 and \$US25,000 to compete in the US National tournaments – between seven and ten days. Whether this would include their expenses would be the subject of negotiations with the sponsors.

“I find the psychology of the game fascinating and I always believe in what I am doing and I am not afraid to look stupid if I am wrong” – something which doesn’t happen too often.

“If I could chose my partner I would play with Tor Helness, Jeff Meckstroth or Alfredo Versace. Several players have influenced my game, in fact so many I don’t think I can mention them all - just say thank you to all my partners”