

MEET THE PLAYERS – JOE GRUE



I first met Joe Grue at the Cavendish in Las Vegas when, in 2001 I first started going to what has become my favourite tournament. Given that he is now 27 years old that would have made him quite young then. Joe has been a livewire on the American and international bridge landscape for around 8 years now having won three World Junior Championships and two US National tournaments. He admits that he does better at pairs than teams.

He has come to Australia to compete in the Yeh Cup finishing in third place in this incredibly prestigious tournament and collecting his share of \$US12,000 prize money.

My interest in youth bridge as the future of the game is reasonably well known so I was delighted to see Joe and his team mates specifically ask a junior pair to join their world class team for the Gold Coast tournament. It also allowed me time to interview him for this article.

Joe grew up in Minnesota in what is regarded as Middle America. Like almost everybody we interview he learned bridge at home growing up with a bridge playing grandmother and bridge parents but points out that he was the only one of his three bridge siblings to take up the game. He often competed in Sectional and Regional tournaments (think congresses) with pleasing results.

At age twenty, around 2000 he moved to New York with the intention of joining what was a growing list of bridge players who were making their fortunes by trading options.

He played high stake rubber bridge for three months before broaching the possibility of options trading and soon found out that the timing was bad and he was not convinced that it was for him anyway.

He continued to play high stakes rubber bridge (upwards of \$US10 per hundred) crediting the 100+ hands he played each and every day for his solid bridge training.

He separates his social and bridge life by only playing outside of New York where he still lives in a nine bedroom brownstone (think terrace house) where most of the occupants are bridge players and their friends so his personal life as well as his professional life is very much about the game.

He has had two serious bridge partnerships firstly with John Kranyak, another youth bridge prodigy and more recently with his current partner Curtis Cheek. He and Curtis are in great demand by the sponsors in the USA based on their results, solid partnership, team ethic and the work they put into their game.

The sponsorship scene in the USA is exceptionally strong, in fact so strong that most bridge professionals are reluctant to sign up for more than one year due to the steady increase in pay rates. Joe describes the scene as 'musical chairs' where reasonable professionals can earn upwards of \$US100,000 per annum but I guess job security is not all that strong. Hey in the current GFC landscape perhaps it is more secure than other lines of work. Joe reports that the market has not YET been affected by the GFC but is wary of that possibility.

There are basically two types of professionals in the USA, those paid to play with their regular partner and those who play with the sponsors. Joe counts himself very lucky that

he is able to play with Curtis but even when there are pairs events he takes the opportunity to play with Curtis to tune up their game.

Joe confesses that he never reads bridge books but feels that his basic instincts and experience are what keeps him at the top of the game. While, as a professional he has limited say in who his team mates are, he counts himself very lucky to have constantly had team mates whom he enjoys playing as well as socialising with – something which he considers important in achieving results.

His long terms plans are to continue as a bridge professional although he dabbles in Poker confessing to being a mediocre online player and a much better face-to-face player. He shares my love for the game of Backgammon which isn't very popular these days (Joe I'll bring my BG set next year)

Some things he says about his tournament life – he generally doesn't drink until the end of play and even then in moderation. While he plays tennis and concedes that fitness in bridge is under-rated he is not as fit as he would like to be. He generally has a 'fast-food' dinner rather than a more formal meal to enable him to have a nap between session to re-energise himself.

About the Gold Coast Congress he says he loves being here, so close to sun, sand, venue and a fiercely contested teams event and is tentatively planning a return next year. His next tournament is the US Nationals which starts next week in Houston where he plays with Curtis Cheek, Mike Passell, Carolyn Lynch, Bart Bramley and Eddie Wold.

Finally his tips to improve your game are:

- play a lot
- pay attention to the little things – he admits to often missing spot cards in the early tricks which often prove very costly
- take you time to play to trick one
- be a good partner (a common theme among our interviewees)

MORE TALES OF WOE

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|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| TMS 9 BD 10 | ♠ 9 | |
| Dealer: East | ♥ Q 9 5 | |
| Vul: All | ♦ Q J | |
| | ♣ A J 10 9 4 3 2 | |
| ♠ K 8 7 3 | | ♠ Q J 10 6 5 |
| ♥ K J 10 8 6 | | ♥ A |
| ♦ K 8 7 | | ♦ A 10 9 4 3 |
| ♣ K | | ♣ 8 6 |
| | ♠ A 4 2 | |
| | ♥ 7 4 3 2 | |
| | ♦ 6 5 2 | |
| | ♣ Q 7 5 | |

Terry Potter reports this hand from the Teams along a line similar to the 1-1 earlier in the week.

East opened 1♠ and west responded 3NT. In their system this showed an unspecified singleton in support of spades. East, having forgotten the system and there they played it. North divined to lead the ♣A with the expected result of down 4 and -400 against a possible +650.

Terry reports that he and partner are still speaking

GET YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

Fire alarm goes off in the apartment block in Broadbeach and when the all clear is given a player returning to the room says "that's lucky" I would have had to go to bridge in my swimmers. No problem says partner as long as we have our system cards.