



Meckstroth passes Soloway to become masterpoint king

The Jeff Meckstroth roll continues. On the heels of winning his ninth Barry Crane Top 500 title, earning 2009 Player of the Year plaudits and racking up his second Player of the Decade honor, Meckstroth is now the all-time leading masterpoint holder. All

of that followed his Bermuda Bowl victory last fall as part of the NickNickell team. In the first week of March, Meckstroth and his fiancée, Sallie Chapleau, traveled from Tampa FL to Indiana to play in the Indianapolis Winter Regional with Doug Simson and Walter Johnson of Columbus OH.

They won their first 13 knockout teams matches and went home with more than 120 masterpoints, enough to push Meckstroth past the late Paul Soloway for the top spot.

After the Indianapolis tournament, Meckstroth's masterpoint total was 65,566.69 to Soloway's 65,511.92. No one familiar with the top levels of bridge is surprised at Meckstroth's success, a by-product of fierce competitive instincts and his love of the game.

As a bridge journalist, vugraph commentator and player, Barry Rigal has seen Meckstroth at work in the toughest of settings. Says Rigal, "Jeff is perhaps the most difficult person in the world to play against. He never shows any sign of being happy or sad when the dummy comes down, and you can never draw an inference from the tempo of the cards that he plays." Rigal adds, "If there's one card you don't want to see when he is defending or declaring, you can be sure the card will appear sooner than you would like it to."

Chip Martel, who figures he has played against Meckstroth as much as anyone, says the many-time world and North American champion "is certainly one of the most – if not *the* most – intense and fiercely competitive guys. He is willing to back his judgment and do what he thinks is right." Martel also recognizes Meckstroth's sportsmanship: "At the table, the atmosphere is intense but still friendly." Zia Mahmood, Meckstroth's teammate on the Nickell team, says it's hard to find enough superlatives to describe the new masterpoint champ. "I would hate to say anybody else is the greatest," Zia says, "but it would have to be him." Eric Rodwell, Meckstroth's longtime partner, says it is always a pleasure to sit across the table from a person "who plays better than anybody." Says Rodwell, "Jeff has a unique approach to the game. He is a good partner, but he is unpredictable

to the opponents.” Meckstroth had not planned to attend the Indianapolis tournament, but he and Chapleau readily accepted when old friends and teammates Simson and Johnson invited them to play in the KOs. He and Chapleau have been practicing to prepare for the Mixed Pairs at the World Bridge Championships in Philadelphia in October.

Meckstroth knew he was close to passing Soloway, a member of the Nickell team until his death in 2007, and he was aware that he did so at the regional. Although the milestone was meaningful because he achieved it playing with Chapleau, Meckstroth says masterpoints are not his focus. Passing Soloway, Meckstroth says, “makes me sad in a way because I miss my friend.”

