

# HOW TO MAXIMIZE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING

by Karen Thomas McCallum

*The following are some suggestions for ensuring that you and your team are playing at your best (i.e., winning). They've worked well for me and for others in the past.*

## PARTNERSHIP

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- PLAY BY GENERAL PRINCIPLES. Make sure that you and your partner have developed good comprehensive general principles that you can fall back on when you encounter a new situation at the table (we'll discuss this in detail this week). Then follow them.
- SYSTEM NOTES. You probably have them, but they may need some work. The Partnership Questionnaires will help you with this. If you haven't done so already, this is the time for you and partner to put your agreements into a notebook. Create even the sketchiest of notes. Then add to them as you go along.
- PLAY WITHIN YOUR PARTNERSHIP. Follow your partnership agreements at the table. Even if they seem silly to both of you at the time. You can change them later.
- IF IT'S NOT IN THE NOTES, WE DON'T PLAY IT! Following this simple rule is worth more than anyone can say. If it saves you even one accident in a long match, that may be the match!

## TEAM SPIRIT

- Playing as a team is the only possible way to win consistently. Be on side with one another and you'll undoubtedly improve your results. Eat your meals together, spend time after the session socializing and drinking together, go sightseeing together. You are representing your country as a team. Make it count, and make it memorable.
- Have faith in your teammates - they're all fine players or they wouldn't be here now, would they? And they're all doing the best they can. Each and everyone of them wants to win as badly as you do. Trust your teammates when you're sitting out.
- Don't forget to have sympathy for your teammates bad results. You will have many bad boards - each and every one of you (you too). Accept them and never, ever criticize. Celebrate the

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good moments, and let the bad ones go. There will be time enough later for discussion and improvement.

- You are a team. If you lose, you ALL lose. It's not one person's fault - so don't cast blame.

### **RESPECT YOUR CAPTAIN.**

- He's there to make decisions that you are not prepared to make. You are there to play.
- You, or your organization, chose him as your captain because you trust his ability to make important decisions. Respect those decisions even when you disagree with him.
- Your captain is there to win too. Have faith in him - he won't let you down.

### **HAVE A COACH**

- You'll need someone onsite to research the opponents' systems and help to prepare last minute defenses, copy convention cards, run out for missing notes, defenses, coffee, pens, lend a willing ear and a broad shoulder when things go badly, make dinner reservations, etc.
- This person may be your captain, a coach, a husband or wife - anyone who is competent and knowledgeable, and is on your side and will want to do a good job for you.
- It's best if this entire job does NOT fall to your captain. He will have his hands full with meetings, committees, conditions of contest, determining which pairs will play best against which opponents, deciding who can defend best against the opponents' systems, keeping up with who is playing well or fading, who is fresh and who needs to rest, etc.
- The more support you have in these trivial, but important, areas, the freer you will be to focus on playing well and winning.

### **PREPARATION**

- YOU'RE GOING TO THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS!
  - Be sure that you know your notes. Go over the areas where you might be a little shaky, and review those obscure sequences which don't come up often.
  - Develop good solid partnership principles to fall back on in the heat of the battle. Be sure they're clear and that you both know

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- them well. (We'll be discussing this in detail during the training period.)
- o Practice bidding hands. Focus on areas where your partnership is weakest, and where you've had problems in the past. Also on areas where you've changed your system.
  - o Do the Partnership Questionnaires with your partner. Don't worry if you don't finish them all. Just plod along and do what you feel you need or want to do.
  - o Fine-tune your system - look for weaknesses and gaps in your methods, and try to find solutions. (Bidding hands helps a lot with this. So will doing the questionnaires. I'm willing to help if you need suggestions.)
  - o Focus some serious energy on slam-bidding, there are a lot of IMPs at stake. (I've provided 1000 hands - if you need more, you're working too hard.)
  - o Develop strategies with your partner and your team (when to be aggressive/conservative, when to swing, your general approach to slam bidding, pushy game-bidding, competing for part-scores, and when to change your normal approach. (Eric Kokish has some good advice in this area which I'll be providing for you.)
  - o Be sure that you have good, simple defenses to the opponents conventions, and a sound general strategy for dealing with those systems/conventions which you might not have prepared for. (We'll be discussing this in detail)
  - o Play practice matches with your team, followed by friendly, constructive team discussion and analysis of swings
- THE LAST WEEK
    - o As the time for the big event draws near, your best preparation is to relax and unwind. Get a lot of sleep. Consider taking a holiday from bridge and work for the last day or so before you leave. Or make it part of your journey to the World Championships.
    - o Don't Play Bridge.
    - o Read prior World Championship books to get a headstart on getting your mind into the right gear for tough play.
    - o Browse a good play book by Reese or Kelsey, to help ratchet your thinking back up to expert level.
    - o Get there early, get settled in and acclimated to the time change, change in diet, etc. Do not arrive the day the event begins. It will cost you if you do.
    - o Review your notes, in a relaxed and leisurely manner. Don't stress.
    - o Whatever you do, don't revise the system.

### **CONSERVE YOUR ENERGY.**

- It's not party time. Of course, you want to have a good time - it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But, remember that you

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are there to win. Save the heavy partying for the victory banquet.

- It's not work time anymore. Your system is what it is. Don't study, don't change it, don't clarify it any further. Let it be.
- Eliminate all outside distractions. Clear the decks of all business and personal matters before you arrive at the tournament so that you are free to focus on the bridge. Don't bring your work with you.
- Don't allow yourself to become involved in rulings and committees and "incidents." That's your captain's job. Your job is to play. If the conditions of play are not to your liking, live with it. You can't change it, but you can cost yourself important energy. Focus your energy where it belongs - you will need it.
- Take care of yourself. Get some exercise whenever you can - take a walk when you're sitting out. And don't eat big meals or drink more than a small amount of alcohol, even at the end of the day's play. The effect is cumulative when you are trying to perform at your best for two weeks straight. Take care of yourself - it's worth a lot of IMPs. And try to sleep. (Yes, I know. Who sleeps?)
- Don't discuss the hands with your partner, unless there is a system confusion which needs to be sorted out immediately, of course. It's a long event - you'll need every ounce of energy you have in the later rounds of the KO. Don't waste it playing the hands twice.

## **QUALIFY**

- Don't try to win the event in the Round Robin. If you play your normal steady game, remembering that you are playing against the rest of the field at this stage, not just against the team you are facing at the moment, you will almost certainly qualify for the KO stages. The teams that try to win big risk losing. Those who sit tight and hang on will usually make it in.

## **THE WEAK LINK**

- Your team is only as good as its weakest link. He may be a weaker player, or perhaps he's just not as tough as the rest of the team, or perhaps he's less experienced. Take care of him. Get the best out of him. Support him.
- Never make any member of your team feel unwelcome in any way. Do not treat any member of your team badly for any reason. You are throwing IMPs out the window when you do.

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## MORALE & MISTAKES

- Don't allow yourself to be demoralized by a terrible result, a big loss - or even (god forbid) a blitz. Everyone has bad sets. The eventual winners will get blitzed somewhere along the line. And everyone has a few really silly, awful, embarrassing (on-vugraph-for-the-world-to-see) results. If it was your teammates today, it may be you tomorrow - or your opponents (they aren't perfect either).
- Don't forget that everyone has great sets too. Take it one hand at a time - it's a long event.
- The team on the podium at the end of the event will not be the team that played perfectly. It will be the team that made the fewest mistakes. When you fall from grace, remind yourselves that with a little luck, and the right attitude, you will make fewer mistakes than the other guys.

## IT'S A CARD GAME.

- Don't forget that, when all is said and done, bridge is a "game." Winning isn't everything. Win or lose, you will never forget the moments when you represent your country in a World Championship. Enjoy them.