

## Winning the Flight B Grand National Teams

Philadelphia PA North American Bridge Championships. Grand National Teams Final, Flight B. July 23-27, 2025. 34 Flight B teams (under 3000 Masterpoints) from across North America that had finished 1st or 2nd in their districts gathered to compete. We were one of two B teams representing District 6 (the MD DC VA area). Various members of our team have been competing in the GNT Flight B event for years and have made it to the finals at the NABC a few times, with some semi-final appearances and one victory (in the 2021 GNT that was played online).



Our team of NVBA members - Rick Bingham (captain), Colin Schloss, Mel Yudkin, Alan Munro.

The format - a round robin on day 1 to reduce the field to 16 teams, then head-to-head all day matches on days 2-5 to determine a champion.

### **Day 1 –**

A round robin, playing eight matches of 7 boards each. After round 7, our mediocre play found us sitting uncomfortably in 19th place, but we managed a solid win in the last match to move up to 14th and join the other 15 teams that advanced to day 2. Whew.

### **Day 2 –**

The top 4 finishers from day 1 earned the right to choose their opponent, so the Wahl team of Minnesota selected us, a team they had beaten easily in the round robin. Opponents Jackson and Sarah Wahl are a talented young couple who met and learned the game at Carleton College bridge club, not many years ago. In fact, later in the NABC they went on to win the 0-3000 Mini Spingold and finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Young 0-3000 Pairs.

The format of the knockout matches was 4 quarters of 14 boards each, with a lunch break at the half. We built a small lead of 20 IMPs during the 1st half, only to see it reduced to 12 in the 3rd quarter. Better play in the 4th had us winning with a score of 113 to 81. This was our closest match.

### **Day 3 –**

Starting on Day 3, play in the GNT moved to tables with screens and cameras. The morning start time was moved 30 minutes earlier, to allow for the slower play using screens. We faced the Vachani Team from the Boston area, who defeated the other District 6 team (Berard) on day 2. With our team leading 155 to 66 after 3 quarters, our opponents withdrew, saving us precious energy and brain cells for the remaining two days.

### **Day 4 –**

The Ashbrook team from southern Illinois was our opponent. We trailed by 1 IMP at the half, but then jumped out to a 40 IMP lead after the 3rd quarter, eventually winning 151 to 97.

### **Day 5 –**

In the final we played against the Dan Oakes team from southern California, the #1 seed. They had easily won every match to this point, never trailing. Some history - on their team was Harvey Jaffe, who Ryan Connors and I opposed in the North American Pairs final in Reno in 2022. Jaffe and partner led that entire event, until the final round where we snuck past them to take the trophy.

Back to the GNT final match. We jumped out to a 41 - 7 lead in the first quarter, then built on it to lead by 57 IMPs after the 3rd quarter.

Unfortunately, Jaffe had a 9:15pm flight to LA that he couldn't miss. There was no way he could make the flight if we played to our typical finishing time of nearly 8pm. Rather than withdraw at the quarter, they asked to start the 4th quarter and see how things went before deciding. When their results at our table over the first 6 boards didn't improve much, they withdrew from the match. The final score was 102 to 45.

This was the 1st (flighted) National title for Mel Yudkin, and the 3rd for each of the others.

Also of note - we learned our teammate Alan Munro is descended from bridge royalty. His grandfather William K. Barrett played on the Ely Culbertson team that won the 1930 Reisinger team event.

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There were many interesting hands among the nearly 280 played. Here was an exciting bidding decision. Vul vs Not Vul, you hold this lovely hand --

♠ A

♥ AKJ975

♦ void

♣ AK8754

LHO deals and opens 1S, and it goes:

1S – Pass – 3S, your call ?

Our East player bid 4S, a Michaels-type cue bid, showing Hearts and a minor. LHO passed, and partner bid 5C.

What does the 5C bid mean? Well, partner must prefer the minors to hearts, since he showed no interest in the known heart suit at all. So probably 0-2 hearts. And in spades, he should have no more than 3 of those based on the opponents bidding and our singleton. So with no more than 5 cards in the majors, perhaps he is 4-4 in the minors, and he bid the 5C as 'pass or correct' (to diamonds). You can envision a possible 10 card fit in clubs, and partner being able to draw trumps and then set up the heart suit with 2 ruffs. So you raise his 5C to 6C. And the bidding proceeds:

1S – Pass – 3S – 4S

Pass – 5C – Pass – 6C

6S – Pass – Pass, your call ?

Our East player judged that partner's pass was forcing, showing a decent offensive hand in context, since he did not double the 6S bid. Is it too much to hope that partner holds Qxxx or better of clubs, and 1 or 2 hearts? So rather than double 6S, East chose a 7C call, which was passed out.

Partner's hand:

♠ Q86

♥ T4

♦ 9832

♣ Q932

and Your hand, repeated:

♠ A

♥ AKJ975

♦ void

♣ AK8754

A spade was led, won by dummy's ace, trumps were drawn in 2 rounds, and the heart suit (which split 4-1) was established with 2 ruffs. Making 7C for a score of +2140.

The other table? They played in 4H making 6, so our making grand slam earned 16 IMPs.

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