

President's Message

On a beautiful spring day in mid-May, twenty bridge players sat down to compete in a 5-table Howell in a location just outside Washington D.C. The concentration of the players was intense, and other than an occasional "alert" or "transfer", the only sound in the room was the hum of the computer. This was no ordinary event, however. This was the first-ever Washington-area youth championship, and the players ranged in age from 10 to 17. The players came from more than a half dozen elementary, middle and high schools from Northern Virginia and Maryland. They were competing for the honor to represent District 6 at the Youth NABC in Atlanta this summer, a trip funded by the District 6 Bridge at Schools Fund.

The winners, who attend Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria Virginia, were Nabil Ahmed and Dan Emmons. They are both 16 years old, and they had a score of 67.6% to take the top prize. In second place, with a 57.9% game, were Eli Robbins and Marcus Maibach. They are both 14 years old, and they attend St. Andrews Episcopal School in Potomac Maryland. The third place winners were Daniel Rubin and Marc Finzi. They are each 12 years old, they attend the Washington Episcopal School in Bethesda, MD, and they finished with a 57.3% game.

During a break in the action - while pizza was being served - I spoke to several of the players. They were all extremely enthusiastic about the game, and looked forward to playing more. One fifth grader struck me as especially perceptive. When I asked him what aspect of the game he liked the best, he said, "I love the bidding". Since lots of beginning players just want to "get past" the bidding to enjoy the play of the hand, this is someone who clearly understands what the game is all about, and who (along with his friends) will continue to play and enjoy the game as he matures. These players represent the future of our game; if the young people who competed in the event are any indication, the future is very bright indeed.

Congratulations to all of the winners in our 2008 youth championship, and we wish Nabil and Dan the best of luck in Atlanta!

Ellen Rosenthal and Elaine Conway were chiefly responsible for putting this event together. The high school, middle school and elementary school players honed their skills at school bridge programs organized by the Washington Bridge League and the Northern Virginia Bridge Association, under the leadership of Shawn Stringer, Suzanne Abrams, Leo Cardillo, and Ron Starr, along with Ellen and Elaine. At some schools, such as at Thomas Jefferson, the bridge program is integrated directly into the school curriculum. At other schools, bridge is either part of the after school activity program, or is run during the lunch break as a club activity. Altogether, programs are now underway at nearly a dozen schools in the Washington area.

The WBL and NVBA are now working to expand these programs during the upcoming 2008-2009 academic year (next year's Youth NABC will take place in Washington D.C., during the 2009 Summer Nationals). Suzanne has prepared a CD that tells schools how stimulating bridge can be for interested students. The CD shows how bridge stimulates and improves analytical reasoning (and possibly even academic performance), and it also features Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, two of the greatest promoters (and funders) of student bridge programs. Ellen, Suzanne

and Barbara Summers have been using the video material to persuade school principals and activity coordinators of the value of providing bridge programs to elementary, middle, and high school students.

I'm convinced we are on the right track in our efforts to get young people interested in bridge again. But it will take time, and we can use all the help we can get to promote the game and encourage young people to play. If you would like to start a program in your area, District 6 has funds and can help provide the necessary teaching materials and equipment. If you are interested in learning more about these programs, and what can be done to get them started, please feel free to drop me a line or give me a call.

Dick Wegman