

Max Aeschbacher

New ACBL Gold Life Masters

Max spent his childhood on the laps of adults playing bridge and couldn't have cared less. After going to grad school in Oregon, playing a lot of poker and moving back to Salt Lake City for a job, one day he said to his father, Bill Aeschbacher, "Hey, you should teach me to play bridge sometime." It seemed harmless in the moment but turned out to be life-changing.

Max was immediately swept away. Over the next three years he spent, he estimated later, 40 hours per week either playing bridge or reading bridge books. He showed up at work enough to not get fired. Girlfriends came and went, but Max could hardly tell.



Being "young" at a bridge tournament was a special thing. You get to know other "young" players. You cling to one another because you have in common the extent to which you stand out from the crowd. In his late twenties and early thirties he related better to the caddies than most of the players. Aside from being young, young bridge players have another thing in common: they tend to be really good at bridge!

Several players in the Salt Lake area took Max under their wing when he started and he is grateful for their patience and mentorship

His dad once quipped, "Max, you got a lot more fun to play with when you started ruffing your losers in the short hand."

The speed with which his game progressed increased dramatically when he started playing with young players from around the country. Greg Humphreys, Brady Hixson, Mitch Towner, Meg Myers, Adam Kaplan, Theri Andino, Cristal Nell, McKenzie Myers, Anam Tebha, Adam Parrish, Jen Chalfan, Arjun Dhir, and several others to name a few. So to speak, each made a mark on his soul as a bridge player. Max learned a lot. His style developed. He learned new bidding systems and more complex defensive carding agreements. He learned things that were rarely, if ever, spoken of in the Salt Lake bridge community. Size Ask? Qminorwood? Reverse Smith Echo?.

Max met his wife, Deirdre Nickel, in 2012 and taught her to play. She had great card sense from the beginning and her game developed quickly. Teaching her improved his game as well. It was especially fun to watch her style develop independently to that of his own. For example, she's a much sound bidder than Max. Max really feels like he's done something right in teaching her because, in spite of being an absolutely ferocious competitor, she's such a gracious partner.

Successes along the way? Max had a few. Some friends from back East with Max entered the Mini Spingold (0-5000) in Atlanta and won. They started as the 26th seed out of 29 teams. That shattered his record for the number of master points won in a single event.

While he didn't beat that record this past summer in Chicago Max did post a new personal record for master points per session in one event by placing third in the open mixed BAM. His partner for that event, Cecelia Rimstedt, deserves a special nod. Her focus at the table is something he'll likely spend the rest of my life trying to duplicate.

Achieving Gold Life Master was never a matter of if, but a matter of when. Bridge was Max's my main hobby and collecting enough points (with as many tournaments as he goes to) was bound to happen sooner or later. What happened at the end of 2015 is worth sharing. After his big results in Chicago Max thought he might be able to catch up to Buzz Farnes and win the Utah unit for 2015. He made plans to play a regional in Kansas between Christmas and New Years with D, Greg, and Peggy Ware, a friend from Denver. Losing in the semi-finals of two Bracket-One KOs, getting up early to play a few side games, and winning the New Years Eve Party Pairs (while achieving something amazing in the world of junior bridge: a defensive beer, along with +1700), he came away from the tournament with just over 50 points. Max thought it was enough. Alas, he was 2 points shy, congrats Buzz.

In closing, Max submits that he might well have achieved something that no other bridge player in the world will ever be able to do, he held the rank of Ruby Life Master for only SIX DAYS! The Ruby rank (1500-2500) officially came into existence January 1st, 2016, and he assumed it. With his points from Kansas, still pending, he didn't become Gold until the system updated on January 6th. Max challenges anyone to go from Ruby to Gold in less time. Too bad he couldn't savor that one more, ruby his my birth stone...

A note about the picture: This was taken at the midnights at the Atlanta NABC. D and Max played against some really nice, and REALLY young boys. It was a blast. The look on Max's face is dismay at discovering a 5-0 trump split.