

*...From the Diary of a Bridge Savant...*

I have played in many of the top-level pair events the ACBL has to offer, and I have had my usual mix of successes and failures. I have finished in the top ten of the entire event, and I also have finished last on the first day. Interestingly enough, it was with the same partner. I have many stories of amazing feats and abysmal failures. The greatest of these events--and the event that holds the most value for me--is the North American Pairs (NAP).

Most pair events held by the ACBL have only a limited number of participants. Most of these events have about 300 pairs. Compared to the total membership of the ACBL, the number of pairs participating in the event is negligible. The NAP is different. The NAP is a grassroots event with three levels of qualification. The first level is the club level. The second level is the unit level. (*ed. note--DII does not require unit qualification. This means there are only club and district level qualifications.*) The third, and final, level of qualification is the District level. This means that any player that participates in a Club-level qualification game has participated in the entire event. Fundamentally, this participant has had a direct role in determining the winner of the entire NAP event.

The most interesting aspect of the NAP is the removal of wolves and sheep. In many of the other pair events, a participant will play against both the elite of the ACBL and those who just want to say that they participated. In these events, there are no stratifications or differing levels of competition. In the NAP, however, not only are there three different levels--these levels only compete against themselves. There is the top level which is over 2500 points. There is the middle level which is between 500 and 2500 points. Finally, there is the bottom level which is less than 500 points. In addition, a life-master cannot play in the bottom level.

For these reasons and more--of all the major pair events--I find the NAP the most pleasing. It sets something within my soul alight to be able to compete solely against people approximating my own level. This, to me, is the truest test of my ability--can I successfully compete when there are no wolves and no sheep.