



Is Your View of Mentoring Games the Same as Mine?

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Like a Sadie Hawkins Dance

Remember back to your high school days when your school held a Sadie Hawkins dance? If you went, did you expect the school to find you a date?

No, you did not. You knew if you wanted to participate that you would have to take the initiative and make the calls necessary to line up a partner all by yourself.

Mentoring games should work just the same way. Your club sets aside a certain number of games where the focus is on mentors and their mentees.

And like at a Sadie Hawkins dance, you, not the club sponsoring the event or the partnership chair, should take the primary role in finding a partner for the game. But as for which role you should play, mentor or mentee, read on.

Who Gets to be the Mentor, who the Mentee?

I have heard players who were playing bridge before tea was a beverage saying that they need a mentor to grow their game. They want to sit across from a player who has more points than they do. So who gets to be mentored?

Dr. Andy Williams, Bridge Education Chair for the Metropolitan Atlanta Bridge Unit (MABU) proposes that a mentee should be

- a player in a beginner's class or a player who has just completed a beginner's class
- or a player who has been playing duplicate bridge for no more than one year.

But at my club, East Metro --like at a lot of other clubs --we have very few players in our club who fit those stringent requirement. Many may have few masterpoints, often less than a 100. But it has been years since they were in a bridge class and most have definitely been at the bridge table for longer than a calendar year. So, as far as who is the mentor and who is the mentee, at East Metro, we loosely set the bar this way:

- a mentor is any player with 600 or more masterpoints;
- a mentee is any player with less than 600 masterpoints.

Checking with your club to see how they will divide the field is your first step to prepare for participating in a mentor –mentee game.

How Should Mentoring Work?

Remember the bad old days when some people thought that all you had to do to help colored children learn (yeah, we were called "colored "children) was to put them in a classroom next to white children?

Well, some bridge players seem to think that mentoring works the same way: all you need to do is sit a "new" player opposite an experienced player for one evening a few times a year and -PRESTO-the new player's game improves.

But it is not that easy. If mentoring is to work, you have to work it. That means you and your mentor-- or you and your mentee-- have to invest time working to grow the game AWAY from the bridge club. You have to have private sessions (plural) where you introduce a new bridge skill a few lessons at a time and then practice those skills during the Mentoring games.

Sitting across from a player you have never played with before and calling it mentoring is not the way mentoring should work. So don't cheapen the process by calling a day or two before a Mentoring game to say you need a mentor or you need a mentee. You do not have to have a mentor or be a mentee to play in our Mentoring games. Everyone is welcome--always. Come out and play with your regular partner. The mentor-mentee pair will appreciate the competition.

Avis Turner 's Approach to Mentoring

My relationship with Avis Turner is an odyssey of mentoring that we all can emulate. For not only did Avis Turner teach me the game, but she played with me. And this is the method she uses with all of her students. She first instructs, then she takes the player with her to club games and plays with them on a regular basis for several weeks until she is certain that the student has a firm foundation on which to build. (She did with me what perhaps no other veteran player has ever done. She played with me in my first National tournament when I had less than 100 points and we—novice and teacher-- placed in several events, even coming in 1st in my first ever team game! Has anyone else done the same?)

The bottom line is this. Mentoring is for all of us, experienced players and inexperienced players.

- "Steel sharpens steel." "
- We are only as strong as our weakest link."
- "If we play against the best, we become the best."

If we in Atlanta are to be among the most competitive players in the American Bridge Association, then each one of us has to feel an obligation to grow the other player's game: "A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS." So I encourage you to do for others what Avis Turner, Robert Davis, Marie Mitchell Jocelyn Jackson , and Bennie Patton have done for me: Grow someone's game. Each one, teach one.

Think of it as a "Sadie Hawkins" Dance."

