

A Woman in the Open

Judith Gartaganis is one of only two women (the other representing India) to compete in the Bermuda Bowl. She plays on the Canadian open team with her partner in both bridge and love, Nicholas Gartaganis. The couple celebrates their 25th anniversary the 24th of September by participating in the World Championships in Bali.

At the time of the interview halfway through the Round Robin, Canada is in ninth position and thus a candidate to be among the top 8.

How did you make it to the Canadian team here at the Bermuda Bowl?

“My husband is a great player, and we have built a partnership together. In Canada the winner of the national championship gets to represent the country in international competition. This year I won my third Canadian championship and so our team got to represent Canada in the Bermuda Bowl.

It is Judith’s first appearance at the Bermuda Bowl. She has previously participated in the Rosenblum and the transnational mixed teams.

How does it feel to be a woman in the open competition?

“It feels good. I certainly realize I am one of the only ones. People ask me ‘Don’t you get nervous playing against men?’ ‘Noooo ... absolutely not.’” (Laughing) Perhaps the contrary: “I have always felt that women are... less predictable to play against.”

Do you and your husband play as much as the other pairs?

“Yes, maybe more. We play on equal terms and try to play whoever is playing best.”

What is your team ambition at these championships?

“Well, we came with the hope that we may be able to make it in the top 8, but that would be a long shot. Canada is certainly off the radar, off everybody’s radar, so perhaps if we could make it into the top half, we would feel satisfied, but a little sad we didn’t make it into the top 8. If we play the way we can play, we will be ok.”

Never go to bed angry

You play with your husband. There are many stories about married couples playing together. How do you make it work?

“I give Nicholas a lot of credit because he is usually the one who makes sure that we don’t go to bed angry. So even if we have to talk late in the night, he usually raises things where I tend to give him the silent treatment. We are old enough now to understand how lucky we are to have a good partner. I think he is happy to have me as a partner. I know that you would say things to your spouse that you would not say to a partner that you really love to play with, so we work hard to treat each other as bridge partners when we are at the table. It is tough though.”

Is it improving or damaging your marriage to play together?

“Definitely improving. It is so important to both of us that if it wasn’t something we did together I think we both would be very unhappy. When we met, my husband was never looking for a bridge playing partner. He just didn’t want one. But there we were. And we are celebrating our 25th anniversary here in Bali the 24th of September.”

How long have you been playing bridge together?

“Since we met, so 26 years.”

If you have any advice for women who would like to compete in the open, what would it be?

“I think you have to go in feeling confident about yourself. There is perhaps a little lack of acceptance. I think that many men just don’t feel a woman can play at the table. I like to send them away shaking their head. It is fine if they want to underestimate me. “

So you think you get some extra points because they underestimate you?

“Yes, I think so. I don’t really believe that men in general are better bridge players. They sometimes play in a different way than women do. But I think during this time I have been playing with Nick and this team, maybe a little of their way of thinking has rubbed off on me, so I tend to think a little more as they do.”

What do you think is the reason such few women play in the open?

“I don’t know. A little bit of fear maybe. Or maybe good, strong teams don’t ask them to play in the open. I have been fortunate. Good players and a good partner surround me.”



Judith and Nicholas Gartaganis