

The Mental Game - 7 New Year Resolutions for Better Bridge

Many people like to make New Year's resolutions. If you are one of those that do and want to make a resolution about bridge - here are some key steps that might help you reach your bridge goals. Don't assume you're too old to make your dream of becoming an elite player come true. The oldest Olympic medallist was **72!**

1. Improve your physical condition. Good fitness is helpful for concentration and mental acuity. If your favourite activity is sitting on the couch with a six pack and a bag of chips, you might not be cut out for the rigors of competitive bridge at the elite level and a social game might be more your thing. However, if you find yourself flagging at the end of the competitive day, then some work on your general fitness might help. A first step is to determine what shape you are currently in. This will help you to select the best training program you will need to follow. You can get an assessment of your current level of fitness by visiting a local gym and consulting a personal trainer. Start a regular program - even if it is just walking, and see if it helps your game.

2. Consider the type of bridge competition you (and your partner) are best suited to. In shooting my main event was .22 rifle, however I used to compete in air rifle as training to improve my main event. As a bridge player consider if you are interested in Pairs or Teams events. There are different strategies for competing in the different events. If you are a conservative steady player, teams might suit your game better than pairs. If you are more of a risk taker, then pairs might be your preference. You might like to excel at both, and choose to adopt different tactics for each type. Choosing which events you wish to focus on helps you keep sight of your overall goals.

3. Develop a training plan. Once you decide which event(s) to pursue, think about enhancing your skills. For shooting I had an annual plan (actually a multi-year plan) with events, training and rest periods mapped out. The plan could include practice sessions at your club, online sessions and some specific practice against other pairs and/or teams. Make the effort to compete in good quality competitions whenever possible, particularly in the lead up to an important event. Success comes from the level of work you are prepared to put in over an extended period of time - unlike exams, in sport swatting for competition doesn't work!

4. Review your progress periodically. After every competition you play in, go through the hand record and think about what you and your partner did. Consider what you might do better. Use data-based analysis to see if you are getting better.

5. Get a coach or mentor. A good coach/mentor can help you develop your skills, so you can progress to the next level. A coach is a sounding board for you to bounce your ideas off, and to give you advice on general system, play and other problems you encounter. In sport a coach usually works with the athlete to develop their training program. , and this may

6. Read five good bridge books. If you don't already read bridge books, there are literally hundreds available for you to choose from. There are a much smaller number that are truly excellent. Ask one of

the top players around what their favourite book is on a particular topic you are interested in, and try reading that one.

7. Set a major event goal: Most States run high quality Gold Point events, and the best players usually go to the ANC Butler Pairs or Canberra SWPT. Often there are short seminars at National events conducted by some of the top players that can be attended for a small cost. However a national event might be beyond you at this stage and you may just decide that trying to win your club's pairs or team's championship is your goal for the year.

THE REST..... IS UP TO YOU