

Michael Dilks d2011

A few months after I moved down to Melbourne in 2004 I played for the first time at the VBA. On the noticeboard someone had placed a card indicating he was seeking a partner.

I was struck by this for two reasons. One, because people usually ask someone they already know to play with them. Two, because of the name of the person: Michael Dilks. As a collector of bridge books and magazines I knew that a Michael Dilks had been on the fringe of England's top echelon of players in the 1970s. Could this be the same person, I wondered?

It was.

Soon Michael and I were playing in the same circles. Subsequently we became teammates and then partners. We had what Michael, in his English way, described as a season together. That was a revelation to me, for Michael thought about the game differently from anyone else I'd played with. A number of his tips are worth serious consideration.

We didn't do as well together as either of us hoped and so Michael moved on, playing with Hayden Blakeman. They were successful and invited me to join them in a team that went on to win the Pennant and then the playoff to choose the team to represent Victoria in the Australian Open Interstate Championship in 2009. In 2007, 2008 and 2010, Michael represented the state in the seniors team at the ANC, playing with Bob Gallus.

Although he'd had a long sabbatical from the game – 18 years – he was still sharp, albeit not as sharp as he had been. That frustrated him.

But his experience at the top level in England, where he won the Gold Cup, Britain's main teams championship in 1975 and represented England twice in subsequent years, was fascinating to anyone who was interested. He had tales to tell of England's top players, including the scandal when Terence Reese and his partner, Boris Schapiro, had been accused of cheating in the 1965 world championships.

As one of England's top partnerships, Michael and Richard Butland appeared in the bidding challenge run in *Bridge Magazine*, the UK's leading bridge journal (in which two pairs bid ten deals and were awarded scores based on the contracts they reached). The then editor, Phillip Alder, tells of one amusing experience:

*On one deal [Michael and Richard] had a clear misunderstanding, getting to a no-play contract. Not wishing to make people look silly, I told them that we would go through each bid until they found the disagreement. This we did. They continued, now on the same page, and reached another no-play contract for a "second" zero!*

Michael was different. Nicola Smith (then Gardener), his favourite partner from England, who went on to become one of the world's best female players, said this of him:

*He had this belief that anything was always possible in life...whatever field you wanted to go into was possible.... I remember him in his thirties going on a ski holiday, and asking him whether he skied. He replied that skiing like everything was a Mind Set*

*and that he would be fine....he had read all the techniques in a book!!!! Suffice it to say he survived the holiday without any broken bones....*

Michael stood out in others ways, as well. He was always rugged up, even in summer; he always had a story to tell; and he could always be heard from a distance, with a high-pitched laugh that was his alone.

Those of us who played with or against him will remember Michael Dilks as a tenacious and sometimes demanding partner, a tough and wily opponent, a gregarious teammate. He will be missed.

David Morgan