



Remembering Billy and Eddie

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I learned bridge when I was 11 in 1962, and after a couple of years spent time reading books and following the stars. In 1965 my father took me to Israel for the first Bridge Festival. I met Benito Garozzo there, and asked him how to play A10x opposite K9xx for three tricks. He took up a napkin and wrote down every combination with the answer before passing it back. I was thrilled that a great World Champion would spend time with me.

The next day the flamboyant Bobbie Slavenburg took me out after his tennis game with Hans Kreijns for Creme Caramel. All through my teens, my Bridge Idols were Benito Garozzo and Georgio Belladonna. I lived in Scotland and saved up to get the Bridge World there every month. From the magazine I learned of the emerging Aces, who were going to play the Bermuda Bowl against the Italians in Stockholm in 1970. As Sweden was an expensive place, my friend Lester and I bundled a tent into the back of our car and set off from Glasgow to Stockholm.

Luckily, the first day at the tournament venue, I bumped into another friend, Patrick Jourdain, who had room in an apartment in the city, and invited us to join him. I saw Billy Eisenberg and the Aces win the first Bermuda Bowl for USA since 1954, but it was anticlimatic as there was no Blue team (Italy played their C-team). I did meet Billy Eisenberg briefly for the first time. He had played there with Bobby Goldman. In 1971 Eisenberg won a second Bermuda Bowl, this time in partnership with Bob Hamman. The Blue team was still in retirement, and USA beat a strong French team in the final.

In 1974 I played the big money tournament in Monte Carlo. Billy played also, but after the main tournament he was playing with Barbara, his fiancée at the time, in a side game. I was not playing, but wandered up to their table and glanced over her shoulder at her cards – she seemed nervous, and perhaps had not played much bridge. The contract was 3NT and she was on lead with KQJ108 in a suit. She led the ten. At the the end of the hand, Billy in his unique calm way, and a smile, said he had been confused by the lead. "It was fourth-best, as you told me." He nodded wisely and smiled again.

"Yes, but that's not the whole story." They went on to the next hand.

In 1975 Billy played with Eddie Kantar, this time against the unretired Italian Blue team. This match will be remembered firstly for the allegations of foot-tapping against Facchini and Zucchelli. USA built a lead of 73 IMPs at the half, and the Italians benched the contentious pair for the entire second half of the match. Italy made a strong comeback in the second half and the match was decided by the famous 7C hand bid by Belladonna Garozzo against Eisenberg and Kantar, with king-eight of clubs under the ace-queen. Still USA had not defeated the Blue team.

In 1976, Michael Rosenberg and I were the reserve pair for the UK team in the Olympiad in Monte Carlo. Unusually the Bermuda Bowl was held immediately before the Olympiad. I went anyway, to watch USA play a top Italian team, including Garozzo, Belladonna and Forquet in the final. I stood at the back of the vugraph room, which was packed with no seats available. USA led by 7 imps when this deal appeared on the screen:

Board 65. Dealer East. Neither side vulnerable.

	♠ A 2	
	♥ K Q J	
	♦ A K J 7	
	♣ A 8 7 5	
♠ 9 5 4		♠ Q J 10 7 3
♥ 7 3		♥ 10
♦ 9 8 6 5 3		♦ 10 2
♣ Q 9 2		♣ K J 6 4 3
	♠ K 8 6	
	♥ A 9 8 6 5 4 2	
	♦ Q 4	
	♣ 10	

West	North	East	South
<i>Forquet</i>	<i>Hamilton</i>	<i>Belladonna</i>	<i>Eisenberg</i>
		Pass	3♥
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♣
Pass	5NT	Pass	6♦
Pass	6♥	Pass	7♥
All Pass			

There had been a break in tempo after the 6♦ bid. Fred Hamilton had considered bidding a grand. The Italians protested, and the director ruled it back to 6♥. USA appealed. Eisenberg stated his partner had looked for a grand slam and he had a seventh heart, an extra queen, and a singleton – how could he hold more? The appeals Committee agreed with him.

It then went to the WBF Executive and Appeals Committee, and they agreed as well. As the Italians stopped in 6NT, the ruling was significant, but fortunately USA won the match by 34 IMPs, more than this contentious result. The Italians had played below their normal form, but Eisenberg was a giant on the stage, and the pundits agreed he played the best of any player in the match. The spell of the Blue team was broken, and they never won another Bermuda Bowl.

Eisenberg won two more Bermuda Bowls, partnering Eddie Kantar in 1977 in Manila, when he played the other USA team in the final and won an exciting match. In 1979, playing with Kantar in Rio, he won again in a photo finish against the Italians, winning on the last board. So Eddie Kantar had his revenge against the Italians.

In 1977 I visited Los Angeles and stayed with Don Krauss, whom I had met and become friends with in Monte Carlo. I spent a week with Don, Billy and Eddie Kantar. They told me amazing bridge stories. I was 27 years old and was mesmerized by it all. Eddie taught me paddle tennis at Venice Beach, and after we played some hands at the side of the court with his friends. A year later I stayed with Billy's sister Karen and her husband Bruce, a professor at San Diego University, and had another week of fun with Billy, Eddie and Don. Billy visited my local bridge club in Glasgow in the late seventies or early eighties. It was a coup to get him there. He gave a seminar to a packed club and took questions from the students.

Everyone there is brainwashed from an early age to play weak notrump at all vulnerabilities. I also played it. Billy hated it, and someone asked him, "Hey, what about weak notrump?" He tried to explain why it was not best. Of course I had to argue its merits with him. In USA I only played strong notrump for many years, until I saw top European players playing ultra weak notrump, 9-12 at favourable in first and second, and followed the trend back in Europe.

In 1991 Maggie and I visited Boca Raton. Billy had moved with his wife Diane there. We were looking for a place for holidays, or maybe we would move in the future. I called Billy and he told me there was a new home being built about fifteen yards from where he lived in a development called Mykonos. We went to see it and took it. A year later it was built. We visited for holidays until 1997 when we moved to USA. Billy helped me get invited to Benito's rubber bridge game. He did not play in it, as who would want to risk their money playing against two of the world's best players, both with strong personalities. Benito and his partner

Lea Dupont had a penthouse apartment in Palm Beach – you could look out on the ocean to give you inspiration if you wished. I played in the game for a number of years. Billy and Benito were great friends and also a formidable bridge partnership. They won the Cap Gemini World Invitational Pairs in 1991 in the Netherlands.

In 1998 Maggie and I were invited to Billy's Hall of Fame party, where we got souvenir hats. He had a man-cave in his house with memorabilia.

We talked about his life back in the sixties and seventies. He told me about Hugh Hefner sending a plane for him on numerous occasions to take him to the Playboy Mansion. There he would play backgammon for huge stakes against celebs who could afford to lose. I am a hopeless backgammon player, but could not get him to teach me. He read a lot of different kinds of books and passed some to me. He always spoke in a way that even if he was perhaps not right, his tone of voice and his argument made him sound like he was right. He talked like a philosopher and there was perhaps a little magic there. He was a special character.

Maggie and I often went out to dinner with Billy and Diane, and Rich Reisig and his wife Raija who was from Finland. Rich was a great friend of Billy who I had met the first time in New York playing in the Cavendish Pairs

Billy spent a lot of time looking after his wife Diane who was not in great health. They moved back to California, and after that I only had contact with him at the Nationals.

Maggie and I visited Los Angeles to see Eddie and his wife Yvonne. They gave us an apartment to stay in, and took us around. Eddie loved his lifestyle. He was a great table tennis player, who also played paddle tennis and tennis. Eddie spent his time working. He wrote many bridge books in a humorous style. He wrote *Bridge for Dummies* in just a few months, to meet a deadline. Eddie wrote masses of teaching material over a number of years, and I have a lot of it. His students just loved him. He said that to make a student enjoy a bridge class you have to make them laugh. For me, he was the world's best ever bridge teacher.

There is a game: who would you like to be, or have been? It would have been fun to be Billy in the sixties and seventies, but if I had to choose between the two, I would pick Eddie. Billy won five Bermuda Bowls and Eddie two – a bridgeplayer from Scotland or even from the United Kingdom has a minute possibility of ever winning one Bermuda Bowl (Michael Rosenberg excepted).

Below is a video of Billy talking, made after his Hall of Fame Award. Some special words of wisdom for serious bridge partnerships come towards the end of the video.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmd7lKemvOg

*Header photo from Sports Illustrated,
May 18, 1975, via bkgm.com*