

Here is the Jeremy Claptrap Story

By: Matthew Ginsberg

At the Bermuda computer bridge championship (note: Championship links can be found at end of this article), I was treated in (in my opinion) an extraordinarily unfair fashion by Al Levy. (Ask Malcolm Pein, for example; he was there.) GIB was disqualified without reason or authority (and subsequently reinstated by the powers that be), my assistant was assaulted (in the precise legal sense) by Al, and a secondary event that I won (the bidding contest) had its \$500 prize money canceled with no explanation. GIB was forced to replay a deal on which it had made a good decision, and so on.

Given this, I decided that GIB would not participate in any event that Al organized. I had little respect for him, and had every belief that any GIB entry in future events would be treated similarly unfairly. GIB did appear, however, inside of Meadowlark Bridge in the 2000 Maastricht event. This was not explained in advance to the contestants, I don't think; the GIB playing engine entered that event pseudonymously with my permission. After the event, when people learned that it had, in fact, been GIB's playing engine that was behind Meadowlark, no one seemed terribly upset.

I thus decided that everyone's interests would be well served by having GIB enter the 2001 contest similarly pseudonymously. I committed to several folks that just as with Maastricht, I would reveal after the fact that GIB had been playing -- whether it did well or poorly. GIB (alias Hoogli) would get a fair shake, which was all I wanted but more than I felt I could practically expect. The computer bridge community itself would benefit from having GIB return to the annual competition; given the public perception of GIB's relative skills, the competitions have been rather lackluster without GIB's inclusion.

Enter Jeremy Claptrap, an established pseudonym used (it is believed) by Morehead in the 30's. Let me point out that pseudonymous behavior is an established part of American life -- authors do it, actors do it, celebrities register in hotels or elsewhere using pseudonyms, etc. I was extremely careful to ensure that nothing I did as Jeremy was illegal. In fact, I went further still. Jeremy provided useful assistance in getting the interface program(me) used in Toronto working. (Among other things, there was an inconsistency about whether notrumps was N or NT that was discovered by me -- as Jeremy -- and would probably have wrought havoc on the event had it not been.) When it became clear that Claptrap was being given a reasonable amount of respect by the other participants, I was careful never to use that respect to further my own ends; Jeremy took no position on any matter on which I had previously expressed a view. I even went so far as to try to make it clear that Jeremy was a pseudonym for *someone*: I used an existing pseudonym. All of the personal details Jeremy provided (starting with his response to the "why Hoogli as a name?" question) were so extraordinarily bizarre that I could not believe that anyone would continue to be taken in. (Nevertheless, some people were.) Even the bidding system Hoogli played was a combination of things that GIB had played in past events and things that had already been selected by other participants; I was being careful not to put any of the other participants to any extra work. (The only person who was put to extra work was Hans Kuijf, but GIB and Jack are doubtless slated to compete at some future date, and Hans has said he didn't mind.) And finally, I jeopardized (and eventually doomed) the whole thing by suggesting that the participants

exchange code so that the table manager could be tested in advance. Making sure that the event came off was more important to me than maintaining the illusion.

I have *never* denied being Jeremy Claptrap. (I've been asked, but I've always simply dodged the question.) In fact, the only thing I did *officially* wrong was that I violated the hotmail terms of service by providing a false postal address (in New Zealand, in keeping with Morehead's original). Microsoft is free to terminate my account. All told, I believe that through Jeremy and his work to get the table manager program working, I actually contributed materially to the success of the event.

So there you have it. In all honesty, I wish it had all worked differently; it would have been nice (for everyone) to have GIB compete. It is clear now that GIB never will compete, and the event itself is in grave danger of dying. That would be a shame.

Matt.