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## Sophomore Tests Mind Power in International Bridge Competitions

December 12, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – While classmates were home for the Thanksgiving holiday, enjoying traditional feasting and relaxation with family, Illinois Wesleyan sophomore Sam Katz spent 10 days competing in the North American Bridge Championships (NABC) in San Francisco.

Katz achieved his personal best in “blue ribbon” pairs competition. His father also competed, placing fourth in “open pairs.”

Whether influenced by nature or nurture, Katz stands to inherit impressive skills: Both of his parents and his grandparents are competitive bridge players. His mother won in national competition at a young age. His grandparents compete regionally, and his father, Ralph — the most successful of the Katz clan — placed second in recent World Team Championships, sponsored by the World Bridge Federation.

Last summer, Sam Katz won a NABC Mini-Spingold team event in Nashville, Tenn. Before enrolling at IWU, he competed in World Bridge Federation contests in Thailand and in Verona, Italy.

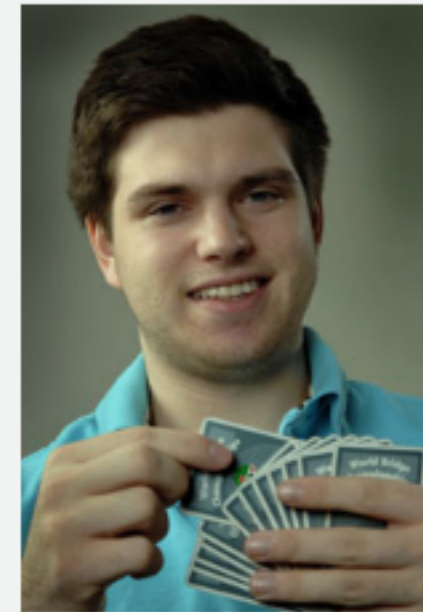
Katz explains his enjoyment of the card game by quoting his dad, who says, “You never stop learning in bridge, because there are so many hands and so many things you can do.”

A Hinsdale Township Central High School graduate and resident of Burr Ridge, Ill., Katz is majoring in economics at Illinois Wesleyan with a minor in math. The analysis of probabilities that he enjoys in his math studies relates directly to the mental competition of bridge.

“It really uses your mind,” Katz said. “You think and visualize all the cards in everyone’s hands. You can figure out what they have from what they’ve played.”

According to Katz, the difficulty of analyzing opponents’ possible actions makes success in the game rewarding. It’s a mental challenge simply to avoid mistakes, even harder to make a great play, he said. “There are infinite possibilities of what you can do. When you do something right, it makes you feel good.”

Though Katz said his college studies occupy most of the attention he might otherwise devote to honing his bridge skills, by studying books or challenging opponents online, he still hopes to qualify for one of the teams competing in the World Mind Sports Games in October 2008, following the Olympic Games in Beijing, China. He’ll vie for a spot during team trials next summer in Las Vegas.



*Sam Katz*

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