

Conrad Woodring UK National Diplomacy Champion 2025 runner up

A Masterclass in Losing Gracefully

When I was asked to write a “second fiddle” article for the UK National Diplomacy Championships in Warrington, I had to wonder: Does this mean I’m improving, or just getting luckier? I suspect it’s the latter. But let’s break down how one can lose with style and dignity to the relentless charm of Mr. Dan Lester.

As I’ve aged in this hobby, I’ve lost a few things—like reaction time—and gained others, like humility and a healthy respect for my own limitations. I’ve been playing Diplomacy since WDC 2000 in Hunt Valley, Maryland (yes, my very first game was at the World Championships—go big or go home, right?). Back in the 2000s, I could think on the fly, adapt mid-negotiation, and keep track of all 34 pieces and the web of lies I’d spun. These days, whether it’s age or rust, I just can’t do that anymore.

To compensate, I’ve adopted a more minimalist approach: fewer choices, modest objectives, shorter games, and a BAC below 0.02%. That last one’s negotiable.

Round 1: Turkey, Drawn and Done

I drew Turkey and partnered with Bernard Andrioli (Austria). He wanted to keep playing to boost his score, and I said, “Sure, I’ll help.” A few turns later, he’d had enough, and we voted the draw in Fall 1906. There were plenty of centers left for me to grab, but why bother? The board top was secure, no one objected, and my eight-center Turkey earned best Turkey and top score for the round. Efficient, if not flashy.

Round 2: France vs. Lester’s Italy

This one was a treat. The game ended in a 9-9-8-8 split, with Dan sharing the board top with my German ally. But the real joy was getting inside Dan’s head.

In Fall 1901, I built Fleet Marseille without telling Dan. When he asked about my intentions, I told him it wasn’t his business. Predictably, he sent all four units west—exactly as I’d hoped. During negotiations, I told him, “Dan, it’s always a weak move for France to run south on Italy early. You might get one center if you’re lucky. I built that fleet and played coy to bait you. It was a test—and you failed.” I sprinkled in some philosophical Star Wars wisdom for good measure. Dan later acknowledged the misstep. To the eastern powers, I said, “You’re welcome. I pulled Dan out of position—enjoy your two-move lead.”

Of course, Dan still won. Because even with a two-move handicap, he’s that good.

Round 3: Russia, Fast and Furious

I drew Russia, Dan drew France. I didn't find a way to get inside his head this time, but when we voted the draw, I was on 13 centers and Cameron Taylor's Italy had 11. Afterward, I overheard Dan lamenting, "It was just too fast. There was nothing I could do." Someone else claimed Dan said I was not only good at the game but also smart and funny. I didn't hear it myself, but I'm sure it's completely true. Dan's nice like that.

Round 4: The Final Dance

By Round 4, I felt I had a decent psychological edge over Dan (despite losing to him in Round 2). The game settled into a 9-9-9-7-ish split, with FG squabbling in the west and IR in the east. I had a solid rapport with Italy and felt confident he wouldn't stab me. I kept enough force in position to respond just in case.

Then Dan did what Dan does: he convinced Italy to move west on me. I locked down Marseille, MAO, and Spain so Italy could not make any progress. Italy was out of position, and Dan executed a flawless four-center stab to secure the win.

Final Thoughts

I played four solid games without doing anything particularly remarkable. Dan deserved to finish ahead of me—his play (and probably many others') was simply better. But I did well enough to reach the top board, and for that, I'm content.

The UK Hobby: Back and Booming

This year's event in Warrington proved one thing: the UK Diplomacy scene is back! So far in 2025, 78 players have played face-to-face across 34 boards. 38 players have played two or more games—up from just six boards in all of 2023!

The UK contingent heading to EDC in Leiden this November will be the largest ever at a non-UK EDC. The London club has hosted six games with 27 unique players. Diplomacy returned to ManorCon this summer. To quote Stephen Agar "Things are happening, this is exciting!"

Behind the scenes, a dedicated leadership team is driving this revival. So if you're excited about what's happening, give thanks to those rebuilding the hobby:

Bradley Grace – Tour of Britain, Warrington NDC

- Chris Woolgar – Spire Con
- Garry Sturley – Tour of Britain
- George Mork – London Diplomacy Club
- Dan Lester – ManorCon

And although they are not organizers, we cannot forget the contributions of Stephen Agar, Toby Harris, Jeremy Tullett, and Andrew Yang.

Watch this space. Reach out if you want to be part of the journey.

- Website: www.Diplomacy.co.uk
- Newsletter: www.patreon.com/ukdiplomacy

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