

David Hood World Diplomacy Championship San Francisco 2025 Bronze Medal

I Finished Where, Again? By David Hood

The 2025 World Dipcon in San Francisco was truly one of the most successful events I have ever attended. And that's saying something. I started attending Dip tournaments, well, a long time ago. The numbers and experiences were awesome - 105 players, 51 total boards of Diplomacy, informative hobby meeting with a wonderful promo for the 2026 in Athens, the first batch of Diplomacy trading cards released, and much more. Adam Silverman led a great team of organizers and other volunteers in putting on what was just a tremendously enjoyable weekend of gaming, socializing, and meeting new folk.

Importantly, we also had a very deserving WDC winner, Noam Brown, about whom much no doubt will be written concerning his domination of two boards in the qualifying rounds and how these scores propelled him to a whisker above second place finisher Adam Sigal. The tournament had its last round structured as a "Champions Pool" featuring the top 21 players after the first three rounds, with one's score in that last round being multiplied by 150% to advantage those 21 for achieving overall tournament victory. Adam had scored a solo victory on one of his qualifying boards, and thus was in a strong position going into the Champions Pool game as part of Round 4.

Enough about Noam winning though. Or even about Adam coming in second. Who cares? The only topic anyone should want to discuss is how and why I ended up taking third. It's by far the biggest news Facing the Book of Twittering Instaverts under the Discordant Blue Sky of our Social Media Planet X. Or at least that's how I Redd-it. So, let's discuss.

As a longtime Dip tournament organizer, I can tell you that the bane of our existence is the fact that we cannot just handle any random number of interested players for a tournament round. The bloody numbers have to be in bloody multiples of seven, otherwise you got problems. Sure, you can recruit one or more people to play two boards at the same time, but that affects one or both games in a negative way, for sure, and it certainly affects those two-boarded players themselves. Not ideal. You can force the extras to drop even if they traveled long and hard to get to your tournament. Not ideal.

No, the real solution is to have folk who are genuinely willing to add or drop to your numbers in order to get to those neat sets of seven. So for many decades, I have volunteered to do that because it's really helpful to the TDs. Plus, I very much enjoy playing other board games so there is almost always something useful for me to do when sitting out a round. Just like I did in Round One of this event. I had a spectacularly fun time Friday night playing the party game Just One with several of Adam's family members and others.

Would have been fine with me to play other games all day on Saturday too, but that was not to be. Adam needed me, turns out, for both rounds that day so I got to work. In my Round 2 game I had a gamelong alliance with Katie Benn where we each finished on 10. Solid result but not great given the shared board top. Then in Round 3 I had a gamelong alliance with Spyros Dovas, which I can honestly say was one of the best experiences I have had playing the game, no disrespect to Kat who was also a great partner. Spyros and I ran AI from the beginning, with my Austria ending up at 11 centers on top of that board at the end.

Given that I had only played two rounds, I assumed that many others would have had better scores on the best 2 of 3 rounds that made up the qualifying rules for the Champions Pool. So I went Sunday morning to Adam to confirm that he did not need me to play, assuming that I would finally have a chance to play some Ark Nova or something. The boy wouldn't even let me get a word out, shutting me down with a hand wave and: "No, Hood, you're playing. You made the top 21."

So I sat down on that final board with an absolutely stellar cast of players. It was my Germany facing Riaz Virani in England, Ben Kellman in France, Brandon Fogel as the Italian, Adam Sigal in Austria, Mikalis Kamaritis as the Turk, and Jake Mannix playing Russia. I did not know this, of course, but three of us would end up taking 2nd, 3rd and 4th overall just from this one board. These are all great guys whom I knew reasonably well prior to this game, whether from past playing them or from past analysis of their play on DBN.

One advantage I may have had here was that I knew Jake, from many years ago when he was more active, whereas the others probably did not (other than perhaps Adam.) That would turn out to matter later.

Out of the gate I was interested in a strong alliance with either Ben or Riaz, and both were receptive. When Riaz committed strongly by ordering to the Channel and Wales, that was going to seal it for me because I love early commitment in an alliance partner. I was EG all the way until two things happened. 1) Brandon showed no interest whatsoever in going to Piedmont because he wanted to participate with all his units, and come out ahead in if he could, the dismemberment of tournament leader Adam. 2) Jake built in St Pete even after we made a deal where he would not do that if I left him alone in Sweden. So, France would be a slower take down with England distracted about Norway and no pressure at all from Italy.

So, I decided to pivot into an FG with Ben, which was always an option anyway because I thought he was mainly a strong alliance player like I am. We proceeded to cooperate on everything, completely, from that point forward... up to the very last move of the game. Hush, we'll get to that.

So Ben and I had a discussion in 1902 about what happens once England is gone. I answered, totally truthfully, that I would then turn against Jake and he would go into the Med. I was not expecting to do it right then, of course, but then Riaz made a proposal I could not say no to for Fall 02. He supported me out of the North Sea into Norway and wanted a junior partner type relationship after that. It worked, and allowed me to build two and then convoy into Livonia in early 1903. Awesomeness.

Unfortunately for Ben, Brandon had started sending stuff west in 1903 as well, so there was a war between them while I tried my best to take out Russian dots as quickly as I could. Brandon got the jump by taking Marseilles, and was really looking good in the east as well because he and Jake had dropped the hammer on Mikalis right after Adam was basically destroyed in the Balkans (he retreated into Tyl and then took my Mun, which he would win until the very last move of the game as a janissary for me.) Hush, we'll get to that.

So the turning point of the game came when I got a build from something in Russia and idiotically tried to build an army in Munich when it was, of course, owned instead by Austria. As Brandon told me later, I kinda went on tilt for a few minutes. I immediately called for a draw vote, with Brandon ahead of me 10 to 9, to end the game before I made any other dumb mistakes. I actually thought everyone would likely agree to it and I would, if I had the time, finally go play my game of Ark Nova.

Instead, Brandon himself publicly vetoed the draw because he thought he needed more centers in order to possibly win the whole enchilada. I frankly, even now, think his decision was a legitimate one.

He could not be sure what he would need to score in order to win, and there were potentially a lot more centers to take.

Then in a flash it occurred to me I could use this. I helpfully pointed out to Jake that it was HIS centers that Brandon could most easily take to pad his center count. Had the virtue of being totally true. Now, Brandon has kicked himself for doing his veto publicly, but I will dissent from his self-criticism by saying that he would have been the most likely private veto candidate anyway if Jake thought about it (and I would have helped him think about it.) So I suspect that Brandon was in a no-win scenario here once I made that proposal and it was vetoed. Jake immediately turned against Brandon, which I thought made sense anyway frankly because he eventually got to 8 centers before losing some back to me later.

Brandon tried to pivot to save his game by withdrawing some from the French front, retreating his MAO fleet to North Africa, for example, thinking that perhaps if he stabilized the Russian front he could come back to contest the board top later. Problem was - who was watching me? Eventually Russia did pivot back against me, which led me (after consultation with Mikalis Kamaritis, whose Diplomacy instincts I deeply trust) to make the consequential decision to just take every center I could at one time and then call for a draw vote to hope that action demoralized everyone into saying yes.

It worked. One from France in Liverpool, one from Russia in Warsaw, and the lonely Austrian center in Munich. I hated killing Adam (I did not know at the time that he would have won the tournament for sure had I kept him alive) but I felt I had only the one chance to get the board top before some combination of Italy, Russia and France made progress against me should the game have kept going.

So, did I really want to play Diplomacy last weekend? Honestly I was fine either way, but I certainly enjoyed myself when I did. That last game was a humdinger, as we say in the country. I would never have thought I played well enough to come in third, but a blind squirrel finds a nut every now and then. And, I get the bonus benefits of being able to claim that I a) screwed over Adam from his victory, one of my closest Dip friends in this hobby, and b) edged Brandon out of third by one-half of a point, ANOTHER of my closest Dip friends in this hobby. So what more could I have asked for.

The ribbing of both shall continue for the foreseeable future.

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