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How I (successfully) defended my second place in the French NDC

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Never won the french Championship

I've been around the Diplomacy scene for a long time (I started back in 1991). I first played casually, then quickly tried tournament play (the French scene was very active in the mid-nineties), and after a few years I even managed to win a few, but not before I finished 5 times second in a tournament. My nickname at the time was "Poulidor", a famous French bicycle racer who collected 8 podiums in "Tour de France"... but never won it. Around the same time I also got involved in the organisation. Between 2001 & 2005 I organized the French NDC, which at the time was a really large tournament (usually more than 100 players), so this tournament always had a special tone for me. But incidentally, at the time I was at my peak sportively, I could NOT compete in this tournament, since I was TDing it. In the end, this is probably the biggest hole in my palmarès : I never won the French NDC.

Championnat de France 2024 Runner up

Last year, after a long pause (7 years), I came back to Diplomacy for the WDC in Milano. This was an absolute blast, with a mix of old timers - friends and very strong newcomers - and new friends. I instantly got hooked again, and played a few more, including the French NDC last year and this year. On both occasions I didn't come highly motivated to win it, but if an opportunity would present I would certainly play it!

So last year, the tournament was held in an hotel in the center of Paris - very good for socializing in between games. And I did. Maybe a little too much ... we finished the party at 6 am on the Friday "evening". The tournament had 3 rounds, Saturday morning and afternoon and then another one on Sunday. I was so tired that I decided to skip the first round. I came in the afternoon to "make numbers", make sure there is 1 more player. And also do my best. I played a tough game as England, allied with Christophe Borgeat's Germany. At one point he was much ahead and I thought I would help him win the race against the South. But then he got in trouble and things went better for me so that eventually he was actually the one who helped me top the board.

With the scoring system (a variant of C-Diplo) topping the board is actually a MUCH BETTER result than anything else. So since the tournament was small (22 players), and no-one had 2 tops after 2 rounds there was actually a chance I could win it all, but for that I would have to get another top (possible) and wake up in time (more difficult...) I did manage to wake up, and entered the next with only 1 agenda : top the board and then hope that's enough. I ended with Turkey. In 1903 I went up to 7 and was topping for the first time, so I proposed the draw... Russia vetoed that draw. The year after I took 3 centers from him. In 1905, I was up to 11, so I proposed the draw again. Italy vetoed that draw. The year after I took 4 centers from him. In 1906 at 15 I proposed the draw... and surprisingly nobody vetoed. I had a very large win and actually I didn't need all those centers to top that board.

The problem is I was monitoring the other board, where Maaïke Blom was also doing very good for herself. Maaïke had so far an elimination (worth $\frac{1}{2}$ point) and a top (with 1 more center than me). So if she topped as well all she needed was 14, since it would place her $\frac{1}{2}$ ahead of me (thanks to her actually playing the first round, contrary to me). In the last year, she managed to get the 3 centers she needed and win it all. Fantastic! I made it complicated for her but she managed anyway, good for her (and for the hobby).

CDF 2025 Round 3 : Russia

So that brings us to this year's French NDC. It was in a beautiful setting, in a winery this time far from Paris. Initially, my schedule made it impossible to come, since I was supposed to go on holidays from Paris the day after in a group of 12, and I was one of the drivers/owner of a car. But I managed to convince 3 persons in the group to drive 1 day earlier, so we can stop at the French NDC which actually was almost on the way (the winery aspect was a big selling point). None of them had played Diplomacy but I managed to convince one of them to play (a bit disappointed I thought I would do better). When we arrived, already 2 rounds had been played. So it was round 3 of 4. So once again I had no particular expectation... except to play as good as I can in my game. I draw Russia, one of my favorite countries, because it has many neighbours so many diplomatic possibilities. I ended up allying with everybody on the board. Which is good... but also not so good (you need to disappoint someone if you want to grow). In the North, I ended up in a 3 way alliance against England, with both Germany & France having plan to stab the other one and keep me. In the South, I ended up in a RAT with me doing basically nothing except giving advice and my good will to their plans. In 1902 I took Norway (up to 7). In 1903, I stabbed Turkey and took Con (up to 8), with Ank & Smy pretty open. At that point I was topping the board so I proposed the draw (just to see if I can actually pull it). To my great surprise they did accept this time! The nice thing about it is that it meant I would spend time with the 2 other person in my car, who had to wait since they were not playing Diplomacy.

CDF 2025 Round 4 : Austria

Normally, the plan was to leave on the Monday morning (since it was Bastille Day, the tournament last round was on a Monday). But there was only 12 people for that round and the organisers asked me and the friend who played the day before if we could play again to make it 14. After negotiation with the rest of the crew (a negotiation which involved a few bottle of wine from the wineries as "Souvenir"), we agreed to play that last round. I drew Austria, with 3 players that were on my board the day before in RIA. They all attacked me from the start. Italy especially was England on my Sunday board, and he lied to me every single turn and attacked me relentlessly. In 1902 I managed to turn Russia. I told him I was not defending Vienna (and I didn't and he took it). I explained him I could not defend everywhere and I wanted his good will. Luckily for me he was stabbed by Turkey the same turn, and we actually played together for the rest of the game. We were both in bad condition, me on 3 and him having lost Rumania and with Turkey in Black Sea. I ended up on 3 after guessing correctly 6 times in a row (Italy was pretty mad about it). There was a draw proposal in 1904. I accepted since there was no way I could win, and all I was doing was defending. England topped that board easily.

CDF 2025 Runner up

So it was time for the final results. At that point I learned how the tournament score was actually

calculated: someone with 4 games would receive a 100%, 100%, 50% & 10% multiplier to his best results respectively. With only 2 games both would count 110%. I had not done any math at all, but I ended up 2nd. I successfully defended my Poulidor title! And the friend I had convinced to play for his first ever tournament ended up 3rd (he was even awarded a "Seedling" title as "Young promising newcomer" – he is 53 years old ^^). Actually apart Christophe who had a very clear lead, it was extremely close between second and 5th place. 1.5 points. About 1 SC.

I'm happy I stopped on the way, I had an excellent time and all the players were very friendly. It's a pity there wasn't more because Gabriel did a lot to make that event friendly and enjoyable. And I came back with 3 cases of wine & a cubitainer for the rest of our holidays.

I'm not sure I would get better results if I were actually trying to win it (for instance by attending all the rounds). Maybe I should try next year ^^.

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