

The Champions Corner is where recent tournament winners share a specific move or strategy that they believe helped them to emerge victorious.

This week we welcome Adam Silverman, winner of Weasel Moot 2023 and bearer of the coveted title "Alpha Weasel". I have many fond memories of Weasel Moots over the years, going back to my first visit in 2010 where I played in the team round along with two Weasels under the name "Bangor's Finest", to playing on the top board at the incredible 2016 World DipCon immortalized in Chris Martin's brilliant analysis videos, to this past year's incarnation, where I somehow found myself ending up as the Alpha Weasel.

So, how did I get here? In Diplomacy we're told that there are no universal truisms, no sure-fire paths to victory. But we do hear over and over some tenets of tournament play that can help with success. I thought I'd share how these nuggets of wisdom played out for me over the course of my three games.

Tenet #1 - Don't be the tournament leader after the first round.

The conventional wisdom goes something like this: A tournament is a marathon, not a sprint. If you get off to too fast a start, you're going to fizzle out by the end. You want a good foundational score in round 1, but not something so high that it will attract attention of people playing the tournament meta in the next round. Rounds 2 and 3 are where you go for the big results. This is certainly a truism that your ally in round 1 will keep reminding you.

I drew England in round 1 and got off to a rapid start, playing a very aggressive opening with France for a fast take-down of Germany that found us owning the German home centers at the end of 1903 and across the stalemate line by 1904. Or, more accurately, it was my French ally who had crossed the stalemate line, and was getting ready to take Warsaw and Italian dots. France had pitched to me earlier on that we stick together for a shared board top at 13+ centers each - that would get us both the solid but not outrageously good result that one should aim for in the first round. Except while France had rapid growth potential, I had just finished taking out the north and would have to go through the slow process of convoying armies over Norway or through Denmark to get units into play.

I believed France was genuine in his offer for a split board top. But I couldn't be sure, and he was asking for concessions that made me nervous. "You don't need to keep a fleet in the North Sea." "You should convoy through Norway, not Denmark." I also thought I had a shot at a big result if I made a move at the right time. France was way overextended. Ultimately, I would need to make some guesses, but if those worked out and the east continued their squabbling, it could be a very big result. But more importantly, the stab was no risk to me since the north was locked up. Here's the critical turn:

I realized as time wrapped up on the critical turn that I had forgotten to ask Austria to go to Munich; he acknowledged afterwards that he would have if asked. This turned out to be a critical mistake, and this along with a missed guess following France's F Bre rebuild led to me getting stopped at 12; still a big score in Open Tribute. So much for tenet #1 - I had the biggest round 1 score, and at the end of the morning round I found myself as the tournament leader.

Tenet #2 - Never leave dots on the board that you can take.

Last year's Whipping, the tournament I direct every year in California, was won by 0.6 points - less than one center. As the wisdom goes, if you can take a dot, you should take the dot, or you might regret it later.

I drew Russia in round 2, a power I feel less confident with than the eastern or central nations, and I had the player with the second highest round 1 score next to me in Austria. Opening the game, I felt

that I could find one or more allies in the south, but I had concerns about the EG alliance that seemed to be forming. Germany pulled me aside in fall 01 and made two propositions. One, he wanted me to build F StP(nc) in 1901. Two, he wanted me to take Norway from Sweden in 02 and give him Sweden. The proposal was barely out of his mouth before I accepted, and it led to the start of what was a game-long RG alliance. I actually never took another dot in the north after the Nwy/Swe trade, but I was able to influence the west dramatically and ensure that no power gained dominance in that theater.

Meanwhile, in the south, Austria and I locked up Turkey, then Italy and I took down Austria followed by Turkey, while I encouraged Italy to get engaged in the west as much as possible, minimizing his unit commitment in the east.

RGI coordinated throughout the midgame. Italy wanted a shared board top, while Germany didn't seem to care much. When Turkey was finally eliminated the position looked basically like this (a mistake in the recording fails to show that Germany had taken Edi from Nth and build in Mun):

I was leading the board at 10 centers and I had some decisions to make. My growth at this point was through Italian dots, with Smy, Gre, Ser, and Tri all looking very takeable to me. With the great round 1 result, a 14+ center round 2 would be tremendous. Except that moving against Italy here would be very different than the stab I made in round 1. There's no impunity in the stab here. If Germany panics about me getting too strong, things can get really rough really quickly. My position is good, but not so good that I can't get pushed back. So, I propose a draw over the table. The Italian player frowns and begins to protest, then after a brief discussion takes a good look at the position and accepts. Maybe I left some dots on the table. But then again, maybe I ended it right when I needed to.

Tenet #3 - There is no luck in the game of Diplomacy

Diplomacy has no dice, no cards, it's just a pure battle of wits and strategy and tactics, right? Okay, okay, so no one actually believes this one, and for me, the luck of the draw undeniably played a role in my tournament win.

I recall a game at a World DipCon many many years ago, in the final qualifying round before the top board, that started with a player, assigned Germany, walking up to the board and announcing in a booming voice, "I need a huge result here to make the top board." I personally had some very good results in the previous rounds and thought a 5 or 6 center survival would be sufficient to qualify. Playing England, I approached the French player and opened my negotiations with "So it sounds like Germany is looking for a huge result. Personally, I need a small result. Want to work together?" The rest of the story tells itself.

Back to Moot; despite possibly leaving a trove of dots on the table in round 2, I find myself with an even bigger target on my back going into the final round. I'm leading, and by a significant margin. But narrow enough that if I'm eliminated there are 5 or 6 people who can beat me with 9-12 center board tops. If I survive, I'm almost uncatchable without someone getting to 15+ in the timed round.

At board call I hear my name on Board 2. Italy. By far the best possible draw in my situation. The hardest country to kill out of the gate. I knew that surviving through the game wouldn't be easy, but I had a fighting chance. Had it been Austria or Turkey, I know my chances of survival would have been near zero. I thought that if I could survive the opening, I could diplomatically manage the board and the clock would ultimately work in my favor. When I saw the rest of the board, I was even more pleased with the draw. While France, Russia, and Turkey were all players in contention, Austria was not. My opening negotiation with Austria, "I just need a survival. Russia and Turkey both need huge results. How do you think you'll end up if you throw your lot in with them? What are your goals for the

game? Work with me, and I'll help you get what you want."

It was a good pitch, and the rest is history. Fast forward to call time and Austria locks up Best Austria with 11 centers, France tops with 13 centers, and my Italy is holding the Med line with 6. It was just the result I needed to secure the tournament win.

I'm not sure there's a lesson or moral here, but for me I think the old tenets of Diplomacy success really come down to this: In each game, work toward the result that you want. Go for it when it's there, get it over with when it's not. And maybe... if luck favors you... you'll find yourself in position to control your own destiny and succeed in getting the job done.

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