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Hall of Fame

Who's up?
Who's in?

Player of
the Decade

**Jeff
Meckstroth**
(Again!)

Soloway KO
Blass vs. Nickell



Biuletyn ACBL jest dostępny wyłącznie dla zawodników ACBL z aktualnie opłaconą składką. PZBS zwrócił się z uprzejmą prośbą do ACBL o udostępnienie do publikacji części dotyczącej Jacka "Pepsi" Pszczoły i miło nam poinformować, że do tej prośby się przychylnono.

Życzę miłej lektury,
Marcin Wasłowicz (-)

PS

W przypadku gdyby ktoś miał czas i chęci przetłumaczenia tekstu na język polski proszę o kontakt na adres marcin.waslowicz@pzbs.pl.

Effervescent Success

Jacek “Pepsi” Pszczola is Player of the Year

BY CHIP DOMBROWSKI



Jacek “Pepsi” Pszczola is the 2019 Player of the Year. The Paul Soloway Trophy is awarded annually to the person who amasses the most platinum points, won in NABC+ events. Pepsi won most of his platinum points in team events, playing on the Blass team, which has had a phenomenal run over the past year and change – winning three major events, placing second in a fourth and reaching the quarterfinals in a fifth. The team consists of Dutch players Sjoert Brink and Bas Drijver; Jacek Kalita and Michal Nowosadzki of Poland; Pepsi and, when he’s well enough to play, captain Josef Blass of Chapel Hill NC.

In the six-man lineup, Pepsi plays with Blass. But Blass has been ill and played only two major events the past two years: the 2018 Spingold and the 2019 Vanderbilt. The rest of the time they’ve played as a team of five, with Kalita splitting his time between playing with Pepsi and Nowosadzki.

The change has worked out well for the team. As a five-bagger, they won the 2018 Reisinger, the 2019 Spingold and the inaugural Soloway KO (see story, pg. 19). They capped the year off with a second-place finish in the Reisinger.

“It was mainly thanks to my teammates,” Pepsi said, noting that three of them played all the boards. “Every one of them gave something. I think they all deserve to be named Player of the Year.

“We won the Reisinger [in 2018] in Honolulu on the last board. After that, it was much easier.”

In team events, they earned 752.73 platinum points in 2019, taking the top five spots on the leader list. But one event put Pepsi over the top. He played the von Zedtwitz Life Master Pairs with Jared Lilienstein, placing fifth. ➤

Where Pszczola earned his platinum points in 2019

Event	Place	Points
Vanderbilt KO Teams	5-8	80.00
Jacoby Open Swiss Teams	17	22.73
von Zedtwitz Life Master Pairs	5	81.43
Spingold KO Teams	1	250.00
Soloway KO Teams	1	250.00
Reisinger BAM Teams	2	150.00
Total		834.16

That brought Pepsi's platinum haul to 834.16.

In Josef Blass's lone outing last year, the Vanderbilt, the team lost a close quarterfinal match to the eventual winners, giving the Wolfson team their toughest match en route to the title. Blass was also playing when they won the Jacoby Open Swiss Teams in 2018. He kept in close contact with the team during the events he sat out, Pepsi said while spending the holidays in Poland. "Josef wasn't present but he was with us all the time. He was for sure a very big part of the team's success this year."

Pepsi has won eight NABC titles and two world championships, including the 2017 Bermuda Bowl, when he played with Michael Rosenberg on Marty Fleisher's team.

Pepsi, 52, was born in Lublin, Poland, a major city with a substantial student population, 100 miles southeast of Warsaw. "Nobody in my family knew what bridge was," he said. When he was 12, he learned the game at a youth camp and then played with friends during high school. By the time he was at the university in Lublin, where he earned a master's degree in engineering, he had made Poland's Junior national team.

He won his first world championship, the World Open Pairs, in 1998, with Michal Kwiecien. Commentators in Lille were unable to pronounce his formidable last name and changed it to Pepsicola, which originated his nickname.

The following year, Sam Lev helped him begin playing in the United States.

He started playing on George Rosenkranz's team with Piotr Gawrys, with whom he won his first NABC title in 2001. He later played with Lev on Reese Milner's team, and then on the Jim Mahaffey and Mark Gordon teams before

joining with Blass the past four years.

"It's a great joy playing with him," Blass said. "He's extremely self-assured. It makes an impression on opponents, and he's treated with incredible respect by all. He's a great teammate. There's a very good atmosphere on the team. He's liked by everyone. He truly deserves it."

Blass, the inventor of the 401(k) retirement plan, was once nominated for a Nobel Prize in economics. He and Pepsi met 15 years ago and have developed 250 pages of system notes. "He's an extremely smart man," Pepsi said. "He's so nice and he works so much on bridge." Blass has recently finished chemotherapy and may return to playing in Columbus.

Pepsi and his wife, Olga, live in Chapel Hill. They have a son, Jakub, in college and two daughters, Zuzanna

and Szymon, in high school.

"It's absolutely amazing," Pepsi said of winning Player of the Year. "I'm so happy about it."

Here is Pepsi in action during the quarterfinal of the Soloway KO versus the Spector team (Warren Spector, Gavin Wolpert, Vincent Demuy, John Kranyak, John Hurd, Joel Wooldridge).

Dlr: North	♠ A 8 5 3		
Vul: E-W	♥ 2		
	♦ 8 6 4 2		
	♣ 9 8 7 6		
	♠ 10 6 4		♠ Q 9 7
	♥ Q 10 9 4 3		♥ K 8 5
	♦ K J 10		♦ A 9
	♣ 5 2		♣ A K J 10 4
			♠ K J 2
			♥ A J 7 6
			♦ Q 7 5 3
			♣ Q 3

West	North	East	South
Kalita	Kranyak	Pepsi	Demuy
	Pass	1♣	Dbf
1♦ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

(1) Four or five hearts

South led a low diamond. Pepsi overtook the 10 with his ace and led the ♥K. When it held, he continued the ♥8. When South ducked again, Pepsi let it ride, and North discarded the ♦8. Demuy, who was then leading the Player of the Year race, won the third heart and switched to the ♠J. Kranyak won the ace and returned a spade to his partner's king, at which point Pepsi claimed the rest of the tricks.

At the other table, Wolpert and Spector stopped in 2NT. The play started similarly with Wolpert overtaking the diamond and advancing the ♥K followed by the ♥8. But on the second heart, Wolpert went up with the queen to take the losing club finesse. Brink got out with a low spade and Drijver returned a spade to his partner's ♠K J. Brink cashed two hearts to set the contract one. ■

Player of the Year leaders

1. Jacek Pszczola, Chapel Hill NC	834.16
2. Sebastiaan Drijver, Switzerland	752.73
Michal Nowosadzki, Poland	752.73
Sjoert Brink, Switzerland	752.73
Jacek Kalita, Poland	752.73
6. Ralph Katz, Burr Ridge IL	655.03
7. Michael Becker, Boca Raton FL	653.24
8. Nick Nickell, New York NY	652.91
9. Jeff Meckstroth, Clearwater Beach FL	617.08
10. Vincent Demuy, Palm Beach Gardens FL	590.31
11. Robert Levin, Henderson NV	575.03
Steve Weinstein, Montclair NJ	575.03
13. Dennis Bilde, Denmark	572.62
14. Roger Lee, Las Vegas NV	567.28
15. Eric Rodwell, Clearwater FL	562.53