



## NGS Myths



by Michael Clark



THE EBU's National Grading Scheme has been with us for more than two years now and most people find it both fun and interesting. We do hear some criticism, but it often has a root in a few common misunderstandings, which we hope this article will clear up for you.

### Myth 1: You're disadvantaged when you play with a weak partner

We hear this one quite a lot. Someone will claim that they no longer want to play with poor Mr P, who hasn't scored above 50% since the late sixties, because it will damage their NGS grading. However, they're worrying about nothing. If both players are correctly graded, then it doesn't matter what the individual strengths are – the NGS takes this into consideration.

The maths is quite simple: if Mr P is graded 30, you're graded 50, and you're playing in a field of average strength (50), then your expected score will be just 40%. If you do better than this, your grade will go up; if you do worse your grade will go down.

The NGS should actually make you more keen to play with Mr P. In the old days you had nothing tangible to gain from playing with him – you were unlikely to win any master points or beer vouchers. With the NGS, though, you have a real goal to aim for and can take some pride in eking out a well-earned 42%, to improve both your grades.

**The facts: In 2013 there were 1450 incidences of a 60+ player partnering someone with a grade below 45. In 49.7% of those sessions their grade went up.**

### Myth 2: You're disadvantaged playing with an irregular partner

This is another common one and it sticks around because there is some truth to it. If you play only with regular partners you will clearly have a higher grade than someone of the same ability who plays only

with pick-up partners. But *how much* does this matter? We estimate that the difference is about 2% between the two ends of the spectrum, so that means that if you suddenly play with a new partner, having only played with regular partners previously, and your new partner is in the same position, you'll need to get about 4% more than usual to break even.

But this is extreme. In reality you'll play with a range of partners, some more regular than others, and your partner-forming habits will already be built into your NGS grade. When you play with the newer partners, you'll be a tiny bit disadvantaged, but when you go back to playing with the regular partners you'll be correspondingly rewarded.

It should also be noted that there is a provision in the NGS for hosts/mentors to exempt themselves, so if you are worried about this you can choose to take up this option by letting the director know before the session starts. Of course, you're not allowed to change your mind if you happen to do well!

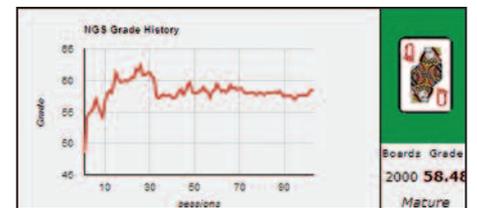
**The facts: In 2013 there were 80,000 partnerships who had played fewer than 50 boards together. Almost exactly 50% of those partnerships improved their grade.**

### Myth 3: Your grade is always 100% accurate

### Myth 4: Your grade never changes relative to other players

As much as we'd like to think otherwise, there is still a lot of luck in bridge. You don't always score exactly what you're expected to score. Some weeks you get a lot of gifts and your mistakes don't cost; other weeks you can't seem to do a thing

right. Your NGS grade will naturally fluctuate around your true grade, and we estimate that the standard deviation is about 2%. This means that most of the time your grade will be within one grade band of your true grade; sometimes it will be two grade bands out, but more extreme cases will be rare. Here's an example graph of a regular player's grade over time. You can see yours by logging into the members area and clicking 'NGS Info' on the right.



As you can see, once this player's grade had settled down it was fairly stable, fluctuating up and down between 57% and 60%. This is completely natural, so don't worry too much if your grade is going down – it might be a normal down-swing. And remember: the further down it goes, the easier it will be to go back up again.

One complaint we sometimes hear goes like this: 'I'm better than so-and-so, but their grade is 1% higher than mine. This proves that the NGS doesn't work.' Of course, the usual answer is that you're not really better than so-and-so, but if you genuinely are then this is likely just a normal fluctuation – 1% is not a significant amount. Maybe you're on a down-swing, and they're on an up-swing. In time you'll both go back towards your true grades and your pride will be restored.

For more information on how the NGS works, there is a brief introduction and a full guide on our website, so please visit <https://www.ebu.co.uk/ngs>

## NGS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF TEAM GAMES

THE EBU will soon start processing teams games for the NGS, using the cross-IMPs that the scoring program calculates. There are some restrictions and software requirements, so interested clubs should check our website for more information.

