

John_Binh Boston Massacre 2024 winner

The Champions Corner is where recent tournament winners share a specific move or strategy that helped them emerge victorious. This week we welcome John Bihn, winner of this year's Boston Massacre!

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The Only Way

"The only way to learn is by playing, the only way to win is by learning, and the only way to begin is by beginning." – Sam Reich, host of Game Changer

I adore the Champions Corner as an opportunity to hear first-hand how prominent names like Zach Moore, Nicolas Sahuguet, and Karthik Konath use their years of expertise to dominate prestigious tournaments. But after this weekend's triumph at the 2024 Boston Massacre, this edition is directed towards other casual players who enjoy absorbing Diplomacy content but are scared to jump into games or explore tournament play.

Guided by the words of quasi-game show host Sam Reich, I hope my story shows others that it doesn't take decades of experience to find success, and you too might just find yourself going from eager newcomer to tournament champion.

The only way to begin is by beginning

As redundant as this next sentence may be, it doesn't make it any less true: you'll never win a tournament if you never attend one.

I'd only had a few casual bar games under my belt by the time the 2022 Boston Massacre tournament was fast approaching. When TD Alex Maslow asked if I was coming, I hedged initially from inexperience and knowing I could only make two rounds. Alex very quickly waived off those concerns, and a month later there I was at a local game shop playing against past and future DBNI final board contenders.

Seeing all the new faces at this year's tournament, I was reminded of my slight trepidation two years ago at getting thrown into games with all these unfamiliar people. But very quickly, my hesitation faded away as we began talking a shared language, seeking each other's support on the board and sharing meals and drinks off the board. From those local to the area attending their first tournament (or even first non-virtual games ever), to those who drove or flew across the country to attend, it was exciting seeing the transformation across the weekend from cagey conversations in Round 1 to supportive camaraderie at the final awards ceremony.

The only way to learn is by playing

While I fared all right in my first ever tournament game in 2022 thanks to my neighbor sparing me mid-game in order to stab Jason Mastbaum for the board top, my second game didn't end quite as

well. As Germany, I was up against an EF that locked in once France agreed not to build any fleets in Winter 1901. That inability to gain any traction showed me the importance of seeking early allies, understanding my neighbors' objectives for the game, and figuring out how I can fit myself into their plans.

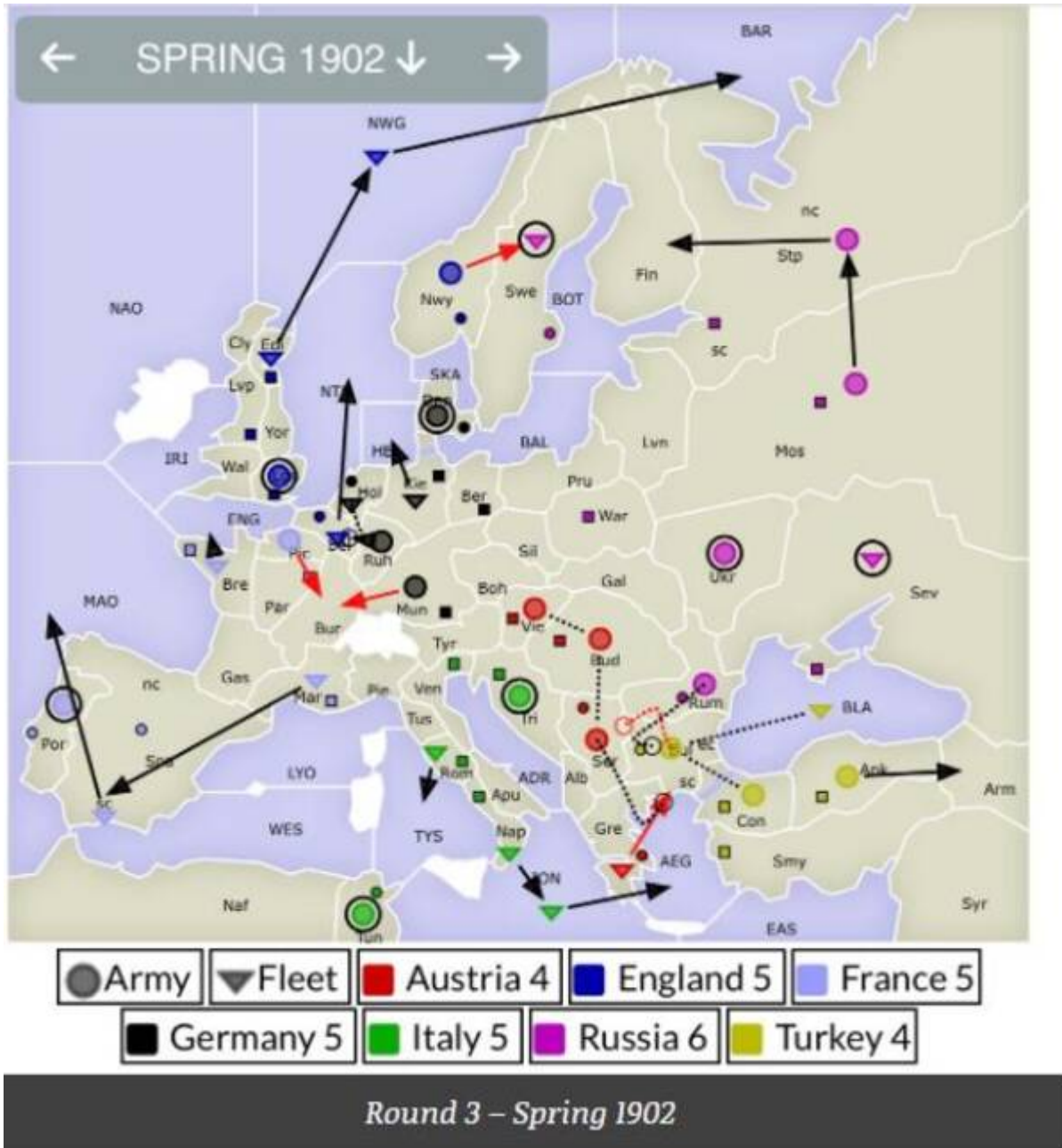
But even our casual games in the Boston area taught me several lessons. I learned from being on the wrong end of too many Western Triples how effective they could be as long as everyone is fully committed. At an evening house game, I played a chaotic Germany switching alliances every other turn, only to see all progress in the West completely stall and Turkey sweep through the board in solo position. Only once the game ended at midnight did I realize all I'd had to eat for dinner was a few chips and salsa. (Genuinely, if I can only impart one piece of advice to face-to-face players, it's this - stay hydrated and remember to eat!!!)

The only way to win is by learning

I realized while writing this section that my Round 1 score this year was identical to my first ever tournament game two years prior- a six-center tie for third-largest power. But this year, I took the lessons gained through my casual play to put myself in contention for top honors.

In Round 2, I was sitting in Germany with EF having productive early conversations without me. Sensing my tenuous position, I took that time to coordinate with Russia, and the good-faith gesture to not move to Denmark in Spring 1901 gained me peace from that front for the next several years. EF came to me proposing a Western Triple, which I nominally agreed to but really hoped to avoid since it would mean betraying my lone ally.

If not for Italy's two fleet builds in Winter 1901, this game likely ends in me either getting swallowed in 1902 when I refuse the Western Triple or EF stabbing me in 1905 after we weaken the other side of the board. Instead, France came to me in Spring 1902 asking if I was still eager to move against England, and that momentum solidified me two great allies and eventually my first ever tournament board top.



Round 3 - Spring 1902

The entire time, I was keeping an eye on the clock and noticing England’s fleets clogging up StP, which meant I was outpacing them. And although the commentators gave me more credit than I’m due for anticipating Germany would drop England down an extra center, all along I knew as long as I stayed slightly ahead in center count, there’s a good chance the final round would end before the board (and especially England) could knock me down a peg. And when the timer beeped just after our spring orders were entered, I knew I had done the unthinkable - held on for a tournament-winning board top!

Regardless of whether I placed 1st or 17th, I’d still make the same pitch for players (especially Boston locals!) to step out of their comfort zone and try your first in-person game, seek out a tournament, or in my case, maybe give the virtual scene a shot. And who knows, you just might get a gold medal and copy of the newly printed Diplomacy board out of it!

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