

Deng plays good bridge :

"Sage of Weiqi Chess"

Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), chief designer of China's reform and opening-up, was a widely known master of the game of bridge.

But Nie Weiping, the master of another game, Weiqi Chess, had not believed it. His disbelief lasted only until he encountered the late Chinese paramount leader, not as rivals but as a pair.

"I thought people called Deng Xiaoping a master of bridge only because he was Deng Xiaoping,"

recalled Nie, Deng's bridge partner for almost ten years.

"Not everyone had the privilege to play the game with Deng," said a proud Nie, in his 50s.

"At that time, my gaming with Deng needed approval by the supreme authorities."

In Nie's eyes, Deng was a kind and easy going "oldie" -- a title given by the top bridge player and his colleagues. Most of the games were played between 1983 and 1984, mainly at the Great Hall of the People, on the western side of the Tian'anmen Square, and sometimes, in Beidaihe, a well-known seaside resort where top Chinese officials hold meetings and have breaks during summer seasons.

Nie said that Deng's skill at bridge showed his clear mind. Deng was a dedicated, faithful, straight forward player.

"The 'oldie' played bridge not only for taking a break but also for training himself, spiritually and physically," said Nie.

The pair was always a triumphant one.

"We won almost all the games, because our rivals were often a bit weaker than us," explained Nie.

But Nie never forgot Deng's true identity. When people came to talk with Deng on confidential issues, Nie would left the seat to make room. Nie's successful partnership with Deng drew attention from other leaders.

Hu Yaobang, former Chinese Communist Party chief, invited Nie to dine with him several times, and Hu paid the bills personally, according to Nie. Nie came up with a photo that was taken with Deng and Yang Shangkun, former state president and one of the long-time comrades-in-arms of Deng. Yang interrupted a game to salute Deng on Oct. 1, 1986. The photo is now included in an officially-published album of Deng.

"Deng is not only a great man of a century or of a great man of a generation,"
said Nie.

"Deng Xiaoping is a rare talent in deed."

Nie's partnership with Deng came to an end in 1991, when the pair cooperated for the last game at the Great Hall of the People.