



By: Don Rogers

Getting Better at Bridge

Now first of all, if you are happy with your game as it stands, no need to do anything. If you just like to come to the club and play, and let the results be what they are, that is quite all right - we are happy to have you! But if you would like to win more often, then I have to tell you that some work is involved.

Playing bridge really well (well enough to win regularly) has a lot in common with becoming proficient on a musical instrument. You might be amused by a person who sat down at a piano the first time and expected to be able to play jazz! Chopsticks is probably their limit until they put in the time, study, and practice necessary to really learn piano.

Just as a beginning musician must put in the time to learn the musical scales on their instrument, it is essential to have the rules and logic of your bidding system down cold. This means study at home. I find that for many people it helps to write it out on a few pieces of paper - flow charts are great if you are used to them. You also must study the fundamentals of card play, both as declarer and defender. Having these elements down pat will make them automatic, freeing up your mental energy to think about more complex bridge problems at the table.

The second element is to read. If you read nothing else, try to read the ACBL Bulletin cover to cover each month. There are columns for all levels of players. Don't skip the more advanced columns; try to work through them and see if you can get the point. Read books if you can - I recommend anything by Mike Lawrence.

The third element is practice, practice, practice! I understand that some of us have schedule limitations, but it is very hard to improve much playing only one time a week.

Lastly, once you have the fundamentals burned into your brain, try playing against the better players in the open games. You may not win, but you will learn a lot! Going to tournaments is also great - it gives you a concentrated dose, and I find that I learn more if I spend three or four days doing nothing much but playing bridge.

Try not to become discouraged if you don't see immediate results. I have always found that progress is not linear; I go through plateaus where nothing much seems to be happening, but then stuff starts to integrate in my head and progress is rapid, at least until I reach the next plateau!