

HOW DO I GET BETTER?

Recently a number of players at the local club have asked me, “How do I get better”. They are generally B players or players at the low end of flight A, but people who don't fare well when they have to play against the “big boys”. There is no simple answer - but let me offer a few observations.

First, read the literature. There are myriads of very good books with which every aspiring bridge player should be familiar. I will cite only a few but anyone who is interested can ask a few of the better players for advice. Read Mike Lawrences' “HOW TO READ YOUR OPPONENTS CARDS”, Jeff Reubens’ “THE SECRETS OF WINNING BRIDGE” and the fine books on defense by Eddie Kantor. At a more advanced level, almost any book by Hugh Kelsey is worth reading. Don't worry about esoteric conventions. Make sure that you can take your tricks both as declarer and on defense.

Secondly, play up. Ask the better players to play with you. Most of them will upon occasion. When they started, someone helped them and they will usually return the complement. When you do play with them, see if they will go over the game with you after the session. Why did they take the finesse into east instead of west, what is the best bid on board 2? - etc. It doesn't take much time and you can learn a great deal.

Next, form a partnership, This sounds easy but it is not. It really doesn't matter what system or conventions you play.

What really matters is that you and your partner are on the same page. Don't try to create a system of your own. What I have done with my last two regular partners is to take Steve Robinson's book titled "Washington Standard" and go through it page by page with my partner. It doesn't really matter if what he advocates is optimal. What matters is we both have the same understanding of what bids mean. If you can achieve this, you will be ahead of 90 per cent of the partnerships that play bridge. It is not uncommon, even among good players to see long established partnerships with no real understanding and common view.

Finally, you might want to consider taking lessons from a pro. We don't have any really active professional bridge players here in Minneapolis now that Bjorgvin Kristinsson is gone. The national pros are quite expensive but there are a few people around from whom you could learn. If you do hire a pro, make sure that his or her personality is what you want. You want someone who tells you rather than yells at you. Ask any of your friends who may have gone down this path.

Make no mistake. If you want to become a really good player, it will require a great deal of effort and dedication. Unless you are a natural, and there are precious few of them, you will have to read extensively, play quite a bit and discuss the hands with a group that involves at least a few of the better players. It is not an easy road but it really is worth it.

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