

FOREWORD

BY DAVE HUGGETT

Do you ever wonder what skills or knowledge those at the top of the game have got that you haven't? Why do they always seem to win, leaving even good club players struggling in their wake? What *is* the secret of winning at bridge? What *do* the great champions of the bridge world know that lesser mortals might hope to emulate?

Two writers and bridge players – Stephen Cashmore of Scotland and Maureen Dennison of England – decided to try to find out. Both of them had long been curious as to why some teams seem to have the knack of winning, even against other good teams. So they set up an experiment which involved three very unusual bridge matches. What made them so unusual was that the teams competing were of clearly different standards, so much so that the results were never in doubt – in all three matches, the stronger teams won.

But after the matches had been played, Stephen teamed up with Justin Corfield (an expert also based in England) to analyse the deals to find out *why* they won.

The results are fascinating. Of course, if you are the sort of person who turns immediately to the last page of a detective story, you could do that now and find out the result of the experiment straight away. But if you do that, you will miss out on what happened in the bidding and play of some seventy-two deals, not to mention the authors' analyses, three quizzes, and additional comments bringing out particular points of interest.

Whatever your own level of play, we are sure you will find something of interest in this book. It should be especially useful to all team players who regularly find that they do not progress as far through a competition as they think they should. And who knows? Perhaps together we will learn the answer to that question that players all over the world have wondered for so long: why *do* they win?

INTRODUCTION

The Question

In a long match, why does a good team almost always beat one not quite so good?

Could the secret be in their bidding methods? At the time of writing, Sabine Auken and Daniela von Arnim are probably the world's best partnership in women's bridge. Is it really a coincidence that they also have the most complex bidding system? The incomparable Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell – 'Meckwell' – are rumoured to have a bidding book three inches thick covering every eventuality. Is this what accounts for the advantage that they seem to have? Or maybe it is more a question of bidding judgment. The French team who won the Teams Olympiad in Salsomaggiore in 1992 played little more than five-card majors, strong NT and weak twos.

Maybe the difference lies in their declarer play, and the ability to make difficult contracts. Think of the likes of Michael Rosenberg and Geir Helgemo. They seem able to create extra tricks out of thin air. On more than one occasion, Rosenberg has found a line of play to make a contract that the spectators and commentators were unable to see, even when looking at all four hands. Helgemo often starts playing a deal in what seems to be a curious fashion – but by the end of play, he has made a contract when the rest of the field failed. More often than not, he does it with the uncanny ability to root out how the opposing cards lie. If you've ever played against the likes of Martin Hoffman, you will know that some declarers are able to play with total accuracy, and are somehow able to play their cards at the speed of light, needing no apparent thought at all.

Or perhaps it all comes down to defence. It is often said that defence is the hardest aspect of the game, and so we might expect that defence is the main area where stronger teams are superior to weaker teams. Good defenders often know where all the cards lie after a trick or two, and declarer must continually struggle against pin-point accurate defence. Bridge books are full of examples – Garozzo and Belladonna taking 1100 against a contract of 1♠, Mike Passell leading a small spade from ♠Qxxx against a contract of 7♠, Bob Hamman refusing what appeared to be an obvious overruff with ♦1092 which led to a forcing defence, an extra 300 points, and eventually the 1985 Bermuda Bowl.

So the question remains – why *do* they win? Is it the bidding systems in use, bidding judgment, or superior technique in play or defence – or is it a combination of all of these?

The experiment

To try to find out *why* stronger teams beat weaker ones, we are going to analyse matches between four teams of clearly different standards. The teams represent four distinct levels of accomplishment in bridge:

- the RABBITS comprise a team of experienced club level players;
- the WEASELS are a team of seasoned tournament level players;
- the WOLVES are players who regularly represent their country; and
- the TIGERS are a world-class team of international calibre.

We are going to look at the results of three 24 board matches. The first match will be the WEASELS playing the RABBITS. The second will be the WEASELS taking on the WOLVES. And the third will be the WEASELS facing up to the TIGERS. So we are going to look at the WEASELS team taking on a weaker team, then a stronger team, and then a much stronger team. On the assumption that the teams play according to their 'form', the results of all three matches should be predictable. The point is not to see who wins, but to learn about *Why They Win*.

On each board we will discuss what 'should' happen, and then relate what actually did happen at the table. And here's the twist: at the end of a board, if it caused a swing, we will try to analyse *where that swing came from* – whether it was caused by superior bidding, superior play, superior defence, or just plain old-fashioned luck. It will be especially interesting to see whether the reasons for victory in one match are duplicated in another. In other words, are the reasons for winning much the same whatever the standard of the participants, or do different factors come in to play at different levels?

The Players

The Rabbit partnerships are Sheila and Charlie Rennick, playing with Donnie and Ann Graham.

The Weasels are made up of Ian Dick and Stuart McCreadie, and Gordon Smith playing with Sam Malkani.

The Wolves – four of the best players in Scotland – are Les Steel playing with Liz McGowan, and Dave Walker playing with Brian Short.

The Tigers, all well-known international players, are made up of Zia Mahmood playing with Andrew Robson, and David Price paired with Colin Simpson.

The Prediction

At the end of each match, and then again in a summary at the end of the book, the swings recorded on each deal will be categorised as to whether they have been caused by:

- superior bidding;
- superior declarer play;
- superior defence; or
- better luck.

Simply by totting up the categorised swings and calculating them as a percentage of the winning margin, we should be able to answer the question posed at the start of this introduction – why does a good team almost always beat one not quite so good? We are going to find out what it really is that wins each match. Of course, it can sometimes be difficult to tell whether a bid or play was better, or just more fortunate, than another. Where this is the case, we will try to apportion the IMPs won or lost in the way that seems most reflective of what really happened.

We are going to stick our necks out and make a prediction. We think the percentages are going to be something like:

Luck	15%
Superior bidding	20%
Superior play	20%
Superior defence	45%

Do you agree? Well, over the next few hours of play, we will all find out. Read on!