

Why We Play Bridge, Part Two

By Jared Johnson
ScoreCard Editor

Charles Goren once said, “The game of bridge produces more arguments than any other game in history - I believe this is part of the game’s appeal.” And since, in particular, duplicate and tournament bridge is sometimes described as stressful and cutthroat with some people “playing for blood,” perhaps we should turn to the story about the doctor who claimed to use bridge as part of his treatment for all his patients.

As the story goes, the doctor explains, “I use bridge with all my patients. If they don’t play, I tell them to take up the game. It’s a great hobby, exercises the mind and keeps you busy. If they already play, I tell them to quit. It’s too stressful!”

In the March issue of *ScoreCard*, we looked at some of the good reasons for playing bridge. Well, we don’t want to scare anyone off, but there are some other reasons for playing bridge there are not quite so noble. Here are some cynical observations about the game and the people who play it (take it all with a grain of salt).

“People play tournament bridge for many reasons. Some play the game in order to release primitive urges; at a bridge table you can get away with actions that bear a gratifying resemblance to assault and battery, mayhem and manslaughter.”

— author Richard Powell, *Tickets to the Devil*

“Why do we play bridge anyway? For relaxation? Don’t kid yourself. A good game of bridge is more exhausting than anything you do for a living.”

— bridge writer Marshall Miles

“Most people play cards to waste time. Bridge players are usually suffering from an inferiority complex and find in the game an easy way to satisfy their striving for superiority.”

— Alfred Adler

“Admirable though it is to work out a game so fascinating, so difficult, so inexhaustibly novel, so dependent for its mastery on self-discipline, there is in (bridge) ... a drunken attempt to escape from realities, and no man plays (bridge) night after night who is properly evaluating his world.”

— *The New Republic* many decades ago

“It offers the opportunity to conquer others. What is the inveterate card-slapper doing when he slaps down that ace but symbolically whacking his opponents in the mouth? And the player whose sole object in sitting at the table seems to be persecution of his partner? There appears to be ample evidence that far beneath the surface, bridge is used as a sledgehammer by many a player.”

— Alfred Adler

“It is almost impossible to deny that bridge is a vindictive game. Such devices as the ‘squeeze’ and ‘endplay’ are related in their nature to the rack and thumbscrew. Competition is a form of warfare, which by militarists may be regarded as good sport, but which is manslaughter in one of its cruelest forms; and nowhere is the spirit of devastating competition more fiercely aroused than in contract bridge.”

— magazine writer Silas Bent

“Bridge is a game where a mass of people sit down to be frustrated.”

— observation by a teenage caddy at a bridge tournament

“Why do I play this game? I don’t know why I play this game. I come here (to the bridge club) every night feeling good, and I go away feeling lousy. Why do I play this game? I don’t know. Maybe I just enjoy torturing myself.”

— Top Colorado player, 30 years ago

“If serenity is one’s major ambition, perhaps bridge should be avoided.”

— Charles Goren

“If you have the slightest touch of masochism, you’ll love this game.”

— advice once offered to a kibitzer

And of course, Khan on the original *Star Trek* series once remarked, *“Is it not said that social occasions are only warfare concealed?”*