

Winning Bridge in 100 Pages or Less - Book Reviews

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Some bridge books can be daunting, hundreds of pages of fine print, card combinations, probabilities, and miscellaneous esoterica. Sometimes you just don't have the time to read a whole book on a particular subject. Master Point Press of Toronto has taken the pain out of learning more about certain specialized topics by publishing an ongoing series of *Test Your Bridge Technique and Practice Your Bidding* booklets, each one usually well under 100 pages. Among the recent entries is *Roman Key Card Blackwood* by Barbara Seagram and Linda Lee, where in using the Blackwood convention the king of trumps (suit agreed upon, of course) counts as an ace in the step responses. Most duplicate players consider this essential. You may get around a missing king in another suit by getting pitches or shortness (ruffing). But you're not getting around dealing with a missing king of trumps, except by taking a usually 50-50 finesse. Then there is *Avoidance Play* by David Bird and Tim Bourke that teaches you as declarer how to keep the dangerous hand off lead. Often there is one of the two defenders you would rather have win the lead, if you have a choice, so that the other can't make a devastating shift through either your holding in a particular suit or dummy's.

Splinter Bids by Seagram and Lee focuses on a special convention whereby after partner's opening bid of one of a major, you make an unusual jump bid to show good trump support (almost always four), game going values and shortness (singleton or void) in the suit bid. Disadvantages? You have used up a lot of bidding room. Advantages? One bid has described a lot, your strength, your trump support and a key feature of distribution which allows partner to evaluate the fit for possible slam exploration.

And occasionally using up all that bidding room is even an advantage. It might keep a pesky opponent out of the auction.

Reading the Cards by Bird and Bourke concentrates on declarer's technique of constructing the unseen hands (both high cards and distribution) based on clues from the bidding, opening lead and play of the hand as it progresses. Too many players forget the auction and opening lead by trick three and play a hand as if everything is a total guess when it isn't.

Jacoby 2NT by Seagram and Lee features another common bidding convention for showing immediate trump support and game going values over partner's opening of one in a major, after which both opener and responder can show additional features of their hands.

Every good bridge player must be a bit of a con artist from time to time. Thus, finally we have *Deceptive Play* by Bird and Bourke, which features a variety of ways to legally hoodwink the opponents. It is one thing to make your contract in a straightforward manner by either normal play or just good luck. But it is always much more satisfying to make an "impossible" contract that the opponents should have beaten, by executing a clever swindle.

All of these books are your concise guides to better bridge play in 100 pages or less. And not bad Christmas gift ideas for your bridge playing friends.