

## Basketball and Bridge

The editor of TrumpTalk, Ken Below, seems to have become my agent.....and far be it for me to dispel that idea since he's been very good at it. First he gets me to write for TrumpTalk, then he sends an article to the ACBL Bulletin editor and I become a fairly regular Bulletin contributor. (Thanks, Ken) Now he's giving me suggestions on things to write about! Well, he does have good ideas and things have worked out good so far. This is the result of one of his latest suggestions.

Perhaps the best one-sentence description of how bridge players feel about their game is playwright George S. Kaufman's parody of a famous remark: "I'd rather be South than be President." What is there about bridge that keeps us coming back for more?

Bridge probably originated in the Middle East in the 19th century although some say it was around in some form even earlier. Auction bridge, one form of the game, was developed by the British in India and later was popular in England and the United States. It is still played but has largely been supplanted by contract bridge, which achieved popularity after important innovations were made in 1925 by Harold S. Vanderbilt. Its phenomenal popularity owed much to the activities of Ely Culbertson . That craze subsided but was later revived by Charles Goren in the 1940's. Today books, tournaments, and newspaper columns on bridge abound.

Duplicate bridge is unlike other games that might otherwise fall into the same class. For one thing it's very competitive. Thus people who play and become addicted to this game are generally very competitive people.....often ones without some other output for those competitive urges. It's also considered to be the most stimulating card game ever conceived even though it takes longer to learn and even

longer to master. The keys are practice, experience and a very positive attitude. Like so many things in life, success at bridge depends upon positive thinking and aggressive actions.

Secondly, it's a serious card game for people who like to analyze situations and work out logical solutions. Every hand is different and the challenges never cease. It's an opportunity to exercise your mind; just as muscles will atrophy when not used regularly, so will brain power deteriorate when not maintained with stimulation. Thirdly, it has statistical and mathematical attractions because of the influence of patterns and percentages.

Duplicate bridge games also serve one other important purpose and that is the need to socialize. It affords us the opportunity to be around people we like and who share our love for this game. Perhaps Martina Navratilova said it for all of us when she stated: "No matter where I go, I can always make new friends at the bridge table".

Perhaps it is the concept that of teamwork that helps to distinguish bridge from the many other games combining luck and skill. Danny Kleinman's comparison to basketball explains that aspect well: " In basketball, players may engage in contests of skill limited in dimension: three-point shooting, slam-dunking, one-on-one, HORSE, and so on. But what makes basketball distinctive, and the most fun to play or watch, are the team interactions: moving without the ball, setting screens and passing on offense; switching and boxing out on defense; using court sense and maintaining court balance. So it is with bridge. There will be opportunities for three-point shots and slam dunks, but complete bridge players are also forever helping their partners and receiving information in return. Playing good bridge is like throwing an outlet pass, running downcourt, getting open, and receiving the ball back in perfect position to score."

Bridge is the ultimate in intellectual competition. It is both fascinating and fun. One is able to pursue winning while encountering the elusiveness of perfection and harsh realities or sublime happenstances of chance. Along the way you have the opportunity to develop your system much as you would learn a new language, meet many new friends and assuage your competitive urges.