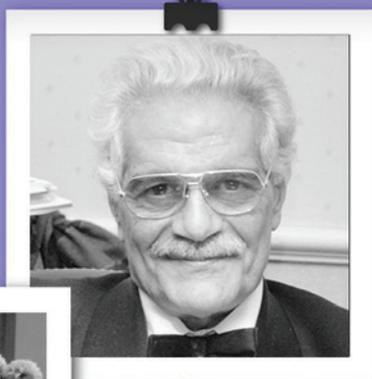


HEROES, ICONS AND SCANDALS

"GREAT CHAMPIONS, WONDERFUL PLAYS, ENTHRALLING
STORIES, SCANDALS, THIS BOOK HAS IT ALL. A MUST-READ."

ZIA MAHMOOD



BARNET
SHENKIN

HEROES, ICONS AND SCANDALS

BARNET
SHENKIN

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To Victor Silverstone, Gerald Haase
and other departed Scottish bridge warriors.

FOREWORD

Barnet is a wonderful bridge player and gifted writer, capturing the characters and their experiences both at and away from the table to perfection.

Barnet rarely played a wrong card, although sometimes he took his time about it — on one famous occasion, I believe it was the Camrose Trophy in Exeter, he took half an hour to play the (correct, naturally) card. Then there was the Gold Cup Finals in Peebles; a polite smattering of applause for any good play by a Sassenach; warm clapping when Barnet or another Scot made a good play.

Top-level bridge players are a fascinating community and perhaps their idiosyncrasies are not as widely known as they should be. With the addition of many of the personalities Barnet writes about, such as dear friend Victor Silverstone, sadly no longer with us, this is a very important book — recording their brilliances for posterity. I loved reading it.

Andrew Robson

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Around eighteen months ago, I wrote a few stand-alone articles and sent them to Paul Linxwiler, the editor of the ACBL *Bridge Bulletin*. He liked them and, when they were published, they seemed to go down well with the readers. The theme was very famous players — some world champions — who were personally known to me. I decided to write more and collect them all as a book. In addition to the old masters, most of whom are now gone, I had personal family memories of the scandal in Buenos Aires in 1965. This tilted me towards the title of the book, and then I had to do further research on more recent events, which are still causing consternation in the bridge world.

Over the last couple of years, playing online brought me back into contact with my friends in the Scottish Bridge Union. Unfortunately, most of them are now in the great bridge club in the sky. However, I took the opportunity to write about their exploits in this book — they, too, were international bridge heroes in the UK in their day.

What made writing this enjoyable for me is that I was not writing about people whom I did not know but that in every chapter, there was someone, or a bunch of people, who were friends or acquaintances and I could relate their story. So this book expands on the theme I explored in my first book, *Playing with the Bridge Legends*. Will there be a third? Who knows? But I'm still playing...

Barnet Shenkin

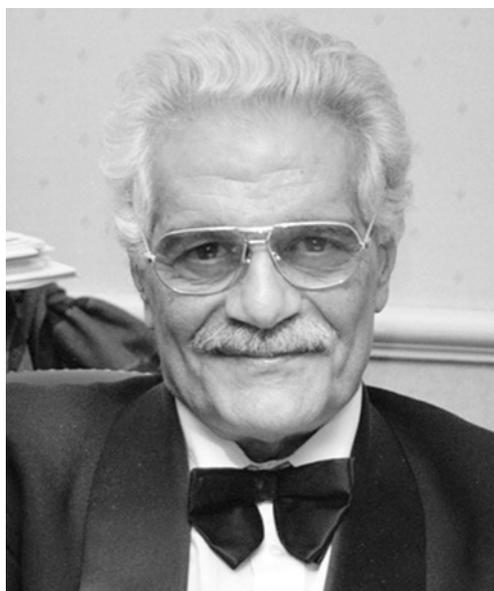
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HEROES

1. THE GREATEST SHOWMAN¹



Omar Sharif

If you asked your friends to say who they believed was the world's most famous bridge player, you would get a variety of answers. You could qualify your question: he or she would have had to have played internationally for their country. Likely, there would still be a variety of answers: Hamman, Garozzo, Belladonna, Zia and Reese come to mind as obvious possibilities. However, the correct answer may surprise you — Omar Sharif. Although Sharif was an actor, he had a great love for bridge. He often called it his 'addiction'. He played for the United Arab Republic in the 1964 Olympiad and was playing captain of the Egyptian team in the 1968 Olympiad. His passion was enduring; he played on the Seniors team for France in the 1999 World Championships in Malta, finishing in second place, and joined the Egyptian team again in 2000.

As for his on-screen fame, he won a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor in *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962. In 1965, he won a Golden Globe Award for best actor in *Dr. Zhivago*, one of the highest grossing films ever (adjusting for inflation). He became a heartthrob for women all over the

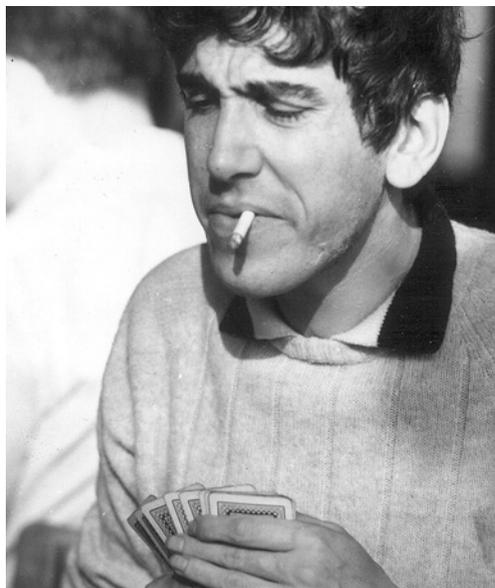
¹ This chapter could not have been written without the help of Amy Casanova of the ACBL, who unearthed the Terence Reese article in *The Bridge World*, and Paul Lavings of Australia, who located for me in his archive a 1970 article written by Harold Franklin in the UK *Bridge Magazine*. My friend Michel Abecassis of Paris also contributed information about Omar.

world. He made *Funny Girl* with Barbra Streisand at the same time the 1967 Arab-Israeli war began. The Egyptian government almost revoked Sharif's citizenship after a poster of Sharif and Streisand kissing became public; the film was banned in several Arab countries. Sharif, in an interview with *The New York Times*, said, 'While we were rehearsing *Funny Girl*, it so happened that the Six-Day war began, and the Arab press called me a traitor because she is Jewish and a photograph had been published of us kissing. I told them neither in my professional nor private life do I ask a girl her nationality or religion when I kiss her.' Sharif had a real-life affair with Streisand for the duration of the filming. The end of the movie was the end of the affair and Omar got over it by dating first his next co-star, Catherine Deneuve, and then Barbara Bouchet. It was said that he was not attracted to Julie Christie, as she had a habit of eating fried-egg sandwiches on the set! Around the same time, he made a movie with Rita Hayworth, and he used to tell his bridge friends a hilarious story of how she spurned his advances in Cannes.

I first met Omar in 1976, at the *Sunday Times* invitational event in London. The players all wore tuxedos and played in lavish surroundings. I partnered Michael Rosenberg and we won — perhaps the highlight of my bridge career; some say it was all downhill from there! Omar was a very good friend of my friend Irving Rose, another Scot and a brilliant bridge player. Omar would play high-stakes backgammon with Rose and his bridge friends. I was included in a few dinner invitations at the Cap Gemini, in The Hague, the Netherlands. He kept the hotel restaurant open after midnight to enjoy excellent food and wine and to chat about the hands. My strangest meeting with him was at the Intercontinental Hotel in Hanover. My wife, Maggie, and I were there for a carpet and rug exhibition. After arriving, we went to the bar and the first person we saw was Omar sitting on a barstool. He called us over and invited us to have a drink with him. It turned out he was also there for the rug exhibition and was representing an Egyptian company. He showed me a few hands from the Olympiad final, USA against France. I clearly remember his words as he scribbled on a napkin, 'Look what your old partner Rosenberg did on this hand'. I did visit his rug stand at the exhibition. It was the start of a profitable relationship between our two companies and a year later, I visited the factory in Cairo, with time for a quick visit to the Pyramids and the Sphinx.

Omar loved to gamble but, aside from that, he spent his money on race-horses and on bridge. In the early seventies, he hired the world's best players to form a team. This included Italians Giorgio Belladonna, Pietro Forquet and Benito Garozzo, all multiple World Champions and amazing players. He added Claude Delmouly from France as his own partner. This team was known as 'The Circus'. As well as touring with his Circus team, he traveled and played all over the world in important tournaments, with dotting spectators at his table. He was a great ambassador for the game.

In 1970, he organized one of the greatest bridge spectacles ever. It was a grand challenge for huge stakes at rubber bridge. His team would be the Omar Sharif Bridge Circus. He would play with Giorgio Belladonna, Benito Garozzo and Claude Delmouly against Jeremy Flint and Jonathan Cansino, two of Great Britain's finest. Playing with Peter Pender, Flint made Life Master in the United States in a ridiculously short time, setting a record. Flint made his living playing rubber bridge for the highest stakes he could in the London clubs. Cansino was a rock at the bridge table. He seldom made a mistake and he played with great flair.



Jonathan Cansino

The stakes were to be £1 per point — \$2.40 at that time. With inflation, that works out at around \$37 per point today. In addition, there was to be a further \$16,000 bet (in today's dollars) every four rubbers. Many saw this as a battle of the systems. The Circus team played Precision, while Flint-Cansino used their own Flint-Pender system, with some Acol. The rules had Omar playing at least 52 of the 80 rubbers over six days and, while he was an excellent player, he did not play a lot of rubber bridge. Flint and Cansino had a lot of club backers. Omar backed himself. The match was held in the Piccadilly Hotel. Sharif brought in a film crew to make a film of the match. He thought it would be good for the game, to let players and prospective players get a taste of the excitement of bridge. The auditorium was transformed into a movie set at considerable cost. The players wore tuxedos; makeup and wardrobe assistants ensured the players were in prime condition for filming. There were TV teams from many countries present, interviewing the contestants. A

large BridgeRama, the equivalent of today's Vugraph, brought the action to an auditorium packed with spectators².

The match started with a profitable opportunity for the Circus team.

Neither vul.	♠ A K J 9 7 ♥ K J 9 5 ♦ Q 9 4 ♣ 6										
♠ Q 10 4 3 ♥ 10 6 ♦ J 10 3 2 ♣ K 9 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8 6 2 ♥ 3 2 ♦ 8 6 5 ♣ J 10 7 4 2
	N										
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	♠ 5 ♥ A Q 8 7 4 ♦ A K 7 ♣ A Q 8 3										

West	North	East	South
	<i>Delmouly</i>		<i>Sharif</i>
			1♣
pass	1NT	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♣
pass	4♠	pass	4NT
pass	5♣	pass	5♦
pass	5♠	pass	6♥
all pass			

1♣ was strong and 1NT showed 4 controls, where Ace=2 and K=1. Once hearts were agreed, all the other bids were cue bids, with 4NT looking for further information. This was a sophisticated auction for 1970. Omar thought the 5♣ bid showed the king, not a singleton — had he tried once more with 5NT, they might have bid the grand slam. Bidding language has advanced since then, and many top players using controls would play trump-asking bids at an early stage, solving the problem. However, it was plus 1010 at today's \$37 a point. Terence Reese was writing a daily column in a national newspaper and criticized Sharif for not having the nerve to bid the grand slam. He quickly received a message from Omar that Delmouly had denied having trumps as good as KJxx.

² There is a link to a short video here. It captures the excitement of this extravaganza. The link was provided by Shireen Mohandes: tinyurl.com/4xwmzfsf

GENERAL INTEREST

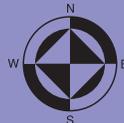
“For the past fifty-plus years, Barnet Shenkin has seen and heard it all. In this book, he lets you get familiar with the stars of today and the legends of yesteryear. Barnet also gives a first-hand perspective of the various cheating scandals that have haunted bridge. Plus, lots of interesting bridge hands. Dig in, learn and enjoy!”

Boye Brogeland

Twenty years ago, Barnet Shenkin’s *Playing with the Bridge Legends* gave readers a fascinating insight into what it is like to play with and against the best in the game. In some ways, this book is a sequel to that one — it focuses on the great characters in the history of bridge, both the heroes and those subject to scandal. Including chapters on Culbertson, Belladonna, Garozzo and Zia, the book also provides behind-the-scenes accounts of the cheating scandals in Bermuda and Buenos Aires involving Reese, Schapiro and the Italian Blue Team, as well as those from the last decade that were uncovered through video evidence and hand analysis. As in his first book, the author draws on his own experiences at the very top of the game.



BARNET SHENKIN (USA) was born in Glasgow into a bridge-playing family. He has won every major event in the UK, including the prestigious *Sunday Times* pairs event (with Michael Rosenberg). He has represented Scotland, Britain and the USA in international events with success. He moved to the USA in 1997, and has since won three National titles.



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