

# Let's Play Some BRIDGE

**FRANK STEWART**



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# Dedication

To my girls, whom nobody could love more.

# Acknowledgments

Many of the deals in this book originally appeared in my column in the *Bridge Bulletin*, the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL)'s magazine, and are used with the kind cooperation of that publication. I have had the privilege of being a contributor since 1981 and, for several years, served as an editor. A few deals are adapted from 'Daily Bridge Club', my syndicated column, or from my earlier books. Many have not been published before.

Paul Linxwiler, the current *Bridge Bulletin* Executive Editor, honored me by writing this book's foreword.

# Foreword

If there were a Hall of Fame for bridge writers, Frank Stewart would surely be an inductee. For decades, Stewart has authored books, columns in newspapers ('Daily Bridge Club'), and articles in magazines, especially the American Contract Bridge League's *Bridge Bulletin*.

Stewart is widely regarded as an expert analyst, but he possesses a smooth style that allows bridge enthusiasts of all skill levels to follow his instructive explanations of even complex deals.

I have had the privilege of editing Stewart's material in the *Bridge Bulletin* for more than 20 years, and his "over-the-shoulder" descriptions of how good players think when declaring or defending are among the best in the business. Stewart is a master of this style, hugely popular with bridge fans, as it allows a ringside seat into the mind of an expert player as he makes his at-the-table decisions, guided by the clues in the bidding and play.

Whether you're a new player hoping to sharpen your analytical skills or an experienced one who simply enjoys matching wits with a writer, Frank Stewart is a terrific choice.

Paul Linxwiler  
Executive Editor, *Bridge Bulletin*



# Introduction

When my twenty-fourth book, *Keys to Winning Bridge*, appeared in 2016, I thought it would be my last one. I had nothing more I wanted to say. But I am attracted to the over-the-shoulder approach to presenting a deal. For many years, I have been contributing such a column to the ACBL's *Bridge Bulletin* and I have published two previous over-the-shoulder books. A book of that type is not difficult to put together and Ray Lee was gracious enough to offer to publish it, so I am giving it one more try.

The over-the-shoulder genre became prominent in the writing of Terence Reese and continued in the work of excellent writers such as Mike Lawrence and Larry Cohen. The reader gets access into the mind of an expert and follows his thought processes. The reader is exposed to techniques — such as counting and drawing inferences — that are, supposedly, expert territory.

In my writing, which comprises books, hundreds of magazine articles and, to date, about 11,000 newspaper columns, I focus on logical thinking. Why do we play bridge? Certainly not to memorize a bidding system nor to adhere to an array of rules. The game's appeal lies in problem-solving. During one session, a player faces hundreds of decisions. Some, he can resolve instinctively; but many require reasoning. That is what a player finds exhilarating. He has a problem and figures out the answer.

In this book, most of the deals present problems at a level I would call 'intermediate'. Some of the instructional points appear more than once. For example, following the odds when bidding vulnerable games, making assumptions in the play and using discretion in entering the auction are recurring themes. I won't apologize for that, since repetition is a learning tool.

You will sit with me and be able to compare your decisions with mine. You won't agree with all my actions; bridge involves personal style and judgment. My at-the-table analysis may not even be error-free; that is also part of the game. Still, I hope you will find it instructive to listen in on my thoughts.

Frank Stewart  
Fayette, Alabama



## Author's note

Tournament partnerships use various systems. One dominant style is Two-over-One, in which a new-suit response at the two-level is forcing to game. Although the bidding in this book is Standard, the focus is on judgment and the commentary is meant to be useful to the reader regardless of the system he favors.

# 1

In a local Swiss Teams, my partner is a solid citizen in the auction, which may or may not be a good thing since my own style is stodgy as well. Our teammates, however, believe in bidding when it is their turn. Our opponents are veteran club players whose masterpoint totals exceed their skill level. The first two boards look flat; then, with both sides vulnerable, I hold as South:

♠ A K J 6 5 4 3  
♥ A  
♦ K 9 8  
♣ 9 5

East, the dealer, opens 2♥.

My hand is too promising for a 2♠ overcall and too wild to start with a double; I jump to 3♠, suggesting a strong one-suiter. There are no preempts over preempts: any call by me would promise high-card values. If I held:

♠ K Q J 9 6 5 3   ♥ 7 6   ♦ 7 6 5   ♣ 5

I would have to pass.

West passes and my partner cogitates and jumps to 5♠. He thinks we can make a slam if I have a control in hearts and can save us from losing two quick heart tricks. Since I have a first-round control, I am obliged to show it. We might have a grand slam. So I bid 6♥. Partner signs off in 6♠ and I am done. West leads the ♥7.

Dlr: East                    ♠ 9 8  
 Vul: Both                    ♥ J 5 3  
                                      ♦ A J 7  
                                      ♣ A K 10 6 2

♠ A K J 6 5 4 3  
 ♥ A  
 ♦ K 9 8  
 ♣ 9 5

West	North	East	South
		2♥	3♠
pass	5♠	pass	6♥
pass	6♠	all pass	

If my partner had held the ♠Q, he might have raised to 7♠. As it was, he didn't like his spade 'support', especially since bad breaks were possible. His 5♠ was aggressive enough since we might well have been off two hearts and (maybe after a trump promotion) a trump trick.

East plays the ♥8 and I take the ace and cash the A-K of trumps. Not unexpectedly, East has a low singleton, so I must avoid a diamond loser to make the slam. Suppose I take the A-K of clubs and ruff a club. All will be well if the suit breaks 3-3 or if a defender happens to hold bare Q-J; otherwise, I expect I will need the diamond finesse.

I lead to the ♣K — both defenders play low — and am about to call for the ♣A, when I stop to reflect. It occurs to me that I may do well to eliminate West's safe exit cards. So instead I ruff a heart and lead a second club: jack, ace, seven. Then I ruff dummy's last heart and exit with a trump to West. The full deal is:

	♠ 9 8	
	♥ J 5 3	
	♦ A J 7	
	♣ A K 10 6 2	
♠ Q 7 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 80%; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <span>N</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 80%; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <span>W</span> <span>E</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 80%;"> <span>S</span> </div> </div>	♠ 10
♥ 7 6 2		♥ K Q 10 9 8 4
♦ 10 5 4 3 2		♦ Q 6
♣ J 4		♣ Q 8 7 3
	♠ A K J 6 5 4 3	
	♥ A	
	♦ K 9 8	
	♣ 9 5	

West must lead a diamond — all he has left. Dummy plays low and when East puts up the queen, I am home.

I think the line I chose was best. I would have succeeded if West had held, say, Qxxx in clubs and either the ♦Q or ♦10. If his clubs had been QJxx, I would have hoped for a winning guess in diamonds. (I could judge to play West for 10x since the lead of my last trump would squeeze him in the minors.)

At the other table, my teammate sitting East wasn't satisfied with a mundane 2♥ opening; he tried 3♥. South overcalled 3♠. North liked his hand but he could do no more than raise to 4♠ and there they rested. South took eleven tricks for +650 and we gained 13 IMPs. A mere 26 IMPs were riding on my play in 6♠.

# 2

In a club duplicate, I have an earnest and competent partner. Only our side is vulnerable and, as South, the dealer, I hold a balanced 19-count.

♠ K Q 4  
 ♥ A Q 4 3  
 ♦ K 8  
 ♣ A J 4 2

I open 1♣, planning to jump to 2NT over a 1♦ or 1♠ response or raise a 1♥ response to 4♥. (Over 1♠, I could reverse into 2♥ but then I would be suggesting longer clubs than hearts, not a balanced hand such as the one I have.)

Our opponents are an active expert pair and West comes in with a 2♣ Michaels cuebid, showing length in the majors, typically 5-5. My partner doubles, telling me the deal belongs to us. East passes.

I suppose I could pass. West will rescue himself to a major, and we might double for a telephone-number penalty. Still, we would have to beat a two-level partial four tricks for +800 to exceed the value of the vulnerable game we can surely make. I hate to let the opponents off the hook and at IMPs, I might pursue a penalty. At matchpoints, I jump to 3NT.

My partner huddles... and raises to 6NT; all pass. West considers his lead and tables the ♠A.

Dlr: South  
 Vul: N-S

♠ J 7  
 ♥ 9 7  
 ♦ A Q 10 9 6 4  
 ♣ K Q 7

\_\_\_\_\_

♠ K Q 4  
 ♥ A Q 4 3  
 ♦ K 8  
 ♣ A J 4 2

West	North	East	South
			1♣
2♣	dbl	pass	3NT
pass	6NT	all pass	

West continues with a second spade and I win. East has followed with the five and eight.

This will be an easy make if I bring in the diamonds but, on the auction, a bad split is more than likely. To get some information, I take the ♣AK. West follows, so I can place him with at most one diamond. On the fifth trick, I lead dummy's ♦10 and let it ride. I can do nothing about a 5-0 break and will be doomed if West has the singleton jack — but West follows with the deuce. So, I cross to the ♦K, return to the ♣Q and run the diamonds. Making six. The full deal:

	♠ J 7 ♥ 9 7 ♦ A Q 10 9 6 4 ♣ K Q 7		
♠ A 10 9 3 2 ♥ K 10 8 5 2 ♦ 2 ♣ 9 3	N W     E S	♠ 8 6 5 ♥ J 6 ♦ J 7 5 3 ♣ 10 8 6 5	
	♠ K Q 4 ♥ A Q 4 3 ♦ K 8 ♣ A J 4 2		

The deal furnished ammunition for my opinion that bidding with weak hands often loses. If West doesn't act, we might reach 6NT; but, lacking a crystal ball, I would certainly go down.

Players often enter the auction without considering the possible consequences. When you bid with a flimsy hand — when you are unlikely to buy the contract — you may disrupt the opponents' auction. But you may just as well impel them to bid with all the more determination, reach an unlikely contract and make it because your intervention provided a clue. Edgar Kaplan once analyzed a match and observed thus: "The results... point to a strange conclusion. Could it be that it pays to bid with strong hands and pass with weak ones?"

This is an issue about which I feel strongly; several deals in this book, including the next few, reflect my bias.

## About the author

Frank Stewart (b. 1946) is one of the world's most prolific bridge journalists, known as an advocate of a sound and disciplined approach to bidding. He won many tournament events before devoting himself to writing. Stewart served as co-editor of the ACBL's *Bridge Bulletin* from 1984 to 1989 and continues to contribute through an instructional column he started in 1981. He edited the ACBL's World Championship books from 1983 to 1987 and was a principal contributor from 1986 to 1989. He was also a principal contributor to the Fifth Edition of *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*.

In 1986, Stewart began a collaboration with Alfred Sheinwold to produce the famous syndicated newspaper column 'Sheinwold on Bridge'. After Sheinwold's death in 1997, the column continued under Stewart's byline as 'Sheinwold's Bridge' and in 2000, became the 'Daily Bridge Club'. It appears in newspapers worldwide and on major internet sites.

Stewart has published hundreds of magazine and online articles, including technical pieces, tournament reports, fiction and humor. He has written twenty-four other books, among them *Becoming an Expert*, *Who Has the Queen?*, *What's Your Call?* and *Frank Stewart's Bridge Club*. He is a senior analyst for ACBL-wide Charity and International Fund events, having served since 1980.

Stewart has been honored by the Birmingham AL Duplicate Bridge Club, of which he is a supporter and a member. The club houses the Frank Stewart Library, which was facilitated by a donation of books and materials from him. In 2005, the club established a trophy in his name for a Sectional Swiss Teams.

In 2014, Frank Stewart received the International Bridge Press Association's Truscott Award for achievements that Alan Truscott, the former bridge editor of the New York Times, would appreciate.

Stewart is a graduate of the University of Alabama, where he studied Voice and Musicology. He is a low-handicap golfer and a past chairman of the Fayette Christian Center of Concern, a food bank. He and his wife, Charlotte, a pediatric speech pathologist, live in Fayette, Alabama. They have a twenty-two-year-old daughter.

## INTERMEDIATE

The “over-my-shoulder” method of bridge writing became prominent in the writing of Terence Reese and continued in the work of excellent writers such as Mike Lawrence and Larry Cohen. In this genre, the reader gains access to the mind and thought processes of an expert. The reader encounters techniques, such as counting and drawing inferences, that are supposedly expert territory.

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During a session of bridge, a player faces hundreds of decisions. Some can be resolved instinctively, but many require reasoning. That is what makes the game so exhilarating: having a problem and figuring out the answer.

In this book you sit with the author and can compare your decisions with his. You won’t agree with all his actions — bridge involves personal style and judgment — but you will find it instructive to listen in on his thoughts.



**FRANK STEWART** has been a leading bridge author and journalist for more than forty years. He is a former editor of the *ACBL Bulletin*, and writes a bridge column that appears in many North American newspapers daily.

