

Story of an Accusation



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Contents

| | | |
|----------|---|------------|
| | Obiter Dicta | 1 |
| | The scandal in Buenos Aires 2, The case against Reese and Schapiro 7, For or against 15 | |
| 1 | The Green Sickness | 25 |
| 2 | A Day to Remember | 37 |
| 3 | A Change of Climate | 47 |
| 4 | ‘Is that a Question?’ Kehela’s evidence-in-chief 57, Kehela cross-examined 59 | 56 |
| 5 | Observation and Inference Opening speech for the British Bridge League 41 | 64 |
| 6 | ‘I’ll be Judge, I’ll be Jury’ Butler’s evidence-in-chief 75, Butler cross-examined 55, Butler re-examined 63 | 74 |
| 7 | The Triumvirate Truscott cross-examined 92, Mrs Hayden’s evidence-in-chief 95, Mrs Hayden cross-examined 97, Becker’s evidence-in-chief 99, Becker cross-examined 100 | 89 |
| 8 | ‘Dear Me’ Swimer’s evidence-in-chief 104, Swimer cross-examined 105, Swimer re-examined 109, Swimer further examined 111, Swimer further cross-examined 112 | 103 |
| 9 | A Thought for Christmas Opening speech for the defence 115, Reese’s evidence-in-chief 117, Reese cross-examined 121 | 115 |

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 10 | <p>‘Written in the Hands’ Flint’s evidence-in-chief 129, Flint cross-examined 132, Heredia’s evidence-in-chief 134, Heredia cross-examined 137, Heredia re-examined 138, Ortiz-Patino’s evidence-in-chief 139, Ortiz-Patino cross-examined 142</p> | 129 |
| 11 | <p>Ringing the Bell Reese cross-examined (second part) 144, Schapiro’s evidence-in-chief 147, Schapiro cross-examined 153</p> | 144 |
| 12 | <p>Anniversary Konstam’s evidence-in-chief 160, Konstam cross-examined 164, Konstam re-examined 167, Figgis’s evidence-in-chief 167, Figgis cross-examined 168, Franklin’s evidence-in-chief 170, Franklin cross-examined 174</p> | 160 |
| 13 | <p>At the End of the Day Closing speech for the British Bridge League 178, Closing speech for the defence 183</p> | 178 |
| | <p>Appendix 1: The Technical Evidence The eight ‘committee hands’ 195, Further hands quoted by Counsel for the British Bridge League 200, Hands introduced by the defence 214, Analysis of swings of hands quoted by Counsel for the British Bridge League 227</p> | 194 |
| | <p>Appendix 2: The Foster Report</p> | 228 |

Foreword

Following the death of Boris Schapiro in 2002, Master Point Press decided to publish a revised edition of *The Great Bridge Scandal*, which presents the case against Reese and Schapiro. To balance the scales of justice we offer this new edition of Reese's own account, with some important additional material.

Story of an Accusation was written as the 'trial' progressed. Early chapters describe the intense rivalries in competitive bridge, events at Buenos Aires and reaction in London. The proceedings at the inquiry contain some extraordinary twists and turns, not previously made public. Was it all just an American 'scare'? What induced the British officials to testify against their countrymen? Exactly where did the truth lie? These are some of their fascinating questions which you will seek to answer for yourself.

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Preface

This is a personal story, not a legal document. It has been written from the standpoint of innocence, because Boris Schapiro and I were innocent. But I have not set out to prove a case or to play down the evidence that was given against us. Whatever the verdict of the Inquiry, no reader will mistake the force with which the case was presented.

I say 'whatever the verdict', because one quality this book must necessarily possess is suspense. I began to write it soon after the Inquiry started, and from then on the narrative has kept pace with the 'trial'. This preface was written long before its close.

Non-players will see that the technical evidence, apart from a few hands that are an integral part of the story, is reserved for an Appendix. There I assume that the reader has some knowledge of the tournament game.

No doubt the British Bridge League, which arranged for the Inquiry, will express the thanks of all players to the members of the court who served such an unexpectedly long stint. As for Boris and myself, how could we ever have imagined that we would receive such wonderful support from Mr Tim Holland and the directors of Crockford's., or that we would be defended by so fine an advocate as Mr Leonard Caplan, QC? Even so, we could not have carried on throughout this long year without the encouragement and goodwill of our expert witnesses and of a host of friends, both known and unknown.

My secretary, Marjorie Hiron, made a number of good suggestions for the book and surprisingly injected a certain amount of 'acid'; as though it were needed.

Terence Reese



Reese and Schapiro playing in the open room against Belladonna and Avarelli of Italy. Swimer is in the 'captain's chair' on Reese's right.



Reese about to lead against Avarelli and Belladonna. Butler (wearing glasses) is behind Avarelli. Dimmie Fleming is taking notes for BRIDGE Magazine, but Kempson decided not to publish any deals.

Obiter Dicta

(L.f. *obiter* by the way + *dictum* a thing said)

It is an unfortunate fact that the most frequent way in which bridge reaches the headlines of the daily press is through scandalous behaviour of one sort or another.

Of all such cases, one stands head and shoulders above the rest, the accusations made against Terence Reese & Boris Schapiro at the 1965 World Bridge Championships.

Story of an Accusation is Reese's account of events before, during and after the event.

* * *

Writing in the May 1965 issue of BRIDGE MAGAZINE, Ewart Kempson reported as follows:

Our World Championship team of Mr M J Flint, Mr M Harrison-Gray, Mr Kenneth Konstam, Mr T Reese, Mr A Rose and Mr B Schapiro will have no difficulty in finishing second and may well win the world title in Buenos Aires this month. The South American team is likely to finish at the foot once again, but have a fair chance of entrusting the wooden spoon to North America. Italy will naturally start favourites, but my money goes on the British team. If they can all be induced to play CAB or Acol, my book would make them five to four on.'

I don't know if Kempson was taking a sly dig at the Little Major, but there were no dramatic system changes and Great Britain was heading for second place when the 1965 Championships became a cause célèbre that has intrigued the bridge world ever since.

One month later Kempson's Editorial ran as follows:

Heartiest congratulations to Italy on her seventh successive victory in the World Championship, a magnificent achievement which is unlikely ever to be equalled.

The Italians had already won the title when incidents – which have been reported on radio and in newspapers throughout the world – led to an unhappy ending to the 1965 championship in Buenos Aires.

The two British players accused of cheating returned to England under this horrible, black cloud ... and alone. All the other players who took part in the championship went on to Rio de Janeiro for a holiday tournament.

I cannot believe that Mr Reese and Mr Schapiro were guilty of using private finger signals in Buenos Aires, and I hope an appeal will be lodged and that they will be exonerated.

Mrs A L Fleming's daily reports from Buenos Aires were to have been published in this issue; in the circumstances I shall not publish anything on the 1965 World Championship. The sooner this contest is abandoned, the better it will be for the game.

Fortunately, the World Championships were not abandoned, and it was soon announced that a formal enquiry would be held into the accusations.

Meanwhile, *The Bridge World*, in its July 1965 issue, went into print.

* * *

The scandal in Buenos Aires

ITALY'S seventh successive victory in the World Championships at Buenos Aires – a triumph of no little magnitude – was overshadowed, hence to some degree spoiled, by the unprecedented, shocking 'cheating' charges against Britain's Reese and Schapiro. Not since the Culbertson–Lenz match of the early 1930s did news media throughout the world give such extraordinary coverage to contract bridge, and it was sad indeed that the reason for this splurge was what it was.

On my return from Argentina in New York I found a folder crammed with requests – often demands – from readers for a complete airing of the charges and evidence against the British pair. Evidently, the world's bridge-playing community gave priority to the shocking news rather than to the Italian performance – however magnificent and unblemished that performance was.

So, bowing to demands, I will defer my own technical coverage of the matches in order to present all the details of the scandal.

Chronology of events

The first encounter between Great Britain and the United States took place on Monday, May 17. Almost immediately, B Jay Becker of the US noticed something that surprised and disturbed him: Reese and Schapiro, his opponents in that session, were holding their cards in strange and ever-changing ways. It was the changes that were so arresting – and, later, so significant. Almost all bridge players, and especially experts, are creatures of habit. If they hold a hand of 13 cards in a certain way, that is the way they hold all hands. They do not project two fingers around one hand and three or four fingers around another.

Text of an Announcement by the Executive Committee of the World Bridge Federation at 12.30 a.m. on Monday, May 24 1965, last night of the World Bridge Championship at the Plaza Hotel, Buenos Aires:

"Certain irregularities having been reported, the Appeals Committee fully investigated the matter and later convened a meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Bridge Federation. The Captain of the British team was present.

"As a result of this meeting the Captain of the British squad decided to play only K. Konstam, M. Harrison Gray, A. Rose and J. Flint in the remaining sessions and very sportingly conceded the match against North America and Argentina. A report of the proceedings will be sent to the British Bridge League".

(Signed)

Charles J. Solomon

President, World Bridge Federation

Geoffrey L. Butler

Chairman, Appeals Committee

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