



COMING BACK TO BRIDGE

Paul Goldfinger

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Author's Note

I started proofreading bridge books for Master Point Press in 2011. This is certainly my dream job, since I get paid to read bridge books! After proofreading a number of books, I started wondering if I could write a bridge book on a topic that hadn't been covered already. And I realized that there was a need for a book to help those who learned bridge decades earlier — and who didn't play weak twos, transfer bids, or takeout doubles — to upgrade their bidding. I self-published the original version of this book in 2014 under the title *Goldfinger's Rule of Thumb: Bidding Basics & Other Bridge Tips*. I want to thank Master Point Press for taking on — and improving — this book, now called *Coming Back to Bridge*, a more descriptive title. It is my hope that by reaching a wider audience, this book will help more people to improve their bidding and enjoy the game.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the many bridge partners I've had over the years, especially Julie who introduced me to bridge in 1973. I also want to thank the myriad bridge authors and bridge columnists I've read, all of whom helped me to learn more and better appreciate the game.

Paul Goldfinger

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Introduction

I couldn't believe it. I had only 6 points, yet the hand was passed out. Somebody must have had an opening hand.

When I mentioned I had only 6 points, one opponent said that he had 13 points but no opening bid, while his partner said that he had 12 points. They had 25 points between them — and possibly game — but neither thought their hand was strong enough to open! Clearly, both of them were playing old-style bridge.

I've seen other examples of old-style bidding where players don't get to the best contract. As this example shows, sometimes they don't even get to any contract! And that's why I've written this book.

This book is designed for those who learned bridge a long time ago and still play the same way they learned. While neither declarer play nor defense have changed that much in the past thirty-plus years, bidding has. And by learning to bid better, you will play better bridge and have more fun.

I've been there. I can still remember one day some years ago when I realized just how little I knew. I had learned how to play bridge decades earlier. While I hadn't played much in the intervening years, I had read the daily bridge column in the local newspaper for more than twenty years, so I thought I knew most of the basics. But on that day, when I passed and my partner almost came across the table, yelling, 'You can't pass — my bid is forcing', I realized that I had some gaps in my understanding.

I immediately started reading every bridge book I could get my hands on. By alternating my reading with play, I quickly raised the level of my game. Considering where I started from, I am especially proud to say that I am now a Life Master.

Most of what I learned is that modern bidding dramatically improves communication over old-style bidding. Those who learned bridge decades ago and haven't updated their systems will find themselves at a disadvantage even at social bridge — and definitely in a duplicate game.

This book is organized into a series of chapters that first give an example of a bidding problem, and then explain a simple convention or rule that solves that problem. Understanding these conventions will greatly improve your bidding. Included in these chapters are some bidding ideas and tips that I've found to be especially useful. Since these chapters provide a lot of information, I've labeled some sections (and all of Chapter 5) as 'Advanced Tips', and these can be skipped in an initial reading of the book. The exercises at the end of Chapters 1-6 will help reinforce your understanding. Exercises noted as *advanced* relate to the Advanced Tips.

This material on current bidding style will allow you and your partner to get into the bidding more often, communicate better, and wind up in better contracts. If you'd rather be declarer than defender, then shifting to current bidding style will certainly help.

One change in modern bidding that will not be covered in this book is what is known as the *two-over-one system*. In this system, some bids at the two-level by the partner of the opener are forcing to game. Clearly, being able to make such a bid at the two-level ensures that the partnership will get to game. But hands that are not strong enough for such a forcing bid can be harder to bid under this system

than the traditional system (Standard American). Since the target audience for this book is those who learned bridge decades ago, I decided to keep things simple and not go into the details of two-over-one, especially since these details can get complicated very quickly.

During bridge sessions I've also seen a number of plays by a declarer or defender that were, to put it politely, not optimal. In response, Chapter 7 provides a number of tips for declarer play and defense to help you avoid similar errors.

Chapter 8 on 'Final Thoughts' suggests ways for you and your regular partner or partners to ensure that you're on the same page when it comes to bidding.

Since this book covers only some of the basics that bridge players should know, there's a lot more that the interested reader can get into. I've listed some books that I've found very helpful in the 'Recommended Reading' section of Chapter 8.

If you hate getting lousy cards when playing bridge, there's an easy cure for that — just play duplicate. Since everyone is playing with the same hands, you can now win with lousy cards. One time my partner and I took just one trick on a hand but got a top score!

Check out the Supplement to learn further benefits of playing duplicate and how to get started. And if you already play duplicate, you may find the section on 'Bidding Strategies for Duplicate' to be helpful.

I love playing bridge. My hope is that this book will help you to become a better bidder and player and thereby increase your love for this game.

Paul Goldfinger

Chapter 1

Bidding Basics

Some years ago, a woman who was very good at declarer play and defense told me that she would always open a 14-point hand, and sometimes a good 13-point hand. That was certainly the norm when she learned bridge. But today that is far too conservative.

I'm not advocating reckless bidding, just being a little more aggressive. It is the norm today to open most 12-point hands — and even some hands with fewer points if they have long suits.

One thing that hasn't changed is that when you evaluate your hand you should still count an ace as 4 points, a king as 3 points, a queen as 2 points and a jack as 1 point — these are called high-card points (HCP). But there are also adjustments to be made for long suits as well as for voids, singletons or doubletons. We'll get into all that later in this chapter, but for now, simply start with a count of your high-card points.

OPENING BIDS

I've played enough social bridge to realize that not everybody has a common understanding of some bidding basics. Here are some simple points to discuss with your partner:

- Most players open with at least 12 high-card points, sometimes with fewer points when you have a highly distributional hand (the Rule of 20 is discussed later in this chapter).
- Open 1NT with a balanced hand of 15-17 points, not 16-18 points as was the norm years ago. Why the difference? As we'll see in the next chapter, there are a lot of advantages to opening 1NT, and using the 15-17 point range will allow you to open 1NT more often.
- If you have a balanced hand with 20-21 points, open 2NT — again, you probably learned a different range. If you are stronger than that, open 2♣, an artificial bid discussed in Chapter 3. The 1NT and 2NT opening bids both require a balanced hand — that is, a hand with no singleton or void and no more than one doubleton.
- If you open with a bid of 1♥ or 1♠ you are promising at least five cards in that suit. Since hearts and spades are the major suits, this is often called opening with a five-card major.
- If you have two five-card suits, always bid the higher-ranking suit first, regardless of suit quality. For example, if you have five spades and five hearts, bid spades first.

If you have opening points, but do not have a five-card major and can't open in notrump, you must open in a minor suit — either clubs or diamonds. If one minor is longer than the other, open your longer minor suit. If you have three cards in both clubs and diamonds, open 1♣. If you have four cards in both minors, open 1♦. Note that if your partner opens 1♦, he probably has at least four cards in that

NEWCOMER/INTERMEDIATE

Has it been a long time since you played bridge?

Bridge is a game that people often decide to learn as empty-nesters. But perhaps you learned the game when you were younger — and while you would like to start playing again, you are nervous about how much the game may have changed. There are new ways of bidding, new conventions, and other things to know before you feel confident about playing even with friends. For those who are “coming back to bridge”, this book summarizes the key changes that someone who has not played for many years will encounter, and explains simply and clearly what you will need to know to be comfortable in the modern game.



Like many bridge players, **PAUL GOLDFINGER** (Washington, USA) learned the game decades ago. When he started playing again in 2006, he quickly realized that he had a lot to learn. By reading dozens of bridge books and magazines, along with playing frequently, he’s gone from being a novice to a Bridge Life Master.

