ERIC KOKISH & MARK HORTON

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

BRIDGE'S GREATEST MATCHES

BOOK 1: 1964 TO 2001

Master Point Press • Toronto

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Publisher's Note

Close Encounters was a long time coming — indeed, as Eric notes in his Foreword, it began life as a totally different book. After initial discussions, the authors departed to their respective continents, and began to work. Both have been writing about top-level bridge for decades, and their files contain a wealth of fascinating material. Three or four years later, when the manuscript finally arrived, it was about twice the length I had envisaged — but it would have been tragic simply to discard half of it. The solution was to divide it into two books, one of which you are holding as you read this. After further lengthy discussion, we decided on a simple approach to this — we would break it into two books chronologically. That way the reader could see something of the evolution of theory and practice in bridge over the decades, and even follow the fortunes of some of the players who are recurring characters in the narrative.

Close Encounters Book 1 covers the twentieth century, beginning at the changing of the guard that ushered in the Blue Team era, and ending with the last dramatic session of the Venice Cup final in Paris in 2001. The second book covers the past twenty years, ending with the most recent World Championship in Lyon in 2017. Inevitably, the Nickell team features prominently in Book 2 — but then they have been the preeminent force in world bridge for the last thirty-odd years.

Ray Lee
Master Point Press

FOREWORD BY ERIC KOKISH

When I was more or less a callow youth, I ate up everything I could read about bridge. The day *The Bridge World* arrived in the mail was always special. So was hunting for back issues. And the annual World Championship Book: something to savor, devour, and cherish. It took me a while to start writing about bridge. I started with match reports, theory articles, and different slants I found amusing on deals I had experienced for as many different bridge magazines as I could convince of my merit, then secured a weekly column in the *Montreal Gazette*.

To give you some idea of how much I was writing in those days, I can share with you the essence of a phone call I received one rainy day from Sami Kehela, one of my idols, and eventually a cherished teammate. 'I say, Kokes,' he began, 'are you getting paid by the word?' I had to laugh because my writing style was not exactly pithy — 'pithy' being another word that often crept into our conversations. Not so much later, I noticed a comment by the much-revered Hugh Kelsey, referring to a certain earnest Canadian bridge reporter as a 'parenthetic' writer, which was also true: I often resorted to including a somewhat related idea within those curved brackets. I resolved to aim for a less-is-more approach and to limit my use of the maligned parentheses. After all, he was Hugh Kelsey; he ought to know what was good. So here I am, more than forty years later, using colons and semi-colons with great abandon, free at last to separate my thoughts.

In 1979 came my big break, when I was invited to analyze the finals of the Rio de Janeiro Bermuda Bowl for the World Championship Book, something I had wanted to do for years, trying an approach that would go far beyond reporting what happened.

It is inevitable that no one plays error-free bridge, but learning why mistakes are made, what the players are thinking, how the intangibles affect the results, which parts of the game make the difference in a match — those are things that have always interested me. I continue to hope that bringing a match to life makes reading about it an almost intimate experience. After I worked on my last World Championship Book in 2006, I thought I would miss the process terribly, but with the emergence of email (to facilitate consultation with the players) and much better record-keeping, just doing a thorough job on the final could take several months, and it had become almost an obsession for me to get everything just right.

But all that bridge writing and all those trips to major tournaments had left me with stories untold, or only partially told. The possibility of revisiting some of the most interesting matches from more than just an analytical perspective was always somewhere at the back of my mind, so

when Mark expressed his interest in collaborating on just that sort of book, I was receptive.

What started out as a project called *Last Board** — a collection of single-deal chapters — has become a bird of a different feather that we call *Close Encounters*. What you will find in these two books are personal slants on some of the greatest matches ever played, including some with superb bridge, some with the other kind, but all culminating with a special ending. In most cases, at least one of us has been on site as a commentator, journalist, player or (in my case) coach, and we try to paint a picture of the tournament scene, the life and times of these important events.

We hope you enjoy the ride. Pacemaker not included.

Eric Kokish, Toronto, Canada, 2018

FOREWORD BY MARK HORTON

Bridge matches can be frustrating affairs, especially if a vast amount of your time is taken up by watching them unfold. It's tricky to entertain your audience as a VuGraph commentator or journalist if the deals are uncooperative. (One famous author of my acquaintance refuses to write up deals that end in 1NT.) However, every once in a while, one is lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time to witness the most dramatic events unfold.

We have selected contests from the last six decades that will have you metaphorically sitting on the edge of your seat. These matches are not only unbelievably exciting, but they are also instructive in so many ways. Having played and written about bridge for more than forty years, I know that there are only two ways to get better at this sometimes infuriating game — play against the best and read as much as you can. These books give you the opportunity to fulfil half of that equation.

Mark Horton, Sutton Benger, UK, 2018

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Contents

1. 1964 The End of an Era

The second World Bridge Team Olympiad was played in 1964 in New York at the beginning of May. The twenty-nine teams that contested the Open series included several players and captains who were to go on to great glory.

In 1964 I† had not yet learned how to play bridge, but six years later I picked up a copy of a book called *The Game of Bridge* written by a certain Terence Reese. As I developed an interest in the game I went on to devour almost every book he had written. Eventually I discovered that in 1965, just one year after the match described in this chapter, he had been involved in one of the greatest scandals ever to infest the game of bridge. Much later, having got to know Terence, I asked him about the Buenos Aires affair; he nodded sagely and said he had plans for something 'interesting' to be published at some point. After his death, his widow, Alwyn, invited me to their flat in Hove, but the great mass of papers we went through revealed nothing.

Some years after that (along with Raymond and Sally Brock, Brian Senior and Robert Sheehan) I was part of a group that started a bridge publishing company that we optimistically called Five Aces. We were friendly with Boris Schapiro and he agreed to write a book for us about his extraordinary career as a bridge player. Naturally we asked him what he would write about Buenos Aires 1965, to which he replied, 'I will leave nothing out'. It was not to be: he died a week later. In the end, all one can say about that extraordinary affair is that, like the mystery of the Mary Celeste, it is still the subject of speculation and controversy.

In the 1964 Olympiad, the teams played a complete round robin of 20-board matches. The matches were scored by IMPs, and the result converted to Victory Points using a scale of 6-0, 5-1, 4-2 and 3-3. The top four teams played semifinals, and the winners of those contested a final to determine the winner. It had originally been decided that those knockout matches would be over 40 boards, but this was subsequently changed to 60.

Great Britain topped the round robin, with a total of 160 VP, followed by Italy (153), USA (147) and Canada, which had won its last eight matches to qualify with 145. According to the regulations Great Britain should have faced fourth-qualifier Canada, but at the last moment it was announced that

† Primary author Mark Horton.

there would be a draw to decide who played whom. Four aces were put in a hat. Canada drew the ace of clubs, Great Britain the ace of hearts. When the Italian captain selected the ace of diamonds, that meant Italy would meet Great Britain.

It was generally accepted that the two most powerful bridge-playing countries in the world were Italy and Great Britain; in the previous nine years, the Italians had won the European Championships four times, just once more than the British. Italy was represented by what was already being referred to as the Blue Team: Giorgio Belladonna and Walter Avarelli, Pietro Forquet and Benito Garozzo, Massimo D'Alelio and Camillo Pabis-Ticci, with Sergio Osella, captain. They were the dominant force in world bridge, having won six Bermuda Bowls in a row, their only setback being their failure to win the first Olympiad in 1960.

The Italians were opposed by Boris Schapiro and Terence Reese, Kenneth Konstam and Maurice Harrison-Gray, Joel Tarlo and Jeremy Flint, with Dr. Sidney Lee as captain. During the championships, many thought that the player who had made the best impression was Reese, a rigid English professional with the profile of a canary, and the author of many ground-breaking bridge treatises. He was also the inventor of a complex bidding system called the Little Major, specifically designed to counter the Italians' strong club systems.

It was clear from the start that Reese and Schapiro would play all the boards in the semifinal and it was long odds that the Italians would go with their top two pairs, Belladonna-Avarelli and Forquet-Garozzo. That meant that both the Little Major as played by the British pair and the Roman Club practiced by Belladonna and Averelli would be on display throughout the match.

This is an outline of the opening bids in the Little Major:

1♣	In principle a heart suit, with 1♦ being either a negative response or the first move on a big hand
1♦	Either a spade suit or a 16-19 1NT with 1♥ being either a negative response or the first move on a big hand
1♥	Either a strong hand, usually 20 points plus, or an Acol two-bid, or a controlled psychic on balanced hands in the 3-6 range
1♠	Limited opening with length in both minors
1NT	Normal notrump, 13-15
2♣/♦	Limited opening, 12-15, no four-card major
2♥/♠	Fairly strong major-minor two-suiter
2NT	A weak three-bid in a minor or a strong minor two-suiter
3♣	A strong minor-suit hand, such as 7-3 or 6-4
3♦	A strong minor-suit hand, such as 7-3 or 6-4

Reese suggested that opponents could double the opening bids of 1♣ and 1♦ for takeout and use overcalls of the nominated suits (1♥ over 1♣ and 1♠ over 1♦ as weak takeout doubles).

The other British pairs played Acol, its cornerstones being the use of four-card majors, forcing two-bids and the weak (12-14) 1NT when not vulnerable (otherwise 15-17).

The Roman Club was based on the following opening bids:

1♣	12-16 balanced, or 21-22/25-26, or 17-20, 4/5 clubs plus 5/6 in another suit, or any shape with 3 or fewer losers, forcing for one round; club one-suiters were opened in the lowest ranking three-card suit
1♦	12-24, unbalanced with a five-card suit, usually not diamonds, forcing for one round
1♥	12-24, unbalanced, the longest suit only when minimum, forcing for one round
1♠	12-24, unbalanced, the longest suit only when minimum, forcing for one round
1NT	17-20 balanced (if 5-3-3-2 stoppers in all short suits)
2♣	12-16, 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0
2♦	17-24, 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0
2♥	14-16, 5/6 hearts + 4/5 clubs, 5/6 losers
2♠	14-16, 5/6 spades + 4/5 clubs, 5/6 losers
2NT	23-24 balanced, 5-3-3-2 only if long in clubs

Higher bids were sound preempts
Opener and responder both use canapé‡

Forquet and Garozzo were using the Neapolitan Club, a forerunner of Blue Club:

1♣	17+
1♦	12-16, 3+ diamonds, reverse = strong
1♥	12-16, 4+ hearts, reverse = strong
1♠	12-16, 4+ spades, reverse = strong
1NT	13-15, semi-balanced with clubs, or 16-17 balanced
2♣	12-16, 6+ clubs, or 5+ clubs and a four-card suit
2♦	7-12, six diamonds exactly
2♥	7-12, six hearts exactly

‡ This is a really bizarre agreement when you think about it, and can (and did) sometimes lead to chaos in competitive auctions.

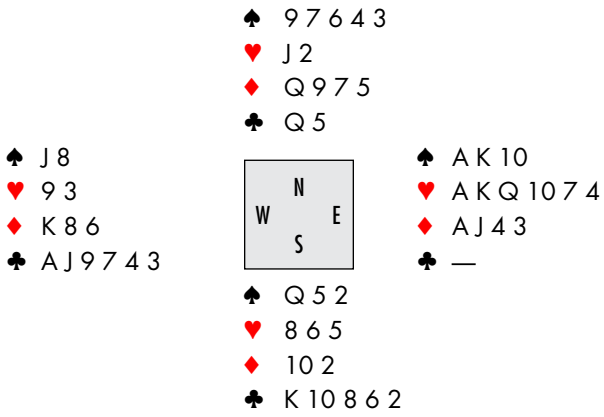
2♠	7-12, six spades exactly
2NT	21-22, balanced, stoppers in all suits

D'Alelio and Camillo Pabis-Ticci were relying on Arno, a version of the Roman Club that used a forcing opening of 1NT that promised 21+ balanced or an unbalanced game force.

Set 1 (Boards 1-20)

It sometimes happens, due to fatigue setting in, that towards the end of a major championship the standard of play is a little disappointing. Writing in the Bulletin of the Championships, editors Richard L. Frey and Albert Dormer remarked that this was not the case here; for a stretch of a great many deals the four players in the Open Room did not make the semblance of a mistake.

Board 1. Neither Vul.



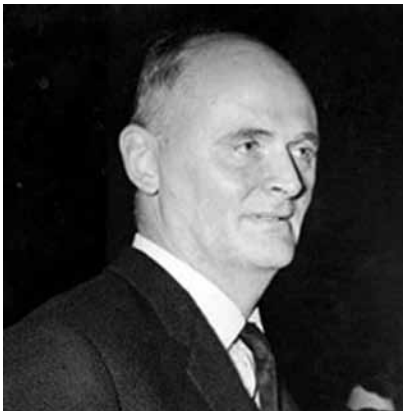
Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
	1♥[1]	dbl	pass
2♣	pass	3♥	pass
4♥	pass	4NT	pass
5♦	pass	6♥	all pass

1. Either a strong hand, usually 20+ points, or a controlled psychic on a balanced hand in the 3-6 range.

It was typical of Reese to attempt an early diversion, especially in a situation where he was protected by the partnership's system, his partner being aware

that 1♥ might be based on a very weak hand. Here Reese would have passed any response other than 2NT, which would have indicated that South suspected a psych.



Terence Reese

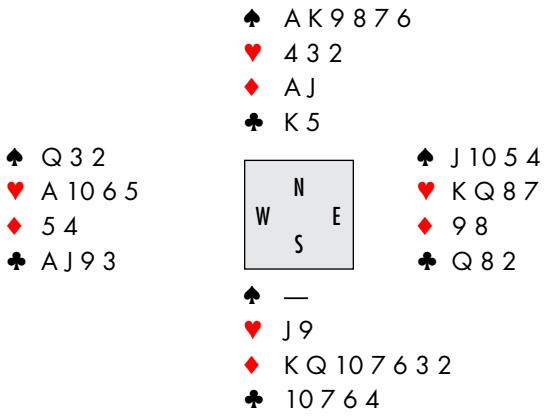
South led the ♥5 and declarer took North's jack with the ace and played three rounds of spades, ruffing the last of these with dummy's ♥9. Then he ruffed a club, drew trumps, crossed to the ♦K, pitched a diamond on the ♣A and took the diamond finesse, taking all the tricks for +1010.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
	pass	2♣	pass
3♣	pass	3♥	pass
4♣	pass	4♦	pass
4♥	pass	6♥	all pass

In this room South led the ♣6, and after pitching a diamond on the ace, declarer took a round of trumps. Then he played three rounds of spades, ruffing in dummy, ruffed a club to hand and drew the outstanding trumps before taking the diamond finesse to push the board.

Board 2. N-S Vul.



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
		pass	2NT[1]
pass	3♠	pass	4♦
all pass			

1. A weak three-bid in a minor or a strong minor two-suiter.

Reese's minor-suit holdings made it unlikely that Schapiro held a strong hand, but hoping to find some sort of fit that made 4♠ playable he introduced his suit and then subsided. West led the ♥A and continued the suit, East winning and switching to a trump. Declarer won with dummy's ace, pitched two clubs on the top spades, drew trumps and led a club towards the king for +130.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
		pass	pass
1♣	dbl	redbl	3♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

Avarelli's initial pass was consistent with the partnership's philosophy about vulnerable preemptive bids in this position. It was standard Italian policy to double with the type of hand Belladonna held rather than overcall in spades. When South jumped to 3♦ promising a decent suit, the ever-aggressive Belladonna (he was, after all, considered the team's most dashing bidder) was

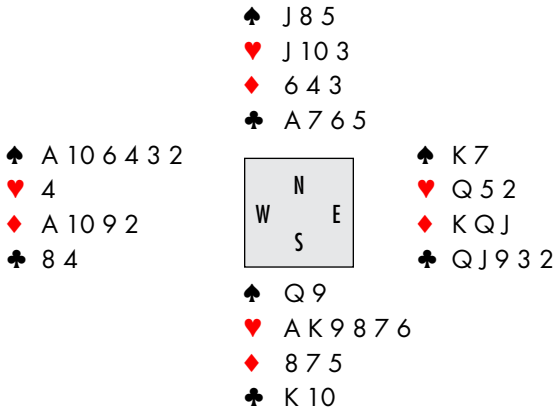
willing to take a shot at game. East led the ♣2 and West won with the ace and returned the suit, the grateful declarer rapidly claiming ten tricks, +630 and 11 IMPs.

Giorgio Belladonna

Given that it was unlikely declarer would have bid 3NT without a club stopper, and surely must have a diamond fit, it looks as if the defenders will need to take their tricks on the go if they are to have a chance of defeating the contract. That points to West laying down the ♥A at Trick 2, only reverting to clubs if partner plays a discouraging card. However, West 'knows' that declarer's clubs are only ♣K5 and if East holds the ♠A, a club return will set up five tricks for the defense (East will unblock the ♣Q under the king).

Many years later, I got the opportunity to play against Belladonna and Pabis-Ticci at a Pairs tournament in Cefalu, Sicily. At the end of the round, Belladonna turned to me and said, 'You play very well, young man'. You might find that on my tombstone.

Board 5. N-S Vul.



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
		1NT[1]	2♥
2♠	3♥	pass	pass
3♠	pass	4♠	all pass

1. 13-16 balanced or semi-balanced, one-suited in clubs.

When Forquet took a second bid, Garozzo (surprisingly, given his lack of aces) decided to advance to game. Reese led the ♥J and Schapiro overtook it and played king and another club. Reese won with the ace and played back a third club, ruffed by Schapiro with the queen, which did wonders for his partner's spade holding. Forquet overruffed with the ace, played a spade to the king and subsequently lost two trump tricks to finish two down, -100.

The eagle-eyed reader will have spotted that if Forquet plays the ♠10 after overruffing he will save a trick, as after North covers, the combined power of the ♠76 come into their own.

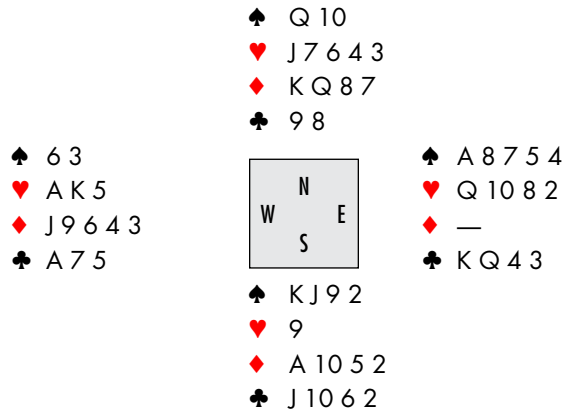
Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
	pass	1♣	1♥
1♠	pass	1NT	2♥
3♠	pass	4♠	all pass

Here Gray's jump to 3♠ more or less obliged Konstam to go on to game. This time when North led the ♥J South allowed it to hold, and when North played

a second heart declarer ruffed and played three rounds of trumps. There was no way to avoid the loss of two clubs but that was only one down, -50 and 2 IMPs to Great Britain who trailed 7-11.

Board 7. Both Vul.



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
			pass
pass	pass	1♠	pass
2NT	pass	3♣	pass
3NT	pass	4♥	all pass

It's hard to imagine any modern player passing with the West hand, but both Forquet and Gray elected to do so. Knowing that West almost certainly did not have three spades, Garozzo was willing to take a third bid in the hope of finding a fit.

It's worth noting that Garozzo was happy to rebid 3♣ as opposed to bidding a direct 3♥. The huge advantage of doing that is illustrated by swapping West's minor suits around. To what extent East's strategy should be influenced by West's initial pass is unclear — it perhaps depends on how certain you are that 2NT might deliver something close to an opening bid.

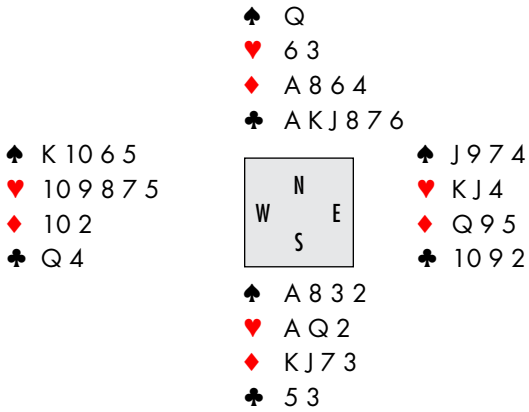
South found the best lead of the ♥9. Declarer won with the ten, and ducked a spade, North winning and returning a second heart to dummy's king. Declarer played a spade to the ace, cashed the ♣K, played a club to the ace, and a third club. North ruffed and exited with a trump, and declarer could only score the master trump, finishing three down, -300. He could have saved a trick by not playing a third round of clubs, cross-ruffing diamonds and spades.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
			pass
pass	pass	1♠	pass
2NT	pass	3♣	pass
3NT	all pass		

Here too, East rebid 3♣, hoping to learn of four hearts or three spades if clubs was not the best strain. North led the ♥4 against 3NT, and declarer won in hand, cashed another top heart, took the marked finesse against North's jack and cashed a fourth heart, South discarding two diamonds and a spade. He then tested the clubs, but when they failed to divide decided to duck a spade, which meant the defenders could collect all the remaining tricks via one spade, one heart, three diamonds and a club for -200. Those 3 IMPs meant the scores were now level, 11-11.

Board 8. Neither Vul.



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
pass	1♠[1]	pass	1NT[2]
pass	2♥[3]	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	pass	5♦
all pass			

1. 12-15, clubs and diamonds, 5-4 or 4-5 or better.
2. Asking for the longer minor.
3. Longer clubs, presumably not minimum.

The precise meaning of 3♥ is unclear — it looks as if Schapiro wanted to make a slam try, but Reese was worried it might be natural. West led the ♥10 and declarer won with the queen, played a diamond to the ace and a diamond to the jack. When that held, he played a club to the ace, a heart to the ace and cashed the ♦K. When the ♣Q appeared on the next trick, declarer claimed the rest, +440.

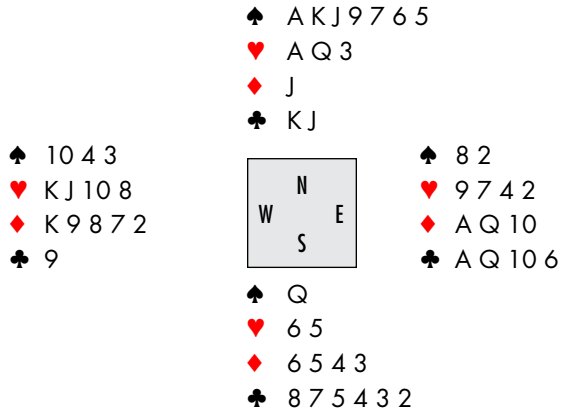
Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
pass	1♦[1]	pass	1♠[2]
pass	3♣[3]	pass	3♦
pass	4♦[4]	pass	4♥[5]
pass	4♠[6]	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♦
all pass			

1. Unbalanced with a five-card suit, usually not diamonds.
2. Natural, normally 10+ (but may be 8/9), possible canapé.
3. A four-loser hand, longer clubs, may have only three diamonds.
4. At least four diamonds.
5. Heart control.
6. Spade control.

East led the ♥4 and declarer put in dummy's queen. When that held, he cashed the ♦K and ♦A, followed by the top clubs. When the queen fell he could claim twelve tricks, +920 and 10 IMPs, restoring Italy's lead, 21-11. With North as declarer in 6♦, the heart lead meant that, had the finesse lost, he would have needed trumps to play for no losers, roughly a 39% chance. There are other issues too, so I leave to you to decide whether the Italians did well to bid the slam, or the British were unlucky to stay out of it.

Board 9. E-W Vul.



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
	1♥[1]	pass	1♠[2]
pass	pass	dbl	pass
2♦	2♠	3♦	pass
pass	3♠	all pass	

1. A strong hand, usually 20+ points, or an Acol two-bid, or a controlled psychic on a balanced hand in the 3-6 range.
2. Negative.

Writing in *Bridge Magazine* in 1969, Reese says that 1♠ was previously played as a step response showing controls. When he was asked how he could pass over 1♠, his explanation was that that bid showed a completely worthless hand. Writing in *The Great Bridge Scandal*, Alan Truscott suggested that Reese's pass was explicable only if North knew his partner held a singleton spade and a weak hand.

West led the ♣9 and East took two tricks in the suit and continued with the ♦A and ♦Q. Declarer ruffed in dummy, came to hand with the ♠Q, played a heart to the queen, drew trumps, and claimed nine tricks, +140.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
	1♣[1]	pass	1♦[2]
pass	2♠[3]	pass	3♦[4]
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

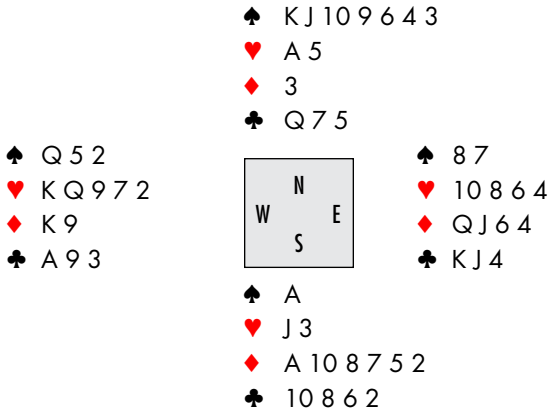
1. 12-16 balanced, or 21-22/25-26, or 17-20 with 4/5 clubs plus 5/6 in another suit or any shape with three or fewer losers.
2. 0-9.
3. Asking bid in spades.
4. Singleton or doubleton honor.

East led the ♠2, removing dummy's only entry, and declarer won with dummy's queen to play a club to the jack and queen. East continued with the ♣A, followed by the ♣10. West ruffed with the ♠10, and declarer overruffed and played five rounds of trumps. When East kept three hearts and the ♦A, he was thrown in with a diamond to lead into declarer's heart tenace, giving declarer nine tricks, for -50. That was 5 IMPs to Great Britain, edging closer: 16-21.

Once declarer has played a club at Trick 2, the defenders must discard carefully to come to five tricks. For example, if West parts with the ♥8, declarer can come to nine tricks by cashing all his trumps bar one, and then exiting with the ♦J. He can ruff the next diamond and exit with the ♥3 to endplay West.

Walter Avarelli

Board 13. Both Vul.



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Forquet	*Reese*	*Garozzo*	*Schapiro*
	1♦[1]	pass	2♦[2]
pass	2♠	all pass	

1. Spades or 16-19 balanced.
2. Natural, assuming partner has opened 1♠.

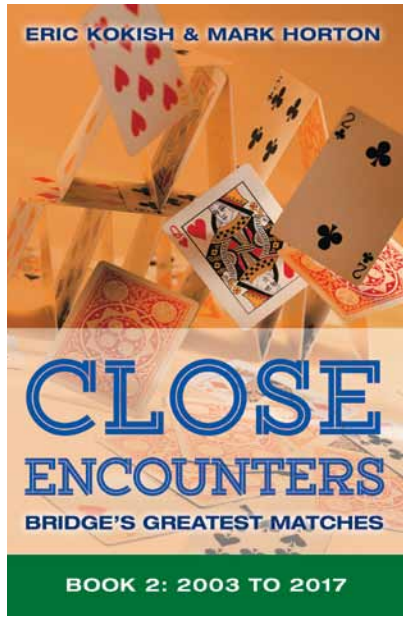
Declarer lost a spade, a heart and three clubs, +110.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gray	*Belladonna*	*Konstam*	*Avarelli*
	3♠	all pass	

Clearly the Italian pair adhered to the principle of making sound preempts when vulnerable, but here it meant they were a trick too high and -100 gave Great Britain another 5 IMPs to leave them just one behind, 21-22.

Also Available



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