

BRIDGE TECHNIQUE SERIES

READING THE CARDS

10



David Bird • Marc Smith

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Master Point Press

331 Douglas Ave
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5M 1H2
(416) 781-0351

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www.ebooksbridge.com
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Email: info@masterpointpress.com

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
<i>Reading the Cards</i>	5
Chapter 1 Clues from the bidding	6
<i>Detective work</i>	12
<i>Clues when a defender has not bid</i>	14
<i>Key points</i>	16
Chapter 2 Reading the Opening Lead	21
<i>The Rule of Eleven</i>	25
<i>Diagnosing an impending ruff</i>	29
<i>Key points</i>	31
Chapter 3 Counting the Defenders' Shape	35
<i>Taking advantage of the bidding to read the distribution</i>	40
<i>Using the early play to help read the distribution</i>	44
<i>Key points</i>	46
Chapter 4 Reading the Defenders' Signals	50
<i>Making use of count signals</i>	50
<i>Making use of attitude and suit-preference signals</i>	53
<i>Inferences from the first discard</i>	55
<i>Is the defender in trouble?</i>	56
<i>Key points</i>	59

Bridge Technique Series

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Reading the Cards

The basis of all problem solving is processing the data to arrive at a logical conclusion. One of the great novelties, and attractions, of bridge is that the data is not all visible. During the bidding you can see only thirteen of the fifty-two cards. You gather further pieces of data by listening to the bids from around the table. When the dummy goes down you can see another thirteen cards and gradually — as each card is played — you gather further information about the hand.

To become a good dummy player, and defender, you must cultivate two main skills. You must read how the cards lie, to gain the data you need. You must then process the information logically, calculating which line of play or defense is most likely to succeed.

In this book we will concentrate on how to read the cards. Is this an easy task? Not particularly. You sometimes have to re-assess all the information at your disposal several times throughout a deal. In defense, you will constantly be counting points and shape, together with how many tricks you think declarer has so far established. Of course, you don't need to do all this work! If you prefer, you can treat bridge as social pastime, with half your mind on picking up young Jeremy from school or tomorrow night's big football game. To play the game well and to achieve success at it, however, it is a sad fact of life that some effort is required. Is it worth it? Yes!

Clues from the Bidding

Playing a contract is always easier if the opponents entered the bidding. Suppose you are sitting South, playing in 4♠, and West opened the bidding with a 3♥ preempt. Immediately you can place him with a likely seven-card heart suit. Suppose his opening lead is the king of hearts. It is now unlikely that he holds a side-suit singleton: he would probably have led such a card. Already you are inclined to place West with 1-7-3-2, 1-7-2-3, or 2-7-2-2 shape. After a few more tricks, you will have a complete map of his hand. You will know also that he is unlikely to hold any missing high cards outside his own suit. Such knowledge will greatly assist you in playing the hand.

Let's look straight away at a full deal where your line of play is affected by the auction:

East-West Vul.	♠ 8 4										
Dealer South	♥ K 10 8 3										
	♦ K 10 2										
	♣ A 8 7 3										
♠ A J 5 2	<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		♠ Q 9 7 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 5		♥ Q 7 2									
♦ Q 9 8 4		♦ 7 5 3									
♣ K Q 10 5		♣ 9 6 2									
	♠ K 10 3										
	♥ A J 9 6 4										
	♦ A J 6										
	♣ J 4										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♥
dbl	2NT	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♣K. How should you play this heart game?

Look at the trump suit first. Missing the queen, with a combined holding of nine cards, you would normally play for the drop. However, there are not many high-card points missing, which suggests that West is likely to hold a classic shape for his vulnerable take-out double — i.e. he will be short in hearts. This is enough to tilt the odds in favor of a finesse through the East hand.

You win the club lead with dummy’s ace, play the king of trumps, and continue with a low trump to the jack. West shows out. Yes! You draw the last trump and must now decide how to play the diamond suit. Which defender is more likely to hold the ♦Q, would you say?

There are two reasons why West is a favorite to hold the diamond queen. Firstly, he held only one heart to his partner’s three. He therefore has more space left to accommodate cards in the other three suits. Secondly, he will also hold most of the defenders’ points. Even if you expected West and East to hold roughly the same number of diamonds, West would be more likely to hold any missing honor.

So, you cash the ace of diamonds and lead a low diamond to the ten. Once again the evidence from the bidding does not let you down. The finesse is successful and you make your game.

Here is a similar deal, where a defender has overcalled. If you feel up to a test, cover the defenders’ cards and take over from South.

INTERMEDIATE

The **Bridge Technique Series** is designed to take the reader through the most important aspects of card-play technique at bridge. Each book of the series focuses on a different topic, and wherever possible, the tactics and strategy are considered from the point of view of both declarer and defenders.

READING THE CARDS

This book covers the art of being a bridge detective. Whether declaring or defending, it is vital to use all the information available to you. Here you will learn to gather clues from what the opponents have bid and what they have not bid, from their leads and plays, and from their defensive signals. More importantly, you will learn to use this information to take more tricks.

DAVID BIRD has written more than forty previous books, including the popular 'St Titus Abbey' collections. (*Saints and Sinners*, 2000, with Tim Bourke is the seventh in the series). He writes two newspaper columns in the UK, and his work appears regularly in numerous bridge magazines in the UK and the US.



MARC SMITH's previous instructional books include *Countdown to Winning Bridge* (1999, with Tim Bourke) and *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* (1999 American Bridge Teachers Association Book of the Year, with Barbara Seagram) and *25 Ways to Compete in the Bidding*, (2000, with Barbara Seagram).

