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Bridge



Bridge players, as such, are acrimonious, sedentary, conceited, unhappy, mercenary, preoccupied and futile. The better bridge players they may be, the more disagreeable they can become and the truth of this contention was needlessly demonstrated again last week in a bitter controversy between foremost U. S. authorities on Contract Bridge - Sidney Lenz, Milton C. Work, R. R. Richards, E. V. Shepard, Walter F. Wyman, and Ely Culbertson.

While most bridge experts regard each other with ill-concealed contempt, the bridge expert whom others resent the most is Ely Culbertson. A pale young man with rings under his eyes, a slightly bald head, he was educated at the Sorbonne, married a bridge teacher after admiring the way she played a hard hand, now, with her aid, makes \$40,000 a year as teacher, author, and editor of the Bridge World. Eight months ago he wrote and published the Contract Bridge Blue Book, advocating a bidding system for contract bridge on which he had worked eight years. Salient point in the Culbertson "approach-forcing system" is a two-bid to show unusual strength and to signify that partner, regardless of the merit of his own hand, must keep the bidding open. So successful was the Culbertson system when used by average U. S. bridge players that his book outsold the bridge works of Work, Whitehead, Lenz, et al., has now sold 112,000 copies.

In contract bridge, a player inevitably supplies his partner with information as to the cards he holds by the way in which he bids. Systems - such as the Vanderbilt convention, the various methods of Lenz, Work, Whitehead, et. al. - are codified kicks under the table, designed to make bidding reveal as much information as possible. There are now so many different systems, i.e., codes of giving information, that bridge players, to avoid dispute though not confusion, are compelled to preface their sittings with protracted conferences to determine which code to use.

Ostensibly to allay their uncertainty was formed last week a new organization, Bridge Headquarters, Inc. in which Sidney Lenz, Wilbur Whitehead, Milton Work and other experts planned to sacrifice their individual systems to form a universal bidding system for everyone to use. The Bridge Headquarters v. Culbertson controversy became a major bridge issue last week when five experts resigned from the Culbertson edited Bridge World to join the new organization.

Scornful, Expert Culbertson immediately declared that he had refused to join Bridge Headquarters, Inc., because it was a "purely commercial proposition," called it a "merger of ex-authorities" said there was no need for a universal system since 90% of U. S. bridge players already used the Culbertson system. Further, he offered to play, either with his wife as partner or with any partner of Lenz's choice, Expert Lenz and any partner Expert Lenz might select, 200 rubbers of contract bridge, bet \$5,000 to \$1,000 that he and his partner would win. Said Expert Culbertson: "I do not deny this merger ... might work out a fairly acceptable system for people who never played bridge before. Each has had a great deal of experience. For instance, this will be Mr. Lenz's system No. 5 ... Mr. Work's system No. 4."

The founders of Bridge Headquarters, Inc., admitted their organization was owned by Embosograf Corp., dealers in bridge supplies, but insisted that their purpose was purely in the interests of "better bridge," accused Ely Culbertson of making the Bridge World a "house organ." The new universal system was promised for U. S. bridge players within a week. The Culbertson challenge had not been accepted last week, but aspersions were cast on Expert Culbertson's sportsmanship in not naming "time, place and weapons." Replied Expert Culbertson: "As to the weapons, I'd prefer a score pad and a deck of cards."

Meanwhile, a Mrs. Madeleine Kerwin, president of the Associate Members of the American Bridge League, assailed Expert Culbertson for plagiarism, said: "I codified the system and called it the Cavendish Club system three years ago Mr. Culbertson has appropriated it and given it his name. ... He is the racketeer of the Bridge World." Replied Expert Culbertson: "A local teacher unknown outside a limited circle ... not dignify her charge by answering it"

Tragic means were required to still the mounting bitterness of the Bridge Headquarters v. Culbertson v. Kerwin controversy. Having resigned from the Bridge World to join Bridge Headquarters, Inc. Expert Whitehead last week embarked on the Ile de France to give lessons to passengers, later visit his wife and daughter in Paris. Two days later, while the argument was at its height, came news that Expert Whitehead had died at sea. A famed expert since 1910, reputed to earn \$1,000 a week, he was 67 years old, a grandfather, close friend to Sidney Lenz who received word of his death while playing at a Hanover, N. H. tournament last week. Last March, Expert Whitehead chartered a ship to take 250 enthusiasts to the West Indies on a trip to be enlivened by no pastime except Bridge. A proud devotee, almost a priest of Bridge, he said, "When God sees fit to do away with the law of probabilities, I will lose and not before."