

FOREWORD BY ERIC KOKISH



BRIDGE



25 STEPS TO



LEARNING 2/1



PAUL THURSTON

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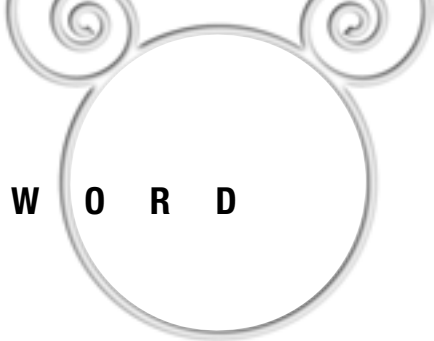
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F O R E W O R D

Paul Thurston is a true believer. If one can imagine writing about a card game from the heart, he's achieved that state of grace in this, his first book, an introduction to state-of-the-art mainstream North American bidding.

The methods and ideas that Paul outlines and carefully explains in the pages you are about to read are those he employs himself and teaches his students. When he tells you that you can play Two-over-One with anyone after absorbing what's in this book, he is not simply plugging his pet system. These methods are popular and not difficult to grasp or remember. If they make sense to you, as Paul's guidance is bound to ensure, you'll find that the learning curve is not steep and that you will be up and running in no time at all.

As Paul tells you in the final chapter, this book is only an introduction to Two-over-One and several essential areas will be broached in a second volume. For example, there is nothing in these 25 Steps about notrump openings and only a few words about two-bids, whether weak, strong or conventional. That's because individual choices in these areas are perfectly acceptable and for the most part (notrump range does influence other actions significantly) do not affect the essence of modern Two-over-One bidding.

You may not be smitten with everything you read here or might be unlucky enough to encounter one of the awkward hands for these methods (for example, responder's game-invitational minor one-suiters after a major-suit opening, or a truly unpleasant eleven-count like:

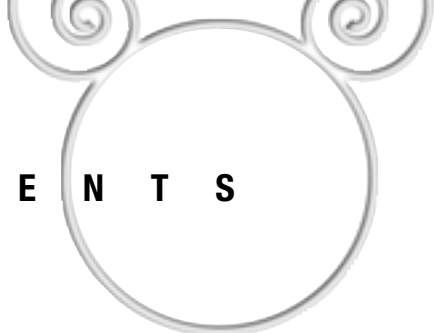
♠ A 6 4 ♥ 5 3 ♦ K Q 7 ♣ Q 5 4 3 2

after a one-diamond opening). However, the systemic building blocks you will find in this book can be adopted selectively. You can choose what parts you like and even tinker with some of the basic structures to suit yourself. While Paul gives you a cohesive system that deals effectively with most high frequency situations and never leaves you floundering (there's always a least-of-evils solution), it's a fact of life that bridge players learn from their own experience

and rarely buy everything that's offered without question. That's healthy and positive, especially where conventions or artificial treatments are concerned. The author is realistic about this, too, and throughout the book you will find alternative ideas and caveats worth heeding.

This book moves along. It's an enjoyable read and offers valuable summaries and excellent review problems at the end of each section. You can be playing Two-over-One effectively within a week, and to that end Paul's first book gets the job done. And you'll have fun too, which should be one of the goals of any instructive tome at any level.

Eric Kokish



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I N T R O D U C T I O N



The American system has been called scientific by many writers. A greater misnomer it is impossible to conceive.

Criticus. Contract Simplicitas. 1933.

Just like the language you speak, the language of bridge bidding is constantly evolving and improving. As an adult, you use a more sophisticated version of English than you did as a child; similarly, as you gain more experience at the bridge table, you will probably want to use something more modern than the basic Standard bidding system you were first taught to play.

In this book, I'm going to introduce you to what many believe to be the most effective bidding language for both today and the immediate future. Whether you play our great game in purely social settings, at a club, logged on to your favorite Internet site or on the tournament trail, there will be something for you in these Twenty-Five Steps. No weight loss, spiritual enrichment or fantastic financial gain (sorry!), but you will bid better!

There'll also be some work involved (sorry again!) – you won't be able to slip the book under a pillow and use sleep-osmosis – so let's look at some good reasons for you to take on the job.

1) It's universal

The language we're going to explore together is the Two-over-One system, a relatively modern approach that has been in the developmental stages for something on the order of forty years. As a departure from Standard American, this system traces its roots to American expert Alvin Roth, undoubtedly the most original thinker in bridge since the glory days of Ely Culbertson.

Just as with real spoken languages, however, the ‘newness’ of this approach comes from developments in the trenches — the trials and errors of inventive players taking on, shaping and refining the elements they find beneficial.

In more recent times, Two-over-One has been primarily shaped and written about by a disparate troika of American theorists-players-teachers – Marty Bergen, Mike Lawrence and Max Hardy. These three have done yeoman service in trying to make the bidding practices and theories of expert players accessible to everyone.

Today, Two-over-One is no longer reserved for just the experts — players at all levels of skill and experience can and do profitably adopt and use this approach. Indeed, a semi-scientific survey I recently conducted of those playing on three separate Internet sites found about 40% of the players from no less than twenty-one different countries playing a version of Two-over-One.

That so many players in all corners of the world have at least a passable working knowledge of Two-over-One is now one of its greatest virtues — it has wide acceptance and whether or not you decide to play the system yourself, acquiring a working knowledge of it will at the very least make you better equipped to cope with many opponents.

2) *It's familiar*

As an offspring of Standard American, Two-over-One will not cause a major shock to your comfort zone. If Standard American is your bridge birth language, acquiring fluency in Two-over-One will be more akin to an English-speaking student learning French or Italian than attempting to master an exotic language like Mandarin or Swahili.

There will be much vocabulary and syntax shared with Standard American, whether you learned your basics from the writings of Charles Goren, Dorothy Truscott or Audrey Grant. And if, like the vast majority, you’ve picked up ‘how to bid’ along the way from a variety of sources, ‘speaking’ Two-over-One will smooth out some of the rough edges of that ‘street’ bidding.

Just to underline what I’m saying here, let me point out that there’s nothing in this book about opening 1NT or opening two-bids. That’s because whatever you do right now is just fine. I’m assuming you play a 15-17 notrump, but what you want to play after that is entirely up to you — Stayman, 2-way or 4-way transfers, Baron, and all the rest. Similarly, if you like Multi 2♦, or two-under preempts, or simple weak two-bids, don’t change a thing. Similarly, your methods for handling auctions where the opponents have opened the bidding can remain unaltered. The only parts of your system that are going to change at all are those that involve your side opening the bidding with one of a suit — and many of those will still be very recognizable.

3) It's adoptable and adaptable

What you are going to encounter in our Twenty-Five Steps is virtually 100% adoptable for immediate and successful use. Okay, there will be a mild adjustment period during which some confusion (translation: bad results and occasional headaches) will occur, but you'll get over that stage easily enough.

About 80% of what you'll learn is based on what I've been playing in a very successful twenty-year partnership with Rick Delogu. This language has also passed the acid test of the several hundred students I've been fortunate enough to teach — casualties have been few and successes many.

Further, one of the great virtues of this approach is that you and the partner of your choice can tinker with it, adding or subtracting as you see fit, without doing serious damage to the fundamental concepts. Don't worry — I'll warn you if there are areas where such tinkering has explosive potential!

In the end, whether you graft on elements of the Twenty-Five Steps to a different systemic approach or embrace them totally, you will profit from the exercise of working through them.

4) It's effective

A review of reports from most championship events, teams or pairs, will generally reveal that the trophies are won and lost in the arena of game and slam bidding. Classical Standard American has often been found wanting in this category over the years, its proponents having been bested time after time by players using various Forcing Club systems.

Without being a totally radical departure from its North American antecedents, Two-over-One is a refined approach that addresses and corrects many of the weaknesses in Standard that have been made apparent in top-flight competition. The ease and accuracy of bidding games and slams is much improved, particularly in the major suits.

However, this improvement is not just for Internationalists. Have you ever stopped in a partscore only to find that making enough tricks to have earned a game bonus was duck soup? 'Don't worry, partner, we couldn't have bid that — the hands just happened to fit perfectly.' Have you ever heard or said that?

Twenty-one point games or twenty-four point slams are not only often makeable but also biddable — and not just by Italian experts or your local club's riverboat gamblers! By the time we're done, you're going to be bidding to consistently better and more rewarding contracts than you previously thought possible.

5) *It's fun!*

Bridge is a game! It's meant to be played! Sure, there's a scoring system involved so we all want to do our best, but if there's no fun, what's the use? This part you'll have to take on faith, for a little while at least, but rest assured that Two-over-One can be a fun system to use. For starters, one of the biggest bugaboos about learning how to bid better is often 'there's too much to remember'. Yes, I will ask you to learn and remember some new bidding concepts and conventions but there will be a consistent logic to it all; understanding will be far more important than remembering — and easier, too!

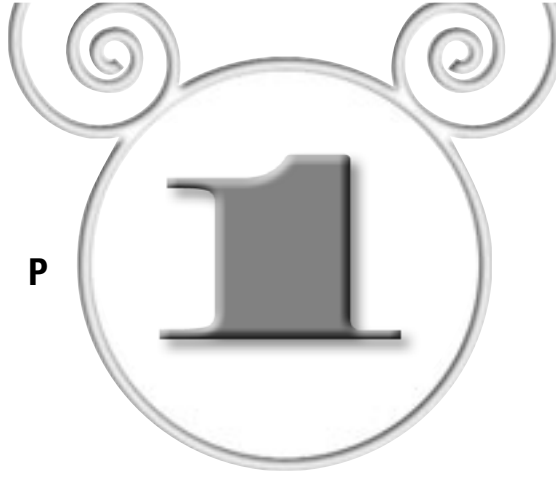
Many players like at least some 'science' and discipline in their bidding, if only to rein in their occasionally overexuberant partner. Creative thinking in a structured framework will be our goal.

Do you currently take a lot of tricks in the bidding? No, we aren't going to change the way the game is played but you will soon find yourself making comments like 'I knew how the play would go before dummy came down' — thanks to our new approach. That's fun!

Harassing the opponents in the bidding with little or no risk to your side can also be a source of enjoyment and you'll find lots of opportunities to do just that in the Two-over-One approach.

And, of course, what it's all about — improved communications with that person you've chosen to sit across the table from — will inevitably lead to superior results — and that's really fun!

S T E P



COUNT YOUR POINTS



Bear in mind that everything you have learned about Bidding and Valuation Methods need not be unlearned. **The Official System of Contract Bridge. 1931.**

After twenty-five-plus years of teaching beginners how to get started playing this amazing game of ours, I've come to realize that we – teachers, writers, experienced players – make learning bridge much more difficult than it needs to be. Initiation into a secret society may be enhanced by arcane ceremonies or incantations, but learning to play a game should be easier than this one seems to be.

Without doubt, one of the places we make it difficult for new players for no good reason is in separating cardplay from bidding. This separation occurs most noticeably when we evaluate the strength of a hand and try to express it in the bidding. As you know, a good bridge hand is one that, on its own or in conjunction with partner's assets, will take lots of tricks. Why, then, is learning to bid all about counting points?

How did it all start?

A gentleman named Bryant McCampbell first introduced the ancestor of the virtually universally used modern point-count system way back in 1915.

Milton Work added some refinements in the 20s (perhaps contributing to both the 'Roaring' epithet and eventually the Crash) and his legacy, The Work Point Count, was eventually adopted and turned into a massive popular success by Charles Goren (and to a slightly lesser extent Fred Karpin), starting in the 1950s.

Goren's genius was definitely in popularizing and marketing bridge and in order that his product portfolio could sensibly include the Goren Count, some further refinements were needed. Devising these additions and modifications fell to Torontonion William Anderson, an actuary by profession.

And therein lies the rub! Without meaning any ill will to future generations of bridge players, a lawyer (Goren) and an actuary (Anderson) were responsible for a tool (the Goren Point Count) that was decidedly more suitable for marketing the game of bridge than for playing it.

Hands up anyone who hasn't gone through the trauma of a partnership squabble over whether a hand should be valued as twelve or thirteen or maybe even fourteen points because 'according to Goren' you should count:

For an Ace = 4 points

For a King = 3 points

For a Queen = 2 points

For a Jack = 1 point

But don't forget to add:

For a void = 3 points

A singleton = 2 points

A doubleton = 1 point

But you may have to make these adjustments:

Unguarded honors = minus 1 point

Raising with 3 trumps = minus 1 point

4-3-3-3 distribution = minus 1 point

However, if you're responder and planning on showing support for partner, some of this changes, such that:

For a void = +5 points

For a singleton = +3 points

For a doubleton = +1 point

Ad nauseam, ad infinitum!

This is the original 'short-suit' counting method for distributional points – many teachers today prefer an alternative but similar process that involves counting extra cards in long suits. Clearly, however, what started out as a simple yardstick for hand evaluation has become amazingly complex in the search for accuracy.

While I was teaching my first large class of beginners many years ago, one young lady whom I had guesstimated to be quite bright dramatically illustrated the sense of pain and futility this point-counting process can occasion in people trying to master it.

With only the 4-3-2-1 high card points chart and the 3-2-1 distributional points chart on the blackboard as guidelines, I gave the students four sample hands to count, asking them to tell me when they got an answer. Not only was my 'promising' student the last of the forty-odd to arrive at an answer, she got the wrong total on each of the first three. So much for her career as a player!

While they all counted the fourth hand, I decided to look over her shoulder to perhaps get an inkling as to why she was having such a problem with this 'simple' exercise. As she mentally plowed through the minefield of calculations, here's what I saw fanned in her hand:

♠A ♠A ♥K ♠Q ♠J ♥J ♠J ♠10 ♠8 ♥5 ♠5 ♥3 ♠3

You try to count that hand!

Enough!

Counting points is never going to be totally done away with, at least until some new millennium genius invents a superior method that at least seems as easy. However, the pre-auction phase of counting points doesn't have to be so complicated as to require a pocket calculator or, for the traditionalists, an abacus. Let's not wear ourselves out before the bidding even starts!

For now, just do it this way:

For each Ace = count 4 points

For each King = count 3 points

For each Queen = count 2 points

For each Jack = count 1 point.

This is the way real bridge players count points. It's easier! It's faster! It won't create distortions in the bidding! No, you won't be a bad person if you discard the baggage handed down by generations of actuaries who've masqueraded as bridge players. It will truly be as easy as 4-3-2-1! (Well, for now, anyway!) Oh, and by the way, you may sort your cards into suits first!





Are you ready to switch over to today's most popular new bidding method?

If you know how to bid using Standard American, you can make the move to the modern Two-over-One system using the 25 easy Steps contained in this book. Among the topics covered are:

- How Two-over-One changes your basic system and approach
- Which parts of your system don't change (many!)
- How Two-over-One auctions work
- The Forcing 1NT
- Rebids by Opener and Responder
- Optional gadgets that go well with Two-over-One bidding, including:
 - > Bergen Raises
 - > New Minor Forcing
 - > Criss-Cross Minor-suit raises
 - > Fourth Suit Forcing
 - > Weak Jump Shifts
 - > Ingberman over Reverses

"With this book, you can be playing Two-over-One effectively within a week."

— *Eric Kokish*

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Paul Thurston is the bridge columnist for Canada's *National Post* newspaper. He is a former Canadian champion and international player, who has been teaching and writing about bridge for many years.

