

THE GREAT BRIDGE SCANDAL

THE MOST FAMOUS CHEATING
CASE IN THE HISTORY OF
THE GAME



ALAN TRUSCOTT

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BRIDGE
SCANDAL**

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*The king of hearts a broadsword bears,
The queen of hearts a rose.
Though why, not every gambler cares
Or cartomancer knows.
Be beauty yours, be honor mine,
Yet sword and rose are one:
Great emblems that in love combine
Until the dealing's done.
For no card, whether small or face,
Shall overtrump our two
Except the heart of hearts, the ace,
To which their title's due.*

ROBERT GRAVES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I SHOULD like to express my thanks to the numerous bridge personalities who contributed their own stories or otherwise supplied me with information, and also to the late Victor Mollo. He acted most ably as devil's advocate in two important areas, the technical evidence and the general arguments for the defense.

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PREFACE to the Second Edition

In May, 1965, headlines throughout the world proclaimed that Terence Reese and Boris Schapiro, Britain's greatest bridge partnership, had been accused of cheating in the World Championship tournament in Buenos Aires, Argentina. They were said to be using finger signals to convey to each other the number of cards held in the heart suit.

Some time later it became known that the World Bridge Federation (W.B.F.) had found the players guilty. But this was only the start. A British inquiry examined the evidence at great length and eventually found the players not guilty on the basis of 'reasonable doubt'.

In December, 1966, Reese published his own version of the affair in a persuasive book, *Story of an Accusation*. As part of his attempt to discredit his opponents Reese claimed that he and Schapiro had never been the object of suspicion. By contrast, *The Great Bridge Scandal* reveals a checkered past history, and cites documentary evidence demonstrating clearly that the heart code was in use five years before Buenos Aires. Reese implied that I and other witnesses for the prosecution manufactured evidence against him. The facts show that if he was innocent he must have been the victim of a gigantic international conspiracy. This book was my reply on behalf of the 'conspirators.'

This new edition, published thirty-nine years after the Buenos Aires affair, provides some corrections and updates. It also offers views of the case from two top players who are also lawyers.

ALAN TRUSCOTT
New York
February 2004

INTRODUCTION

BRIDGE is without question the queen of card games. It presents a challenge to players on all levels, from beginners to experts, from ages nine to ninety-nine.

But it has three substantial drawbacks lacking in chess, which is the other great intellectual game.

It provokes displays of bad manners and bad temper, simply because it is a partnership game. Husbands and wives rail at each other in domestic foursomes, and sometimes divorce is the result. National champions squabble acrimoniously at the table and indulge in bridge divorces without need for legal formalities. The game tests character, and it is perhaps unfair to blame the game because some players fail to pass the test.

The second drawback is that there is a luck factor, although some would regard this as a plus rather than a minus. The luck factor is a substantial element in rubber bridge, the form of the game normally played in homes and clubs, but good players will do better than bad players in the long run. In the tournament game the luck of the deal is eliminated. Each partnership and team is trying to do better than other players holding the same cards. Some luck remains: good contracts and good plays sometimes fail, bad contracts and bad plays sometimes succeed. Some decisions are strictly guesses, so the spinning of a mental coin can influence the result considerably.

This luck is at a minimum in a long team match, for the side that plays better almost always wins. Luck is about as likely to decide such a match as it would be in a close golf or tennis match between high-class performers. These head-to-head matches are the norm in world competition. Each team consists of six players, four of whom play in each session according to the instructions of the non-playing captain. Each deal is played twice, and the team that holds the North-South cards on the first occasion will hold the East-West cards when the hand is replayed. The two results are eventually compared, and if one team has an advantage it gains a certain number of “international match points” (IMPs) according to a sliding scale. The international matchpoint scores finally decide the result of the match.

The World Championship in 1965 was a four-cornered contest between Italy, the defending champions, Great Britain, North America, and Argentina. It was played in a nine-day period in Buenos Aires, and during that time each team

played a match of 144 deals against each other team. Carl' Alberto Perroux led his great Italian Blue Team — Pietro Forquet, Benito Garozzo, Giorgio Belladonna, Walter Avarelli, Massimo D'Alelio, and Camillo Pabis-Ticci — to victory for the eighth time. In each session the spectators had a choice. They could watch a designated match in comfort in the Bridge-O-Rama theater, following the play card by card on a giant electric board and listening to an expert commentary. Or they could watch the other match “live” in less comfort by sitting on a wooden staging surrounding a playing table and peering down at the proceedings. This table, in the Open Room, was the only one at which the players could be seen by spectators, a fact that became significant later in the week.

The third drawback of bridge is generally assumed not to exist, and the assumption is an entirely reasonable one.

It is possible to cheat.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

- BECKER, B. JAY, of New York (died 1987). Member of the U.S. team in Buenos Aires. See [Chapter 1](#).
- BOURNE, GENERAL LORD, of London (died 1982). Co-chairman in the London inquiry.
- BUTLER, GEOFFREY, of London (died 1985). The British delegate to the World Bridge Federation in Buenos Aires. See [Chapter 5](#).
- CAPLAN, LEONARD, of London. Q.C. Counsel for the defense in the London inquiry.
- ERDOS, IVAN, of Los Angeles (died 1967). Member of the U.S. team in Buenos Aires.
- FELL, GEOFFREY, of Skipton, England (died 1979). Nonplaying captain of the British team in 1952.
- FLINT, JEREMY, of London (died 1990). Member of the British team in Buenos Aires.
- FORQUET, PIETRO, of Naples. Member of the Italian team in Buenos Aires.
- FOSTER, SIR JOHN, Q.C., M.P., of London (died 1982). Chairman in the London inquiry.
- FRANKLIN, HAROLD, of Leeds (died 1998). British tournament director.
- FREY, RICHARD, of New York (died 1988). A.C.B.L. director of public relations.
- GAROZZO, BENITO, of Rome. Member of the Italian team in Buenos Aires.
- GERBER, JOHN, of Houston, Texas (died 1981). Nonplaying captain of the U.S. team in Buenos Aires. See [Chapter 3](#).
- GOLDBLATT, SIMON, of London. Counsel for the prosecution in the London inquiry.
- GRIEVE, WILLIAM, of New York. Member of U.S. team in Turin, 1960.
- GRUENTHER, GENERAL ALFRED, of Washington, D.C. (died 1983). Honorary President of the W.B.F.
- HARRISON-GRAY, MAURICE, of London (died 1968). Member of the British team in Buenos Aires.
- HAYDEN, DOROTHY (now Truscott), of Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. Member of the U.S. team in Buenos Aires. See [Chapter 2](#).
- HÉRÉDIA, IRÉNÉE DE BAJOS, of Paris (died 1998). French tournament director.
- HIRON, ALAN, of London, later of Malaga, Spain (died 1999). An assessor at the London inquiry.

HIRSCH, TANNAH, of Stamford, Connecticut. Assistant editor of A.C.B.L. Bulletin.

JAQUES, ARTURO, of Buenos Aires (died 1991). Chief commentator in Buenos Aires.

KEHELA, SAMMY, of Toronto. Coach of U.S. team in Buenos Aires. See [Chapter 6](#).

KEMPSON, EWART, of Gainford, England (died 1966). Nonplaying captain of British women's team in 1952.

KONSTAM, KENNETH, of London (died 1968). Member of British team in Buenos Aires.

LANDY, ALVIN, of New York (died 1967). A.C.B.L. executive secretary and former W.B.F. secretary.

LERENA, RAOUL, of Buenos Aires. Chief tournament director at Buenos Aires.

LEVENTRITT, PETER, of New York (died 1998). Member of U.S. team in Buenos Aires.

MACNAB, ROBIN, of Bozeman, Montana (died 1984). A.C.B.L. president and U.S. delegate to W.B.F. in Buenos Aires.

MARKUS, RIXI, of London (died 1992). Member of British women's team in Dublin, 1952.

MARQUARDT, EDUARDO, of Buenos Aires. Nonplaying captain of Argentine team in Buenos Aires.

MARX, JACK, of London (died 1991). Member of British team in 1950.

MATHE, LEW of Los Angeles (died 1986). Member of U.S. team in 1955.

MEREDITH, ADAM, of New York (died 1976). Member of British team in 1955.

MOBBS, SIR A. NOEL, of London (died 1959). Chairman of B.B.L. in 1950.

MOLLO, VICTOR, of London (died 1987). English bridge writer.

MURRAY, ERIC, of Toronto. Member of Canadian team in Turin, 1960.

OAKIE, DON, of San Jose, California (died 1983). Member of U.S. team in Turin, 1960. See [Chapter 13](#).

PERROUX, CARL ALBERTO, of Modena, Italy (died 1977). Nonplaying captain of Italian team in Buenos Aires.

PETTERSON, KELSEY, of Los Angeles (died 1983). Member of U.S. team in Buenos Aires.

PRESTON, RICHARD of London (died 1978). Partner of Ralph Swimer.

PRIDAY, TONY, of London. An assessor at the London inquiry.

RAPEE, GEORGE, of New York (died 1999). Member of U.S. team in Turin, 1960.

REESE, TERENCE, of London, later of Hove (died 1996). Member of British team in Buenos Aires and one of the accused players.

ROSE, ALBERT, of London (died 1970). Member of British team in Buenos Aires.

RUBIN, IRA, of Paramus, New Jersey. Member of U.S. team in Turin, 1960.

SANTAMARINA, AGUSTIN, of Buenos Aires (died 1995). Member of Argentine team in Buenos Aires.

SCHAPIRO, BORIS, of London (died 2002). Member of British team in Buenos Aires and one of the accused players.

SILODOR, SIDNEY, of Philadelphia (died 1963). Member of U.S. team in Turin, 1960.

SOLOMON, CHARLES, of Philadelphia (died 1975). W.B.F. President.

SWIMER, RALPH, of London (died 1997). Nonplaying captain of British team in Buenos Aires. See [Chapter 4](#).

TARLO, LOUIS, of London (died 1997). Nonplaying captain of British team in Turin, 1960.

THE BECKER STORY: OBSERVATION

1

B. JAY BECKER, of Flushing, New York, born 1904, was one of the world's greatest players. He was world champion in 1951 and 1953 and represented the United States on four other occasions. He had the rare distinction of winning a national championship in his first year of tournament play, and his thirty-one titles include twenty-one in major team events. He had the best record of any player in the Masters Individual Championship, an event no longer played.

His syndicated bridge column was published in more news papers throughout the world than any other, and he was a member of the National Laws Commission, which deals with matters of laws and ethics in bridge for North America.

He could field a Becker bridge team, including two sons, a brother, and two nephews, at the time the strongest family team of six in the world. (In 2003 this can be challenged by the Moss family group: Mike Moss, Sylvia Moss, Gail Greenberg, Jack Greenberg, Brad Moss, Andrew Moss and Jill Levin.)

It all began innocently enough. Dorothy Hayden and I were playing against Reese and Schapiro on the first day of our match against Great Britain, and we were about one-third through the evening session's play when I happened to look over at Reese on my right and noticed that he was holding his cards with two fingers spread in V style in front of his cards.

It meant very little to me at the time, but it struck me subconsciously that this was an uncomfortable way to hold cards. At least 99 per cent of all players grip their cards with thumb and four fingers; you would have to search far and wide for players who do not hold their cards this way.

I will never know whether this fleeting observation of how Reese was holding his cards would have made a lasting impression on me except that when I looked at Schapiro to my left on the very same deal I observed that he was also holding his cards with the same two fingers (the index and middle fingers) in a V formation.

Again what I saw caused only a subconscious ripple in my thoughts, since I was concentrating deeply on the bidding and play of the hand. At the time I had

no reason to think that this extraordinary way of holding cards was more than a strange coincidence, since I had played against Reese and Schapiro on a number of occasions and had always found their behavior and their ethics at the bridge table beyond reproach.

However, as the evening wore on, I could not fail to notice that the number of fingers used by Reese and Schapiro in holding their cards varied from hand to hand. Usually there were three or four fingers showing, less often one or two, but the pattern, whatever it was, kept changing from one deal to the next.

While I did not permit my observations to interfere with my play, the gnawing feeling that something improper was going on and that finger signals of one kind or another were being exchanged could not fail to assert itself in the back of my mind. In a dull sort of way it seemed to me that the changing pattern of fingers with each deal could not be accidental, but I did not have time really to think about the matter because my first obligation, obviously, was to play each hand for all it was worth and not to allow myself to be diverted by anything else.

We finished the evening session without incident, and it turned out that Britain gained 10 IMPs on the 20 boards we had just played. With one-third of the 144-board match now over, the American team was 22 IMPs behind.

As usual, we met after the session with our teammates and went over the hands played. Peter Leventritt was greatly in need of cheering up; he had had a disastrous hand against M. Harrison-Gray and Albert Rose in which he had claimed the balance of the tricks in a slam contract and then proceeded to go down because he was not allowed to draw a missing trump he had forgotten about. The oversight cost us 17 IMPs; without it we would have been 5 IMPs behind instead of 22. It was not until nearly two hours after the session was over that I finally had a chance to speak to Mrs. Hayden privately about what I had observed.

As I expected, she had seen nothing irregular in the behavior of Reese and Schapiro at the table, and I remember that I even had had some doubts at the time about the advisability of telling her about the finger signals. As the session and the evening had worn on I had become more and more convinced that we were being cheated in some unknown way, and by the time I decided to tell Mrs. Hayden of my suspicions, my doubts were almost entirely dissolved.

What I said to Mrs. Hayden was: "Dorothy, I'm very sorry to have to tell you this, but I think we were cheated tonight."

Mrs. Hayden reacted to this quiet bombshell very calmly. She did not tell me that I was either crazy or mistaken but merely asked what had happened that made me think so. I then related what I had seen in the course of the evening. We had a deck of cards handy, and I demonstrated how the cards had been held by

Reese and Schapiro. I could not tell her how many fingers were shown on each particular hand because I had not noted either in writing or mentally the number of fingers associated with each hand.

As the conversation progressed Mrs. Hayden expressed strong doubts that Reese and Schapiro would be signaling in such a blatant and obvious manner, but when I pointed out that she had not observed the finger movements herself and that apparently no one else had noticed anything strange in the way they held their cards, she realized that there might be something to what I was saying. I said to her several times that she did not have to rely on what I had told her I had seen but that she could observe for herself the next time we played against Reese and Schapiro and then make up her own mind about whether they were signaling to each other.

There were two other matters I took up with Mrs. Hayden. One was that I asked her not to tell anyone else about our conversation or my suspicions, and to this she readily agreed. We were both well aware of the seriousness of a cheating accusation, and neither of us was inclined by nature to go off halfcocked on such a vital matter.

The other was a plea on my part, which I repeated time and again, that regardless of what she observed the next time we played against Reese and Schapiro, she was not to allow her game to be affected. I realized only too well that seeing the changing fingers might interfere with her concentration, and all I could do was stress the importance of playing her best game when we met them again.

We were not scheduled to play again against the British before Thursday, and during the interval Mrs. Hayden and I did not refer to the Reese-Schapiro problem in more than a very cursory way. We were busily engaged in playing against Argentina and Italy on Tuesday and Wednesday, and there was not much time to think about anything else. Furthermore, we did not know whether we would play against Reese and Schapiro again, or against some other British pair. The nonplaying captains —Ralph Swimer for Britain and John Gerber for the U.S. — primarily were responsible for the pairings, and there was a great deal of jockeying going on in this regard.

As it happened, Mrs. Hayden and I were pitted against Reese and Schapiro in the opening session on Thursday. I do not know whether this was accidental or by design, but there we were, carrying on where we had left off Monday night.

The fingers went into operation immediately. From the first board we played to the last one fourteen boards later, the ever-changing pattern of fingers continued. There was no need for me to ask Mrs. Hayden whether she saw what was going on: it was all too obvious.

My point had been proved, regrettably, but it was no cause for satisfaction. I

THE GREAT BRIDGE SCANDAL

In 1965, the bridge world was rocked by an accusation of cheating at the world championships in Buenos Aires, an accusation involving one of the world's best pairs: Britain's Terence Reese and Boris Schapiro.

The non-playing captain of the British team was convinced of their guilt. He suspended the two players, and forfeited the matches in which they had played. The World Bridge Federation banned them from competition, but back in England, a judicial tribunal declared them 'not guilty' on the basis of 'reasonable doubt'.

Revised and updated, this book tells the full story of the Buenos Aires affair, in which the author played a central role. Almost fifty years after the original events, the story is still enthralling:

- The personal accounts of the many world bridge stars who were part of this incredible drama
- Step-by-step accounts of the two hearings, and why they came to the conclusions they did, with new commentary from lawyers with bridge expertise
- The startling tale of Schapiro's confession, and why it was concealed
- The story and written notes of Don Oakie, who observed Reese and Schapiro using similar signals in Turin five years before, and how his evidence was covered up
- Photographs showing the signals in use in Buenos Aires and Turin
- Analysis of the technical evidence – the hands that were played – from both the prosecution and defense.

This is more than a spellbinding account of a notorious scandal. It is story of talent and human weakness, enigma and revelation, pride, prejudice and shame, that transcends the mere game of bridge in interest. It illuminates strange byways of human motivations and passions, and the other games people play.

ALAN TRUSCOTT has been Bridge Editor of the *New York Times* since 1964, and probably knows more than anyone else about the complex world of international bridge: the systems and conventions, the winners and losers, the characters and the cheats.

