

# ONE TRICK AT A TIME

how to start winning  
at bridge

Jim Jackson



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Master Point Press • Toronto, Canada



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# INTRODUCTION

If you already earn many firsts at your club and in tournaments, congratulations — this book is probably not for you. However, if you are new to duplicate bridge, or don't earn **masterpoints**\* as often as you would like, or you are doing okay at the club but not in tournaments, this book will help you score better and have more fun along the way.

Some people are so gifted they breeze through the ranks and go on to challenge for national titles. Others study diligently and despite all their efforts discover bridge is not their game. This book is for the vast majority of us who fit between those two extremes. I am not one of the Grand Poobahs of bridge, nor will I ever be. I'm a regular guy, put my pants on one leg at a time, and I made a lot of mistakes along the way to becoming a **Life Master**. You'll read about some of them in this book. If we learn from our mistakes and (even better) from the mistakes of others, if we apply what we have learned when we sit down at the table, and if we find some compatible partners and teammates, we can become better bridge players.

I first played bridge in high school (1963-8). Four of us gathered on weekend nights or summer evenings at the kitchen table and played for hours. We used a simplified Goren bidding system. I have no idea how good (or more likely bad) our rubber bridge was, but we had a lot of fun. I did not play bridge in college, but in the mid-seventies one of my co-workers, Len Carusi, talked me into joining him to play duplicate a few times at a local New Jersey club. We thought we were pretty sophisticated: we used Stayman and Jacoby Transfers after our one notrump openings.

Flash forward to January 4, 2006. I had been playing backgammon online and was in the process of writing a novel. Consequently, I was spending a lot of solitary time and needed more social activity than backgammon provided. I wondered if bridge might be a good fit. Put a thought out there and the universe tends to respond. My Kentucky neighbor, Dottie Caster, asked me to fill in at a Wednesday social bridge game despite knowing I had not played a hand for almost thirty years. I wasn't first or last that day and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. One of the players offered to take me to the Northern Kentucky Bridge Club in Elsmere, KY to play duplicate, which she thought I would like. I remembered having fun with Len way back in the dark ages and said sure.

I joined the **ACBL** and quickly boned up on bidding, switching overnight from four-card majors and strong two-level openings to five-card majors and weak two-

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\* Bridge is full of arcane terms, some of which you may not have encountered if you are new to duplicate bridge. The Glossary contains definitions for the words or phrases that are printed in bold type the first time they appear.

bids. People were friendly (a big change from the mid-seventies) and I was hooked. On January 17, 2006, I scored my first masterpoints when Gayle McCann dragged our partnership to a third place finish.

On October 23, 2007, I earned my 300th masterpoint and, having already fulfilled the other requirements, I became a Life Master. Along the way, I won some events and even scored a 75.86% game with Hank Greenwood at the Superiorland Bridge Club in Marquette, MI. Mostly, I earned my points with seconds and thirds and fourths.

No matter what a person's skill level is, bridge provides continual opportunities to learn. I'll be the first to admit (and my partners will heartily concur) that I still have much to learn about the game. Along the way to my gold card, however, I picked up a number of key points — tricks if you will — that helped me start winning more often at bridge. In this book, I will share those with you.

The book is divided into six sections: the first five cover bidding, declarer play, defense, strategy for pairs games and team games, and partnership issues. The last section, Try These, consists of practice deals. The examples are mostly from actual play and many of them are included because someone at the table made an error. Lots of the errors are mine, but many are by my partners. This is not because my partners routinely play poorly; they don't. However, I find it easier to spot errors in someone else's play and make a quick note than to figure out what I did wrong while I am making the plays! Believe me, all my partners could write books too...

Now let's get started.

# Chapter 1:

## SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL BIDDING

Teachers I have spoken with say they give more lessons about bidding than anything else. That makes a lot of sense. Good coaching can certainly improve defense or declarer play, but bidding is like learning a new language and you have to use it on every deal you play, even if all you do is pass.

At the Harris, MI regional in 2007 I attended a workshop by Audrey Grant in which she presented a hand for the dealer with the following cards:

♠ K 9 7 5 2   ♥ Q 6   ♦ K Q 9 6 4   ♣ 10

With these cards, would you open the bidding or pass?

She asked those who would open the bidding to raise their hands. About half the class did. She then asked who would pass, and the other half raised their hands. (For this discussion we will ignore the few unwilling to commit.) What was the right answer?

She said, ‘Look around the room and choose your partners from those who raised their hands at the same time you did!’

### BIDDING BASIC #1:

Play with someone who agrees with you on what a bid means.

The main purpose of partnership bidding is for partners to describe their hands and come to a conclusion about what contract they choose to play on that deal. In Chapter 5 we’ll discuss a process for agreeing on a **convention card** with your partner, which is the first step.

Much of your partnership bidding understanding comes from your initial discussion of your partnership convention card, but not all of it. You would like to avoid a bidding disaster like this one I participated in soon after I started playing. I was sitting West:

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	1NT <sup>1</sup>	pass
2♦	all pass		

1. Forcing.

# NOT WINNING ENOUGH MASTERPOINTS?

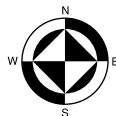
This is not a book for players who win regularly at their local bridge club — it is for those who don't, but would like to.

The author does not claim to be a top-level expert, and admits that he made many mistakes on his way to becoming a Life Master. The book will help you to avoid these same mistakes, and learn from the mistakes that you do make. It won't teach you complex conventions, or esoteric cardplay techniques, but it does contain a wealth of solid advice that will help you every time you sit down to play.

Written in a conversational, non-technical style, this is a book that will help any intermediate player become a better bidder, a better declarer, a better defender, and a better partner — the recipe for becoming a winner.



**JIM JACKSON**, known as James Montgomery Jackson on his tax return and to his mother whenever she was really mad at him, splits his time between the woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Georgia's low country. A published fiction author, this is his first bridge book.



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