

# WORLD CLASS

21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY



EUROPEAN BRIDGE STARS

**MARC SMITH**  
FOREWORD by ANDREW ROBSON

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# *Foreword*

I remember lapping up Guy Ramsey's classic 1955 book *Aces All*, devoting a chapter to such stars of yesteryear as Nico Gardener, Iain Macleod, Rixi Markus and Terence Reese. It transported you back 70 years and gave you a real feel of our game in those days. I hope this book will similarly be read 70 years from now.

It is amazing to think that Marc Smith's *World Class* was written a quarter of a century ago – I'm delighted he has written a follow-up. It's such a winning formula, enjoying the characters of the top players, admiring their brilliances and commiserating with their disasters.

In these pages, you can look forward to reading about iconic veterans such as Peter Fredin of Sweden; Michal Klukowski of Switzerland, many people's vote for the world's best player today, still only 27 years old; and, even younger stars of the future such as Sanna Clementsson, also of Sweden. Indeed, she may well still be around in 70 years...

Andrew Robson

# Acknowledgements

## Author's Note:

I would like to thank three people who have spotted my typos and corrected my grammar during the production of these volumes. David Bird, Barbara Giesbrecht and Bill Lide have all done sterling work to get this manuscript into shape. Thanks all for both your help and inspiration. My thanks particularly to Babs, without whom these volumes would not exist – she began encouraging me 3-4 years ago to write an updated version of the original. She also helped greatly with many of the interviews, and thought of questions I hadn't come up with. Finally, thanks to a couple of stars from the original *World Class*, Andrew Robson and Larry Cohen, for the kind words they added in their Forewords to these volumes.

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# Introduction

Who are the people behind the familiar names that you read about in your bridge magazine or watch performing in major events shown live on BBO VuGraph? What does it feel like to lose a World Championship final? Which partners or authors influenced their style? Who was the most interesting person they played with or against? How do they see the future of the game?

Published in 1999, the original *World Class: Conversations with the Bridge Masters* is unquestionably my favorite of all the books I have written on the game. It brought to life many of the great players of that era, with 25 subjects divided into five categories: All-Time Greats, Stars of Today, Women Stars, Rising Stars and Great Writers.

When selecting the subjects, my intention was to choose a representative group of players who could provide an insight into bridge at the top from many perspectives, rather than picking a definitive list of the world's best 25 players. Having said that, many of those who were included would have been in everyone's 'Top 25'. I also aimed to be as international as possible, and 13 countries were represented.

A quarter of a century has passed since the first book, and many new and exciting players have come to the fore. *World Class: The 21st Century* is being published in two volumes so that I can include the bridge lives of 30 titans of the game. Volume 1 features players from nine European countries. Volume 2 includes players from the USA and the rest of the world, adding representatives from another five countries. So, we have a total of 14 nationalities this time. It is also refreshing to note that more than half of the young players featured in the 'Rising Stars' section are women. (25 years ago, none were.)

One thing is certain — every one of the players appearing in this book can truly claim to be 'World Class'...

I'll finish with the same statement I made a quarter of a century ago. The author and publisher wish to thank every one of the subjects who appear within these pages. Most of the interviews were extensive, and we are grateful to them for the time and effort they put in. I hope that they will show their friends and family this book sometime in the future and tell them proudly, "See, I really was one of the best..."

Marc Smith. 2023

*Section One*

*All-Time Greats*



# *Sally Brock (England)*



## **SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS**

**1979-1987**  
**Sandra Landy**

**1987-1992**  
**Steve Lodge**

**2008-2016**  
**Nicola Smith**

**2009-**  
**Barry Myers**

**2015-**  
**Fiona Brown**

## **BORN**

June 12, 1953 Trowbridge, England

## **CURRENT HOME**

London

## **PROFESSION**

Bridge, semi-retired

*Sally Brock made her international debut at the 1978 World Championships in New Orleans. She reached two finals at that event, finishing sixth in the World Mixed Pairs playing with her then-husband, Tony Sowter, and seventh in the World Women's Pairs in partnership with Rita Oldroyd. A year later, Sally made her debut in the Great Britain Women's team, winning the European Championship in Lausanne. That was the start of a remarkable run of success: a bronze medal at the 1980 Olympiad; a second European title; and the ultimate prize in the world of women's bridge, victory in the 1981 Venice Cup, winning the final against the Americans on home soil in New York.*

*That British team won medals at the first nine championships in which Sally Brock played, including a second Venice Cup victory, in Brazil in 1985. During that same period, Sandra Landy and Sally also won two bronze medals from the World Women's Pairs, in 1982 and 1986.*

*More than four decades after her career at the top began, Sally is still collecting medals. She claimed three more, all bronze, in 2022, from the Venice Cup in Salsomaggiore, and both the McConnell Cup (the Women's teams) and the Mixed Pairs at the World championships in Wroclaw. In all, this remarkable player has earned a total of 30 medals from European and World championships, eleven of them gold.*

*Even more amazing, perhaps, is that Sally achieved all of this while raising three children, and being one of the nicest people you could hope to meet.*

*Let's see where it all began*

## **Getting started**

My parents started teaching me when I was 14, after I had proved competent at first whist and then solo. I was at boarding school, but went to a day school for A levels, and I played at least once a week with my parents and friends at home. Of course, I thought I knew it all! When I went to Nottingham University, I quickly realized I didn't!

After a year at university, I got together with Tony Sowter, and we were married at the end of my second year. I then dropped out, aged just 20. (I know, I was bonkers!) But from then on, bridge dominated.

We bought a big house in Nottingham that was once a bridge club, having been assured that we would easily get planning permission to

change it back. But we didn't get permission. Then we got friendly with Joe Amsbury and got involved with *International Popular Bridge Monthly*. I learned to do the layouts and, for many years, doing layouts was my main source of income. I worked on *Bridge Magazine*, a chess magazine and travel guides, as well as doing things for the English Bridge Union.

Of course, I learned a lot from Tony: he was my first and most influential bridge mentor. I was lucky to learn from a lot of people in those days: Tony Forrester, Roman Smolski and Steve Lodge were around a lot. You can hardly help but improve, playing with and talking bridge with that level of player.

*Did you read bridge books, and is there any book and/or writer you would strongly recommend for people learning the game?*

I did read bridge books, but I think more for fun than directly to learn. Of course, you learn all the time, even if just reading fiction such as David Bird's *Abbot* stories. I remember staying up all night to read *Right Through the Pack*. I have always had bridge books and magazines in the loo!

*What do you think is the most important lesson for an aspiring bridge-player to learn?*

That the more you know the more you realize you don't know. I think in one's own perception one probably makes a consistent number of errors as one improves. The better you get, the more you see.

## **The 1981 Venice Cup**

*You had already won a couple of European Championship titles, and collected a medal from the Olympiad, but the 1981 Venice Cup was your first World Championship win. What do you remember of that event?*

It was a very long time ago 😊, but one thing I do remember was that the team received explicit instructions from our non-playing captain that under no circumstances were we to bid any grand slams!

I can't remember whether Sandra and I did, but I know one of our pairs had a poor auction to a grand that needed two tricks from a suit of AJxxx opposite two low, so it was completely no play. That meant that we had to

play four-handed day after day for a while as he refused to let them play again.

This deal from the 1981 Venice Cup was widely written up at the time. We were playing Brazil in the last match of the round robin, and the situation was that we would qualify for the knockout stage as long as we did not lose more than 10 IMPs on the final set of boards. We gained 12 IMPs on this deal and won the set by 1 IMP, so it was fairly crucial.

|                 |     |                |  |
|-----------------|-----|----------------|--|
| N/S Vul.        |     | ♠ Q 8 4        |  |
| Dlr: North      |     | ♥ K 10 5       |  |
|                 |     | ♦ A K Q 9 7 2  |  |
|                 |     | ♣ 4            |  |
| ♠ 2             | N   | ♠ A J 5        |  |
| ♥ 8 7 6         | W E | ♥ A J 9 3      |  |
| ♦ J 8           | S   | ♦ 10 6 4 3     |  |
| ♣ A Q 9 7 6 5 2 |     | ♣ 10 3         |  |
|                 |     | ♠ K 10 9 7 6 3 |  |
|                 |     | ♥ Q 4 2        |  |
|                 |     | ♦ 5            |  |
|                 |     | ♣ K J 8        |  |

| West            | North        | East            | South        |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <i>Mandelot</i> | <i>Landy</i> | <i>Powidzer</i> | <i>Sally</i> |
|                 | 1♦           | pass            | 1♠           |
| pass            | 3♦           | pass            | 3♠           |
| 4♣              | 4♠           | all pass        |              |

West led the ♥7, which ran to my queen, so I cashed three top diamonds, pitching two hearts. West ruffed the third diamond with the ♠2 and continued hearts, which I ruffed. I played the ♣K now, West winning and playing a third heart, and I ruffed again. It looked as if West's distribution was 1-3-2-7, so I ruffed a club and ruffed a winning diamond with the ♠10. I then ruffed my last club with the ♠Q.

East overruffed with the ♠A and played a heart, so I ruffed in hand with the ♠7 and overruffed in dummy with the ♠8. I then led dummy's last spade towards my K-9, finessing against East's ♠J.

One of my most memorable disasters also came in the 1981 Venice Cup. Even after all these years, I still remember it! Sandra and I had the agreement that we usually led the ace from suits headed by A-K and, if we led the king and then switched, it promised a singleton.

The auction was 1NT-2♣-2♥-4♥. Sandra led the ♦K, the ♦A and switched to a spade. My hearts were A-x-x. Declarer won the spade in dummy and called for the ♥J from J10xx. Unaccountably, I ducked. Then, realizing what an idiot I was, I ducked on the next round too, frightened of Sandra's wrath when she saw my ace. Of course, I then got thrown in with my ace of trumps to give declarer her contract!

However, there was a happy ending. Ten minutes later, a director poked his head round the door and said the board had been cancelled because a caddy had put it on the other table the wrong way around!



*The Great Britain 1981 Venice Cup winners: l-r, front: Maureen Dennison, Diana Williams, Sandra Landy; back: Pat Davies, npc Derek Rimington, Sally [then Sowter]. (not in photo Nicola Gardener)*

Oh, and I vaguely remember the closing ceremony and prize-giving too. There was a banquet with associated dancing. I recall that our team danced with the Bermuda Bowl winners. I got John Solodar, I think.

## Major Championships

*You had a remarkable start to your international career, collecting medals at your first nine major events. What do you recall of those first European and Venice Cup victories?*



Did I really? I think that when you personally do something, it never feels that remarkable. If ‘stupid old you’ manages to do something, then it couldn’t have been very hard! I suppose that was pretty good!

Sandra Landy (left) was a fantastic person to play with. Back in those days, she was quite fierce. If you did something wrong, she would shout a bit, but quite quickly she would end up apologizing for shouting!

*You have won the Venice Cup twice, the Olympiad twice and the McConnell Cup twice. Do you have one world championship victory that is particularly special and, if so, why?*

I guess the one in Beijing in 2008. My third husband, Raymond, had died on Jan 1<sup>st</sup> that year, and I had no plans to play any international bridge. The partnership between Nicola Smith and Heather Dhondy had split up, and Michelle Brunner had terminal cancer. While everybody felt very sympathetic towards her, they did not think she should be on the team.

I went to a party that summer and sat next to Nicola. She asked how I would feel about playing with her. The answer was “Great!” First, I had to work out some childcare. When I managed that, we were on.

Nicola (right) and I had played together previously (in Menton in 1993) and we had not done well. This time we were great. We won pretty much all our matches without much difficulty.

We played China in the final and were lots up (141-58 MS) after three of the six sets. We lost half of our lead in the fourth set, but we steadied the ship in the next set and went into the last stanza some 40 IMPs or so ahead (it was 47, 190-143 MS).



I thought our last set was pretty flat, although that might be a reflection of my ability to assess a card, rather than any slur on team-mates! It was

certainly something of a surprise when, at the end, the BBO operator announced: “England win by 1 IMP.”

We had held on to win 223-222!



*The 2008 prizegiving: (pictured left to right, Nicola Smith, Sally Brock, Nevena Senior, coach Sandra Penfold, npc Martin Jones. (not pictured, Heather Dhondy, Catherine Draper and Anne Rosen)*

## Life in the Bridge World

*Share with us some of your favorite bridge memories.*

There was quite a good moment at the end of the World Mixed Pairs playing with Chris Willenken in Wroclaw. We had been doing well and leading for a fair part of the last day but, in the final few boards, things had gone very badly and it seemed like we would be out of the medals.

On the very last board I held a balanced 14-count with ♠AQ10x and ♥QJ doubleton. With both sides vulnerable, my RHO opened 2♦, showing at least 4-4 in the majors.

All we had agreed was that we would treat this like a Multi, so I doubled. LHO bid 2♥ and Chris bid 3♥. Did that ask for a heart stopper or show one, I wondered. Hoping to gain more information, I temporized with 3♠. LHO doubled, and Chris redoubled.

None the wiser, I bid 3NT. LHO doubled and everyone passed. LHO led a heart and dummy's contribution in the suit was the singleton ten!

Time stood still for about five minutes, until RHO finally played low and I made an overtrick instead of going for 800. (He had opened with ♥Axxxx and thought the suit would be blocked if he played his ace, and he expected his partner to hold a high spade honor for her double of 3♠.) That board was just enough to lift us back up into bronze-medal position.

I remember the next deal, although I don't recall exactly where it happened. It's a good illustration of why you should never give up.

|             |   |            |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|-------------|---|------------|-------------|--|---|---|---|---------|--|--|
| Both Vul.   |   | ♠ 6 5 3    |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
| Dir: West   |   | ♥ Q 10 8   |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|             |   | ♦ A 10 3   |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|             |   | ♣ A 10 7 4 |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
| ♠ 7 4 2     |   |            | ♠ Q J 10 8  |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
| ♥ K 9 4 3 2 | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> </table> |            | N           |  | W | S | E | ♥ 7 6 5 |  |  |
|             | N   |            |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
| W           | S   | E          |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
| ♦ Q         |   |            | ♦ K J 9 5 2 |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
| ♣ 8 6 5 2   |   |            | ♣ K         |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|             |   | ♠ A K 9    |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|             |   | ♥ A J      |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|             |   | ♦ 8 7 6 4  |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |
|             |   | ♣ Q J 9 3  |             |  |   |   |   |         |  |  |

| West | North | East     | South |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| pass | pass  | pass     | 1NT   |
| pass | 3NT   | all pass |       |

West led a heart so, of course, I won with the jack and ran the ♣Q. When East won with the ♣K and returned a heart, things were not looking promising. I forlornly cashed my clubs, then crossed to the ♦A and exited with the ♥Q.

Thankfully, West fell for it, or there would be no story. He cashed his heart winners, suicide squeezing his partner, and I made nine tricks.

The next story not only encompasses one of my favorite bridge memories, but also memorable disaster. In 1985, Tony Forrester and I went to New York for the Cavendish tournament. The night before play starts, there is an auction at which each of the pairs is sold. We arrived in plenty of time to discover that they had not received our reply accepting the invitation to play, so they were not expecting us. All they could suggest was that we show up the next day, and hope someone would drop out.

The next morning, one of the organizers made an announcement asking if anyone was willing to give up their place. Nothing happened. Then Joey Silver and Irvine Litvack, who were the holders, stood up and said: “F\*\*\* the lot of you” and walked out so that we could play. Every time they were in the same place as us after that, we took them out for dinner!

Anyway, we did quite well, finishing about sixth, I think. On the penultimate board of the first day, one of our opponents virtually bid 7♠ all on his own after Tony had overcalled 3♥ at some stage in the auction.

Dummy came down with a Yarborough except for a doubleton ♠J. Declarer basically played out all of his trumps and I, with several small hearts and ♠1098xx, thought it was a good idea to discard a diamond. Declarer then cashed five diamond tricks and we lost a grand slam swing. In those days, scoring was cross-IMPed, so that board cost hundreds of IMPs. It was SUCH a horrendous thing for me to do, that even Tony was lost for words – a rarity indeed!



*A happy Fiona Brown and Sally with the McConnell Cup, following their victory at the 2018 World Bridge Series in Orlando.*

*Of what personal or professional accomplishments are you most proud?*

For a while after the 2018 World Championships, I was the World Number One woman player in the WBF rankings. That felt pretty good. I will never be #1 again (because I'll be playing more Mixed and Seniors and so not have any chance to get enough Women's points).

*What is the funniest thing that's happened whilst playing bridge?*

I was playing in an international event with Nicola Smith. It was a while ago and they had caddies. Nicola went to the loo when she was dummy, and I asked a caddy to sit down and play the dummy for me.

My LHO led and I called "Small". The caddy didn't do anything. So, again, I said: "Small." He looked confused. I said, "Please play a small spade." He looked up and said, "They're all the same size!"

*Who is the most interesting person you have played bridge against?*

Sometime in the late 1980s, I played in an invitational team event in Sicily with Tony Forrester, Irving Rose and Rob Sheehan. Forrester and I played a whole set against Pietro Forquet and Giorgio Belladonna. That was quite a treat. I can't remember much about the actual bridge. I think we won by 1 IMP.

*The England team, winners of the 2014 SportAccord World Mind Games in Beijing. (left-right: Heather Dhondy, Fiona Brown, Sally, Catherine Draper, Nicola Smith and Nevena Senior)*



*What is the strangest place you've played bridge?*

We once played at Waterloo Station in the rush hour. I can't remember now quite what it was that we were promoting, but lots of people stopped to watch, clearly wondering what we were doing.

## **Marriage and Bridge**

*You have been married to three very good bridge players. What effect on your game did each of those relationships have?*

Tony Sowter was a great mentor and I owe a lot to him. He was very patient, although I maintain that one reacts to someone else's worst reaction. Some people yell, but I do remember saying to Tony, "Don't you go raising that eyebrow to me!"

I was with Mark (Horton) for quite a while, but we didn't play much together. We got married the Christmas after that 1981 Venice Cup. At the

time, I had a much greater reputation than he did, and I think he struggled a bit with that.

Raymond Brock (below) was the perfectionist. I remember one occasion when we were playing an IMP game at New Amersham Bridge Club. I didn't defend how he wanted me to. If I had done what he wanted,



we MIGHT have taken another trick, so that declarer would have made nine tricks rather than ten in 2♦. He was so angry with me. But I took my revenge, which was getting up to make myself a coffee without offering him one!

Raymond and I didn't actually play that much. Toby was born in 1993 and I only really played in big events professionally from then on. We did occasionally play together, if it meant that we would only be away for a single day, mostly local events or the Gold Cup.

*I would imagine that there is a huge difference between playing with Raymond and with Barry Myers. How have you found that adjustment?*

Barry (right) and I began playing after Raymond died. When your husband and bridge partner dies, apart from all the obvious grief etc., you have also lost a bridge partner. I played locally with Peter Czerniewski for a while, but then he died too. Barry had not played much for years because of pursuing his barristering, and he was just beginning to come back to the game. We played for a year or so before getting together.



I guess Raymond and I did have quite a lot of system. Barry has a very practical approach, and I have learned to keep system to a minimum and use general judgement a lot. We take great pleasure in bidding slams (especially grand slams) without using RKCB. We bid this one recently:

Marc Smith's original *World Class*, published in 1999, became a classic. This all-new edition features the world's best players of today discussing their lives, at the table and away from it — how they started, their best and worst bridge memories, their favorite hands, why partnerships work well, and their hopes for the future.

You may recognize the names from your bridge magazine or from watching them play online. This book will show you their human sides. You will relive their triumphs and disasters at the bridge table, and pick up plenty of tips to improve your game. Get to know many of the world's best players, male and female, young and old.

#### Players in this volume:

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David BIRD (England)

Sally BROCK (England)

Simon DE WIJS (Netherlands)

Peter FREDIN (Sweden)

Jessica LARSSON (Sweden)

Bauke MULLER (Netherlands)

Daniela VON ARNIM (Germany)

Sophia BALDYSZ (Poland)

Sjoert BRINK (Switzerland)

Sanna CLEMENTSSON (Sweden)

Brigitta FISCHER (Hungary)

Michal KLUKOWSK (Switzerland)

Cedric LORENZINI (France)

Nevena SENIOR (England)



The author of over 40 books on the game, **MARC SMITH** will be known to many readers as the expert panel conductor for the popular monthly bidding challenge hosted on Bridge Base Online (BBO). He also writes a regular column on BBO, reporting on major bridge events.

Smith has collaborated with such stars as Jeff Meckstroth, Zia Mahmood, Martin Hoffman, David Bird, Tim Bourke and Julian Pottage. With Barbara Seagram, he co-authored *25 Conventions You Should Know*, which won the American Bridge Teachers Association's Book of the Year award and remains one of the best-selling bridge books of all time.

He lives in Southampton, England and is a diehard fan of the Raiders American football team.

