

Lynn Berg

# STARTUP BRIDGE AND BEYOND

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## *Welcome to My Bridge World*

“Bridge! What else gives you 24 new opportunities in one afternoon?” When I heard David Berg (my late husband) say this, I realized that it represented so much of what I like about the game. I enjoy the mental challenge, the chance to try something new every time I pick up 13 cards. And then there’s the pleasure and puzzle of trying to communicate with a partner and solve those puzzles together. I’m in my sixth decade of bridge and it hasn’t lost its appeal. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the game by excellent players and teachers in a time when bridge was one of the most popular pastimes around. My mentors played duplicate, so I was never afraid of competitive bridge, always preferring it to other forms of the game.

I have seen massive changes in the game—which you need to know about to be comfortable.

If you’re new to the world of competitive bridge, you’ll find out quite quickly that this kind of bridge is a partnership game. Many social bridge games do not stress partnership agreements. Changing partners every few hands or rubbers does not lead to strong partnership agreements or cooperation. You’ll hear references to “my bridge club” not “my bridge partner.” The rubber form of the game rewards good cards as much as skill. Got a bad hand? Play quickly to get it over with so you can get a better hand. Even “Chicago” scoring takes away little of the sting of bad cards. Duplicate rewards good defense and partnership cooperation.

Duplicate bridge has had a bad reputation in many areas. “Those people” take it too seriously, aren’t friendly, are



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sharks. A lot of this bad rep comes from going into a duplicate situation unprepared and feeling inadequate to deal with the differences. I teach, direct, play and manage at a club where most newcomers feel welcome and comfortable—partly because our club makes sure they have the information they need to be at ease so they can learn, play and have a good time while doing so.

I'm here to guide you and your partner into thinking bridge.

With this book, I hope to give you the information and advice that will enable you to take full advantage of what bridge has to offer, a foundation of facts and techniques which will put you at your ease in many different bridge environments. I've always enjoyed mentoring at our local club. I hope this book will serve a similar purpose. It won't take the place of detailed classes, but it should make you better able to take advantage of more extensive presentations. Think of it as an extended glossary: the chapter titles will help you find what you're looking for. If you're reading a PDF, you'll also be able to type a key word in a search box to locate topics.

Much of the material in *Startup Bridge—and Beyond* is based on the columns I have written for the American Contract Bridge League monthly *Bulletin* and for the Florida District Nine *Sunshine Bridge News*. Looking back over the 100 or so columns I've written, I realize that the best of what I've accomplished is like the old adage, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you feed him for life." It's not mostly a matter of memory work (though that will be needed) but of a revised attitude and approach to the game.

# Startup Bridge—and Beyond

## *Part One Getting Started*

Are you just getting started in duplicate bridge? Whether you're just new to duplicate or new to thinking about the game, I hope to help you be a better player who has more fun.

### **How and Where to Start**

Finding a place to play takes research if you don't already know duplicate players.

If you live in a small town or rural area, there may be only one scheduled game a week—maybe in a church basement or even someone's living room.

Even if a club advertises that partners are guaranteed, it's courteous to call ahead. It's a help for the Director to have a day's notice. If you are asked about your skills or masterpoints, be honest. It's no crime to be new, but misrepresentation is unfair.

Larger towns have more choices. If you have the luxury of choice, look for a club which schedules novice or limited games (0-20, 0-500, 0-199, 0-299, for instance). They are most likely to welcome newcomers. If a game is marked "invitational," you will need to call ahead and find out if you are welcome, even if you have your own partner. You'll find out about available games easily if you go on line to ACBL.org and click on "Play." There will be listed a playing location and a contact person with phone number and e-mail. [See **Appendix 8 for On-Line Bridge.**]

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If no novice or limited games seem to be available, go to “Learn” on the ACBL website to find teachers in your area. There may be a lesson game or invitational game associated with a class. You can also find teachers at [ABTAhome.com](http://ABTAhome.com). In North America, the American Bridge Teachers Association attracts the best and the brightest, awarding Master Teacher status to the elite of its membership.

No novice activities in your area? Get enough players to show an interest and start a novice game. You can be the instigator!

## *Check List Going to a Duplicate Game*

### Before the Game at Home

- Be sure of time, location and entry fee. Directors really appreciate the right change.
- Be on time—a few minutes before game time is a courtesy to the Director, who must set up the game. If you are going to be last minute, call and let the Director know.
- Many clubs ban scent and perfumes because of allergies. Be careful not to cause a problem.
- Take the appropriate convention card for this partner.
- Take—and wear—your name tag if you have one.

### Before the Game at the Playing Site

- Get a clean insert for your convention card so you can record opening leads, contracts and results.
- Get your entry and find your place.
- Are refreshments/coffee allowed in the playing area?
- If there is a pre-game lecture, listen—or take your discussion with partner out of ear-shot.
- Pay attention to announcements. It's only courteous and might save time or confusion later.
- The Director will announce how many tables there are and how many boards per round.

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### During the Game

- If there is a clock, check it and make sure you are playing on time.
- If you want summaries or hand records, do you need to sign up? Do so before the last round if possible.
- Don't exceed the time allotted for a break.
- If you are new, introduce yourself if the Director doesn't make a general announcement introducing you to the group.
- If you are carrying coffee or another beverage from table to table, use a napkin or coaster. It's irritating to find a wet ring.
- Clean up after yourself.
- If you are dummy and the round is called, pass a board or two to the next table if the Director isn't there to do it.
- If you are waiting for another pair to move, avoid watching their play and don't crowd them. If you are having to wait very often past the called round, call this to the attention of the Director.
- Say "please" when you call the Director.
- Record the opponents' number, the contract, the opening lead and the result for each board. It's always a good idea to do this, but it's essential in a team game.
- Moderate your voice for any discussion so it won't be heard at other table, especially if your table finishes early.

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### At the End of the Game

- What is the local custom at the end of the game? Should you take table mat, boards, scoring machine to the front of the room? If it's a rented/borrowed location, does everything have to be put away? Tables and chairs moved? Help if you can.
- Check your scores on a summary or recap sheet. If there's an error, the sooner corrected the better. If the correction will be in your favor, you'll have to have corroboration from your opponents unless it's incontrovertibly clear.
- Plan on time for a postmortem. This could be as informal as you and partner on the phone or being part of a group who go out after the game, hand records and scores at the ready, to compare notes.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Make a date for next time.

If you have never played duplicate, there will be some details of the mechanics which are unfamiliar. If you can, visit the playing site when you have a free hour and have a look at the setup.

The biggest differences are boards and bidding boxes. The game is called “duplicate” because the same hand can be played at more than one table. The cards are kept in order by the four players, then returned to a holder (called a board because it's shaped like a plank—just a visual pun) to be passed on to other tables to be played again. For several decades now, bidding has been non-verbal, with bidding cards placed on the table in front of each player. Their use makes the room quieter and reduces the chances that other tables will hear what they shouldn't.

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Take a few minutes to get oriented. Where are the restrooms? Coffee and water? Supplies like pencils and convention cards.

The person in charge is called the Director. In a small club he may play, but there will probably be a non-playing Director in a larger game. There may be a time clock all can see, or the Director may be calling the rounds and letting players know when they should move on. The movement of cards and players is predetermined by the Director. Typically in an Open game, about seven minutes will be allotted for each hand. This includes time to move from one table to another. The average competitive game will play between 18 and 27 hands in a session, taking about three to three and a half hours. Limited games allow more time per hand—as much as eight minutes—or even more for a novice game

If you are a newcomer, you should meet your partner and talk about what agreements you will play. Be honest about what you know. If you can claim to know the basics of Stayman, Transfers and Weak Twos you will be off to a good start. Don't try to remember anything extra on your early outings: you'll have enough to deal with in the new surroundings, even if you've come with a familiar partner. All this is much easier if you can begin in a Newcomer or Novice game where everyone is relatively inexperienced.



## *Pace Yourself*

Give yourself time to learn.

The biggest mistake many players make is to think that just learning a raft of new conventions will make them better players. The strain it takes to remember and keep straight a lot of new concepts all at once would daunt anyone. Add the fact that most bridge auctions depend on no conventions at all and you'll soon realize that your success or failure at bridge is not dependent on how many conventions you know. Think of the poor bald guy who keeps hoping the next bottle of snake oil will miraculously grow him a mane: even players who use a lot of gadgets will find that close to 90% of the time it's not conventions which drive their choices.

When you're new, you should “play bridge like a duck.” No matter how hard you're paddling, look calm on the surface. No one will know you're a newbie if your demeanor doesn't give you away. An added benefit: Acting calm and assured will make you *feel* more calm and sure of yourself. You might remember Anna's song in *The King and I* about dealing with fear: acting brave will make you feel more brave.

Don't tell everyone that you're a novice. That sounds too much like an apology, as well as being an invitation to be taken advantage of. Even if you believe that a great result was mainly an accident, keep mum. If you're playing against a more advanced pair, asking about a bid or play is fine—when there's time at the end of the round.

Dithering and second guessing yourself is a waste of time. It's profitless: you're just spinning your wheels and not getting anywhere. Most second, third and fourth thoughts won't be any better than your first impulse. Nothing will

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worry your partner more than your seeming so uncomfortable.

It helps to develop a routine before you get to the game. If you've played with this partner before, get out your convention card and review it. New partner? Arrange to meet early to fill out a card. You could take one with you that you find comfortable to use as a starting point. Remember that you should both have cards, filled out alike. This review will help you remember your agreements. It's likely that there will be small differences when you play with different partners. Few things are more alarming at the bridge table than suddenly realizing that you have no idea what your partner's bid means. Filling out a card together and reviewing it regularly will help avoid this panic.

No one will mind if you are a new player, but there will be a lot of objections if you are a slow player, especially in the Open games. Slow play is the bane of the game, leading to vociferous complaints. Act like a knowledgeable player: Lead before you write in your private score (the inside of the convention card) or record the contract on a scoring device. Try to play in tempo. If you're the dummy, pass a board or two if the round has been called before your table is finished. Be mindful of the clock and come back from breaks on time.

Compliment good play. Confine your comments on partner's unsuccessful performance to, "Nice try, pard." Partners live up to our expectations. Always play as if your partner is correct and he'll fulfill this hope. Conversely, assuming that your partner is usually wrong will have a disastrous effect.

When you're inexperienced, it's really hard to judge how you're doing. Even seasoned players will think they're having a bad game when the points are running the other

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way. And the game feels better when we have good cards. Just remember that a bad day at bridge is better than a good day cleaning house (or substitute any other chore you dislike).

There's a proverb that "Who lives may learn." We keep coming back to the bridge table for the challenges: we're helping our brains and psyches in the process. Lose at bridge? It's still a winning strategy just to show up. Do you know the joke about the older woman who visited her doctor for a routine checkup. He complimented her on her condition and asked what she was doing to keep so well. "I play duplicate bridge," she replied. "That's great for your mental well-being! What are you doing to stay physically fit?" "Well," she replied with a grin, "I do sit East-West!"

## I'VE GOT YOUR BACK!

Nothing is scarier than not knowing what to expect—as we all know, knowledge is power. I'm here to inform you, encourage you and help you (and your partner) help yourselves. Use this book as a way to get into the mysteries of bridge and its most challenging form, duplicate.

Sure, knowledge of basic bidding protocols is necessary, but so is knowing what to expect, how to develop a partnership, what's going to happen as you play in various events, and how to deal with mistakes and setbacks.

Use this book like an extended glossary—it will give you the barebones start which will allow you to make an educated move to more information when you want it.

Never forget: bridge is for fun!



**LYNN BERG** (Florida) has been a member of the ACBL for over 55 years. In that time she has been a player (Sapphire LM), a club manager and director, a director and teacher on cruises, a Tournament Director, a unit and district official, head of ACBL's Education Foundation, a teacher and a bridge writer. She contributes monthly to the ACBL *Bridge Bulletin* and is currently club manager for the Deland Bridge Club. She also enjoys reading, knitting, gardening, cooking and any kind of travel. She likes to say, "If I am in the room, someone is having a good time!"