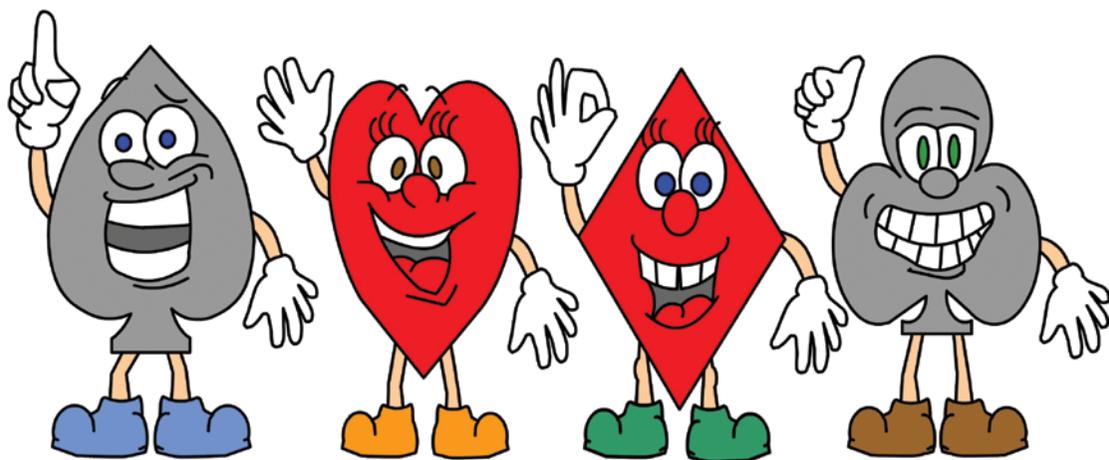


FIVE TO FIVE HUNDRED

*ON THE ROAD TO BECOMING A
LIFE MASTER*

Tim Kohl & Bob Jiobu



Illustrated by Tim Kohl

An Honors eBook from Master Point Press

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DEDICATION

To our wives, Mary Jo and Karen, who so patiently put up with our playing bridge for hours and spending days away from home playing in tournaments.

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after becoming a Life Master, Tim had the idea of writing a book aimed primarily at newer players who were striving to become Life Masters. He thought he was in a good position to offer help because the challenges were still fresh in his mind. Not long after that, Bob joined the project.

Of course, several thousand other bridge players have had similar ideas, and some have written excellent books. However, we were undaunted by those numbers and slowly forged ahead.

In producing this volume, Bob was mainly responsible for the text and Tim was responsible for the graphics. Nevertheless, as in a good partnership, this finished publication represents a joint- effort. As authors, we closely collaborated on the many technical matters and broad ideas.

Our goal is to help newer players earn the 500 masterpoints necessary to become a Life Master. We assume these players already have around 5 masterpoints; hence, the title:

*“Five to Five Hundred:
On the Road to Becoming a Life Master”*

NOTE ON STYLE

In 2015, the American Dialect Society accepted “they” as a singular, gender neutral pronoun and voted it “Word of the Year.” Following their decision, we use “they” in place of “he and she,” “them” in place of “him and her, and “their” in place of “his or hers.”

We also use an informal writing style and as will become evident; we highlight various types of information with various emojis.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book consists of 5 parts:

1. *The Behavioral Side of Bridge*. We look at how the behavioral sciences (mainly social psychology, sociology, and behavioral economics) can help us to become better players.
2. *Numbers*. We tackle the topic of probability. Our approach is aimed at non-mathematically inclined players. We also discuss scoring and how it affects bidding.
3. *Why?* We emphasize the underlying reasons for doing things.
4. *Technique*. We explore the various technical aspects of bidding and card play.
5. *Tools of the Trade*. We devote this part of the book to notrump because we suspect that newer players will reap big rewards from mastering the basics of notrump early in their bridge careers.

KISS PRINCIPLE AND BRIDGE

Throughout the book we refer to KISS: “Keep it simple ‘stupid.’”¹ This acronym summarizes the argument that simple systems get the job done more reliably than complex systems. Several bridge authorities endorse KISS, especially for newer players. As former teachers, we also endorse KISS, but we recognize that “simple” is relative.

Getting the “job done” means one thing to new players and another thing to advanced players. New players might be satisfied to reach a game whereas advanced players bidding the same hand, might be disappointed to miss a slam.

¹ Often, this is misstated as KISS: “Keep it simple, stupid.” However, Kelly Johnson, a U.S. Navy engineer, coined the acronym as: “Keep it simple stupid” (no comma). Evidently, he meant the relationship between the way sophisticated systems fail and the sophistication necessary to repair them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It is said mastering bridge is a journey, and that the journey is more important than the destination. We agree. We can only wonder what our lives would have been like had we not bumped into each other at the bridge club, and had not met the many people who enriched our journey:

Emmy, Don, Doris, Anita, MK, Harold, Skip, Marsha, Betty, Kenny, Marty, Hugh, Harry, Trish, Dianne, Lew, Bob, Ken, Janelle, Sherry, JV, Dennis, Ike, John, Jane, Monica, Pandy, Rick, Eunice, Mike, Siraj, Eileen, Michele, Drew, Judy, Michelle, Dean, Cheryl, Jay, Art, Lola, Donna, Pat, Sharon, Jack, Roger, Prakash, Sam, Jodee, Rick, Allen, Jimmy, Dick, Shelley, Fred, Ann, Dan, Joe, Sean, Larry, Yvonne, Polly, Lowry, Judy, Jeanne, Mary, Bob, Frank, Kevin, Bill, Ella, and Kathleen...and those who are gone: Dick, Siva, Chris, Bob, Gisela, Carroll, Sylvia, Gloria, Honey, Nancy, Dwight, Don, Patty, Ursula, Samir, Nina, Joyce, Howard, and Virginia.

The following players helped to edit the manuscript:

Karen Clemency, Dean Congbalay, Tim Curry, Siraj Haji, Hugh McCracken, Frank Paynter, Joyce Penn, Michele Ruf, and Judy Williamson.

The following players contributed quotes and insights:

Jay Albright, Ken Eichenbaum, Siraj Haji, Cheryl Schneider, Anita Torrence, and Joyce Penn.

WE THANK YOU

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I. THE BEHAVIORAL SIDE OF BRIDGE



S. J. Simon, a noted bridge authority, years ago claimed that “your technical game is only one half of the reason why you lose at bridge. The other half is your psychology.”² More recently, professional Robert Todd observed that “Bridge is a game of skill, but also a game of psychology.”³

Consistent with these comment, Karen Walker, a well-known bridge teacher, often writes about anxiety, body language, and various behavioral topics. In addition, Larry Cohen, Billy Miller, and other bridge authorities frequently intersperse behavioral matters within their technical discussions.⁴

² S. J. Simon, *Why You Lose at Bridge*. Devyn Press, 2006: 85.

³ Robert Todd: <https://www.advinbridge.com/>.

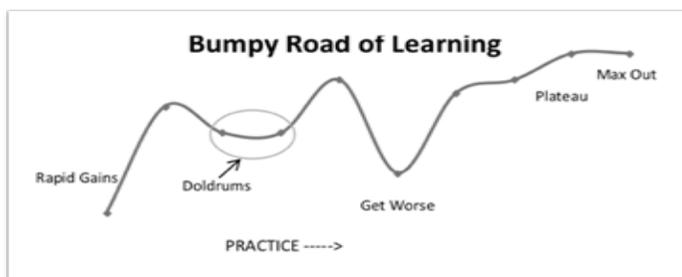
⁴ Karen Walker, Billy Miller, and Larry Cohen often write for the *Bridge Bulletin*.

1. LEARNING THE GAME

Learning bridge is like learning anything else.

Almost everyone who starts down the road to earn 500 masterpoints concentrates at first on learning the technical side of the game, such as bidding conventions and card combinations. They soon realize bridge is a complicated game. Some players take it as a challenge and stride ahead forcefully. Others learn the basics and some of the more advanced material; yet others find the game so complicated they return to kitchen-table bridge, which is (lest we forget our roots) an honorable and enjoyable pastime.

Nevertheless, our experience as teachers leads us to believe that anyone can learn to play bridge at an advanced level because learning bridge follows a typical learning curve, which looks like this:



If you're in the doldrums, don't despair. You will improve.

The curve shows that, typically, learning progresses in an up-and-down fashion. You learn rapidly at first, but you become so preoccupied with new material you forget some of the older material. You then get worse and stagnate in the doldrums. If you keep working, you might get worse temporarily before reaching a plateau. From there you will eventually attain your maximum. After that, you won't improve much; but if you are a mere human being, it will be a long time before you arrive at that impasse.

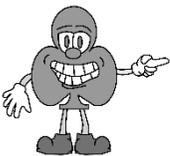
HOW TO LEARN

Everyone knows that to get better at bridge, you must practice...practice...practice. However, practice alone will not get you very far down the Road to 500. You must practice the right way with the right feedback.

Psychologist Anders Ericsson has documented that point. His research suggests it takes 10,000 hours of practice to master music, chess, or bridge. That is a daunting task, but newer research suggests there is nothing sacred about 10,000 hours. Any number of hours will lead to improvement. There are, nevertheless, a couple of rubs along the way.

The first rub is that you must *deliberately practice*: Concentrate intensely on what you are trying to learn and constantly challenge yourself to master increasingly difficult material. For example, you might try more complicated bidding conventions, add forms of signaling, and force yourself to count the hand down. Playing deliberately requires discipline, effort, and patience.

The second rub involves *deliberate instruction*. You need a mentor. Your mentor, however, can take any form: A specific person, a series of classes, or consistent advice from a more knowledgeable player. Without a mentor, you will flounder about and not progress systematically in the desired direction.



A mentor can help you sidestep mistakes on your journey to becoming a Life Master. Thank them every time you play.

LEARNING BRIDGE AND THE COMPUTER

To improve your game, you need to declare and defend a lot of hands. However, doing that at a club might not always be practical. An alternative is to play against a computer program, such as the Bridge Baron. You can play and reflect on several boards in an hour because the computer instantly does the “housekeeping,” such as scoring, dealing, and arranging your cards.

We know a beginning player and an expert player, both of whom work and have limited opportunities to play. They each play on the computer nightly; and they claim computer-play improves their game and is enjoyable, too.

Playing against the computer has a downside. The computer is a machine and does things no human would do. Offsetting that tendency is the fact you’re a human and you do things no machine would do. These two tendencies possibly cancel each other out over many hands, but on any given hand, the results might not accurately reflect what would happen with a human opponent.

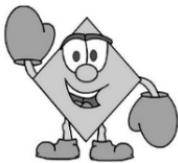
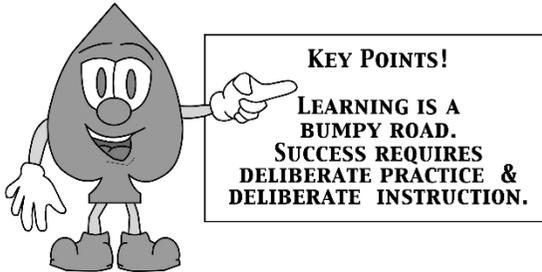
Nevertheless, if you remain aware that a machine is a machine, playing the computer lets you practice more hands than you could possibly play at a bridge club.

LEARNING BRIDGE AND THE INTERNET

To play against a computer doesn’t require you to personally possess a bridge-playing program, or even a computer. You can use a smartphone and play on the internet. The most popular bridge site is BBO: Bridge Base Online (bridgebase.com). You can log on and play against the computer (called playing with “robots”). Fun Bridge is another site that offers competitive play with robots. Both sites let you earn ACBL masterpoints by competing in robot tournaments that are played throughout the day and night. The ACBL, the governing organization of American bridge, also has an assortment of learning programs aimed at newer players.

The internet has several sources of learning. BBO offers vugraph (televised) tournaments, instruction, chat rooms, and an array of teaching aids. Another internet resource is Bridge Winners (bridgewinners.com). It offers hundreds of articles written by numerous experts, chat facilities, and learning aids. VuBridge (vubridge.fr.) has dozens of online courses that allow you to play instructional hands with the computer.

Whether on a computer or the internet or at a club, deliberate play combined with deliberate instruction might be described as “satisfying,” but it might not be described as “a whole lot of fun.” The fun part comes when you start getting top boards, winning tournaments, and beating those players who used to clean your clock.



I hated every minute of training, but didn't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.

~Muhammad Ali~

MASTERING BRIDGE IS A JOURNEY

This is a book for improving players who have graduated from the novice class and are embarking on the long journey to that coveted Life Master title — which now in North America requires winning 500 masterpoints.

Written in a light, readable style, with liberal use of cartoons and *aide-memoires*, the book first addresses the mental approach necessary for bridge success — topics including how to learn, being mentally tough, trusting partner, and how to have constructive discussions after a disaster. It goes on to cover the numbers game — basic probability, how the scoring method affects decisions, and how to become a lucky player. The remainder of the book is technical, covering decision-making, opening leads, defensive signaling, hand evaluation, and some recommended bidding ideas and approaches.



TIM KOHL (USA), a retired teacher, is a Silver Life Master and a licensed ACBL teacher. He combines professional training with personal experience as a bridge player to advise less-experienced players as they become Life Masters. When Tim is not playing bridge, he enjoys completing small woodworking projects. He has published two books on woodworking.



BOB JOBUBU (USA) began playing bridge as a college freshman but after graduation did not play for thirty years. He is now a retired sociology professor who has researched demography, social psychology, and data analysis. Currently, he is playing a lot of bridge while thinking about how to use social psychology and probability to win more tricks.