



# GETTING INTO THE BIDDING

A BRIDGE TOOLKIT

BILL TREBLE

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my parents,  
Bruce and Elfarata Treble



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## INTRODUCTION

When I first started to play bridge, most of the books and publications dealt with auctions where your side had a free run with no interference. Whether you played Standard American or one of the more elaborate systems popularized overseas, the focus was on reaching the best contract. Takeout and negative doubles got some ink, but overcalls in those days were near-opening bids in high-card strength, and partner was expected to bid accordingly.

For several reasons, however, people began to make overcalls more frequently. There was a growing recognition that excellent shape is just as important as points in deciding whether to compete. Soon, some players abandoned the idea of insisting on “the goods” for a direct overcall, hoping for a chance to balance later with hands that weren’t quite so robust. Instead, they’d display a willingness to get involved right away if the level was convenient, as opposed to waiting for the perfect hand to take direct action.

The widening of the overcall range, combined with a move towards a friskier preempting style, vaulted competitive bidding to the forefront rather than merely being an afterthought. A healthy amount of discussion was needed if both the opening and interfering sides were to keep a sure footing.

The nature of bridge literature changed in tandem, with a proliferation of books devoted to specific aspects of the topic. For example, Mike Lawrence has written on overcalling and balancing, and both Larry Cohen and Andrew Robson have dealt with higher-level battles. What seems to be lacking so far is a one-stop shopping experience that covers the entire realm in a fair amount of detail but at a pace that won’t cause the reader to experience a sense of overload.

This book is intended to build a foundation that will enable you to succeed in the hurly-burly of the contested auction. It naturally divides into three stages. In Chapters 1 to 4, we look at competitive actions that occur immediately after the opening bid or relatively early in the bidding. Moving on to Chapters 5 to 7, we find out about several ways to compete over their 1NT opening and also talk about how to claim your fair share of the turf as the bidding continues, both in low-level auctions and way up there in the stratosphere. At this point, you are in a good position to flourish if you have digested the contents sufficiently. If you happen to be in a regular, serious partnership with higher aspirations, Chapters 8 and 9 contain lots of good reference material for arriving at firm understandings. There are quiz hands throughout, and an entire chapter of them to wrap things up.

In the thirty-plus years that I've played bridge, I've met many wonderful and interesting people who have shared their insights and experience with me. Much of their advice is included in these pages. For example, Colin Ward, who always has a quip for any occasion, came up with the gem that "The only effective defense to a preempt is an overbid." Well, maybe.

I'd like to mention three people especially, with all of whom I've had long-standing partnerships. One is Tom Butterworth, who took me on when he was one of the top players in our area and I still had some rough edges on my game. He was not only a wellspring of knowledge that benefited me greatly, but his temperament, sportsmanship and genuine friendliness towards everyone at the table was a shining example for us all. Dave McLellan was an excellent match for me in plunging into an abundance of intricate bidding techniques. Watching him play, I saw his intensity and desire to scale the heights, and as a declarer, he was able to work out the layout of just about every hand he played. Finally, there is my wife Sue, who has not only enriched my life in every way imaginable, but is a walking advertisement for having no fear at the bridge table. Some years ago, when I kept rambling on about doing a book on competitive bidding, she finally had enough of it and said, "Well, when are you going to stop talking about it and get cracking?" She always gives me a nudge and a wakeup call when I sorely need it. Love ya, Sue.

CHAPTER 1

# PRINCIPLES OF COMPETING AND BASIC TOOLS

Effective bidding in contested auctions is a vital part of winning bridge, and its importance cannot be stressed highly enough. I often play bridge on the internet, and I did a study of some recent sessions. Here are the statistics:

<b>Tournament #</b>	<b>Unobstructed Auctions</b>	<b>Both Sides Bidding</b>
<b>1</b>	5	7
<b>2</b>	3	9
<b>3</b>	5	5
<b>4</b>	5	7
<b>5</b>	6	6
<b>6</b>	5	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>41</b>

Over the course of six sessions, then, competitive auctions represented almost 60% of the deals played. Because a lot of current theory and many of the books you read now emphasize an ‘in your face’ style of interfering with the opponents, the bidding landscape has changed significantly over the course of the last 10-20 years. To take one example, a strong notrump opening would usually buy the contract in a bygone era. Not so anymore. From personal experience, I can tell you that more often than not the opponents are butting in over our 1NT openings with some kind of one- or two-suited overcall.

# ONE-STOP SHOPPING FOR COMPETITIVE BIDDING

In the modern game of bridge, the majority of auctions see both sides involved in the action, and every improving player needs to acquire the basic tools to handle this kind of bidding.

This book covers all the basic building blocks of competitive bidding (takeout and negative doubles, preempts, overcalls, competing over their notrump openings and dealing with competition over your own, forcing pass auctions, the Law of Total Tricks, and more). It also describes a number of useful conventions and gadgets with which you need to be familiar (whether or not you play them yourself), and suggests other optional treatments for partnership discussion. Each chapter ends with a review quiz, and the final chapter is a summary quiz covering all the material.



**BILL TREBLE** (Winnipeg, Canada) is an expert bridge player who has been a bronze medalist in the Canadian Teams Championship. His wife Sue, a bridge teacher, wishes Bill would pay more attention to the excellent advice in this book.



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