



Improve Your  
**BIDDING JUDGMENT**

NEIL KIMELMAN



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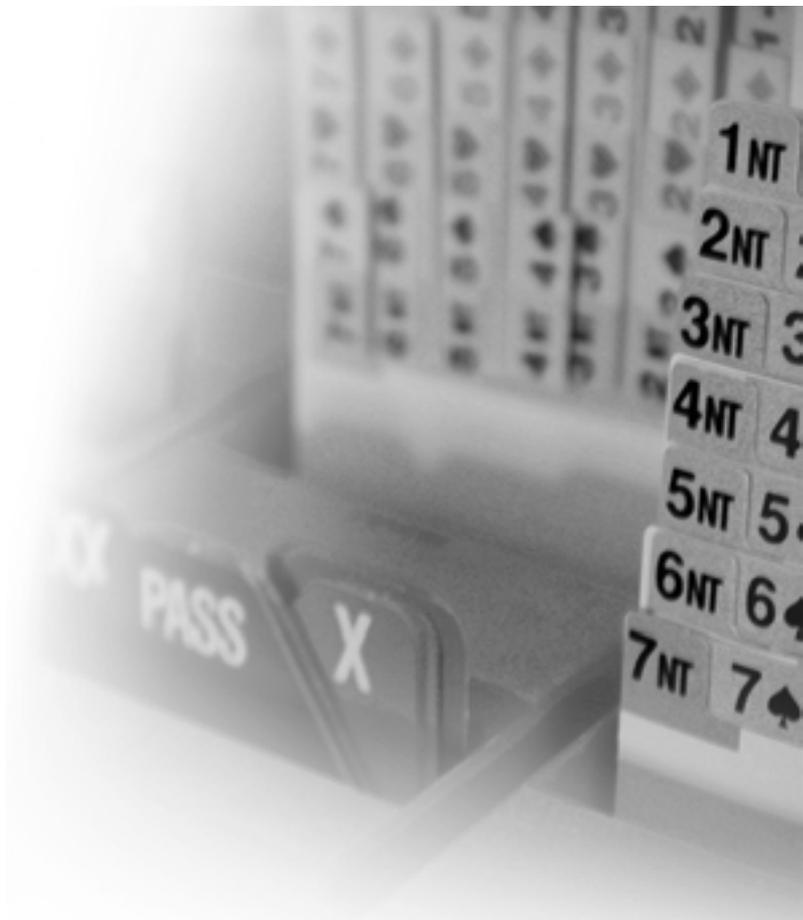
To my parents Edwin and Zelma, who taught me to play bridge when I was nine years old; my daughter Erin for her suggestions on the title for this book; my son Kyle for his support.

I would also like to acknowledge my long-time partner (1976–2004) Bob Kuz, who is very familiar with some of these hands.

To my good friend and sometime partner, Bob Todd, who served as a devil's advocate and critiqued the content. To Karl Gohl, my current partner, who taught me some really great conventions and treatments.

Finally, to my wife Colleen. Our partnership has lasted longer than any of my bridge ones. Thank you all.

*Neil Kimelman*  
*June, 2008*



# AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION -OR- I TRIED MY BEST

*The real secret of the expert  
is to make logic seem  
like flair.*

- Hugh Kelsey

Bidding is where you win and lose at bridge. Sure, defense is important, but often their contract is going to come home no matter what you do. If you want to improve your defense, read a Woolsey or Kelsey book. Superior declarer play can also help you win, but once again, read Watson's *Play of the Hand*. Add in Clyde Love's *Bridge Squeezes Complete* and Mollo's *Bridge in the Menagerie* for technique and imagination, respectively, and you have a solid declarer play foundation.

Bidding is where it's at! It is where the majority of IMPs and matchpoints are won and lost. It's great to have a well-honed bidding system, with well-discussed conventions and treatments. When they come up, they can greatly reduce areas of uncertainty and allow us to make better bidding decisions. But those pesky opponents! They are always bidding, especially when we don't want them to bid. Plus, they jump levels, and take away our bidding space. To make matters worse, their bids show something completely artificial, totally unrelated to the suit they bid. Unfortunately, our own conventions are often rendered useless in these ambiguous situations.

I suggest two additional tools are needed to supplement your specific agreements:

### **1) A partnership philosophy.**

I played with the same partner for twenty-eight years, from 1976 to 2004. Unfortunately, we did not always get out and play as often as we would have liked to, due to the other priorities in our lives. However, this didn't stop us from being very effective when we did play. The reason is that we had general principles that guided us in unfamiliar auctions and situations.

### **2) Good judgment.**

This book is all about the thinking that is needed to make good bidding decisions, which will also make life easier for your partner.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK**

The scoring is usually teams (IMPs), but sometimes the deals come from pairs (matchpoints). Although all can benefit from the book, most of the problems are intended for intermediate and advanced players. Some of the key points have been included as Tips that you can find highlighted throughout the book.

Although I have tried to stay away from recommending systems and conventions, you will see a bias to 2/1 game forcing. I have also included some discussion of shortness-showing bids and other methods that I feel are important in enhancing your bidding judgment.

I have used 99% real hands. For that reason I have usually included names of the participants and the full deal. Among the top-level players you will find involved are the following:

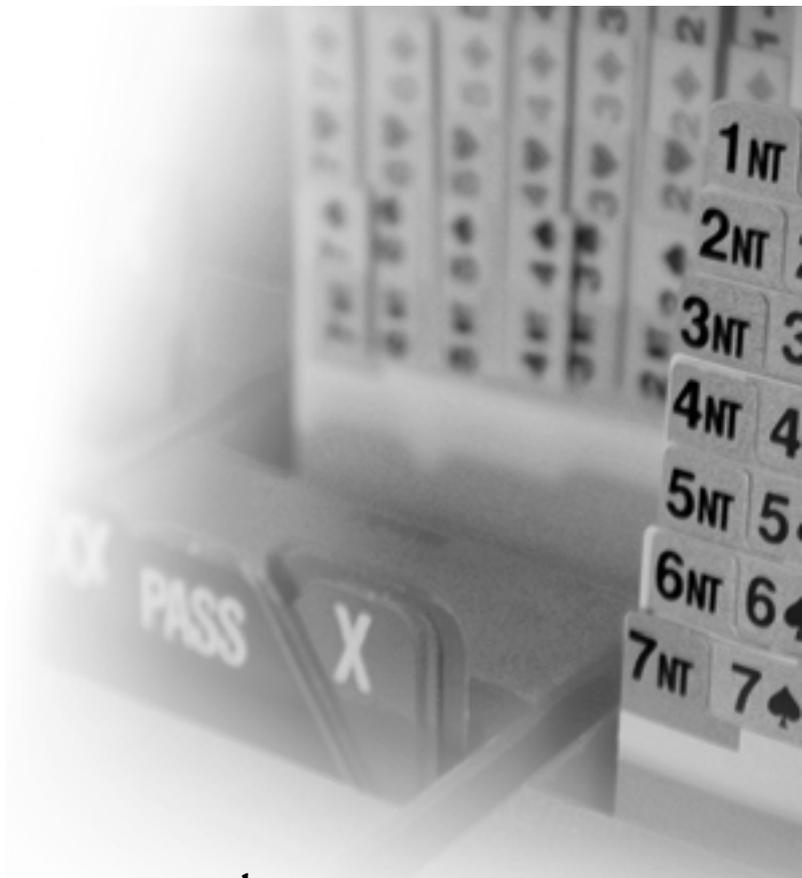
Balcombe, Bates, Bramley, Cohen, Daigneault, De Falco, El Ahmady, Fallenius, Fantoni, Forrester, Fredin, Garner, Gartaganis, Gitelman, Graves, Greco, Grue, Hamilton, Hamman, Hampson, Helgemo, Helness, Kantar, Kokish, Lasut, Lauria, Lazard, Lindkvist, Madala, Mahaffey, Maksymetz, Manfield, Manoppo, Meckstroth, Mittelman, Morse, Moss, Muller, Nunes, Passell, Pavlicek, Rodwell, Rosenkranz, Sadek, Sanborn, Silver, Smith, Smolen, Sokolow, Soloway, Todd, Versace, Weinstein, Welland, Wolff, Zia.

Approximately half the material is from personal knowledge and experience, although there are quite a few deals taken from recent World and North American Bridge Championships (NABC) events. Two of the major events from which material is drawn are the annual Canadian National Team Championships (CNTC) and the Canadian Open Pairs Championships (COPC).

Finally, I have tried to inject humor into my writing. This, I hope, will serve two purposes: make the reading and learning more fun, and help us remember that even though it is our passion, bridge is just a game where we can fiercely compete, while still enjoying the company of those around us.

I sincerely hope you will find this book valuable as you aspire to improve your overall bridge performance and enjoyment at the table.

*Neil Kimelman*



# Chapter 1

## PARTNERSHIP 101 -OR- SINGING IN THE SAME KEY

*“Where’s the band you held  
during the auction?”*

- A comment Jan Janitschke sometimes made  
when dummy came down.

# YOU LIGHT UP MY LIFE

To aid our discussion, I will use the analogy of traffic lights to help in decisions. I encourage their use when at the table or in discussions with partner. Essentially:

## GREEN LIGHT

I have a maximum for my bidding

*or*

I have no wasted values

*or*

The bidding has made my hand better

## YELLOW LIGHT

I have some wasted values

*or*

Not sure if we have a good enough fit for this level

*or*

I have defensive values

## RED LIGHT

We are off two aces for a small slam  
(or one ace for a grand slam)

*or*

I want to penalize our opponents

*or*

I don't have what I said I did

Traffic light terminology is something that almost everyone can visualize and understand, which is why I find it very effective.

# PHILOSOPHY 101

You can't make informed decisions in the bidding unless you know what partner's (and the opponents') bids mean. If there is no consistency

then it becomes more of a random contest. However, skilled players want to take advantage of their skill. They also want to take advantage of their better judgment, methods and temperament—all attributes that are worth seeking.

**Tip 1** Have your bid—be disciplined.

If you always do that, partner will make better decisions and you will build partnership confidence.

**Tip 2** Show partner what you've got.

Yes, this will help the opponents sometimes, but in the long run it will better serve you and your partner.

These first two Tips are cornerstones for an effective partnership. The more consistent you can be, the better chance your partner can make the right choices. The opposite is obviously also true. *Discipline, discipline, discipline.* You will see that all through the book I will say, 'You have shown your hand, trust partner'. Your partnership will not be able to do this unless you follow Tips 1 and 2.

**Tip 3** Have discussions with partner.

One of the fascinations of bridge is that we are always encountering new situations. It is good practice to keep discussing what you think certain bids would mean in these instances. The key is to ensure that you and your partner are on the same wavelength. The following are examples of *some* of the questions that I feel all partnerships need to ask themselves:

#### **a) Opening bids**

Light or solid? What about in third seat?

#### **b) Weak two-bids**

What do they promise at various vulnerabilities? What about in first or second seat, vulnerable against not?

### c) Preempts

What do they show? How does this change depending on seat and vulnerability?

### d) Cuebids versus pattern bids

What is the partnership preference? In this auction, for example,

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	pass	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	3♥
pass	4♠	pass	5♦

is 5♦ a cuebid or showing your pattern, in this case short clubs?

### e) Reopening doubles

Do you always protect when partner passes an overcall, in case partner wants to penalize the opponents?

**f) In the auction below, how many points does the double show?**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	pass	dbl

**g) In the following auction, what does the second double promise?**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♦	1♠	pass
pass	dbl	2♣	dbl

Most experts agree it shows a trap pass of spades. But is it also a penalty double of 2♣? If not, does it promise a minimum number of clubs? Again, many experts agree that doubler should have at least two clubs, but this is definitely not a universal understanding.

Here's an example that shows how having firm partnership agreements can pay off. In the 2006 CNTC qualifying round, Karl Gohl and I bid these hands as follows:

# BIDDING IS WHERE YOU WIN OR LOSE AT BRIDGE!

Bridge players are taught numerous rules to help them make good bidding decisions, rules that involve things like point count, losing trick count, the Law of Total Tricks and a host of other evaluation methods. But eventually everyone discovers that there are more situations where these rules don't apply than where they do. This book fills a gap in bridge literature by discussing how to make decisions in the bidding, especially in competitive auctions.



Think about your own game. Are you sure you know when it's right to be aggressive and when to pull back? When to bid on and when to double the opponents? When to push forward for a slam and when to be content with reaching game? This book goes through the factors you need to be aware of in your hand and in the bidding around you (partner's and the opponents') that will help you get these decisions right more often. Filled with real-life examples, practical advice and helpful quizzes, this book will help any reader become a better bidder.



**NEIL KIMELMAN** (Winnipeg) is a Canadian expert who plans to play much more top-level bridge after his forthcoming retirement. This is his first book.



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