

Fifth Chair



Book Review: Ron Klinger's 100 Winning Bridge Tips For The Improving Player

100 Winning Bridge Tips for the Improving Player
(Master Bridge Series; Great Britain: Victor Gollanz LTD [second impression 2003],
145pp, \$14.95)

Ron Klinger is an Australian internationalist who has written dozens of books on bridge. This book, a revised version of his 1987 volume, contains 100 bridge tips for the improving player. The book itself is divided into six sections: "The Rule of 1 to the Rule of 10" (1-10), "Constructive Bidding" (11-20), "Competitive Bidding" (21-35), "Opening Leads" (36-55), "Declarer Play" (56-80), and "Defensive Strategy" (81-100).

The tips themselves are well worth review and reflection, especially tip #72: "Do not follow any tip blindly." This tip is offered in the context of declarer play but it is applicable to all sections.

However, Klinger's book troubled me for several reasons. Although the book claims to be for the improving player, Klinger uses concepts like "losers" without explaining what a "loser" is. Thus tip #18, in a discussion of reverses, states "The reverse promises a strong opening (16+ HCP or 5 losers or fewer)." Well this is actually a true statement, but nowhere that I saw in the book is "loser" defined.

More importantly, some technical inaccuracies are present in the book. For example, the discussion of Roman Key Card Blackwood (tip #16) uses a very non-standard schedule of responses in which 5NT shows 5 key cards without the trump Queen and 6♣ shows 5 key cards with the trump Queen. Tip #56 proposes "the even suit break" rule and begins with the words, "Assume the missing cards divide as evenly as possible." Mathematically, odd numbers of cards (3, 5, 7) tend to break more evenly rather than less (2-1 instead of 3-0, 3-2 instead of 4-1 or 5-0, 4-3 instead of 5-2, 6-1, or 7-0 respectively). Even numbers of cards, however, tend to break less evenly than more, so that 3-1 is more likely than 2-2 and 4-2 is more likely than 3-3.

Klinger's tip is not "wrong;" I understand what he is trying to say and hence can put his tip in context. However, it is in my judgment misleading. Most intermediate and some advanced players will be confused and mis-apply the tip.

And there are always areas of disagreement in our great game. Holding ♠J8643 ♥AK2 ♦A76 ♣Q5 (p. 37), I would not double a 1♣ opening bid, and I would not pass a 1♦ or 1♥ opening bid in favor of a 1♣ overcall. Tip #31 (Rule of 10 and 12) is a very conservative approach to converting takeout doubles into penalty passes that isn't very realistic against preemptive barrages. If on the auction 1♥ (DBL) RDBL (3♣); p; p; ?, I doubled with ♠Q862 ♥J5 ♦975 ♣AK108 and found that the opponents make an overtrick and that partner's opening bid was ♠K103 ♥K98763 ♦Q832 ♣VOID, I personally couldn't stomach the view that "Although West had a featherweight opening, this was not the prime cause of the disaster" (p. 52).

I therefore judge this book as food for thought that is best read by advancing players. Intermediate players will I fear be confused, and as S.J. Simon once wrote, there is no more dangerous bridge player than a willing, but confused, partner.

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