

Fifth Chair



New Book by Sarantakos and Bird

Famous Bridge Records

(*Master Bridge Series*; Trafalgar Square Publishing [2002], pp. 144; \$15.95)

Bridge with the Blue Team, Pietro Forquest

(Trafalgar Square Publishing [fourth impression 2002], pp. 384; \$27.50)

Bridge is a game played seriously by some and socially by many. We admire experts for their skill and prowess, often wondering if we will ever achieve the heights they so often scale.

And secretly we wish for evidence that they are just as fallible as we are!

Authors Bird and Sarantakos have done us a favor by collecting under one cover an amazing collection of hands - bridge records to honor the decision to accept bridge as an Olympic sport. Here, in some 27 chapters (and an index), we can marvel at the ups and downs of bridge played at the highest level.

For example, chapter one treats us to a no-swing 3NT hand, duly bid and made by both pairs on a combined 18-count. Ever go down zillions in a save? Chapter two shows us a hand where a sacrifice at the 5-level went down 11 tricks. Chapter three shows us hands where slam was made at one table but the hands were passed out at the other.

Have you ever struggled to make game with eight, nine, or even ten trumps? Chapter five shows us hands where experts made game contracts with six trumps!

As I trust you can imagine, these hands are spectacular, ascending the heights of ecstasy and plumbing the depths of despair. Anyone who enjoys bridge will enjoy these hands, and I confess that I have already read this book several times, from cover to cover, not so much to learn but as a reminder that bridge is first and foremost a game that gives us great pleasure. This book is suitable for everyone regardless of level, but I daresay that the better one plays, the more one will appreciate the hands with which the authors have graced us.

In sharp contrast with *Famous Bridge Records*, *Bridge with the Blue Team* gives us a glimpse at the expertise of history's most famous group of bridge players. From 1957 until 1975, the Blue Team won every international team championship it entered. This collection of hands ranges throughout this period and shows the greatness of the Italians

as bridge players. Mostly presented as examples of declarer play, occasionally as examples of defensive play, Forquet generally follows this pattern. First, the hands are presented single-dummy (i.e., only two hands showing, either declarer and dummy or defender and dummy). A crucial point in the play of the hand is reached, and Forquet invites the reader to make a play. He then proceeds with the story of the hand and the reader is in this way able to compare his play with the actual play.

The type of play required varies from hand to hand. Many involve squeezes or end-plays; some involve deception or a tactical stroke. But every hand, every single one, is an example of bridge at its most beautiful.

Bridge with the Blue Team is not a book one reads for pleasure. It is best read slowly, carefully, but most of all thoughtfully. It should also not be read as a fair test of one's skill as a declarer or defender, and I will use my authorial license as an excuse not to reveal what percentage of plays I got right (other than to say that it was pretty low). It is also a book that will profit multiple readings and like Famous Bridge Records will give greater rewards to better players, because the better one plays, the more one will appreciate the sheet genius displayed in these hands.

As a bonus, Forquet provides a summary of the three main Italian bidding systems (Blue Team Club, Roman Club, and Arno, also known as Little Roman Club) and an historical summary of the Blue Team's record in international competition. My only regret here is that the Precision system (used by the Blue Team in some later competitions) and the Leghorn Diamond system (which to be fair was never used by the Blue Team in international competition, only in European tournaments) is not included.

This book is best suited to advanced level players or better; novices and intermediates who read it will be more bewildered than amazed.

Henry Sun
Bridge Reviewer