

Fifth Chair



Book Review: It's Your Call: Bidding Problems Answered by International Panel, ed. Brian Senior

It's Your Call: Bidding Problems Answered by International Panel, ed. Brian Senior (England: Five Aces Books, 2000), 122 pp/, \$17.95

The book presents many bidding situations that were put to a panel of international experts. The situations are themselves divided into the three main sub-categories of "Constructive Auctions" (34), "Defensive Bidding" (30), and "Competitive Auctions" (58). Several panelists are quoted (usually in just a sentence or two), and Senior adds his two cents' worth where he deems it appropriate. In addition, because these problems were derived from the International Popular Bridge Monthly magazine, each one was moderated by someone whose comments are also included from time to time.

For fifthchair.org readers, the first section on constructive auctions will be mostly unhelpful because the system used in the problems is very different from common American methods. Weak 1nt and 4 card majors are used instead of strong 1nt and 5 card majors. Two over one is not game forcing (or even almost game forcing). Consequently, the problems as posed would not occur in an American context. For example, one problem asks what opener's next call after a 4♣ splinter would be, after opening ♠ J1075 ♥ K6 ♦ KQ103 ♣ AK9 with 1♠. Obviously, most fifthchair.org readers would open this hand with 1NT and not face this problem at all.

Still, there are many interesting ideas in this section. For example, how should responder's rebid after 1♥ - 1NT; 2♠-? Is 3♣/3♦ weak (♠xx ♥x ♦ QJ9xxxx ♣ Kxxx), or is it strong (eg., ♠Kx ♥x ♦ KJxxxx ♣ Qxx)? What does 2NT mean? If opener plans the sequence 1♥-2♠-3♥, is 3♥ forcing, or can responder pass with a dog?

Finally, it is worth mentioning that being exposed to different bidding systems, with different requirements and means for similar-sounding auctions has the salutary effect of reminding us that not everyone bids like Americans do, and that actions that appear weird on the surface might be completely understandable in the context of a different bidding system.

Sections two and three, because they are defensive and competitive, are less affected by the non-American system postulated for the book. As such, they are more useful to fifthchair.org readers because they are focused more on judgment and experience than on methods. Here one finds all the old chestnuts: off-shape takeout doubles, 4 card overcalls,

two suited overcalls when not 5-5, when one's best option is to bid NT without a sure stopper in the opponent's suit, how to survive enemy pre-empts, and so on.

I found this book to be both interesting and frustrating. It is always interesting to see how experts handle bidding problems, and the book's layout, which groups similar problems together, enhances this. Studying sections two and three will provide a concentrated exposure to the kinds of problems one faces every day at the bridge table.

But the book was frustrating in that on many occasions I wanted to read more discussion than the book had. The 122 problems match the book's 122 page length, and so the discussions often felt abrupt.

Still the benefits of the book outweigh its flaws. Because the bidding system used in section one will be unfamiliar to many, I judge section one to be most appropriate for advanced players and beyond. However, even intermediate players can benefit from a careful reading of sections two and three.

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