

Fifth Chair



Book Review: Mike Lawrence's *The Complete Book on Hand Evaluation*

The Complete Book on Hand Evaluation in Contract Bridge, Mike Lawrence
(Louisville: Devyn Press, 1983, vi+194; \$11.95)

Question: how can one improve one's bidding skills?

Answer: By improving one's judgment and system knowledge.

But how does one improve one's judgment?

A great place to start is with hand evaluation: knowing whether the hand you have is good, bad, or indifferent.

Lawrence's book addresses this exact issue.

Why is a singleton ace usually worse than a doubleton ace? (See chapter 1.)

In what situations are kings worth more than three points? (See chapter 3.)

What are common warning signs that a promising hand won't take as many tricks as one might hope? (See chapters 3 and 4.)

Why are shortness showing bids, like splinters, so important? (See chapter 5.)

The next three chapters discuss the evaluation of poor hands (chapter 6), good balanced hands (chapter 7), and good unbalanced hands (chapter 8).

Chapter 2 provides a lengthy discussion of some common situations that can affect hand evaluation.

Chapter 9 shows hand evaluation in action from Lawrence's point of view.

Consider this example from my favorite chapter in the book (chapter 3, page 49). You hold ♠QJ1075 ♥3 ♦QJ1042 ♣K6. Partner opens 1♣ and you respond 1♠. So far, so good.

Now if partner raises to 2♠, Lawrence says "This is a good hand and you would go to four spades." But if partner rebids 2♣, this same hand has "little of sure value to offer partner.... You could procede [sic] with two diamonds, but gingerly."

Interesting, isn't it? In one auction your nine-point hand is worth a jump to game. In a different auction, it is almost not worth taking a second call.

Or take this example (chapter 7).

Consider this 13-point hand: ♠A62 ♥A853 ♦J54 ♣A86 and compare it with this 17-point monster: ♠K7 ♥KQJ95 ♦KQ10 ♣K97. Which hand would you rather have?

Right, it's a trick question! Opposite partner's vulnerable 3♣ opening bid, Lawrence argues that the first hand is an easy 3NT response. The aces represent both fast tricks and control, and the ace of clubs should solidify partner's suit. Nine tricks should be easy unless the opponents lead diamonds and have 5 fast diamond tricks.

But the second hand opposite partner's vulnerable 3♣ opening bid could be a disaster. Assume that the AQJxxx of spades is behind you and that RHO has both red aces. A red suit lead followed by a spade switch followed by the second red ace means 8 tricks for the opponents, which means down 4 for us. (Lawrence isn't as pessimistic as I am and avers that we might only be down 3.)

The whole book is full of insight and good ideas, expressed in language that is deceptively simple. In his Introduction, the late Alfred Sheinwold writes "This is not the ordinary bridge book.... It's a book for experienced bridge players." I judge it differently. This is a bridge book that will reward individuals of all levels of bridge skill, but without a doubt the more experienced you are, the more you will get from it. It is the kind of book that can be read, with profit, several times. If you are in the novice-intermediate group of bridge skill, buy this book and read it. Don't worry about the fact that some of it will be over your head, because when you go back to it a year from now, you'll get more and more and more of it as time goes by.

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