**Improve Your Bidding Judgement – Neil Kimelman**

When we learn bridge we are usually taught bidding by reference to a set of easily-remembered rules (open with 12 points, bidding a suit requires at least four cards, rebidding it guarantees five, etc.) As we become more experienced we tend to add more and more refinements (not always improvements) to our methods – transfer responses to one no trump, splinter bids, weak two-bids and often many, many others. However, the successful players usually score in the bidding not because their methods are better than those of their opponents (after all, if one bidding system were clearly the best, everyone would play it) but because their bidding judgement is superior.

Although the author of this book is Canadian, the subject is bidding judgement, so that the basic bidding system played is mostly irrelevant. The book covers the vital area of how to make the correct decision (especially in competitive auctions) by being aware both of the positive and negative aspects of your hand and also of what is going on around you – partner’s and the opponents’ bidding. He tackles such subjects as Slam Investigation and gives advice like “If you do not have a clear sense of the right strain (which suit, no trump) it is better simply to try to describe your own hand and hope that partner can take control”. This sounds so simple that you wonder why it has not occurred to you before – and yet how many of us get most of the way towards a slam and then in effect guess whether or not to take the plunge? The writer’s Tip 5 (there are over two dozen) is perhaps the simplest and yet the single most important: Trust Partner!

High-level competitive bidding decisions – an area where, in team play, many matches are won and lost – come under the microscope. This includes a separate section on whether to double or bid on – again, the source of many large gains and losses. There is also a chapter on dealing with the unusual – the main point is that you need to be able to think on your feet and adapt to unfamiliar bidding situations, often by doing the unexpected.

The chapters are short, which makes for easy reading as each topic can be digested in a single session, and are well illustrated by hands taken from top-flight play. If I have a criticism it is that one or two of the chapters are too short – only three and a half pages on balancing and just three on dealing with misfits – and I would have appreciated more examples to illustrate the points made.

The last third of the book comprises over sixty problems where you are given the bidding (with explanation of conventional or systemic bid, so that again the methods used are not a problem) and asked to provide the next bid. There are then detailed answers to these problems, with reference made to the topics covered earlier on.

This book is aimed at good players. A good technique (bidding, play and defence) is assumed throughout, but for those who are prepared to study the material there is a lot here that will help to develop your bidding judgement –and, as the author says, “Bidding is where you win or lose at bridge”.