**Slam Bidding Made Easier – Marty Bergen**

Although Marty Bergen is an American author I have found that his earlier books (Points Schmoints, etc) have been very popular with my (British) bridge students. He has a very relaxed and easy-to-read style and he makes a lot of good points. He also makes these points very simple to remember so the reader finds that nearly all of what he has read has been taken in and understood. Marty always includes a good deal of humour so that his books are really entertaining.

In this book, Marty tackles the subject of Slam Bidding. We all love to bid slams – although the author does stress that this is as much about keeping out of bad slams as getting into good ones - and the book contains a terrific amount of advice in this area. As the author states, this book is not aimed at beginners, nor is it aimed at experts, but at everyone in between. Importantly, the bidding system that the reader uses is hardly relevant, and the concepts introduced throughout will work equally well whether your style is Acol, 5-card majors or even Strong Club.

In the first part of the book (i.e. the first seven chapters) Marty discusses hand evaluation – a topic that he has probably written about more than anyone else. He tackles the important area of modifying the familiar 4-3-2-1 point count and suggests that aces are underrated – a subject that I have tried (not always successfully) to teach as many of my students hate what Marty refers to as “Aces and Spaces”. At least now I have someone on my side and more ammunition when I try to explain that aces are always good cards. He also describes his own point-count methods (where aces are upgraded and queens and jacks are downgraded) before introducing his latest simplified method of adjusting the initial valuation of your hand. Following this he discusses in detail other factors in hand evaluation. Although many readers will be aware of the importance of intermediate cards, distribution and good quality suits, Marty explains these ideas in such a way that everyone should be convinced. It is only when the author starts introducing his idea of Starting Points, Dummy Points and Bergen Points (all requiring some arithmetical skill) that I feel he may lose his readers.

The second half of the book starts by examining Italian Control Bids (where controls, both first and second round, are shown up-the-line) and again he makes a convincing case for this style. The “Magic of Voids” and the “Ten Commandments of Good Slam Bidding” cover important ground, and his study of Splinter Bids and the Jacoby Two No Trump will act as a good refresher course for many players. Blackwood Dos and Don’ts is essential reading for all players, and there is a separate section on Roman Key Card Blackwood. Possibly the most useful slam convention (Marty’s “Favourite Slam Convention”) will be new to most players – 5NT “Pick a Slam”. This is a very simple convention, requiring no great feats of memory and, as the author says, “it is fun, logical and, once you get used to it, not difficult”. All that it requires is that a player be willing, when he does not know what slam is best, to ask his partner for an opinion. Of course, if you always know what the right contract is then you have no need for this convention, but for the rest of us I think that it is brilliant.

This book is easy to read, contains a lot of good material (much of which will be new to you) and, like most of Marty Bergen’s books, is highly recommended.