



Viewpoint

By Brent Manley

*Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend.
Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.*

— Groucho Marx

Eyes right

I'm writing this in late April and feeling sore at myself for the way I played bridge last night. I went down in two makers and piddled around on a couple of other contracts, taking fewer tricks than I should have. The fact that my partner and I ended up with a decent game anyway was no consolation at all.

It's time for me to get out my copy of "How to Read Your Opponents' Cards." That always seems to jumpstart my bridge brain. I'm sure my partner last night, Mark Ospeck, would appreciate it.

You will notice that this month's cover — inspected closely, perhaps maniacally, for errors, to be sure — features a stack of books. Inside, you will find the results of two surveys taken to identify experts' and readers' favorites.

I didn't vote in either survey, but if I had, the Mike Lawrence classic mentioned above would be my No. 1. The book, published in 1973, had not been out very long when I got my copy. I read it so many times in the first year I owned it that I'm surprised it didn't fall apart.

About 20 years later, while researching the book I co-wrote with Bob Hamman, I discovered a fascinating bit of trivia about the first of dozens of works Mike has produced.

Mike was an original member of the Aces, the full-time bridge squad put together by Ira Corn to challenge the formidable Italian Blue Team in the Seventies. One day, Corn gave Mike an assignment: "Do a book."

Eight weeks later, "How To Read Your Opponents' Cards" was ready for publication. It is still considered the best of its kind. That is an impressive feat for someone writing his first book on orders from the boss.

Mike didn't stop there, of course, and it's no surprise that "anything by Mike Lawrence" was a frequent comment on the surveys.

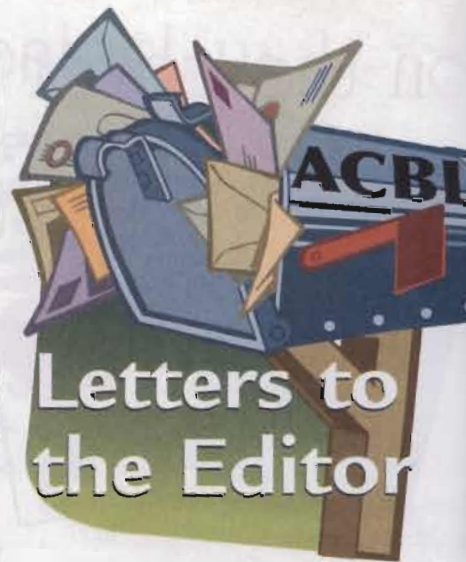
The fact that you have picked up this magazine almost certainly means you are interested in duplicate bridge. For players just starting out, the game can be nearly overwhelming at times. Help is needed. Experience is the best teacher, of course, but reading can speed up the progress significantly.

Playing bridge without thinking is a prescription for failure, but it's not always clear what you should be thinking about. The reason I like "How to Read Your Opponents' Cards" so much is that it so deftly directs the thought processes to the right areas.

My friend Mike is just one of many gifted authors who can help take your bridge game to the place you want it to go. The literature is there, waiting for you. The lights will go on for you much quicker if you just open those books. □

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Defective doubles

To the Editor:

In the Conventional Wisdom series (July 2005, page 29), a box on the convention card is explained and makes it clear that it is intended to cover takeout doubles that have traditional strength but do not show support for all unbid suits, so-called off-shape doubles. The comment states that "experienced players consider this type of double to be poor [bridge]."

The ACBL Alert Procedure states, "No double requires an Alert except those with highly unusual or unexpected meanings." Absent any other considerations, the minimum off-shape takeout double would be Alerted because it is clearly "unusual and unexpected" in the context of contemporary bridge. The "other consideration" in this case is the convention card (also created by the ACBL). When a treatment is specifically covered by the convention card and is marked in black, by checking the box on the convention card, you are deemed to have adequately alerted the opponents.

Let's hope this box is marked in red the next time convention cards are printed. This will promote much better disclosure and should not proliferate Alerts (another annoying problem), considering that most players do not make minimum off-shape takeout doubles. I've never seen the box checked.

TOMMY SOLBERG
Lecanto