

VOLUME 71

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The Bridge World



TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT

SPINGOLD '99, II

Larry Cohen

BRIDGE WORLD

STANDARD 2001: POLL 5

SECOND TWIN, II

Jeff Rubens

PORTABLE BRIDGE

NOTATION

Kaj Backas

THROW WINNERS,

KEEP LOSERS

Patrick Jourdain

PROCRASTINATION:

THE SOUL OF TECHNIQUE

Alfred P. Sheinwold

HIGHWAY ROBBERY

Samuel Fry, Jr.

HOW THE ODDS CHANGE

\$ 8.00

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partners did not overcome the uninteresting characters and plot. A moderate number of deals include some valuable lessons, but do beware the advice on page 62.

* * *

Ron Klinger's pocket flipper called **"Five-Card Majors Bid-**

ding" (Gollancz; 30 varied-size small pages; \$6.99 paperback) presents what strikes us as a weird combination of British and American methods (e.g., a one-heart opening shows at least five; in response, two notrump is invitational). We have never met anyone who uses the system this publication says is standard.



Portable Bridge Notation

by **Kaj Backas**, *Helsinki, Finland*

Here is a description of some bridge activity. Can you guess what it means?

[Board "1"]
 [Room "Open"]
 [Dealer "N"]
 [Vulnerable "None"]
 [South "Stansby"]
 [West "Cohen"]
 [North "Martel"]
 [East "Berkowitz"]
 [Deal "N:KJ9652.T87..JT64
 A8.KQJ5.8532.K85
 Q3.A9642.KJ764.9
 T74.3.AQT9.AQ732"]
 [Score "-300"]
 [Contract "3SX"]
 [Declarer "N"]
 [Result "7"]
 [Auction "N"]
 2S X 3S X
 Pass Pass Pass
 [Play "E"]
 HK HA H3 H7
 C5 C9 CA C4
 SA S3 S4 S2
 S8 SQ S7 SK
 H5 D4 ST SJ
 CK D6 C2 CT
 HQ H2 C3 H8
 HJ H4 C7 HT

D8 DJ DQ S5
 C8 D7 CQ CJ
 D2 DK DA S6

I'd wager that you could tell exactly what is described, even if a few of the representations were not immediately obvious. The text presents a deal layout and associated information, bidding and play. If you understand the syntax of this bridge shorthand, you can "read" it. But why would anyone want to use such a notation? Because it can be interpreted conveniently by computers, thus is effectively universal—yes, there are some English words, but this causes little difficulty for players who speak other languages (and computers don't care).

The idea on display, inspired by standard chess notation, is Portable Bridge Notation (PBN), a fee-free public language whose first worldwide standard was published in 1998. Its purpose is to enable the saving and communicating of bridge deals (plus associated information) through a standard text file, one that can be used independently of the computer platform. Its design criteria include straightforwardness, so

that anyone using software that supports the PBN standard can easily create, transmit, receive, understand and use the information it encompasses.

The simplest way to type PBN packets is first to create a basic PBN deal file in your favorite word processor. This basic file will have the format of an ordinary deal file (so you don't have to remember the order of the "tags," or the code words used, and so forth), but will allow for the insertion of information specific to the deal currently being described. For instance, the first five lines of your basic file might look like this (compare with the example above):

```
[Board """]
[Room """]
[Dealer """]
[Vulnerable """]
[South """]
```

One of the programs that supports PBN is a "verifier," which examines your creation and checks for syntax errors. This acts as a gentle tutor in early days, a guardian against typing errors later on. In certain word processors, you can, if you prefer, use a form that enables direct data input conveniently. One of the advantages of PBN is that if everyone uses the same approach, you will be able to save a deal in universal format directly from whatever generating or playing program you are running. Indeed, some bridge software already has the ability to take a deal it has just processed and to save it in PBN format.

There are other useful tools that enhance the standard. A PBN viewer allows the user to step through the bidding and play of a

PBN-formatted deal, in movie style, or to browse through the cards already played. Converters make it possible to transfer data from one bridge program to another, using PBN at an intermediate stage. The style of PBN makes it easy for software to process only the information relevant to its current task. Even the most complex PBN text should not crash a program or cause it to operate incorrectly.

If the standard gains universal acceptance, authors could use filters that convert PBN-described deals into the keystrokes needed to typeset a book or magazine. Thus, you can send your article or letter to *The Bridge World* in a file that requires minimal retyping, which will not decrease the chance that it will appear. Later, should you wish to send your creation elsewhere, you can provide an equally effective text file with almost no additional work (because your fundamental file uses PBN; all it needs is to be run through a different filter).

Work is continuing in the hope of improving the standard based on the results of early experiences. Possibilities include adding complete score tables, providing a formal syntax to explain calls and played cards, enabling intercommunication between two bridge-playing computer programs, and attaching personal comments. To participate in the Internet discussion group dedicated to PBN, get in touch with the originator and coordinator, Tis Veugen, at <http://www.iaehv.nl/users/veugent/pbn.html>

You can download the Version 1.0 standard from <http://www.compart.fi/~kgb>