

A bridge too far for some

Charis Chang

MOST people who have tried to decipher *The Manly Daily's* bridge column have been left totally confused by the world's most popular card game.

Its secret language is a source of pride for players who sprout terms such as "dummy goes down," and "ace won the trick" with particular zeal.

Having joked about how enigmatic it all was, it was decided that I should be given the job of cracking its code.

Thankfully Cath Whiddon, one half of the team that won the Northern Beaches Pairs this year, agreed to be my guide.

Ms Whiddon teaches a beginners class at the Peninsula Bridge Club in Warriewood.

I met her there for a lesson on Tuesday but I found I was already missing one of the game's key ingredients — a partner.

Ms Whiddon said finding the right partner was like looking for "the one".

"It's like a marriage, you've got to find the best fit, someone who is supportive, encouraging, rather than nagging and whingeing."

In fact being a supportive partner is part of the etiquette of the game and it is poor taste to criticise a partner or opponent in public. And unlike poker, making misleading statements or using bluff tactics is considered unethical. Bridge is played with a straight face.

Luckily, I was not the only one who turned up for Ms Whiddon's lesson without a partner and I was



Margaret Wilson (left) and Lionel Stacey with Charis Chang at Peninsula Bridge Club.

able to join a beginners table. Having previously played games of 500, many of the rules made sense including the concept of "trumps", a suit that is declared superior to the others at the start of each game.

I caught on quickly and was declared "a natural", but knowing

the terminology and the rules of the game is just the beginning.

Given the same cards, different players might choose to play them at different times to neutralise their opponent's stronger cards.

You also need a good memory to remember what cards are still to be played. Another tactic is know-

ing when to push the other team to make a higher bid so that you earn points when they don't succeed.

Ms Whiddon said the game required the people-reading skills of poker, the analysis of chess and the understanding of your partner needed for doubles tennis.

The fact that her beginners



HOW TO PLAY BRIDGE

- Most popular game is contract bridge. You need four people, playing in teams of two
- A deck of cards is dealt out equally with each person getting 13 cards.
- One suit is declared "trumps" and is considered superior to the other suits
- The idea is to win as many of the 13 hands called "tricks", as possible
- Players declare before play starts how many tricks they can win
- Learn more at www.abf.com.au or peninsula.bridge-club.org



ETIQUETTE PLEASE

- Don't speak harshly to opponents or your partner; Once play starts the successful declarer thanks their partner; Having secret cues with your partner about your bidding is considered cheating
- Source: Australian Bridge Federation

course runs for 10 weeks is testament to the game's complexity, with one barrier being the special language, which Ms Whiddon says is part of its allure.



Do you have any shortcuts to understanding the great game?

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