



*Play & Learn with Pat Harrington Volumes 1 and 2*

# Keep your beginners happy, and make more money too

*by Amy Nellissen*

I've been selling Great Games/Pat Harrington software to my students ever since Volume 1 came out in 2008. But it wasn't until this week that I finally sat down to play the second set, Lessons 7-13. It's easy to see why the American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) named Introduction to Bridge Play and Learn with Pat Harrington Volume 1 as its 2009 Software of the Year.

First and foremost, this software is designed for bridge students, not players. Volume 1 (Lesson 1-6) is appropriate for absolute beginners with no prior bridge experience. The subjects covered in both versions follow Pat's beginner course perfectly: Three full lessons are devoted to trick taking and understanding what a contract is before bidding is introduced. Lessons 4 through 6 cover notrump opening bids and responses, major suit opening bids and responses, and minor suit opening bids and responses.

Volume 2 (Lessons 7-13) is for those who have completed an absolute beginner course or the equivalent. Subjects include dummy points, notrump bids by responder, notrump rebids by opener, takeout doubles, preempts, strong 2C openings and Stayman.

As with all of Pat's teaching materials, the students learn by first bidding and playing a hand. Only then is the deal analyzed to see what worked, what didn't work, and why. Students can rebid and replay each hand as many times as necessary before moving on to new material. When ready, a new tidbit of information is presented and immediately another hand is bid and played to reinforce the new concept.

When students make the right bid, the software gives positive reinforcement. For example, "Good. Now let's look at what North will do after your 1NT response."

When a bidding mistake is made, the software clearly explains why: "You don't have the strength required for a two-over-one response. Without a heart fit, and with no four-card or longer suit that you can bid on the one level, resort to a 1NT response."

## ***Gets them playing outside the class***

We teachers all know that the best thing for our students would be to get together to play with others outside the class. We also know this rarely happens.

Even when armed with phone lists of other students, few will make the effort to play.

This software helps address that problem. Now when students complain that they can't find people to play with or that they aren't available to come to supervised play, I counter with, "Have you tried the software?"

I point out that by using the software, the student will be the declarer on all eight hands in each lesson – as compared to the classroom where they will declare only once or twice in a two-hour class.

In my beginner and advanced beginner classes, I find that students who buy and use the software are much better able to keep up in the class. They play faster, with more confidence, and understand more. They tend to stay interested instead of dropping out.

## ***Beginners need to miss a few classes?***

"I love the class, but I'm going on a cruise, and I'll have to miss two or three classes. I'm not sure if I should sign up for Advanced Beginner."

In the old days, this question churned my stomach. I knew darn well that after missing two or three weeks in a row, most students would be so far behind that it was usually best to suggest they wait to join a later class. But who knew if that later class would fit into their schedules? That cost me students.

Now I can offer another option: "Take the software on your cruise and you'll be all caught up to rejoin your friends when you return."

## ***Opportunities for Teachers to Make Money***

The software retails for \$34.95. Bridge teachers can buy it from Great Game Products for \$21 plus the actual shipping cost. There are no minimum order requirements. (Contact Cindy Offterdinger, 888-762-8922, sales@bridgebaron.com.)

But the real financial benefit to teachers is that this software helps keep students interested and gives them enough practice and confidence to become intermediate students and hopefully, players.

## ***Drawbacks***

Currently the software is only available for Windows. For some reason I get lots of retired schoolteachers in my classes, and they all seem to use Macs. Great Game Products expects to have a Mac version available by next year (2011).