



Review of Pat Harrington's new beginner course

by Amy Nellissen

The more I teach this game, the more I wonder how anyone ever learns it. Since I started teaching six years ago, I've used six different beginner courses—including two that I tried to write myself (what a disaster!).

I was never satisfied with a beginner course — until now.

Pat Harrington's new course, *Play & Learn: Beginning Bridge – A Complete Lesson Package*, solves many of the problems I've encountered with other beginner courses. It simplifies the game for students and teachers alike.

No Bidding Until Week 4

Teachers will appreciate Pat's approach: No bidding until the fourth week. Instead, students play lots of hands, learning basic play-of-the-hand and defensive tactics. The concept of game and choosing the best contract (trump suit vs. notrump) is introduced without bidding.

When I taught the course, I found that even those who had played before benefited from the time spent on play. By the time I introduced opening bids in Lesson 3, they were chafing at the bit to learn bidding. Quite a difference from the old days, where the fourth week was the one where their eyes began to glaze over and they started to drop out.

Throughout the course, new bidding concepts are paced appropriately for beginners. There's an entire lesson devoted to the responder bidding notrump, another where opener rebids notrump and another where the students learn to count dummy points and trump in the dummy.

Easy to Customize to Any Length Class

Because the course comes in a three-ring binder, it's easy to teach any number of weeks that you choose. You get 13 individual lessons numbered 0 through 12. Use what you need; save the rest for the advanced beginner course.

Each lesson contains a detailed lesson plan for teachers, Pat's Play & Learn printouts and three or more handouts for students: 1) lesson notes on the day's topic, 2) a homework sheet, with answer key and 3) copies of the hands they played in class with analysis. Just add your name and phone number to the handout, make some photocopies and you're ready to teach. Your class fee can include the cost of printing handouts as well as a folder or notebook to hold them. There is no textbook to order or purchase.

Play & Learn Hand Records are Included.

If you are accustomed to calling cards for your students, try the Play & Learn hand records once, and you'll be hooked. Students make fewer mistakes making up the hands, and you won't find yourself repeating cards for tables that weren't listening.

With this course, you'll need a good system for making up hands because ... They play LOTS of hands each week.

Most lessons provide eight practice deals. Since I run two-hour lessons, I couldn't quite get them all in. But even my newest beginners are able to play about six hands a week.

Over the years, I've given up on

the notion that my beginners will get together between classes to practice. It just ain't gonna happen. Since they can't learn without playing, they're going to have to play a lot of hands in class—and this course accomplishes that.

Standard American for Beginners

The bidding system is Standard American with 16-18 notrumps, (there are no 18s, so you can change to 15-17 if you feel the need and the course discusses that change in a later lesson), five-card majors and limit raises. The last lessons include takeout doubles, preempts and strong two-club openings. You can add a lesson on Stayman by using the Introduction to Stayman lesson from the Modern Notrump Bidding Teacher Manual, which is available for free download at ACBL.org.

One innovation I really appreciated is a direct raise to four of a major shows 13+ points and 3+ trumps. I know from attending the American Bridge Teachers' Association conventions that many of the country's top teachers are doing this now.

This may make expert players cringe, but trust me, it's by far the best approach for your students -- because they understand it. One spade-two spades is 6-10 points, one spade-three spades is 11-12 points and one spade-four spades is 13+. Easy. Pre-emptive raises can be introduced later in an intermediate class where they belong.

If you've read this far, I guess you can tell I'm an enthusiastic fan of Pat's new course. I highly recommend it and suggest that the first time you use it, teach it exactly as written. It will change your teaching forever — to the benefit of both you and your students.

To order, send a check or money order for \$100 US to: Pat Harrington, 14840 Crystal Cove Court, Fort Myers, FL 33919-7417