

# Paul Lukacs:



*“The best bridge player ever away from the table”*

This was the admiring quote that Victor Mollo used to define one of the most unusual stars of the bridge firmament after WWII.

It is now more than 20 years since he passed away peacefully in his Tel Aviv house in Hayarkon Street and yet Paul Lukacs's fame as the most dazzling problem writer ever shines untarnished by the ravages of time.

Born in Hungary in 1915, Lukacs became in his young age a representative of that central-european bridge explosion that brought so many new talents to the international scene.

The thirties were the years of the Austrian “Wunderteam”, which collected four European titles in six years from 1932 through 1937, using the feared “Viennese Club”, a system created by Paul Stern (see info on this colorful player in side-column) and based on the unusual point ratio of 7-5-3-1 instead of Milton Work's 4-3-2-1.

Its hegemony was fiercely contended by the no-less talented Hungarian team, led by the immense skill of Robert Darvas (who was later to write “Right through the pack”, a clear candidate for best bridge book of all time) and where Lukacs was seen as a highly gifted and extremely promising player.

Unfortunately the black shadow of Nazism soon put an end to this resurgence and forced the dissemination of its members: Paul Stern went into hiding and later managed to emigrate; his partner, Willy Frishauer, moved to the USA, while Rixi Markus and Fritz Gordon opted for Great Britain where they would form for many decades the mainstay of their world-class ladies team.

Lukacs, instead, made “alia” to Israel in 1939, where he soon found out that despite the great excitement of living through the years which would lead to the formation of the State of Israel, his erstwhile passion had to be perforce put aside since he was not able to find players of the calibre he was used to. He did not let that bring him down : his brilliant analytical talent (he was a renowned mathematician) and his love for the game found a totally different and unusual outlet: the single dummy problem.

What is this animal, you might ask?

Well, most of the problems that we find in the bridge press are double dummy problems, meaning that all four hands are shown. The task of the solver is therefore limited to finding the solution that works given that specific distribution.

The single dummy problem reflects, instead, much more closely the challenges encountered by a declarer when dummy is tabled: he needs to find a line which caters to all the possible layouts.

The subtle difference between a single dummy problem and the real life approach of your average declarer is that the latter will opt for the best percentage line while the problem solver's quest is much more wide ranging since the objective is to devise a line of play which works with all possible distributions.

Let us take a look at a couple of the best examples of his genius :

1) West declares 6NT after a diamond lead:

♠AQ		♠J10932
♥AKJ		♥109432
♦AKJ10		♦Q32
♣AKJ10		♣-
	W N E S	

How can declarer succeed in this hand against any defense and all distributions ?

2) Having been gifted with the following hand East-West get to 7NT:

♠J10987		♠AKQ
♥QJ1098		♥AK
♦864		♦AKQJ1097
♣-		♣A
	W N E S	

East, still enamoured with his wonderful collection, takes his time tackling the easy task of declaring the hand on a heart lead and one of the kibitzers invites him to table his cards and claim because there is no way he can go down even if he tried on purpose.

Our declarer, snapping out of his reverie, contests such a statement betting that: “as long as diamonds are 3-0 and nobody pitches the ♦5 on purpose, it is possible to deliberately go off in 7NT”.

What can one do to achieve this kamikaze inspired objective and win the bet ?

Lukacs was a common sight at the money bridge table where he would happily spend many hours every day and even managed to represent Israel. He also had a key role in the development of future talents, amongst them one of the best Israeli bridge players of all time: Salek Zeligman, who partnered him after he arrived in Israel from Poland in 1971 and still fondly remembers the way the old master would rejoice when faced with an intricate problem at the table and would methodically proceed to solve it time and again.

## Solutions:

1) West takes the diamond lead in his hand. If he now played ♠A and ♠Q, the opponents will duck and when they come in with a heart or a club they have the cashing trick to defeat the contract. If instead we play the top hearts followed by the ♥J, the defenders will take but declarer can only make 11 tricks: a spade, four hearts, four diamonds and two clubs. What happens, however, if one immediately plays the ♠Q? If it is taken, then declarer makes four spades, two hearts, four diamonds and two clubs. If the ♠Q is ducked, West can switch to the ♥J which gives the defenders an insoluble dilemma: if they take, declarer makes two spades, four hearts, four diamonds and two clubs; if they duck the ♥J, they will give declarer the tempo to set up a club trick by playing the ♣J and he will now collect 12 tricks with two spades, three hearts, four diamonds and three clubs.

2) After taking the lead, declarer plays the ♦A pitching the ♦6, then he cashes all the top spades and hearts in his hand; then he goes to dummy taking over his ♦7 with the ♦8 and pitches all his winning diamonds on dummies winning hearts and spades. The result? He will now be left with the ♦4, destined to be captured by the lowly ♦5, the card which will allow him to achieve this extraordinary feat.

(This article was prepared with the collaboration of Moshe Katz, Shalom Zeligman, Migry and Pietro Campanile)

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nothing  
serious...

Dr Paul Stern founded the Austrian Bridge Federation in 1928. He was a bridge writer and co-inventor of the Vienna bidding system. As a player, he won the European Championship at Scheveningen in 1932, and again in London in 1933. He was also the captain of the Austrian team that won the World Championship in 1937 in Budapest beating Ely Culbertson's team.

After the Germans annexed Austria in 1938; he returned the Iron Cross he had won in World War I to the Nazi authorities, together with an insulting letter. They

promptly put him on their extermination list as No. 11. This high placement in what was undoubtedly a very long list did not thrill Dr Stern who went into hiding and some time later managed to escape to England after an adventurous journey to Switzerland through the Austrian alps.

Whilst living in London, he often played rubber bridge at the famous Lederer's club. Although previously a career diplomat, Paul did not tolerate fools gladly and some of his outbursts eventually attracted the attention of the press.

A reporter interviewed him one day and asked him why he sometimes used expressions such as 'ass', 'ox', and 'donkey' when addressing his partners. Always the diplomat, Paul replied coolly: "It is my way to show how much I love animals."

The reporter now played his trump card: "What about the report that you once threw a cup of coffee at your partner?"

Paul dismissed the incident with an imperial gesture in the air: "It was nothing serious," he said. "There was no sugar in it!"



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